Reading Between the Lines

by ThatEDMHipster

Summary

A look into the scenes that weren't displayed on-screen for seasons 2-7 of SVU, and the love story of Alex Cabot and Olivia Benson.
Wrong Is Right

“Who do you sleep with, Miss Cabot?”

An interesting question. Truth be told, Alex couldn’t remember the last time anyone had asked her straight out. Of course, Captain Cragen was unaware of the history and meaning that question exactly held for her, but nevertheless, it struck a chord.

Was SVU a place where they had no secrets? No, everybody has secrets. And Alex was going to hold onto hers until disclosure proved absolutely necessary. At the very least, this assignment was going to be an interesting one.

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Olivia closed the car door behind her, ready to return to the precinct.
“So, about the Morris Commission —”
“Olivia,” interrupted Elliot, exasperated, “I don’t wanna talk about it. Not Maureen either.”

Olivia refocused her eyes on the road. “Okay then,” she began, “what do you want to talk about?” Elliot’s eyes lingered out the window for a minute, deep circles visible beneath them. “Why’d you cut your hair?”
Olivia rolled her eyes. “Really? That’s what you want to talk about?”
“C’mon, throw me a bone here,” he replied.

She shrugged. “I guess I was bored. New millennium, new hairstyle?” Elliot laughed. “Yeah, that would’ve worked if you’d cut it in January.” “Seriously, there’s no deeper meaning here. I just wanted a change.”

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“You guys, find the Lexus, find the boy. Munch, Jeffries, let’s find out how good this new ADA really is, huh? We need a search warrant for Radial Velocity.” Olivia stopped short at her desk. “We’ve got a new ADA?”
Cragen nodded. “And it looks like this one’s a permanent fixture. Name’s Alexandra Cabot.” Olivia cocked an eyebrow. “Huh, as opposed to our usual rotating cycle? Well, when do we get to meet her?”
“Later,” said Elliot. “C’mon, those phone calls aren’t gonna make themselves.”

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What an embarrassment. The look Jeffries gave her as the two detectives left her office was a familiar one: old money. But she figured it was better to make nice with the new detectives than stonewall them, even if it did mean calling in a familial favor. Besides, wasn’t Jeffries the promiscuous one anyway?

Alex sighed, sinking down in her chair. No, she was not going to start thinking ill of her new unit already. Besides, even if Munch was a bit of an oddball, he seemed alright, and Captain Cragen was a decent enough man. Hopefully the other detectives would prove to be at least cordial, if not friendly.

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Elliot stormed out of the precinct without as much as a “see you later.”
"I can understand where he’s coming from, but jeez, the guy could at least fake a smile," quipped Munch.
"Coming from you, that’s serious," Olivia joked. "Lighten up Munch, he’s had a rough week."
"Right," said Munch, "back to scouring the hidden paraphernalia of the missile geeks."

"So, how did you manage to get your hands on all this anyway?" asked Olivia.
"Cabot, the new ADA," he replied.
"Wow, how’d she manage that?"
"Friends in very high places," said Munch. "By which I mean family in very high places."
"Oh, come on," said Olivia. "She can’t be that bad. What’s she like otherwise?"
"Tall, blonde, younger than you even," answered Munch. "Why do you want to know so badly anyway?"
"I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but there aren’t a lot of women working in SVU," said Olivia, a little peeved. "It’d just be nice to have another female on the team, that’s all. Change the subject."
"Alright," said a bemused Munch, "what prompted the nouvelle coiffure?"

"So, where is she?" said Olivia, leaving the interview room.
"You just missed her!" Munch called out gleefully.
Olivia sighed, exasperated. "What, do I have all the bad luck or something?"
"Nah, I’ve got my fair share," said Elliot, right behind her. "And you’re not missing much, she’s a piece of work."

"How’d it go in there?"

"Oh…"

Well, she’d finally met the new ADA, the elusive Miss Cabot. Never mind that she couldn’t look her in the eye during her testimony. Cabot exuded confidence and her voice never wavered. That, and she was about a thousand feet tall and beyond gorgeous. The first time Olivia had ever testified, she’d harkened back to the first oral presentation she’d given in grade school. She’d felt like she was going to wet her pants. This? This had been much, much worse for entirely different reasons.

"Kid’s toast."

Alex exited the elevator just as Cragen and Stabler were heading down the hall to leave the precinct.
"Oh, Detective!" she called out. "Congratulations on the Morris Commission."
"Oh yeah, thanks. See you later." The two men hurried past her.
"Sorry about him."

Alex turned to see Detective Benson leaning on her desk.
"Should I always expect such a warm reception?" Alex asked.
"Nah, give him time," said Olivia. "He’ll warm up to you."
Alex folded her arms. "I’m not so sure about that one."
Olivia smiled. "Trust me, I was the new girl last year."
"Does it get easier?" asked Alex.
Olivia thought for a moment. “The cases don’t. But you’ll warm up to the unit. We’re not all bad.”

Working with SVU was turning out to be an interesting prospect indeed.
It had been a damn terrible day, Nafisah Amir was dead, and if Cabot didn’t stop leaning across Elliot’s desk, Olivia was going to have a heart attack.

This was not what she’d planned for. She’d wanted a new pal, a girl to give the guys a hard time with and go out for drinks with and bitch about her love life with. Not a cool, alluring woman who positively took her breath away.

She’d asked Abbie Carmichael what she knew of Alex without gaining much from it. All that Abbie could provide was:
1) Alex was new, only a couple of years out of law school,
2) Her family connections had served her well during her job hunt,
3) She had political aspirations, whatever those might be, and,
4) She was known as being somewhat aloof. Not a cold woman, but she certainly kept to herself.

A lack of information only complicated matters. If Alex had a reputation, that would be something she could work with. Distance didn’t leave her much to go on.

For now, she’d be as friendly as she could, without being overly friendly if she could manage it. And she’d continue to admire the woman sprawled across the desk.

Alex wasn’t exactly partial to men anyway, but if there was one thing she despised, it was a bastard with an ego. The commissioner’s challenge of SVU and her case against Jaleel Amir left a sour taste, and she stormed out of Cragen’s office, ready to prepare an opening statement that would really take this piss out of Amir and his lawyer. She was, in fact, so concentrated on her anger that she blew right past Detective Benson.

“Hey!” the detective called out. “Everything okay in there?”
Alex stopped short. She hadn’t thought she’d looked upset – she certainly wasn’t trying to.
“I’m fine, but you’d best keep an eye open,” she replied. “Saleh Amir lodged a formal complaint with the US Government.”
Benson rolled her eyes. “Of course he did.”

Alex smiled. “Don’t worry, that won’t stop me from prosecuting this case to the fullest extent possible.”
Olivia chuckled a little. “Go get ’em, Cabot.”
“Oh, believe me,” Alex replied, her voice full of ice. “I will.”

As Alex disappeared into the elevator, Olivia clutched her hair. Go get ’em? God, that was a stupid thing to say.

“His culture didn’t program him to kill,” Elliot lamented, “his father did. Jaleel is afraid of him, everyone is afraid of Saleh Amir.”
“Except for one person,” interjected Olivia. “We’re forgetting Mrs. Amir.”
“Mrs. Amir is out of bounds,” said Cragen.
“Anyway, Mrs. Amir would never give up her son, or go against her husband,” replied Alex.
“She already has,” insisted Olivia, “on both counts when she told us that he was on a plane home to
Afghanistan.”

It was an obvious fact to notice, and yet it was a brilliant one. How had Olivia seen it and Alex missed it? This could work wonders in securing a guilty verdict.

It wasn’t like Alex had overlooked Olivia by any means. In fact, the more time she spent in SVU, the more the detective caught her eye. At first, she’d figured that Olivia was there to do her two years and rotate out. But she was devoted to her cases in a way Alex hadn’t noticed in the other detectives. It was as if Olivia was completely at home in SVU.

Although that fact would have unsettled her if Olivia were a man, the fact that she was a woman made her seem a bit nobler. Alex would definitely have to invest time in getting to know Olivia, if at least to pick up some strategy on coping with the unit’s unsettling cases.

Besides, it didn’t hurt that she was pretty damn cute.

“And Saleh Amir?”

“He’s in the wind, Captain,” said Elliot. “I’m just sorry we couldn’t get there sooner.”

“And with that, it seems we’ve come full circle.” Cragen sighed. “Someone should notify Cabot. She’s the one who told us about the missing Mr. and Mrs. Amir in the first place.”

“I’ll do it,” Olivia volunteered.

“Be my guest,” said the Captain.

Olivia dialed the number to Alex’s office and could feel her palms getting sweaty as it rang. *Come on Benson, you’re not a teenager.*

“Alexandra Cabot,” rang the cool voice through the receiver.

“Uhh, Alex, it’s Detective Benson,” replied Olivia, swallowing heavily. “I’ve got some bad news about the Amirs.”

“What’s wrong?” asked Alex.

“It seems that Mr. Amir didn’t take too kindly to Mrs. Amir’s betrayal. He, uh,” Olivia grasped for words, “he murdered her in their apartment and boarded the first flight back to Afghanistan.”

“Oh God, that’s awful,” murmured Alex into the phone. “He just…disposed of her.”

“Tell me about it,” complained Olivia. “This whole case has been nothing but a headache regarding the treatment of women. To tell you the truth, I could really use a drink.”

“Well, you’re in luck,” said Alex. “I know a great little place about four blocks away from the DA’s office. Let me give you my cell number, and you can call me when you get off work.”

little place about four blocks away from the DA’s office. Let me give you my cell number, and you can call me when you get off work.”
“What exactly about Kenneth Cleary gets under your skin anyway?” asked Alex.

Olivia sighed, vacantly stirring her drink.
“It’s not so much Kenneth Cleary as it is Harper Anderson,” she replied, “his original victim. I let her down a year ago because I was dealing with some personal issues and couldn’t find her rapist, and I let her down again six months later when I found him and couldn’t convict him.”

Alex nodded in understanding. Olivia had learned, after a few sessions of post-work drinks, that Alex didn’t press for details. It was one of the things that endeared her to Alex even more. At least she was finally able to make eye contact with the blonde.

“I know you two have history, but I honestly don’t know what to do about her. She wasn’t exactly a star witness to begin with, but after the stunt she pulled this afternoon – I don’t know,” said Alex. “I feel bad about the whole mess,” said Olivia, shaking her head. “I was a little too rough on her when I showed up at her doorstep.”

Alex thought for a moment. “Give her a call,” she suggested. “It may help mellow her out a bit, and at the very least, it’ll clear your conscious.”

“And if Harper cools down, that’ll help your case,” said Olivia.
Alex smiled wryly. “Just doing my job.”

Mrs. Cleary left the office shaking and close to tears. Alex hung her head.
“This isn’t going to work, is it?”

Olivia sighed. “You never know. She may pull together at the last minute.”
“Somehow,” said Alex, “I don’t think that’s going to happen. SVU really does operate on a whole different level.”
“You didn’t think this was going to be easy, did you?” Olivia cocked an eyebrow.
“No, I didn’t expect that. I don’t know what I was expecting,” said Alex.

“Yeah, me either,” said Olivia. “Listen, I’ve gotta get back to the precinct. Catch you later?”
“Not tonight,” said Alex, “I’ve got to come up with some way of salvaging this testimony.”
“Tomorrow, then,” said Olivia. She squeezed Alex’s shoulder. “Bye.”

*Oh, thought Alex, that was nice.*

“Hmm,” murmured Munch, “is that Miss Cabot and a stiff drink I spy in Cragen’s office?”
“Maybe, maybe not,” said Elliot, putting on his coat. “I’d better get home. Kathy’s going to flip.”

Munch craned over his desk a little further. “It is the ADA. Well, who knew?”
“The judge tore her a new one in court today Munch,” said Olivia. “I think she’s allowed to relax after work.”
“I could use a drink myself,” admitted Fin.

Cragen barged out of the office.
“Elliot, turn right back around and grab your partner. We’ve got trouble.”
“What’s going on, Captain?” asked Olivia.
Alex looked somber. “Shots fired at the Cleary residence.”
“What’s the status on that court order?”
“Cabot’s meeting with Judge Petrovsky in the morning.”

Shit. Maybe she shouldn’t have said that. *Keep calm Olivia, no one’s giving you a weird look. No one’s raising their eyebrows, asking how you knew about Alex’s date in court. It’s not like you met for drinks last night. It’s not like you’re dating or anything.*

*No, it’s not like we’re dating,* thought Olivia. *I wish. Goddammit.*

She set down the plate of Chinese food. Cragen and Elliot were having a conversation which she didn’t hear. She suddenly wasn’t hungry anymore.

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“Hey Alex!”

After going head to head with Petrovsky all morning, the voice was a breath of fresh air. It was nice to walk with someone, talk with someone who wasn’t jumping down her ass or giving her the stink eye. Especially because said person kept bumping into her as they walked down the hallway, a little too purposefully. Was she ever cute.

But then everything was jolted back to earth with the announcement that McKenna had landed in the hospital. Thanks Elliot.

Olivia sighed. “Looks like we’re off to Mercy. Sorry you busted your ass all morning.”
“Well, at least I got paid for it,” said Alex. “I guess I should consider it practice for the next time I’m in Petrovsky’s courtroom. The woman is harsh.”
“I believe it,” said Olivia. “She looks harsh.”

Alex smiled. “Well, I suppose I’ll see you later.”
“Wait,” interrupted Olivia, “is that a new haircut?”
“Oh,” said Alex, caught off guard. “It is.”
“It looks nice,” said Olivia. “It, uh, highlights your jawbone. It’s a good look for you. I like it.”

Alex hoped she wasn’t turning as red as she felt. “Thanks. I like it too.”
“I understand sir. Yes, SVU’s on it, Captain Cragen is my next call. Okay, I-I’ll talk to you later, sir.”

Alex hung up the phone and ran her fingers through her hair. Her assignments weren’t exactly kittens and rainbows, but this was the first time she’d caught a case that made her literally want to vomit.

What made a seven-year-old shoot another seven-year-old?

Benson had less than a year before she could leave. In a way, Alex was jealous. But in another, she wasn’t. Cases like this could help make a difference in the real world, reach the constituents Alex wanted voting for her someday. In the end, it was all politics, wasn’t it?

Something was off here. Alex picked up the phone and dialed SVU. “Captain? Yes, I just got off the phone with my boss…no, I agree, there’s more to this than meets the eye. We’ll start by charging the parents, that should get them talking.”

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“But remand? Was that really necessary??” said Elliot, his voice rising. Olivia quietly got to her feet in the background.

“It wasn’t my call!” Alex shot back. “The chief ADA forced my hand. With all due respect, I’ve already been chewed out enough; I don’t need to hear the whole shtick again.”

“He’s seven years old, for Christ’s sakes!”

“Elliot!” said Olivia.

“Fine,” replied Elliot, “I’ll get the car.” He strode towards the bathrooms.

Alex let out a deep breath. “Not that I can really blame him. I swear I had this same conversation yesterday morning.”

“He’s forgetting that there’s another victim is in this situation,” said Olivia. “You’re doing your job, even if nobody’s happy about it.”

“It really is all politics,” said Alex bitterly.

“Huh?” said Olivia.

“I’ll explain it to you over drinks later. God knows I could use a few.”

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“You know our take on it,” said Cragen.

“Well, I know what my boss’ will be,” replied Alex. “He’ll still see a bad apple who likes seeing people dead.”

“So, Elias needs to talk,” concluded Olivia. Somehow it felt really, terribly wrong to be eyeing Cabot while talking about drug dealers and a child murderer. Not Olivia’s fault, though. Wearing that black shirt should be a crime itself. Sex appeal in the first degree. Shut up brain.

Alex sighed. “His attorney won his motion. He’s back home until the hearing.”

“Go,” ordered Cragen.

Elliot and Olivia followed Alex out. “Hey, Cabot,” said Elliot.

“Hmm?” she replied.

“I wanted to apologize for losing my temper the other day,” Elliot said. “We’re all on edge here
and I didn’t handle it well.”
“Understood,” said Alex, slightly astounded. “I appreciate it.”

Elliot walked over to grab his keys.
“Did you say something?” Alex muttered to Olivia.
“No,” Olivia whispered back. “I’m just as surprised as you.” You bet your ass I said something. Cabot.

“Is there anything we can do for Cabot?”
“We’ve exhausted the platter of sacrificial heads. It’s out of our hands.”

Olivia tuned Cragen out. Attractions aside, she genuinely felt bad.

“Teflooon!” called out John.
Alex chuckled humbly. “I’m just glad the city isn’t burning.”
“You more than survived, you’re a hero!” said Cragen.
“Congratulations,” said Olivia, squeezing her shoulder.

“Thanks,” blurted Alex, caught off-guard. “Actually, my boss was so happy, he said I could take Sunday off.”
That was a little too quick, Cabot, she thought. But it didn’t matter. Please, do it again. Neither a day off nor drinks could be a better prize.

“...a congratulatory drink.” Oh, Elliot was speaking? She stared back at Olivia, dumbstruck. What was that glint in the detective’s eye?

“Sure,” said Alex.

So this is how it ends, thought Alex. The clock beeped. Oh, 1 A.M. already?

The drink never happened. Instead, Benson and Stabler rushed off to the scene of yet another child killing. Elias was dead. At the end of the day, nobody won. Not Carly Jackson, not Elias and his family, not Mrs. Strada. For an adversarial justice system, there was an awful lot of losing going on.

She couldn’t sleep. Wouldn’t. She stared longingly at the phone. This is a bad idea. The phone stared back. No worse than any other ideas you’ve had lately. She picked up the phone and dialed Olivia’s number.

“Benson.”
“Well, I suppose it’s nice to know I’m not the only one lying awake.”
“After what happened tonight?” said Olivia. “No, I’m not sleeping.”
“Tell me about it,” said Alex. “I can’t face the nightmares.”
“I know this isn’t exactly a consolation, but the nightmares go away,” said Olivia. “This one really got to you, didn’t it?”

Alex let out a noise of frustration. “You know, I took this job for, in retrospect, an idiotic reason. I wanted to make myself into a crusader, for my political future. But the more I work this unit, the more the lines blur and the politics fade. And in the DA’s office, I’m the only one who sees it. My
boss used this case to boost his campaign platform and the media used it to stir up racial tension. It was never about any of that!”
“No one understands how Special Victims works, Alex. I won’t pretend I do. I haven’t been here much longer than you.”
“Yeah, and you’ll likely leave before I do,” Alex said. “After this case, I’m the hero of the office, as sick as that sounds now. They’ll keep me on for another year, at least.”
Olivia remained silent for a moment. “Olivia?”
“No, I’m not going anywhere, Alex.”

“Well,” said Alex, relaxing a little bit, “I’m sorry to call you so late at night, even if you were up.”
“Don’t worry about it,” replied Olivia. Alex could practically hear her smile. “You can call me any time.”
Noncompliance

Forget the sadistic bastards, the child molesters, the serial rapists. Olivia could stomach those. It was the mental health cases that made her uncomfortable. You couldn’t comfort these people, you couldn’t understand them, and you couldn’t convict them, because it wasn’t their fault. Or was it? At least this case looked open and shut.

Alex certainly seemed to think so, especially when Elliot mentioned the hair follicles. She slapped him with the subpoena. “I never turn down evidence,” she said, smiling at Olivia.

Olivia grinned back. God, this woman is hot.

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Of course, when was the last time they’d had an open and shut case?

Elliot closed the door to Cabot’s office. “Okay, I’m officially out of ideas.”

“What do you mean?” said Olivia. “Now we track down the gun.”

“Yeah,” said Elliot snidely, “and then we call up Amelia Earhart. I just wish we could get the jury to look past Mark Nash’s illness.”

“She has a point, you know,” said Olivia.

“Hey, I know your stance on it,” said Elliot. “And she does have a point. You’re just like any twelve jurors who’d walk in that room, you think the mentally ill are dangerous no matter how unwarranted that is. That’s why you’re defending her, because she’s right.”

No, thought Olivia, that’s not entirely why I’m defending her.

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“Is it bad that my second thought was ‘I’m so glad we recorded his confession?’” asked Olivia. Alex sipped her drink vaguely. “Depends. What was your first thought?”

“Oh god, how horrible.”

Alex gave a small smile. “Then I think you’re okay.” She sighed. “Really though, dealing with the mentally ill legally is sticky.”

“It’s sticky in real life, too,” said Olivia. She groaned. “God, let’s change the subject. What’re you doing this weekend?”

“Oh, you know, the glamorous life of a young lawyer,” said Alex. “Working late, working overtime. Preparing for Thanksgiving. You?”

“No one yet,” said Olivia. Shit. Alex burst out laughing. “No! I mean nothing yet. No, you know what, I mean no one. Nothing and no one. No one and nothing.”

Alex laughed harder. Well, that was all the conformation I needed. “Well, if it’s any consolation, you’ve brightened my mood. Besides, you never know.” Alex cocked an eyebrow. “It’s not the weekend yet.”

The feeling drained from Olivia’s legs. God, she IS hot. And she’s going to drive me insane.
Yes, she’d given the word to cut Andrews loose. But Alex had never expected that Cragen would turn around and charge his wife with assault.

“There go the cavalry,” Elliot said to the retreating backsides of homicide. “Good riddance.” Olivia plopped down at her desk. “I hate this case. I hate him, I hate IAB, I hate everything involved.”

“Ah yes,” said Alex spitefully, “you just missed a lovely run-in with the gentlemen of internal affairs.”

“And?” said Elliot. “Those humps busting our asses?”

“Not anymore,” said Alex coolly. “I told them to piss off. Politely, of course.”

“I like her,” Elliot announced to the squad room. “She can stick around. You ladies want coffee?”

“Always,” said Alex.

As Elliot hustled over to the pot, Alex leaned in close to Olivia. “After that sort of praise, I figured I shouldn’t announce that I don’t hate this case, I just hate men.”

Olivia gave her an interested look. Alex winked.

“This is blackmail,” Mrs. Andrews spat bitterly.

“No, Mrs. Andrews. It’s the law,” Alex replied.

She hadn’t been lying to Olivia; she really did hate men. Pigs, always sniffing around to take what wasn’t theirs, be that sexual or otherwise, and to hurt others. Did Mrs. Andrews not see the manipulation? The emotional abuse? Did loving someone really make you this idiotic?

It wasn’t like Alex knew.

Then again, if this was what love was, then she was glad she’d never had the pleasure.

The mudslinging in this case had been heinous, inside the courtroom and out. Alex had dueled it out with Andrews’ attorney every time they’d seen each other. And the cops! She couldn’t walk down a hallway without garnering at least a dirty look. As she and Munch left the courtroom, one of them whispered “Ice Queen.”

“New York’s Finest!” Munch called loudly. “If they bother you again, you let me or anyone in the unit know.”

“I appreciate it, Munch,” said Alex, “but I can take care of myself.”

Besides, it was kind of true.
“Hey, we just found our guy on the Miller case,” began Olivia, leaning in Cragen’s doorway, “can this wait?”
“Close the door,” said Cragen.
What had she done? “What?”

“Sit down Olivia,” said Cragen, a little too somberly.
“What?” asked Olivia. Maybe she hadn’t done anything after all. What was going on?
“Really,” said Cragen, “I think you should sit down.”
“Just tell me, what’s going on?” Now she was genuinely concerned.

Cragen took a deep breath. “Your mother…had an accident.”

What? Is she-
“I am so sorry.”

No.

“She didn’t make it.”
Oh no, no.

“Really,” said Cragen, “I think you should sit down.”

“Just tell me, what’s going on?” Now she was genuinely concerned.

Cragen looked away. “She fell, um, down the subway steps near 10th and Broadway –”
“No,” Olivia cut in, shaking her head. “My mother never takes the subway.”

Cragen looked pained. “The entrance outside the Velvet Room.”
The puzzle pieces fit painfully together. “She was drunk,” Olivia said. But not to Cragen. To no one in particular. Maybe to herself. A single tear ran down her cheek.

“If you need anything,” began Cragen.
“I’ve been waiting for this day for a long time,” Olivia murmured. “But now that it’s here, I have no idea what to do.”

They want to settle?” Munch said incredulously. “Is everyone involved in this case a spiteful self-important windbag who wants nothing more than…”

“Oh man, you got him started again,” said Fin, shaking his head. “You know Munch, until you, I’d never met a cop who reads the dictionary in his spare time.”

Munch glared at him. “I get the point.” He softened his tone. “Hey Benson, how you holding up?”

“Oh,” said Olivia, “I’m fine.”
“Well, we’re all here for you,” said Fin. “Anything you need.”

“Hey Benson, how you holding up?”

Oh, sorry,” said Olivia. She seemed distracted.
Alex frowned. “Is something going on?”

Olivia sank into her desk chair. “My mother died, last week. I had to make funeral arrangements
and I didn’t think to call. I’m sorry.”
“Oh Olivia, I’m so sorry,” said Alex. She lowered her voice. “I completely understand. Is there anything I can do?”
“No, I’m just…trying to get back into my routine. It didn’t exactly come as a shock.” Olivia smiled, but there was no heart in it.
“At least let me buy you dinner sometime this week,” Alex offered. Olivia started to refuse. “No, I insist,” said Alex.

Olivia shook her head. “You’re sweet. Dinner it is, then. Thanks, Alex.” This time, her smile lit up the room. “I’ll see you then.”

“Alright, you call me,” said Alex, turning to leave the precinct, smiling back. The cards were beginning to fall into place.

Benson was obviously interested. She’d blushed and tripped over her words too often for Alex not to notice it. But despite her ball-busting demeanor in the field, she was shy and careful in person. Which meant she really liked Alex. And Alex really liked that.

Well, if Olivia wasn’t going to pursue her, she would pursue Olivia. Aggressively.

“Munch! Benson just filled me in, you got anything new?”

Benson and Stabler pushed Siobhan into the squad car waiting outside the courthouse. “Finally,” said Stabler, “all the loose ends in this one tied up neatly.”
“See?” said Benson, smiling at Alex. “We win sometimes.”
“And when we do, justice is especially sweet,” said Alex maliciously.
“Cabot, remind me to never get on your bad side,” said Elliot.
“You can really tear up a courtroom,” said Olivia.
“I’ll take that as a compliment,” said Alex, contented. “Anyone up for dinner?”

“I’d be crazy to miss pot roast night,” said Elliot. “Besides, Elizabeth’s making the mashed potatoes and she wants my help.”
“Understandable,” said Alex.
“Tell Kathy I said hi,” said Olivia.
“You ladies have fun,” replied Elliot. “I’ll drop the car back at the station.”

Elliot turned for the courthouse parking lot. Alex leaned in close to Olivia.
“Truth be told, I wasn’t inviting him anyway. You seem to be back in your usual spirits.”
Olivia breathed deeply. Alex was close. Very close. “All I really needed was to get my head back in the job. Like I said, it wasn’t entirely unexpected.”
Alex smiled foxily at Olivia. “I’m just glad you’re feeling better. Do you like Italian food?”

Olivia’s brain went dead. “I like anything. I like food.” Especially if you’re involved.
“So, no ID on the girl yet?” said Alex.
“All we know right now is she’s not Carla Brice. We’re headed to missing persons next,” replied Olivia, covering her free ear. “It is buzzing in here today. Sometimes I would kill for a private office.”
“This box? It may be quiet, but it sure is cramped,” said Alex. “I’m not due in court for another forty-five minutes. Got any other wonderful news to tell me?”

“Well, they’ve arrested a suspect who’s a likely match for the department store rapist. We should have the DNA by next week.” Olivia glanced around the office. “Change of subject. What are you doing for New Years?”
“I honestly hadn’t thought about it,” said Alex. “Why?”
“Well, consider this your official invitation to the office party, if you can call it that.” said Olivia. “Munch is old friends with a guy that runs a café two buildings down from his apartment. He closes up for the night and lets cops take over the place. It won’t be a big to-do, but if you’re interested, you’re welcome.”
Alex smiled. “Depends. Is there any particular lure to this gathering?”

Olivia laughed. “It’s the one night of the year that I like to pretend I’m back in college and get stupid drunk. Plus, Elliot gets really weepy after he’s had a few.”
The ADA laughed. “Then I wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

“A warrant for where, exactly?” asked Alex, pushing her glasses up the bridge of her nose.
“Kyle Hubert’s little love nest,” replied Munch.
“Shouldn’t be an issue,” said Alex. “His alibi is paper-thin and the girls find him unsettling. I’ll walk it past the first judge available.”

“I find this whole case unsettling,” said Fin. “This whole gymnastics thing, turning girls into body-conscious women with too many adult men involved. It freaks me out.”
“Welcome to the world of white privilege,” said Alex. “I went through private schooling and I’ve got stories just like this one. Minus the rape and murder, of course.”
“Well, that’s a slight comfort,” said Munch. “Speaking of comfort, would you be interested in partaking in our hospitality this coming New Year’s Eve?”
“Benson already told me about it,” said Alex. “I’ll be there.”

The case closed in a disgusting twist of events, and the grand jury returned a no bill. This murder was just too dark to get to trial.

But that was then and this was now, and this was fun.

No one was too silly. Elliot had left around nine, having promised his wife he’d be home before the New Year. Cragen, a teetotaler, took off shortly after. Now Munch was arguing with the café’s owner, somewhat sloppily, about the merits of Dvorak, and Fin was quietly drinking another beer.

Alex had nursed her prosecco very slowly, watching as Olivia started in on her next whiskey sour. “You promised me stupid drunk, detective,” she chided.
“That was before I had to work tomorrow,” said Olivia, grinning.
“Can you believe Cragen?!” Munch cried out.
“How’d you hear that from all the way over there?” cracked Fin.
“By dulling certain senses, I can elevate others to new heights,” Munch quipped.

“I’m more of a mess than I’d planned, admittedly,” said Olivia.
“You can still walk and you can still speak coherently,” said Alex. “You’re not horrible.”
“You’re right,” said Olivia. “I’m such a champ.” She slumped back in her chair. “God, is it that time already? I need to get home.”
“Come on,” chided the detective at the next table over. Alex had forgotten his name. Cavotta?
“You’re not gonna ring in the New Year?!”
“No, I’d prefer a dull pounding in my head in the morning rather than a fierce migraine.” Olivia sighed. “I’m really not as young as I pretend to be.”
“I getcha,” said the man. He turned to Alex. “Cherish it while you can, Cabot!”

Olivia got to her feet, slightly unsteady. She waved enthusiastically to her colleagues as everyone called their best wishes and goodbyes. “I’ll walk out with you,” offered Alex.
“I’m just buzzed,” Olivia said when they made it out the door. “I’ll be fine.”
“Still, it’s a crazy night,” said Alex. “Let me take you home.”

Olivia’s place wasn’t far, but the night was cold. She linked arms with Alex, glad for a little bit of courage. Had she been sober, she’d be red as a stoplight.
Alex smiled. Tipsy, but not drunk. Happy, but not emotional. Perfect.
“This city is so loud,” said Olivia, shaking her head. “I don’t know how I’m ever going to sleep tonight.”
“Something tells me you’ll do just fine,” said Alex. “How’d you get so unlucky to get stuck working New Year’s Day anyway?”
“That’s what happens when you live alone,” said Olivia, sighing heavily. “You get to do all the fun jobs.”
“Remind me not to tell Cragen I’m a bachelorette, then.”

Someone wolf-whistled as they walked by. Alex didn’t pay it any mind and Olivia didn’t seem to notice.

When they finally made the trek up Olivia’s stairs, the detective plopped down onto her couch.
“You were right about sleeping, I’m exhausted.” She sighed. “Give me a minute, then I’ll see you out.”
“It’s five to midnight,” said Alex. “Turn on the TV and we’ll watch the ball drop, then I’ll go.”

Olivia complied eagerly. She’d always loved this, ever since childhood. The best part of living in New York was New Year’s Eve. As the countdown swelled, Olivia joined in. Still not entirely sober, she thought, still don’t entirely care.

“Five…four…three…two…one! Happy New Year!!” She twisted towards Alex, yelling and throwing up her hands.

Alex snaked an arm behind the detective’s neck and kissed her.
Sunlight streamed through the broken side of the blinds, the trumpet call to awaken the steady
march of troops inside Olivia’s skull. God, her head was pounding. *Yep, officially way too old for
this.* She kept her eyes closed. *No, I don’t want to get up. No.* Something wasn’t quite right. *I’m
naked.*

She never slept naked. She turned over and nearly shot out of bed. *Yeah and I never sleep with a
naked Alex Cabot next to me either. Oh my god, what happened last night. Oh my god. Oh my god
it’s almost 8 o’clock and I am late for work.*

Creeping as quickly as she could, Olivia threw on some clothes, grabbed a banana from the fridge,
and scrawled a note. “Not abandoning you. Off at work. Eat whatever you want.” Though she
wanted to, she didn’t add “I’m positively terrified.”

As she blew out the door and into work, she had no idea of the true mental impact that was to come
as the memories of their liaison flooded in throughout the day.

- 

Alex woke up around 9:30. *I haven’t slept this well in a long, long time,* she thought, stretching out
in content. She could almost purr. Olivia was gone, but that was no surprise. Alex got out of bed
and began collecting her clothing, piece by piece.

After finally tracking down her shirt, she strolled into the kitchen, hoping for some orange juice at
least. She found Olivia’s note and chuckled. *She has to be losing her shit right now.* Alex opened a
(surprisingly well-stocked) fridge and found her orange juice, plus jam and bread. Though Olivia
didn’t exactly mention where to find a spare key.

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Olivia had not slept well lately, which was turning her cases into a disaster. New Year’s brought in
a whole slew of complaints that took them a week and a half to sort out. Elliot kept asking why she
looked so pale. “Just job stress,” she assured him. Hopefully this nasty fraternity party rape would
keep him distracted.

Thank god she hadn’t been called to testify lately. Alex hadn’t called since New Year’s Eve, and
Olivia was almost glad.

It wasn’t that Olivia couldn’t remember what happened. She remembered, all right. She
remembered everything.

- 

“Did either one of these guys make sexual advances towards you?” asked Olivia.

*Alex didn’t kiss her tenderly. It was a hard kiss, and Olivia’s mouth was burning. Without thinking,
Olivia lowered her hands to the blonde’s waist, pulling her in deeper. Alex bit her lip and she
moaned, and Alex giggled back into the kiss.*

“I think you’re propositioning me,” said Olivia, still half drunk.

“You’re absolutely right,” said Alex, unbuttoning her shirt.

“Not more than usual,” Kelly replied, “but we were just having fun.”
“She was drunk!”
“So was he,” replied Elliot.
“So that excuses him?” Olivia asked incredulously.
“No, but her behavior’s open to interpretation.”

“She might’ve played it out and woke up with a case of buyer’s remorse,” Fin offered.
“So now we’re blaming the victim?!” Olivia shot back.
“Nobody is blaming her, but we all know how hard it is to get an indictment on a he-said she-said
without the ambiguities,” Cragen said gently.

“That was the lab, tox screen just came back,” said Munch darkly. “They found traces of GHB in
Kelly’s urine.”
“So much for the ambiguities,” Olivia said casually.

Considering the alcohol-induced ambiguities in her own life, Olivia was not taking this
conversation well.

“It’s an extension of the loco parentis rule of the university,” began Alex. Olivia poured her coffee.
She’d been a useless noodle ever since the ADA walked into the squad room. She lingered by the
coffee pot as long as she possibly could, trying not to look at anyone. Least of all Alex.

“We uh establish a pattern we’ve got our probable cause,” she babbled. Or something like that. She
walked straight past Alex. Nope, not looking. Munch was saying something. Olivia counted her
blessings. At least she wasn’t choking on her tea. Though she wasn’t drinking it either. Alex
looked straight at her. Keep talking Olivia. Keep talking.

“At this point, anything’s worth a shot,” said Cragen. The boys kept moving but Olivia was frozen
in place.

“Just say the word and I’ll stop,” said Alex. Their shirts and Alex’s skirt had disappeared some
time ago. She pushed Olivia back on the bed, kissing a trail down her stomach. Painfully slowly,
she unzipped Olivia’s pants and pulled them down. Olivia threaded a hand through the ADA’s
blonde hair and was rewarded with a wet, hot tongue pushing itself against her soaked panties.


Alex was still looking at her.

“Can I call you?” Olivia blurted. Alex clapped a hand to her mouth, desperate not to laugh.
“Yes, you can call me. I’d like that.”

Olivia was going to wear holes in the floor if she didn’t stop pacing. The phone was still in her
hand. She’d dialed and hung up a million times now.
Just do it. You have to work with her. You have to see her. You said you’d call.

She dialed again and put the phone to her ear, closing her eyes. It rang three times before Alex
picked up.
“Hello?”
“It’s me,” said Olivia. “I…I don’t even know what to say.”
“I know,” said Alex. “I probably should have called you, but I didn’t want to rush anything. Besides, you weren’t entirely sober, and I still don’t know what you remember and what you don’t. Honestly, this case has made me feel awful about it.”

“Oh god, no, don’t say that. What happened with us is nothing like that. I wasn’t that drunk. I remember, Alex. I remember everything and I haven’t been able to get it out of my head and I’m losing my mind because I’m at work, talking to rape victims, and all I can think about is –”

Alex unclasped her bra and rose from the edge of the bed. She pushed herself on top of Olivia and kissed her deeply, her tongue tangling with the brunette’s. Olivia tasted herself in Alex’s mouth. She reached down and stripped off Alex’s panties, plunging two fingers inside the blonde. Alex gasped into Olivia’s mouth and Olivia ground against her.

“That. All I can think about it that.”
Alex let out a long slow breath. “If it’s any consolation, I’ve been having the same problem.” She thought for moment “You know, I still have your spare key.”

“You do?” said Olivia. “I didn’t even think to check if it was gone. Or, come to think of it, tell you where it was.”

“Well, I obviously found it just fine. Though, I do need to give it back to you.”

“You can give me a lot more than that.” said Olivia. Shit. “I said that out loud, didn’t I?”

“That you did,” said Alex, smiling wickedly. “How about I come over and redeem that offer?”

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“I’m nervous,” said Kelly, shaking.

“You’re gonna do fine,” reassured Olivia. “Just listen to Alex. She’ll guide you through the testimony step by step.”

“At an angle,” Alex whispered fiercely. “Like this?” Olivia replied.

“Mmm, god. Yes, just like that.” Alex bucked into Olivia’s hand. She lowered her head to Olivia’s chest. “Pleasure yourself,” she ordered, kissing Olivia’s breasts. Olivia complied. When Alex sucked her nipple, Olivia came hard.

She’s good at that. That guiding thing.

“Will any of them be in the room?”

“No. Just you, Alex, and the grand jury.”

Still, this case was turning out to be trickier than Olivia had ever imagined.

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“You’re really something in there,” Olivia muttered.

“In the bedroom?” joked Alex.

“Yes. No! In the courtroom.”

“The grand jury?” said Alex. “You weren’t even there for half of it.”

“But I’ve been in there, I’ve been on the stand, I’ve watched your cases,” said Olivia. “Your demeanor in the courtroom is like nothing I’ve ever seen. You’re fluid, composed, striking. The first time I testified for you, it scared the hell out of me. My stomach tied itself in knots.”

“I don’t think that was your stomach,” said Alex, eyeing the detective. “I’d hazard that was something about six inches lower.”

“You’re crude,” said Olivia, smiling. She inched closer to the ADA. “So, what are your plans for the evening?”

“Well,” replied Alex, “I was planning to go by your apartment and take your clothes off. I figure
we’ll play it by ear from there.”

“You’re going to make me crazy. I’ll spontaneously combust, I swear,” replied Olivia. She glanced at her watch. “What is taking so long?”

“Don’t read too much into it,” Alex assured her. “They have a lot of evidence to sift through, a lot of testimony to consider.”
“Alex, you can’t imagine how needy this little girl is,” pressed Olivia.
“Needy,” Alex said warily, pulling a chair from in front of her desk. “Olivia, we do sex crimes and child abuse. I’m sorry, but there’s not much we can do for the emotionally short-changed.”
“Well, what about abandonment?” tried Olivia. “Her parents tour nine months out of the year, her father is a documented alcoholic, and what about Corbin?”

Alex looked Olivia over curiously, trying to ascertain what was driving Olivia to fixate on this little girl. Well, she’s passionate in everything she does, I’ll give her that. That was a traffic accident.
“You’re speculating,” countered Alex.
“Not about Ashley’s disorder! Ashley’s tantrums, her running away, her accidents! It can only escalate,” said Olivia.
Alex cut her off. “Olivia, why are you doing this?”
“Because this kid is in trouble,” replied Olivia.

Alex thought for a long moment. I scared the hell out of her on New Year’s. I guess I owe her one.
“We might have imminent risk of harm.”
“Well, there must be something that you can do about that,” said Olivia.
“Maybe,” Alex replied cautiously. “But we still have one major hurdle.”
Olivia sighed heavily. “Yeah, Cragen’s already put me on modified until this blows over.”
Alex smirked. “Ouch.”

They stared at each other for a long moment. Alex glanced at the door twice to make sure it was shut, then leaned in close.
“You’re not using our situation to force a favor, are you?” Alex whispered.
Olivia looked shocked. “No! Come on, do you really think I would do that?”

She narrowed her eyebrows. “Our…situation?”
Alex blushed. “You know. The fact that we’re sleeping together.”
Olivia grinned. “Come on. I’ll give you a ride back to the precinct.”
“You’d better give me another sort of ride if I’m going to take on these celebrity nutjobs,” muttered Alex.

-

Cragen was red in the face, foaming at the mouth. “Are you trying to get fired, because that’s the only option I have left!”
“Do you think I would put myself on the line if I didn’t know what was in store for this little girl?” replied Olivia, remarkably calm.
“She’s been hurting herself for years,” Alex offered, backing Olivia. “We can subpoena her medical records.”
“And her teacher, and the headmaster!” concluded Olivia. “They saw the problem, but did nothing about it! Parents wouldn’t let them.”

Cragen relaxed slightly. “What are you thinking?”
“An Article X proceeding,” answered Alex. “We can remove the girl from the home.”
“That is gonna play great in the press,” said a stressed Cragen.
“Well, it’s family court, not criminal, and I’ve already made a couple of phone calls,” Alex said quickly.
“There isn’t a less disruptive avenue?” Cragen asked.
Olivia shook her head. “None that Ricki can’t circumvent.”

“She’s already circumvented us,” Cragen said sternly. “We’re under a restraining order.”
“It’s an active investigation,” explained Alex. “I’ll get it lifted.”
Benson, Cabot, and Cragen held eye contact for a long, stiff silence.
“Do it,” Cragen ordered finally.

The tension in the room deflated and Olivia let out a deep breath, practically skipping out of the office. They headed for the elevator and waited to speak until the doors were shut.

“Thanks for going to bat for me,” Olivia said softly.
Alex shrugged. “Just doing my job.”
Sure, thought Olivia. “Situation.”
“Hmm?” said Alex.
“Our situation. We don’t just, uh, y’know. We go out. We meet up at restaurants, we enjoy one another’s company,” explained Olivia. “We’re dating.”

“Dating,” mused Alex, stepping out of the elevator. “It’s been a while since I’ve dated anyone. Not since before law school.”
“You’re not the only one out of practice,” replied Olivia. She tried hard to get a read on Alex’s expression.

Alex turned, facing the precinct’s exit. “We should keep this quiet,”
“Wasn’t planning to tell a soul,” replied Olivia.

Elliot continued to look at her from the other side of their desks, his face fixed with a curious expression. “It’s been about a month now, hasn’t it?”

Olivia stared at him in shock. A month? Oh god, it has. How did he figure it out?!
“Since what?” she said, her stomach beginning to knot.
“Your mom,” he replied.
Oh, thank god. He doesn’t know. “Where did that come from?”
“Olivia, it’s me,” he replied. “I know the issues you had with her.”
“No,” said Olivia, shaking her head, flooded with relief. “No connection.”

“Successful woman, rarely home,” continued Elliot. “When she was home, she was drunk. You were lonely and neglected, and you never had a chance to resolve the thing before she died.”
Olivia glanced up at him. “You’re wrong.”
Elliot gave up. “I’ll get you a coffee.”

Some partner, she thought. Right now, she’d much prefer the company of Alex, who didn’t ask questions and was much better with her mouth. Albeit, for different reasons.
Secrets

Every morning before work, Olivia left her apartment to run the loop around Central Park. Well, not every morning. She’d been known to miss a day occasionally, after a particularly long day at work or a sleepless night at home, or if she felt like lifting some weights instead. It wasn’t new, but Central Park always had something interesting going on, and she liked to exercise in the morning. It stirred her brain and prepared her for the day ahead.

Plus, it came in handy sometimes. Like when she had to sprint after a high school student for five solid blocks.

"You busy?" Olivia muttered into the phone.
"Well, it is late, but I was heading to bed anyway," replied Alex. "What’s going on?"
Olivia groaned. "I need a break. We’ve been interviewing swingers all night from the filthiest place I’ve ever stepped into."
"Filthier than that Flings place?" asked Alex.
"You have no idea," said Olivia. "These people could put a year’s worth of fluids into a mattress in one night. I felt violated."

"It’s a different world, that’s for sure," said Alex, breathing out. "One I’d prefer to stay far away from."
"Call me old-fashioned, but whatever happened to monogamy? Beyond the incredible STD risk, there’s all the emotional baggage weighing these people down," said Olivia, "It can’t be healthy."
"It’s not," replied Alex, "that’s why we’ve got a dead woman on our hands."

"Hold on," said Olivia, "Munch and Fin are fighting and Cragen’s walking over. I need to pretend like I’m working."
"Don’t worry about it," said Alex. "I should get some sleep anyway."

She’d almost lost it in the grand jury. She’d gone at Montrose with every ounce of frigid ardor in her body, and he didn’t crack, and she’d been this close to slapping him directly across the face.

Everyone was expecting her to bring this one in. Petrovsky had openly told her what to do and she had failed. Cragen had pretended not to be disappointed, but she’d heard it in his voice. Elliot had shaken his head in anger at the verdict. Olivia had looked at her sadly, her eyes saying It’s not your fault.

But it still wasn’t right. The horrible violations of confidence replayed in her mind over and over again. "She was a WHORE!" Montrose yelled. The testimony of the rest of the people from Dante’s burned in her brain. "She’d sleep with any guy, any way, any how."

In Alex’s mind, personal lives stayed personal and secrets were kept. She stayed in her office until she heard the janitor in the hallway, then packed up her things and headed home.
Her cell phone sang shrilly, an unwelcome guest at this little party.

“Oh please, shut up,” Olivia moaned.
“Mm,” Cabot sucked on Olivia’s mound a little harder. “You’ll have to answer it eventually, you know,” she said into Olivia’s pussy, the heat from her voice ticklish.
“Fine,” sighed Olivia. “But stop that so I can concentrate. Benson.”

“Sorry to wake you, Detective, but we’ve got shots fired in Kips Bay and a dead pedophile on our hands. Your partner’s already on his way,” stated Cragen.
“Alright,” sighed Olivia. “I’ll be right there.”

“Pick her up,” ordered Cabot, clearly distracted.
“Okay, why’re we doing this now?” asked Elliot.

Olivia was only half paying attention. She was in a daze from a lack of sleep, lost in the events of the previous evening. Alex’s hands gripped her pencil tenderly, and Olivia thought back to those same hands on her body, squeezing and twisting and pressing against all the right places.

“I’m not doing this,” Elliot said firmly, his voice rising.
She jolted back to reality. “Elliot…”
“No!”

“Guess that lets Lindsey off the hook,” said Olivia.
“And it puts us on the trail of a serial killer,” responded Elliot.
“Look, you handle this how you want, but I’m going home,” said Olivia. “I’ve been nodding off all day and I really just want to pass out.”
“Feel free,” said Elliot. “Call Cabot for me, though. Tell her she was wrong.”
Olivia rolled her eyes. “Sure, I’m gonna love having that conversation. Goodnight.”

She dialed her phone after getting off the subway.
“Hello?”
“I suppose you’ve heard about our second dead sex offender?”
“Cragen called me about twenty minutes ago. I squared everything away with the Bransons.”
“That’s good,” said Olivia. “Actually, I’m calling on behalf of Elliot. He wanted me to, and I quote, ‘tell her she was wrong,’” she said sarcastically.
“I’ll cherish it dearly,” said Alex. “Are you heading home for the night, or are you up for drinks?”
“Sorry, not tonight. I caught three hours in the crib last night, but otherwise I’m walking dead. I’m going straight to sleep.”

“Ballistics report came back positive for the Campbell attack.”
“But no match on the murders,” finished Elliot.
“Sure?” pressed Cabot.
Olivia handed her the report. “Tested it twice. We don’t have the murder weapon.”
“Then we don’t have a case,” Alex said matter-of-factly. “The most I can charge him with is
attempted murder on Mr. Campbell.”

“Unless you play hardball,” replied the Captain. Olivia frowned. The Captain was giving Alex a weird look, and she didn’t like where this was going. Clearly, neither did Elliot.

“Look, wait a minute,” he cut in, “I read the file. There was a kid in the car, he thought the perp was carrying, the skull had already raped and tortured the kid’s mother.”

“I know the facts,” Cragen said gravely, “but we’ve got two murders to close.”

Olivia caught Alex’s eye. The ADA looked back, her expression sour.

Elliot looked dumbstruck. “So we pat our win column at the expense of a good cop? Because he made a judgment call?”

Alex and Olivia looked on. Thankfully, no fireworks this time. Cragen backed off and Elliot headed off to the interrogation room. Alex sighed and gave Olivia a sideways glance. “This ridiculous pissing contest is getting awfully old.”

“You okay?” asked Olivia.

She was visibly worried, so Elliot lied. He nodded.

“Want to go grab a drink?” she offered.

“Nah, I should go home,” he said, smiling.

“You sure?” she said. “Yeah,” he replied.

She looked remarkably downcast. “Okay, I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“You will,” he replied, patting her shoulder.

Olivia sat back down at her desk, her head in her hands.

“Olivia? You okay?”

She turned. Cabot was standing by the door.

Olivia sighed. “Sort of. We got a call from the hospital. Turns out Elliot’s at risk of contracting HIV due to the wound in his hand.”

Alex looked worried. “And you?”

The detective shook her head. “Didn’t ingest any fluids, didn’t touch any wounds. My risk is practically non-existent.” Olivia stared ahead blankly. “It’s very scary to think about.”

“How so?” asked Alex.

Olivia lowered her voice. “With my mother dying so recently and all –”

“Olivia,” Alex cut in. She stared Olivia down, her blue eyes piercing the detective. “Elliot is going to be fine. Nothing is certain. He’s not going to die.”

“It’s just hard when the people you care about are at risk,” Olivia said. “SVU is my family now, and I don’t like it when my family’s in trouble.”

“Walk with me?” offered Cabot.

They left the precinct in silence. When they’d made it a few blocks from the station, Olivia gripped Alex’s arm. Alex saw a single tear roll down Olivia’s cheek.

“Olivia…”

“It’s true,” Olivia whispered. “This really is the only family I have left.”

“Look at me,” said Alex softly. Olivia turned her head.

“Olivia, I don’t know a lot about your family situation, and to be honest, I’m terrible at this sort of thing.”

“What sort of thing?”

“Comforting people,” said Alex. She looked slightly cynical. “Some would say being nice.”

Olivia laughed a little.
“But, I do want you to know that I’m here for you. Whatever you choose to keep to yourself, I
won’t press for. And whatever you do tell me, I will keep a secret.”

She pulled the blonde in for a hard, unexpected hug. Alex felt an unfamiliar sensation brewing in
the pit of her stomach.
“Guys, wait a minute,” said Elliot, hanging up the phone. “Last week a woman in Queens was raped, nearly choked to death in a warehouse. The perp broke into that warehouse…using a crowbar. Three days ago, she woke up and told Queens SVU her attacker put a plastic bag over her head.”

Munch looked severe. “A repeater.”
“Carrying a cop’s gun,” said Olivia gravely.
“We got this,” said Fin. “Let us make this guy comfortable and we’re on our way.”

Elliot sunk his head into his hands, his elbows planted squarely on his desk.
“Hanging in there?” asked Olivia.

Elliot sighed. “Between the nausea and the dizziness, yeah. This couldn’t have come at a more inconvenient time,” though.
“Why’s that?” asked Olivia.
“Valentine’s Day,” he replied. “Looks like this year, the best present I can give my wife is ‘not HIV.’”

Shit. Valentine’s Day.

“You’re right,” said Olivia, “I hadn’t even thought about that.”

- 

“I’m going to see the Chief of Departments,” said Cragen.
“That sounds like a suicide mission,” said Olivia.
“Let’s hope not,” replied Cragen, “he’s a friend. Maybe he knows who’s trying to shut us down.”
“We can’t let this go,” pushed Olivia.

“Oh, we’re not,” said Cragen. “It’s our turf.”

Olivia nodded. It was time to run an errand.

- 

Alex was drawing up witness lists for upcoming cases when she heard a knock on the door.

“Hey Cabot, mail’s here.”
She frowned. “So early?”
Williams shrugged. “It’s Valentine’s Day. Guess they put a rush on it.”

She pulled out a handful of things from her mailbox. The usual interoffice requests, something involving case files, and a couple of personal envelopes. One would be the Valentine’s note from her Uncle Bill; no matter how old she got, he never failed to send something. The other simply said “Alex,” on the front. She closed the door to her office, laughed at Uncle Bill’s corny card, and opened the last envelope.

“Dinner tonight, my place, 7:30? I promise this isn’t all I got you. Didn’t want to send anything too flashy, figured the office would ask questions. See you then. XO, Olivia.”

Alex smiled warmly. Subtle. She grabbed her briefcase and headed for court.
“That was delicious,” said Alex, sipping the last of her wine. “Where’d you learn to cook like that?”
“You pick up a lot of useful skills, being a latchkey kid,” said Olivia. “Hold on, I did promise you something else.”

She grabbed a small box from the hall closet. “It’s nothing out of the ordinary, but I figured you’d still like it.”
Alex stood and undid the wrapping. “Champagne truffles, delicious.” She smiled at Olivia.
“Thanks. I promise I’m not dating you just for the food. You can unwrap yours now.”
Olivia tore the wrapping off Alex’s gift and lifted the lid. “Hey, new running shoes!”
“Yours look like they haven’t been replaced in about eight months,” said Alex.
“Try a year,” replied Olivia. “I’ll get good use out of these. Thanks a lot, Alex.”
Alex raised an eyebrow. “Actually, I got you something else, too.” She pulled Olivia in close, sliding her hands under her shirt.

“Hmm?” said Olivia.
“I brought charges against the two IAB officers who’ve been stonewalling us,” whispered Alex. She squeezed Olivia’s left breast.
“God, you’re the best,” Olivia breathed. She pulled Alex in for a kiss.

Alex responded enthusiastically, pulling the detective’s shirt over her head and unclasping her bra. She took Olivia’s breasts in her hands, fondling them gently as Olivia unbuttoned the ADA’s blouse. The brunette leaned forward, kissing her neck, and Alex ground against her. She reached down to unzip Olivia’s pants.

“Mm,” muttered Olivia. “The kitchen’s not exactly clean right now.”
“Then bedroom,” replied Alex. She let Olivia lead the way, admiring the detective’s ass.
“You’re wearing too many clothes,” said Olivia.
“I can fix that,” said Alex sensually. She slid off her skirt, then unhooked her bra, letting it fall gently and slowly from her shoulders. Olivia stared at her, mouth slightly agape. Alex carefully hooked her index fingers beneath her black lace panties, then changed her mind.
“You first,” she ordered.

She climbed on top of Olivia and kissed her deeply, her tongue finding its way into the detective’s mouth. She pulled off Olivia’s underwear and circled her finger around the brunette’s clit, then reached up to twist her nipple. Olivia moaned.

Alex pulled back, grinning wickedly. “Happy Valentine’s Day.” She abruptly thrust two fingers into Olivia’s pussy and began to fuck her hard.

“Drop the charges?” said Alex incredulously.
“That’s what I’m asking you to do,” said Olivia.
“I have bulletproof evidence! It’s a no-brainer for the grand jury.”
“I understand that,” began Olivia, “but if we go ahead with this, Karen Smythe’s life could be in danger. She becomes a victim all over again, only this time? This time it’s our fault.”

Alex pursed her lips. “A conviction on drug charges puts Town and Bates away for a lot longer than they ever would go for the rape.”
Alex gave her a stunned look. “Don’t ask me to let them walk on a rape.”
“You think that I want to?” Olivia said in a small voice. “I would string them up myself if I could.”
“We all would, but it’s not about that. It’s about the law.”
Olivia pursed her lips. “A conviction on drug charges puts Town and Bates away for a lot longer than they ever would go for the rape.”
Alex looked irritated. “That’s not exactly justice, is it?” She couldn’t look Olivia in the eye though.
“These cops took away part of her life,” replied Olivia. “Is it justice for us to take away the rest?” She finally met Alex’s gaze. 

Don’t look at her, thought Alex. Don’t, or you’re going to think back to Valentine’s and do whatever she says. Don’t let her get to you. Remember the law, remember your principles.

“I’ll see if my bosses will go for it,” she began, “I’ll just...tell them to do the math.” She nodded at Olivia and walked off. Cabot, you limp rag.
Olivia glanced at her watch and sighed. “Hey you guys, it’s going on eight o’clock, we’re fresh out of leads, what do you say we call it a day?”
Everyone shrugged in agreement. “Still got time to go to the toy store,” said Elliot. “Kathy’s gonna faint when she finds out I got the twins’ birthday present two days early.”

Olivia dialed Alex’s number.
“Alex.”
“Hey, it’s me.”
“What’s the word?”
“We still on for dinner?”
“Absolutely,” Alex said wryly. “See you in fifteen?”
Olivia laughed. “I think so.” She smiled broadly. “Okay. See you then.”

“How’s Mr. Perfect?” asked Munch.
“Ahh…” Play it cool, thought Olivia, but be convincing. “He’s good. Of course I’ve only met him once and the only time I talk to him is when I’m calling to cancel, but other than that, great.”
“You got any plans tonight Munch?” interrupted Fin. Thank you.

Cragen pulled open the elevator doors. “Everybody stays.”
“Why?” said Elliot, confused.
“Man in a white van grabbed another girl.”

Everyone filed out of the elevator, but Olivia hung back. She pulled open her phone and hit redial.
“Well, the captain’s cancelled our dinner plans.”
Alex sighed. “Looks like it’s leftovers for me, then.”

The sun was just coming up when Alex entered the squad room. “Good lord,” she remarked, “this place exploded into paperwork.”
“Ah, bureaucracy,” Munch offered. “You’re here early. Would you like some coffee?”
“No thanks,” said Alex, “seems like you need it more. Anything turn up from the canvas last night?”
“I wish,” groaned Fin.
“We need Sophie Douglas,” said Elliot. He turned to face the rest of the squad. “Come on, daybreak. Let’s move it to the back.”

Alex nodded. “I’ll serve notice as soon as I can get in front of a judge.” She glanced at Olivia who was hastily going through files. “Got anything for me, Benson?”
“In a minute,” she said. She waited for everyone else to get back to work, then motioned for Alex to come in closer.

“Last night, Munch overheard me on the phone.”
Alex’s eyebrows shot up as she paled.
“He didn’t hear the other end,” Olivia muttered. “So, I, uh, kind of made up a boyfriend.”
“I see,” said Alex. “Well, I’m just glad his hearing isn’t razor sharp. Maybe this could work to our advantage, who knows,” she said stonily. “Thanks for letting me know.”

She turned sharply and strode out. Olivia felt perplexed. Did she say something wrong?
Alex figured she might as well put in extra hours as well. The snatch of the second girl had put SVU in overdrive, and the hoops she’d had to jump through to compel Mrs. Douglas to allow Sophie back for an interview had put her way behind schedule. Plus, it wasn’t like her girlfriend was going to stop by any time soon.

Alex set down the file and stared at the wall, pissed.

The phone rang. Olivia snatched it up.
“Benson–”
“Pretend I’m this so-called boyfriend and act apologetic.”
“Michael,” said Olivia, calling up the first name that came into her brain. “Hi. I am so sorry.”
Munch listened surreptitiously from the next desk over. “Keep going,” said Alex.
“Yeah, we have kind of a cluster going here,” said Olivia.
“Make it look like it isn’t going to work,” the blonde ordered.
“I…I really can’t talk right now, so let me call you later, okay? Alright, thanks.”

Olivia hung up the phone. She was confused and not entirely sure what had just happened, but she was far too tired to care.

“Dammit, it’s the twins’ birthday and I never picked up their present,” griped Elliot.
“Well, I think you have an excuse,” said Olivia.
“Yeah, you come talk to me after you cancel on Michael again tonight.”
Olivia floundered. What should she say?

-Dammit Alex, why did you do this? Why’re you acting so strange? He isn’t even real.

The talk with the Queens detectives wasn’t cordial, but it was effective. Elliot and Olivia bolted from the diner with a few new leads.

“Damn, you flattened that sandwich,” said Elliot.
“I’m pissed,” she replied.

And she was. She was pissed at this kid-raping waste of space and she was pissed that she’d had to make up something so stupid and she was pissed at her girlfriend. Olivia was running on fumes and done with secrets and lies for now.

“I’m not cancelling on Michael again because I’m not calling him again. He rang me this morning to let me know that he’s no longer interested.”
Elliot stared at her apologetically. “Olivia…”
“Whatever. We’ve got a little girl to find.”

They’d finally cornered the bastard. After 72 hours of sleeplessness, they’d gotten Mills. He was going to burn in hell after the government put a needle in his arm.

She called Cragen to tell him the good news, then gotten permission to catch the subway back to her apartment. It was time to commence mission shower. She turned the key and opened the door, the fresh scent of…deli sandwiches hitting her like a truck.
“You never did take back your spare key,” said Alex, munching away on a ham and swiss.
“You’re wonderful,” said Olivia. “Thank you.”
“I’m just glad this bastard’s off the street.”
“Man,” said Olivia deliriously, “I can’t stay mad at you.”
“You were mad at me?”
“The fake boyfriend thing. It was stupid. Don’t even worry about it.”

She sat down on the couch. She’d meant to reach for her sandwich, but she passed out from exhaustion before she got the chance.

Alex knew why Olivia was mad, of course. The ADA had been forceful and jealous about the entire ridiculous situation. But it was important to Alex to keep up appearances. Olivia needed to remain a straight woman in the eyes of SVU.

“See you later, Olivia.” She let herself out.
Olivia was used to keeping things hidden, but she was still a little miffed with Alex for the stunt with the made-up boyfriend. She understood the need for secrecy regarding their relationship, but she felt like Alex owed her a more thorough explanation. Still, Alex was entitled to keep things to herself, and it was a stupid thing to stay mad about for too long.

Plus, this was the first relationship she’d had in a while where one of the parties wasn’t looking for an out.

Cragen stormed out of his office. “Elliot, with me. We’ve got a hostage situation.”

“The renovations will continue up until the end of May, so I’m going out to the summer house while your father, God rest his soul…”

“Mhm,” said Alex. She was positively bored to tears. Trying to make use of this otherwise wasted time, she sorted through juror questionnaires and made a list of potential strikes.

“Anyway, it looks like your brother is going to make it out of grad school after all, just barely. Honestly Alexandra, I wish he had your work ethic. But what’s new with you? Did you hear about that policeman whose daughter went missing? Truly awful.”

Alex sighed. “Actually, I have. The father is friends with SVU’s captain, so our unit caught the case.”

“Our unit? Don’t you mean your unit, Alexandra? They work for you, after all. Anyway, you ought to apply for a change of venue, it can’t be healthy to deal with all those sexual crimes all day long. I knew a friend of your father’s, a real louse –”

“Mother, someone’s on the other line. I really have to go.”

Alex sipped her coffee while watching Jeffries interrogate the young man. Was this for real? She’d gone to some pretty wild parties in college, but nothing like the raves that the street kids described. It was a whole other world to her, one filled with danger and lacking in second chances. But perhaps that was what white privilege bought you. The opportunity to screw up without ruining your life. Allowing yourself to lose control without losing your safety net. Superiority.

“He’s not much help,” said Cragen, sighing.

“He can’t even make an ID,” said Alex. “We’ve got nothing.”

“What about the new date rape drug law?” asked Cragen. “We could charge the creeps who doped him with facilitating a sex offense.”

“If we could find whoever gave him the drugs or shot the film,” countered Alex. “Right now, I need a perp.”

“We need Jill Foster,” replied Cragen.

“I’d prefer a witness who wasn’t a drugged-out street kid,” said Alex. Especially superiority.

The captain’s door burst open. “That’s it, both of you!”

“Captain,” began Munch.

“You wanna go undercover, we’ll go undercover! Jeffries, I want you at that rave tonight!”
“Captain,” said Jeffries, “with all due respect, there’s no way in hell I’m going in there by myself.”
“Fine,” commanded Cragen, “you all go! I’m calling the brass.” He retreated to his office.

Elliot looked at Olivia. “Does that include us?”
Olivia felt sick to her stomach. “I sure as hell hope not.”

The vultures were circling. After Jill’s and Tito’s deaths, Captain Cragen had become an example and the entire unit was being hung out to dry. But no one caved. The loyalty of the SVU detectives had been too steady to shake. And, to everyone’s surprise, so had Alex Cabot’s.

Munch and Elliot had tried to convince her to come out for drinks after work, but Alex declined, saying that she had plans for the evening and that she appreciated the offer.
“Another time,” she said, “I promise. Thanks.” She gathered up her coat and headed into the night.

“She’s really not all that bad,” said Munch. “Not the friendliest woman, but I’ve certainly known worse.”
Elliot nodded. “Her heart’s in the right place.”
“Well, continue making nice, and maybe you’ll get the Cabot aristocracy to put your kids through college,” suggested Munch.
“I think I just became ill,” said Elliot. “Does her family really have that much money?”
“It’s all speculation, but I’ve seen the family name come up once or twice in the papers,” replied Munch. “Besides, everything about her screams white upper-class privilege. You missed a great moment in which she made fun of Benson’s get-up for our little operation.”

“Actually, I was thinking she might’ve skipped out tonight because Olivia left early, I know they hang out after work occasionally,” said Elliot. He frowned. “She didn’t say why, come to think of it.”
“Why they hang out? I’d think that’s obvious, your detective skills are slipping,” replied Munch. Elliot rolled his eyes. “No, Munch. Why she left.”

“Did somebody at least get a picture of your outfit?” asked Alex.
“It was expressly forbidden,” replied Olivia. “A mutual pact was made by all parties involved to prevent physical documentation of our appearance.”
“Sounds like something Munch came up with,” said Alex. “But really, I still can’t believe people enjoy these things, much less attend them.”
“Some people like to let off some steam by doing drugs and dancing until they can’t feel their legs,” replied Olivia. She took a sip of her water. “Didn’t you ever go out in college?”
“Yeah, but I was never more than a little tipsy,” said Alex. “It made it a lot easier to pick up chicks.”

Olivia raised an eyebrow.
“Hey,” said Alex, “some people turn experimental when they’re drunk.”
“Valid point,” conceded Olivia. She thought for a minute. “When did you first know?”
“Know what?”
“That you were interested in girls.”

Alex thought for a moment. “Always,” she replied. “You?”
Olivia shrugged. “It’d floated in the back of my mind for a while, but it didn’t cement itself until I was at a party in high school. A drunk friend of mine violently made out with me, and after I got over the shock, I discovered that I was having a really good time.” She laughed. “I guess drunk
people just seek me out. God knows I’ve had enough experience, thanks to my mother.”

“I can’t even imagine,” said Alex. “But, I can sympathize. My mother’s a heinous bitch.”
Olivia looked at her, shocked. “Oh come on.”
“Don’t even try, Olivia,” said Alex. Her voice deadpanned. “I am 100% serious.” She leaned over to kiss the detective. “Let’s talk about something else.”
“We got a pattern here. Check with NCIC, maybe Jill played her fantasy out in some other city before she took her act on the road,” ordered Cragen. “Coe have any family here?”
“A brother,” Fin replied, “a high-powered art dealer. He owns the apartment on Riverside Drive where Victor lives.”
Cragen nodded. “Persuade him to let you take a look around.” He turned. “Benson, Stabler, with the asbestos testing we’ve got files piling up. You’re on delivery duty before you talk to DeSantos.”

Elliot sighed. “Where to, Cap?”
“A few are headed to the 20th, the rest to the DA,” said Cragen. “Not terribly out of the way. You might call Cabot first, there’s a chance she could be in court.”
“I’ll do it,” offered Olivia. “you get the car.” As everyone headed out, she grabbed the phone and dialed Cabot’s number.

“Alex Cabot.”
“It’s Benson. We’re coming by to drop off a couple of files, just wanted to make sure you were in first.”
“You might want to wait; I was just heading out for docket. Any news on Coe?”
“Touch and go,” said Olivia. “We’re off to see if he’s connected to DeSantos or Dowd in any way. Anything else?”
“Actually, yes. Drinks tonight, after work. I’ll call you with details when I clock out.”

It happened once every few months, but was almost unbearable when it did. Jury selection went from tedious to agonizing, doing paperwork became impossible, and meetings in chambers? Forget about it. If Alex Cabot’s libido didn’t stop raging, she was going to murder the next person who sneezed at her wrong.

At least this time, she had a willing partner. She’d gone out with Olivia for drinks last night then ravaged the detective fiercely. At first Olivia had been shocked. Then she’d turned eager and receptive.

Alex groaned. “Come on,” she pleaded, “harder.” She grabbed Olivia’s hip, sinking her nails in as the brunette pounded three fingers in and out.
Olivia laughed. “You’re insatiable tonight. What is this, round three? You know I’ve gotta get some sleep at some point.”
“I don’t care,” moaned Alex. “All I care about is that you don’t stop.”
“You’re insane,” said Olivia. She leaned in to kiss Alex, straddling the blonde. Her left hand slid in and out of Alex’s pussy rapidly, her fingers slick with come. Olivia reached her right hand down and pressed hard onto Alex’s clit.
“Shit!” yelled the blonde. She arched her back and came violently as Olivia kissed her neck.

Yeah, fuck the paperwork. Nothing was getting done today.

“You think DeSantos knows who these people are?” asked Alex.
“Maybe she helps them fulfill their fantasies,” suggested Cragen.
Did you have to phrase it that way? Really?
“Pimps don’t just supply client lists,” said Fin. “They’re supposed to provide protection and screen out the freaks.”

“So you think she intentionally sent her escorts to the slaughter,” said Alex. I’m going to slaughter someone myself if I don’t get laid within the next 24 hours.

“She sent Tommy Dowd to these people twice,” stated Munch. “I think she knew exactly what she was doing.”

“It’s not enough to arrest her,” Alex countered quickly. “It’s enough for a search warrant, but the second you serve it, she’s tipped off and you’re left with just pimping and one uncorroborated statement from a co-conspirator.”

“Any suggestions Counselor, we’re open to ‘em.”

Oh, I’ve got suggestions, but nothing I want you hearing. “Maybe Tommy Dowd will agree to wear a wire.”

“We have nothin’ to offer him,” said Fin.

“Except the chance to do the right thing,” said Alex. “Especially if he feels he’s responsible for his friend’s death.”

She glanced across the hallway and caught sight of Detective Benson heading their way. The detective saw Alex and smiled. Alex looked her straight in the eye. I want you, Olivia. I want you hot and wet and right now, I don’t care who knows it.

At the other end of the hall, Olivia felt slightly violated, but aroused.

WHO approved this?” said Mrs. Dowd, steaming.

An awkward silence ensued.

“I did,” said Alex, her heart sinking.

Olivia looked at her sympathetically.

A knock came on the office door. “Come in,” called Alex.

“Just me,” said Olivia. She closed the door behind her. “The happy couple’s been shipped upstate, and I’ve got a last batch of files for you. They’re finishing the asbestos testing up today, thank god. How’re you doing? Libido still going strong?”

Alex leaned back in her chair. “Not anymore. Nothing like a grieving mother to knock the wind out of your sails.”

Olivia leaned against the edge of Alex’s desk. “That’s too bad. It’s been a lot of fun.”

“Don’t worry,” said Alex. “It’ll happen again.”

Olivia leaned in for a quick kiss. “I hope so,” she said, smiling.

This is a bad idea.

Alex leaned forward and kissed her again. And again, and again. And before either woman entirely knew what was happening, Olivia was straddling Alex’s office chair, reaching underneath her skirt. “Quietly,” whispered Alex, “We shouldn’t. But keep going.”

“I thought you said you’d –”

“I know what I said. Apparently, I lied.”

Alex gently pushed her chair back so Olivia could kneel between her legs. The detective hiked up Alex’s skirt and pulled down her panties. She kissed her way up Alex’s thighs and Alex bit her lip,
trying her damndest not to make any noise. Olivia’s tongue, wet and warm, traced Alex’s outer lips and drew a circle around her clit, painfully slowly, before lowering to her slit. This is a bad idea. Alex’s hips bucked slightly, on impulse, and Olivia drove her tongue into Alex’s pussy, humming with pleasure. Gripping her chair with one hand, Alex threaded the other through the detective’s hair as Olivia fucked her senseless with her mouth.

She removed her mouth from Alex’s slit and pressed it against the upper edge of the blonde’s mound, dragging her tongue across her clit. Alex could feel her toes curling. Every inch of her body ached with the sensation she’d been craving for the past three days, a want so deep she’d never known it existed. Her clit was exploding with pleasure as Olivia sucked on her mound. This is a bad idea. Alex twisted her fingers in the detective’s hair. “Olivia,” she whispered, “oh god, Olivia…”

“Hey Counselor, have you seen my –”

Elliot flung open the door unannounced and uninvited. The ADA, Detective Benson, and Detective Stabler froze.

“I see you’re busy. I’ll just come back another time, then,” said Elliot. He slammed the door shut.

“Oh my god,” said Olivia. She sprung up from behind the desk. “I swear I locked it. Do you have a tissue? Never mind, I found them.” She snatched a kleenex off of Alex’s desk and hastily wiped her mouth. “I bet I smell like it too. Man, I’m sorry Alex, I am so sorry.” Alex didn’t say anything. She sat in her chair heavily, whiter than a ghost.

“Alex? Are you okay? Alex?” Olivia gripped her shoulder and Alex jumped.

“I…am going to kill Elliot Stabler. And I was almost finished too,” she spat bitterly. Olivia chuckled and Alex glared at her. “This is no laughing matter. Get out there and make sure he keeps his mouth shut. Otherwise, I’ll have his balls.” Olivia bit her cheek, suppressing a smile. “Yes ma’am.”

- 

Olivia softly opened the door to Alex’s office. Elliot was waiting on a bench down the hallway, redder than a stop sign. She quietly sidled up to him.

“Car waiting?” she asked. He nodded wordlessly.

“Then let’s go.”

They walked down the courthouse steps in silence.

“Uh, Elliot…”

“Wow,” he said, breathing out. “Uh…first let me apologize. To both you and Cabot. And second, please do whatever you can to convince her not to kill me.”

“I don’t think she’s going to kill you, Elliot.”

“Hey, you didn’t see her face, you were – you know what, I’m not even going to go there. I didn’t even know you swung that way.”

“I swing both ways,” said Olivia, a little embarrassed.

He sighed deeply. “How long has this been happening? Or was it a spur of the moment type thing?”

“Since New Year’s,” said Olivia. “Look, could you please not tell anyone? There are a lot of reasons why we need to keep this a secret.”

“Well, if you wanna keep it quiet, I’d suggest not going down on her in her office,” Elliot said, his face turning redder.

“Swear to god, Elliot, I thought I locked the door.”
“Don’t worry,” he replied. “I won’t say a word. I don’t think anyone’d believe me anyway.” He groaned. “God, it’s gonna take weeks for me to get that out of my head.”
“Pervert,” cracked Olivia.
“No more than you.”
“Touché.”
“John!” yelled Fin.

“Anything on the tattoo?”
Fin nodded. “Butch filled in a few details. I ran it through PIMS and got a hit. Skell named Frank Taggett on parole for assault.”

“Where?” asked Munch.

“PO said he got a custodial job at the fish market.”

Munch grabbed his coat. “Later, Counselor.”
Alex sighed. She should probably get back to work as well. She turned to leave and was faced with a very interesting scene.

On the left, there was Elliot, trying desperately not to look at her, biting his cheek and concentrating intensely on a pile of papers. On the right, there was Olivia, fierce and gorgeous, practically boring holes in Alex with her stare. Alex knew that look all too well.

She wants to know why I haven’t called.

“Good luck up there,” said Elliot. He hung up the phone. “Okay, we’ve officially brought Munch and Fin up to speed. With that, I’m clocking out for the night.”

“Wait up,” said Olivia, “I’ll walk out with you.”
She grabbed her coat and followed Elliot out. They got on the elevator in silence.

“So…” began Olivia, “when are you going to start talking to me again?”

“Man, I’m sorry,” said Elliot. “It’s just been really hard to process.”

“I’m still the same person,” said Olivia, a little peeved.

“No, it’s not that at all,” said Elliot hastily. “I’m just really not used to, you know, invading people’s intimacy. Plus, I’m still worried that Cabot’s going to slaughter me if I so much as walk funny.”

Olivia sighed. “I wouldn’t know. I haven’t talked to her since it happened.”

Elliot looked Olivia in the eye for the first time in a week. “Wait, what?”

“You think you’re freaked out by this?” said Olivia. “She’s petrified. We work in a profession where there are lots of gay females, but the DA’s office? Not so much.”

The brunette sighed. “I do wish she’d talk to me, though.”

“Then call her,” said Elliot. “Don’t sit around waiting. Believe me, I’ve been married sixteen years, I know.”

Well, this was a first. Alex had been known to run when she had no other alternative, but Canada was a bit of a stretch, especially considering that she didn’t own a car. At least she was legitimately here on business.

She’d just arrived at work that morning when Phillips had laid out the order to go up north and barter. After a good bit of hard bargaining, she’d managed to convince an old friend to lend her a set of wheels with the promise that she’d pay him back somehow. Then her cell phone rang and she answered on impulse.
“Alex Cabot.”
“Got a minute?”

*Why right now? “Actually, I don’t. I’m about to get on the road for Canada.”
“I didn’t think you were that desperate to avoid me,” cracked Olivia.
“You know that’s not the reason I’m going,” said Alex.*

“Well, you can’t hide from me forever,” replied Olivia. She lowered her voice. “Trust me, Elliot practically wants to throw up every time he thinks about it. I don’t think he’s even told Kathy.”
“I know,” said Alex. “This honestly isn’t a good time, though. I’ll call you once this whole debacle is resolved and I’m back in the city. I promise.”

She’d gotten in the car, turned the ignition, and pumped up the radio, desperately trying not to think. Her head sunk into her hands.

“Where is he?” rang a familiar voice.
Alex got up. “In a holding cell.”
“What’re you doing here?” asked Fin.
“Uh, serving the extradition warrant,” began Alex. *What indeed.*

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John burst out of interrogation “He says they won’t extradite on capital offenses?!”
“Canadian Supreme Court tightened their restrictions last year.”
“So he could flip us off from Canadian prison,” Munch said incredulously.
“Well, he can make the argument,” replied Alex. “That doesn’t mean he’ll win.”
“He saves his neck, he wins,” countered Munch.

Alex was back in prime form. Away from the distractions of the city and one very alluring detective, she’d been able to clear her head. Canada had allowed her to strengthen her resolve and get ready to face the true challenge that lay back home: apologizing to Detective Benson.
“Look,” she said, grabbing her briefcase. “I did not come all the way up here to go home empty-handed. John, you did your job. Now let me do mine.”

Munch watched her walk away. There was something funny about that woman; he just couldn’t pin down what.

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Alex waited patiently at the table, anxiously downing her third glass of water. What was taking Olivia so long?
She’d felt so sure of herself this morning. She’d called Olivia as she promised, setting a date for dinner as a way to create neutral ground. She’d wanted them to be on equal footing for this discussion.
God, why was this happening? If it’d been someone else, Alex would have waited a while, then called to say things weren’t working out and that they’d be better off if they saw other people.
If it’d been someone else. Something about Olivia compelled Alex not to pull her usual disappearing act, and the ADA had yet to determine exactly what that was.

“Hey, sorry, we were –”
Alex jumped, spilling water down her front.
“Oh man, I’m sorry Alex,” said Olivia hastily. She grabbed her napkin. “Here.”

Alex pressed the napkin to the spill. “At least it’s only water. You scared the hell out of me.” She
breathed out. “God, it’s times like this I could really use a cigarette.”
Olivia frowned. “You smoke?”
“Used to,” replied Alex. “I gave it up in law school.”
Olivia nodded. “So, what’s going on?”
“With what?”
“Alex, come on. You know with what.”

Alex took a deep breath. “I’m sorry, Olivia. At first I didn’t call because I was too freaked out by the whole thing. I had a similar experience several years ago and it didn’t end well. Then I didn’t call because…don’t get upset when I say this, please.”
Olivia nodded carefully, unsure entirely how to react.
“I didn’t call because this is the point at which my relationships usually end. Someone finds out or the other party tells someone and I handle it poorly.”

“So, you didn’t call because you want to end it?” said Olivia. The detective felt shocked and a little hurt. “That’s a horrible reason, Alex. I’d rather you have let me know than –”
“No, you’re wrong.” Alex cut her off. “I didn’t call because I don’t want to end it and I was worried that’s what would happen if I did.” The ADA seemed surprised at her own words.

Olivia looked frustrated. “You thought I would break up with you because my partner walked in on us?”
Alex withered. “I don’t have a good history with relationships. I’ve never made one last past the six month mark because I honestly have no idea what I’m doing.”
At last, Olivia smiled. “Alex, I really like you. I want this to keep going, and I completely agree that we should keep our relationship a secret. If someone finds out that we’re both working together and sleeping together, it could mess up both our careers. And Elliot also understands that, which is why he’s keeping his mouth glued shut.”

“I really like you too,” said Alex in a small voice. Her tone was inquisitive and almost shy. “I’m sorry.”
“Apology accepted,” said Olivia. She let out a sigh of relief. “Thank god this is resolved. These have been the worst two weeks of my life, what with nobody talking to me.”
“What do you mean?” asked Alex.
“Oh god, you have no idea,” Olivia began.
Alex didn’t like to stay the night. Olivia hadn’t noticed at first, usually because she was still riding a wave of orgasm-induced bliss, but she slowly started to put two and two together. Even if they both fell asleep, Alex was always gone the next morning.

Olivia still couldn’t decide if she was offended or not, but she knew she wasn’t just some toy for Alex. The ADA didn’t make a habit of sneaking out. She always gave Olivia a kiss goodbye, or at least left a note. Still, it was awfully odd. Alex was sweet and funny and fantastic in bed, but reserved. Not someone who trusted easy, as far as Olivia could tell.

The detective made a point to ask her next time the two of them were alone. For now, another day, another dead woman found with a dog collar and a crucifix.

“Any idea how long she was buried?” asked Cragen.
Olivia shrugged off her coat. “ME’s best guestimate is three years.”

“Valentina? Are you sure?”
“Positive,” replied Olivia. “We need to take another look at the matchmaking service.”
“I’ll let Munch and Fin know,” said Cragen. “You guys update Cabot and head back to the station.”
“Thanks Captain,” Olivia hung up the phone.

“So, where to?” asked Elliot.
“The precinct,” said Olivia. “You drive, Captain wants me to tell Cabot what’s going on.”
“Sure he does,” muttered Elliot.
“While I’m on the phone with her,” jested Olivia, “I’ll also be sure to loudly discuss our sex life in graphic detail.”

Elliot blushed violently. “If you keep this up, I’m gonna lose my mind.”

“Let’s ask the other sister,” said Alex. “Oh, and Benson, do you have a copy of those dental records? I still don’t have one in my files yet.”
“Sure, at my desk.” She turned to Elliot. “Just a minute.”
He shrugged. “Take all the time you need.”

Alex followed Olivia to her desk. “He’s still keeping his mouth shut, right?” she said in a low voice.
“Absolutely, don’t worry about him,” replied Olivia. “He knows if he so much misspeaks that he’s toast. In the meantime, I’m ensuring his silence.”
Alex smiled, adding the dental records to her briefcase. “What’s your method of torture, detective?”
“I keep threatening him with vivid descriptions of my private life.”

Alex raised her eyebrows. “And that does the trick? Any other man would be spellbound.”
Olivia shrugged. “Nothing like good old-fashioned Catholic guilt.”

“So…” said Alex, “we believe her?”
“Uh, she might be lying to us, but she wasn’t lying to him,” answered Olivia. “Which makes her the only one to put Toscu at the scene,” added Elliot.

“We could have video tape of him in the act and we still couldn’t touch him,” said Cragen bitterly, “because of his diplomatic immunity.”
“Alex,” pleaded Olivia, “there’s gotta be something you can do.”

*For you, Olivia? I’ll give it a shot. *“Lemme check with a friend.”*

Olivia drained her glass. “That was a brilliant move, expelling Toscu.”
Alex shrugged. “I wish I could take credit for it. Did the funeral go according to plan?” “Seems it, though that family has a lot to sort out, especially for that poor little girl.” Olivia stared dead ahead, half contemplating another beer and half lost in thought.

“Something on your mind?” asked Alex.

Olivia bit her lip. “Actually, yeah. How come you never stay over?”
“Does it bother you?” said Alex, looking surprised.
“Not really,” said Olivia. “I was just curious.”

Alex sighed. “Well, it’s nothing against you, I promise. I just like to sleep in my own bed and I live surprisingly close to you.”
“Where?” asked Olivia.
“Uh, try eleven blocks south of here,” Alex said sheepishly.
“Well, that explains why you also had the number for HoHo China on speed dial.”
“They’re the closest and best place I know in uptown,” replied Alex.
Olivia cocked her head. “So, why didn’t you say anything?”

“Honestly, I’m embarrassed,” said Alex. “It’s very plush and I didn’t want you to laugh or feel uncomfortable so I’ve always gone to your place.” She rolled her eyes. “My parents picked it out. God, I am the stereotypical WASP.”
Olivia thought for a moment. “No, you’re not.”

“Hm?” said Alex.
“You’re a mystery,” replied Olivia.
“Going to solve me, detective?” asked Alex.
“No, I’ll let you set the pace. Believe me, I spent years hiding my mother’s alcoholism. I know that if you push too hard, people only clam up.”

“This is why SVU has such a fantastic closure rate,” joked Alex. “Come on, let’s get out of here.”
“Does that mean I get to see how fancy your digs really are?”
“If I have to,” said Alex, groaning. “You’ll have to find out eventually. Now’s as good a time as any.”
Olivia grabbed her coat, shaking her head. On her way out, she opened her cell phone and dialed a number she now knew by heart.

“Alex Cabot.”

“You are not gonna believe what just happened to me,” began Olivia.

“Some sleaze whistled at you when you walked past the cage?” joked Alex.

“Unfortunately, I’m used to that,” replied Olivia. “The FBI loaned us a psych for the Tandy murder, a guy named George Huang.”

“Oh,” said Alex, “that was nice of them.”

“Yeah,” said Olivia, “I thought so too until he told me to sit out the interrogation with our prime suspect.”

“What?” said Alex, surprised. “Why?”

“Because I’m a woman, and apparently, women make this guy nervous,” said Olivia, rolling her eyes. “Really, it was just ridiculous. So, I get sent to pick up the guy’s application for the police academy, when the husband of the victim comes into the squad room and chews me out for snooping into her private life. To top it all off, both Cragen and this Huang guy witness the whole thing.”

“Well, you’re having a hell of a day. If it makes you feel any better, council for the Romanian ambassador has buried me in paperwork.” The blonde sighed. “You should probably let the captain know that this case isn’t going to trial. It’ll take us at least four months to sort through all of his motions, and then we’re handing him off to the feds.”

“Can’t say I’m surprised,” replied Olivia. “At least he’s unlikely to ever be allowed back in the country. You free this evening?”

“The DA’s office just made a round of new hires, so I’m supposed to go to the meet and greet. It shouldn’t last past ten, though. Should I stop by?”

“Nah, we’ll make plans another night this week.”

Elliot returned to the interrogation room to “get on this guy’s level.” Really, what was it with psychiatrists? This Huang guy seemed odd to Alex.

“…and if I take her credit cards away, she don’t give me any,” said Elliot nastily. Alex scoffed in disgust. “I can’t listen to this. Call me if you get anything new.”

She turned to leave and flipped her phone open.

“Benson.”

“This interrogation is making me nauseous,” Alex said icily. “Give me an excuse to go get a search warrant so I can get out of the precinct.”

Olivia smiled on the other end of the phone. “Working on it.”

The supervisor led Olivia over to the lockers.

“Why no doors?” she asked.

“They got something to hide, they can leave it at home,” he replied. “Here it is.”

Mayberry’s locker was plastered with photos of Veronica Tandy, photos she had clearly never consented to taking. Olivia immediately grabbed her cell.
“Hello?” said a clearly aggravated Alex.  
“Go get that search warrant, Counselor,” ordered Olivia. “The perp’s got photos of our victim, Veronica Tandy.”  
“That’s the best news I’ve heard all day.”

“He wasn’t under arrest,” replied Elliot.  
“I specifically cautioned you about the custodial issue,” spat Alex, bearing her fangs.  
“You said he was to be free to go at any time,” said Cragen. “Now, my detective persuaded him otherwise. He did a hell of a job getting that confession.”

“Whose side are you on?” asked Elliot.  
“Mine!” said Alex.  
“Mm,” replied Elliot sarcastically.

Alex’s eyes shone with rage and Elliot swallowed.  
“You know the trial closure rate for sex crimes cases is four percent? Four percent! Now there are other factors responsible for that –”  
“I did my job Counselor –”

The two began yelling over one another. Watching an angry cop and a Type A lawyer slug it out was not pretty. Olivia, who had been quietly observing this whole exchange, rose to her feet, unsure of what to do.  
“I stayed in that room and pushed him to the edge and you lost him on a technicality!”

Alex looked like she was going to rip out Elliot’s throat.

“Alright, now that’s enough, both of you!” yelled Cragen. “Do we know where he is?”

“He’s still in New Jersey with his mother,” said Olivia quickly. “I notified the locals, they said they’d do their best.”

Alex massaged her temples, still fraught with anger.  
“Well, that’s reassuring,” said Cragen cynically. “Now what do we do to catch this hump before he strikes again?”

“Can you reconstruct his movements after the attacks?” asked Huang.

Stabler stormed out of Sanderson’s office, Cabot hot on his heels.  
“Really, detective? You couldn’t show some restraint for fifteen minutes?” she chastised.

“We wouldn’t even be here if it weren’t for your mistakes in court,” he replied.

“Guys…” began Olivia.

“I made no mistakes!” said Alex. “I went to court and fought my ass off and played by the rules. Or maybe you’ve forgotten how to do that, considering the fact that your fancy interrogation tactics lost us our confession?”

“Our confession?! That was my confession!”

“And I did the best I could,” spat Alex. “I’m sorry it didn’t meet your standards!”

“Please!” cried Olivia. “No one is blameless in this situation, but no one is completely at fault either. Can we just agree to finish this pissing match and get on with doing our jobs?”

Elliot clenched his fists and paced towards the stairs. Alex closed her eyes and let out a heavy sigh.  
“Olivia’s right,” she said. “What really matters here is that we’re still trying to get the Mayberries. We haven’t given up yet.”

Her phone rang and she snatched it up. “Sanderson’s pleas didn’t fall on deaf ears. We’ve got our search warrant.”
The detectives approached the car, but Elliot stopped, fixing her with a cold stare.
“Just because I have to keep your secrets, Counselor, doesn’t mean I have to like you.”

He slammed the car door shut.
“That was uncalled for,” said Olivia, her tone malicious. “If you even whisper –”
“Trust me, I’ll apologize to her later,” said Elliot. “I may not like her right now, but I don’t hate –”
“No, you get out of this car and apologize to her NOW!”

Elliot sighed and opened the car door. He could deal with being on the ADA’s shit list. His partner’s? Not so much.
The elevator doors of the sixteenth precinct opened on one frustrated Alex Cabot and one apologetic Don Cragen.

“You should have called me!”

“We thought we’d see if we had a case first,” explained the captain.

“When my bosses tell me that you guys have a suspect and I don’t already know that, I look like an idiot!” she replied.

“Alex, you know better than to think I would keep you out of the loop.”

Alex sighed. “I know, I’m sorry, it’s just two women ripped apart in twenty-four hours by the same perp and everybody’s edgy. We ready for a line-up yet?”

“It’s premature until we’re done canvassing the second murder scene,” said Cragen. Munch slipped out the door, carrying a cup of coffee.

“Do you have an ID on that victim yet?”

“Teresa Folsom, twenty-four,” replied Munch. “She’s a publicist for a publishing house. This is for her roommate.”

“She give you anything?” asked Cragen.

Alex slid into the squad room and approached Olivia’s desk.

“Got anything for me, detective?”

“Well, I can confirm that Teresa Folsom’s no prostitute, nothing came through in the computer. Fredericks is waiting in interrogation, and,” Olivia lowered her voice. “an apology.”

“For what?” asked Alex.

“For not calling to update you on the case,” replied Olivia. “And for having to bail on you last night.”

Alex squeezed Olivia’s arm. “I understand. It’s all part of the job.”

Olivia’s head swam. Maybe it was due to lack of sleep. Or maybe it was due to the fact that this blonde was just too perfect.

- 

“Not Jack the Ripper again,” groaned Fin.

“Ripperologists are convinced,” began Munch.

Elliot and Olivia shared a look.

Thankfully, the tension between her partner and her girlfriend seemed to have dissolved. Elliot had offered Alex a genuine apology and Alex had received it well. Thank god, because it’d be hell to work with them if they kept up the fights.

Olivia knew why Elliot had been slow to warm to Alex. He’d come from a lower-middle class family and was working regular overtime to try and put his kids through college. She’d grown up in a strictly upper class family and was a single woman only caring for herself. Elliot had made it through college thanks to the generosity of the army, while Alex’s parents had paid for private schooling, university, and law school. Not inexpensive places either; Alex had gone to Vanderbilt, then Columbia for law; the best of the best. Hell, Olivia had finally finished paying off her student loans just last year, small as they’d been. But Alex had proven herself to be more than her pedigree. She and Elliot hadn’t clashed because their agendas were different; they’d clashed because they were fighting for the same thing in different ways. And even though Olivia could tell that their relationship was still bizarre to Elliot, Alex had earned his respect regardless.
Which was good. Despite the fact that Alex strode into the squad room bearing bad news, Olivia couldn’t help but smile. This relationship made her happier than any she’d had in a long, long time.

Munch and Fin bolted for the crib. Elliot returned to the tips. When he looked up, Olivia was still sitting on the other side of the desk.
“You too,” he said.

“Oh no, I’m too pissed to sleep,” she said. Right now, she should be in bed. Six hours ago, she should have been making love to her girlfriend. Two before that, they should have been eating Chinese takeout and laughing at Friends. “You want some help?”
Elliot tossed her a stack of papers. “I’m not gonna say no.”

She began filing through the list. “Spotted on Broadway…it looks like the subway token clerk at 68th and Lex…that’s my night doorman!”
Elliot fixed her with a stare. “I know you’re working off some nervous energy. You don’t have to read every one of them out loud.”
Olivia raised her eyebrows. “Aren’t we in a mood?”

Elliot leaned back, defeated-looking. “You know, it’s the middle of the night, and I’m sitting here, realizing I spend more time with you than I do with my own family. No offense.”
Six months ago, she wouldn’t have understood the weight this statement carried. Now she had someone of her own to spend time with, someone to love.

Love?

“We both need a vacation,” said Olivia.
“You got that right,” said Elliot.
“Wait a minute,” said Olivia. “Here’s one with a guy…says somebody gave him a check with bloody fingerprints on it.”
Elliot suddenly looked alive. “Where?”

Alex stared straight ahead into her TV. Olivia had picked up from the deli, but she wasn’t feeling hungry.
“What’s wrong?” said Olivia. “You haven’t touched your sandwich. I made sure they used Dijon mustard this time.”
“Today I watched Daniel Varney have an emotional and mental breakdown while locked in a prison psych ward,” said Alex vacantly.

Olivia stopped short. “Okay, now I’m not hungry either. Are you okay?”
“He’s guilty, but he’s not responsible,” said Alex, still not looking at Olivia. “He’s just as much a victim as the four people he murdered, as is poor Mrs. Varney.” She rubbed her temples. “Have I ever told you that I requested this job?”
“No,” said Olivia, putting her hand on Alex’s arm, “you haven’t. Why?”

“Because I thought it would turn me into a noble crusader, a paragon of justice. But, more than that, I had my own reasons. Living among the wealthy means you see a lot of so-called ‘traditional values,’ women being subservient to their boyfriends and husbands, allowing themselves to be taken advantage of without a second thought. After seeing one too many of my sorority sisters get date raped, I figured someone needed to do something.”
She sighed. “Instead, all I do day in and day out is see horror after horror cross my path. There is
no black and white in SVU. Even when we win, we lose.”

“You’re still accomplishing exactly what you’ve set out to do, Alex,” reassured Olivia. “It’s not easy, but you’re fighting like hell for it, and doing a damn good job.” She paused. “Do you know why I requested Special Victims?”

Alex looked at Olivia for the first time all evening. “No.”

“Because my mother was raped, and I’m the product of that rape.”

“Olivia…” Alex looked woeful.

“She told me that I was proof that sometimes, you can make something good out of something bad. And I took that to heart and joined the police force. I fight for all the women like my mother, just like you do.” She smiled weakly at Alex. “It’s a hard job, but we keep fighting for justice. And I don’t know about you, but I don’t plan to stop.”

Alex smiled back. “I don’t either. We need to fix this, get Varney’s medical records. And to answer your original question, yes, I’m okay.”

She kissed the crook of Olivia’s neck gently. Olivia pulled her in close and kissed her back.

“One shot of penicillin back then could have cured him,” said Huang.

“And these four victims would still be alive,” Alex concluded.

“Yeah, if the insurance company had told them!” said Olivia, throwing up her hand in disgust. “I want their ass.” She turned on her heel and left the captain’s office, her stride sharp.

God, she’s hot in that shirt, thought Alex. And when she’s angry. And every waking moment.

Alex didn’t know where this relationship was going. Mostly because Alex had never had a stable relationship with the possibility of going anywhere before.

All she knew was that Olivia Benson was an amazing woman. Tough but sensitive, ballsy but possessing the biggest heart she’d ever known. She loved the way Olivia could intimidate a suspect twice her size, her ability to empathize with victims, her love of Depeche Mode. And she also loved the way Olivia had slept with her last night, making sweet, intense love to Alex with her mouth. She’d soothed Alex’s every doubt and rocked her body by sucking her pussy lips, making Alex come over and over. She’d kissed Alex deeply and arched her back as Alex paid her back, rubbing the brunette’s clit fast but gently. Olivia had moaned Alex’s name and Alex had loved every second of it, loved the way that she was having sex with a woman who wasn’t a casual fuck, but who really, truly cared about her.

Love?
Alex watched Ramsey’s interrogation, the stress clear in her face. “Do we have anything to corroborate the rape?” she asked. “Only Meagan’s testimony,” replied the Captain. “Any physical evidence is long gone.” “And Lily?” she asked.

She was not looking forward to the fallout from this one. Forget the evidence, the charges, the trial; what she dreaded was the inevitable phone call from her mother once the papers got wind of this. Her father and the elder Sutherland ran in similar social circles, and this was going to “besmirch the good name of Cabot.” She could already hear her mother crowing on, and with everything she had on her mind, the last thing she needed right now was family butting in.

“Medical exam showed vaginal irritation, but nothing conclusive,” said Cragen. “Jodie’s was negative.”

Alex turned towards the door. “That leaves us with the photos and the underwear, but Lily still hasn’t provided testimony linking them to her alleged abuse.” “Meagan passed the poly,” said Cragen.

“You know that’s inadmissible,” cautioned Alex. “It confirms her story. We let him go, he goes right back home to his daughters.”

Alex looked worried. “Alright. Arrest him for the rape.” She wasn’t scared of what her mother would say, but scared of what she couldn’t.

Alex had no experience with love, but she’d begun to believe that’s what this was, and she was lost and terrified.

Elliot’s cell phone chimed shrilly. “What a mess,” said Fin. “Meagan hadn’t screwed up the investigation, we might’ve nailed him,” said Elliot. “Stabler.” Olivia took another gulp of her beer. “She was trying to protect her sister.” “Yeah, well, the road to hell is paved with good intentions,” Munch said flatly.

Olivia did her best to maintain the conversation. She wasn’t supposed to be here tonight, but Alex had been too tired and stressed to do anything but sleep. She’d said her mother had been riding her ass about the Ramsey case, but Olivia could tell something else was troubling her. However, she wasn’t going to push it.

“Not quite, that was the captain,” Elliot interjected, looking frazzled. “Evan Ramsey was murdered.”

Stabler, Benson, and Cragen sat in Cabot’s office, their expressions grim.

“And we all had a hand in it,” said Alex. Elliot looked grim. “However,” she continued, “the forensics aren’t spectral. The lab matched the prints on the shell casings to Meagan’s.”

Olivia’s stare burned a hole in Alex’s back. God, that skirt.
“What about her state of mind?” asked the captain, interrupting Olivia’s reverie. “Meagan believes that she was raped,” said the brunette, “but none of this would have happened if that therapist hadn’t filled her mind with a lot of garbage.”

She shot Alex a suggestive look that neither Cragen nor Stabler caught. The ADA cocked an eyebrow and returned the detective’s stare. “The therapist didn’t pull the trigger,” countered Cragen, “Meagan did.”

“Look,” began Alex, “she planted those photographs and she lied about it. That shows a clear and logical state of mind. Her prints are on the shell casings and her own sister places her at the scene of the crime.” Her eyes remained fixed on Detective Benson. “Jodie’s not gonna want to testify,” interrupted Elliot, stealing Olivia’s gaze. “Well, I’m issuing a subpoena,” replied Alex. “She’ll testify or she’ll be in contempt.”

“Come on Counselor, that seems excessive,” said Elliot. “I don’t think her mother is gonna produce her otherwise,” said Cragen, shaking his head. “We don’t have a choice. Benson, can you take testimony for this one? You were the first to interact with Meagan.” Olivia nodded. “Surely.” “If you’d like, we can draw something up right now,” offered Alex. “That’d be good,” said the captain. “Elliot, you and I will head back to the precinct to make sure the reports are in order.” Elliot shrugged and stood. “See you later.” As the captain headed out the door, he shot Olivia a quick wink and followed suit, closing the door behind him.

Alex smirked. “Did he really just do that?” “Apparently,” said Olivia, laughing a little. “How’re you feeling?”

Please, please don’t ask me that. “Violated,” replied Alex. “That was some look, detective.” “Well, that’s some skirt, counselor,” said Olivia, smiling provocatively. “But seriously, you seem like you’ve had a lot going on lately.” Alex sighed heavily. “I’ve started attending hearings I’m not even involved in to avoid my mother’s calls. Trust me, I’ll be very glad once we’ve put this one behind us.”

Olivia wrapped an arm around Alex. “If it’s making you this stressed, then I will be too.” She kissed Alex on the forehead. Alex’s chest flooded with warmth while her gut sank. She leaned her head against Olivia’s shoulder and closed her eyes.

Olivia frowned. “You okay?” Alex sighed. “Okay enough to get back to work. We honestly do have to get some testimony written for you.”

“I’m on my honeymoon here Miss Cabot,” said the chief ADA, “so I can still blame my predecessor for all the screw-ups in this division. Unfortunately, I told the DA…I supported your strategy.” The elevator dinged. “Do us both a favor, huh?” he ordered. “Fix this mess!”

How? Alex wracked her brain as she strode down the hall. Without thinking, she opened her phone and dialed SVU.

“Benson.”
“I need you.”
“For what?”

Alex stopped short. The words caught in her throat. “Actually, I don’t know. I don’t remember why I called now.”
She thought hard. “The murder. Jodie. I need to talk to her and I want you to be there.”
“I’ll clear it with the captain,” said Olivia. “Call you back in ten.”

Alex stood in the middle of the hallway, floundering. 

*I called because I want you to be there and I don’t know what to do and I need your help, but I can’t tell you what’s going on.*

“Cabot? You okay?” asked Williams, passing by her in the hall.
She shook her head. “This is one hell of a case.”
Traffic was a nightmare and Elliot had too much on his mind to sit still. He opened his cell phone and dialed Olivia.

She picked up on the third ring. “Hey, what’s going on?”

“This is creepy and I don’t like it,” he said. “I wanted to make sure you’re not alone tonight.”

Olivia laughed. “I don’t think it’s that worrisome, but I’m not by myself. Hey Alex, say hello to Elliot.”

“Greetings, detective.” He could hear her voice from across the room.

“Thanks,” Elliot said. “Just needed to clear my conscience. Have a nice evening.”

Olivia hung up the phone. She rolled her eyes playfully. “Can you believe him?”

Alex nodded. “It’s a bit overprotective, but I agree with him. Someone is playing at you for something.”

“I wish I knew for what,” responded Olivia. “God, this takes me back, though. The Cordell case was only four months out of the academy, and Clayton was my second case in SVU.”

“That wasn’t that long ago, you know,” said Alex.

“About two years now,” said Olivia. “I guess it seems like a lot longer than it has. A lot has happened in the past year.”

She smiled at Alex, snuggling up to her on the couch. “Some things bad, but more good.”

“I’d agree with that,” said Alex. She kissed Olivia, snaking her hand inside the detective’s shirt.

“I’m so glad I convinced you to buy this,” she said, squeezing Olivia’s breast. “It looks good on you.”

Olivia laughed. “Then why are you taking it off?”

“Hush,” ordered Alex. She unclasped Olivia’s bra and began to kiss her nipples, gently nibbling and licking them as Olivia hummed with pleasure.

As long as she could keep the detective distracted, she could steer the conversation away from said good things. Thus, away from love.

“...”

“We’ll dump her phones, she might give her ex a head’s up that she’s looking,” said Elliot.


“Feel like some dinner?” he asked.

Olivia searched for an excuse. “When’s the last time your kids saw your ugly mug?”

“We’ll set an extra place,” he said. “Come on.”

“Yeah, no thanks,” replied Olivia. “I’ll see you later, okay?”

She walked off, desperately trying to clear her head. She’d just made it to the subway station when her cell phone rang.

“Benson,” she said, answering vaguely.

“Please stay with me,” said the blonde on the other end.

Olivia sighed. “Not tonight, okay?”

“No, it’s not okay,” said Alex. “I’m worried. This is getting to you more than you’re letting on.”

Olivia closed her eyes hard. “If someone’s after me this hard, I don’t doubt he’d hurt you. I can’t put you in danger like that. We’ll talk later, okay?”
She hung up before Alex could respond. The ADA set her receiver down, crestfallen.

Alex walked into the squad room. Olivia was nowhere to be found. “She’s upstairs with Huang,” Elliot offered.
Alex looked around, then approached his desk. “Good, I need to talk to you.”

Elliot looked suspicious. “About what?”
“I’m going to guess I’m not the only she’s been shutting out over this past week,” said Alex.
“You’re right about that,” said Elliot. “She doesn’t want anyone to go out of their way for her because she’s tough and independent. It’s just how she operates.”
“Regardless, I’m worried sick about her,” confessed Alex. “We need to get a protective detail.”

“She’s not gonna like that,” Elliot said, letting out a heavy breath.
Alex looked at him. “You know it’s the right thing to do.”
Elliot thought hard. “Yeah, I do. I’ll call it in.”
“Thank you,” said Alex. Elliot could hear the distress in her voice.

“Mr. Plummer,” said the captain, across the room. “Thank you for coming in. Right this way.”
“And I see you’ve brought council,” said Alex.
“My client’s been railroaded by the police before. He’s here under duress. Is he a suspect?”
“That’s premature,” said Alex. “This is an ongoing investigation. As soon as we can clear him, Mr. Plummer can put this behind him.”
“Well,” replied his attorney, “you’ll understand if we insist on Detective Benson’s absence.”

“Your request is unnecessary,” said a voice behind them. “I’m taking off.” She glanced quickly at Alex, then grabbed her things.

Olivia, Munch, and Fin left for Chauncey’s, but Elliot hung back. He had questions to ask and a phone call to make.

“We have gotten warrants before based on less,” said Olivia, her voice rising. “Why are you stonewalling?” First her partner, now her girlfriend?
“This is different and you know it,” said Alex. “Once a judge hears the suspect’s history, he’s gonna bend over backwards for the guy.”

“I saw him, Alex!” said Olivia. “Plummer is stalking me.”
“How did he know where you were when he was in the interview room being questioned?” asked Alex, trying to calm her girlfriend down. She knew that going to a judge would prove fruitless.

“He must have overheard!” Olivia replied.
Valid point. “Okay, how many businesses are in the area near Chauncey’s?”
“I don’t know! Severals! Why, where are you going with this?” Olivia asked angrily.
“Any decent defense attorney is going to say that Mr. Plummer was in the area running errands, that it was just a coincidence.”
Olivia looked at her, furious. “He has killed four people and we’re doing nothing!”

Alex steeled herself. She had to ask this question, but she hated herself for it all the same.
“How many drinks did you have?”
Olivia turned away, speechless.
“Olivia, the system made a mistake before,” explained Alex. “Now everything we do is under a
microscope.”

Olivia started at her, seething. “I wasn’t drunk.”

She left the office, slamming the door behind her. 
*I’m sorry, Olivia.*

- 

The knocks on the door finally ended when the phone began to ring.

*Please, just go away.*

Elliot gave up. He’d reached the entrance to her building when Alex Cabot breezed by him. 
“She’s not answering,” he said.
“I’ll let myself in, then” said the ADA.

Olivia jumped as she heard the door unlock. 
“Just me,” said Alex. She flicked on a light switch. “You shouldn’t be sitting here alone in the dark.”
“He planned this whole thing,” said Olivia, shaking her head. “He murdered those four people, he set everyone in the office whispering about me, and then he had me kill him.” She looked forlorn.
“And I played right into it, every last part. And neither you nor Elliot will leave me the hell alone.”

“Because we care about you, Olivia,” said Alex, sitting next to her on the couch. “I’ve been going out of my mind and you won’t even let me help.”

Olivia pulled away. “If it involves questioning me about my drinking habits, I don’t want your help.”

“Do you really think I wanted to ask that?” said Alex. She sighed. “In the interest of full disclosure, I might as well tell you that the protective detail was my idea as well.”

Olivia looked as if she’d been slapped in the face. “I can’t believe you, Alex. Here I am, stewing over this case, and this is your idea of comforting me? Do you honestly think I need this? Did you consider that if I wanted you to come over, I would have called?”

“You can hide from the rest of them, Olivia, but you can’t hide from me,” Alex said firmly. “I love you, and –”

Both women froze in shock. The anger and the hurt melted off of Olivia’s face. Alex’s mouth hung open.

“You love me?” asked Olivia, after a very long silence.
“I love you,” said Alex, slowly. She grasped for words. “And it scares the hell out of me, because I’ve never loved anyone before.” She locked eyes with Olivia. “Not like this.”

Olivia looked dumbstruck. “Wow.” She stared back at Alex, then finally began to speak.
“Truth be told, I love you too. I’ve loved you for a while, Alex. I just didn’t say anything because I didn’t want to scare you off.”

“Trust me,” said Alex, wearing a small smile. “I’m not going anywhere.”

She pulled Olivia into a deep hug, and the detective finally relaxed.
“This case has been a miserable pile of shit,” said Olivia.

Then she began to cry. Alex rubbed her back and kissed her forehead, suddenly unafraid.
Cragen left Alex behind in the squad room, instead opting to bother Munch and Fin.
“So, what’s the word on Sanford, Counselor?” asked Elliot.
Alex sighed. “We’ll have to prove he actually sold the babies. Otherwise, he walks.”

“Oh c’mon, that’s not fair,” said Elliot disdainfully.
“We can’t prove he had any idea what Alicia Moore was going to do though,” said Olivia.
“Man, if either of you had kids, you’d understand,” Elliot said, shaking his head.

Alex looked ill. “Just the thought overwhelms me.”
Elliot smiled. “Not the nesting type, Counselor?”
“I’ve already got enough going on in my life, thank you,” replied Alex. She looked at Olivia.
“Dinner? Drinks?”
“How ‘bout both?” offered Olivia. “We’ll figure out where after I grab my things.”
Alex nodded. “I’ll let Sanford’s lawyer know he’s headed to Central Booking.”

Elliot looked sideways at Olivia. “Does that bother you at all?” he said quietly.
“The fact that she’s not interested in children?” said Olivia. “Not at all. I’m with her; I’m just way too busy to have kids right now.”

“Where’s Steven Tallmadge?”
“Who?”
“What,” said the captain, “you forgot to tell your new hotshot lawyer you kidnapped a baby after killing the mother?”

“What, are you crazy –” began Sanford.
“It’s all right here in your book,” said Cragen, slamming Sanford’s register down on the table.
Alex gritted her teeth. “We’re willing to deal in exchange for information.”
“Oh, you can’t prove that I kidnapped or killed anybody,” replied Sanford. “Not now and not then! No!”

“Actually,” said Alex, “we have –”
“The offer’s up for ten more seconds,” Cragen interjected. Alex stared at him frostily. Not your call.
The defense attorney chuckled. “You don’t have a case.”
“Oh really?” Cragen shot back. He stood, staring Sanford down. “After I tie you to the Tallmadge kidnapping and murder I’m gonna nail your ass to the wall.”

He stormed out of the cell. Alex gave the prisoner and his lawyer the most polite smile she could manage before following suit, ice running through her veins.

Cragen was being ridiculous, but she was being more ridiculous. Why had she volunteered to help this kid? Alex walked out of the precinct, exhausted. She barely paid attention until she finally unlocked the door to her apartment and poured herself a stiff drink.

A knock came from across the room. Alex groaned, then checked the peephole.
“Oh, it’s you,” she said, unlocking the door and letting Olivia in. “Thank god.” She kissed Olivia
deeply, placing her hand firmly on the detective’s thigh.
“Rough day?” Olivia said, smiling seductively.

Alex kissed the brunette’s neck. “Mm, you have no idea.” She sighed. “I volunteered to represent Tyler Blake in family court because I was tired of looking at Cragen’s sad puppy dog eyes. If I say I’m going to kill your boss, do you promise not to report me for conspiracy?”

Olivia ran a hand through Alex’s hair. “Trust me, I hate this case too, but we’ve got no choice but to work it. Plus, you’ll get some pro bono hours in this way.”

Pressing her forehead to Olivia’s, Alex sighed. “I know, but it’s still aggravating. My office thinks this is a complete waste of time. If the captain hadn’t gone digging, we’d have a lot less work on our hands and three families would have been allowed to continue their normal lives.”

“True,” began Olivia, “but at least we confirmed that Steven isn’t dead or living in an abusive home.”

Alex frowned. “Don’t you dare make me feel better about this.” She kissed Olivia hard again, sliding her hand between the detective’s legs to squeeze her mound.

Olivia giggled. “Why not, hmm?”

“Because,” began Alex, working the zipper on Olivia’s pants, “then I won’t have a reason to stress fuck you.” She slid her fingers beneath Olivia’s panties, gently rubbing her lips.

“Then I guess I should remind you that you still have to go court tomorrow,” Olivia whispered.

“Ugh,” muttered Alex. She thrust a finger into Olivia’s slit and began to stroke.

“Ah,” moaned Olivia, closing her eyes. “And…you volunteered…for it.”

One finger became two as Alex pulled off Olivia’s panties with her free hand. “Mm,” said Alex, “what on earth was I thinking?” The blonde kissed Olivia’s jawline and began to thrust.

“Ah…Alex,” said Olivia.

“Mm?”

“Do we really…have to do this against your door?”

“Absolutely,” replied Alex. She bit Olivia’s bottom lip and slammed her fingers deep in Olivia’s pussy, feeling her own underwear soak through. Olivia began to thrust slightly against her hand as her inner walls tensed.

“Can I at least…take off my shirt?” asked Olivia, tilting her head back.

“I’ll take it off for you,” offered Alex. She pulled Olivia’s shirt over her head with one hand and continued thrusting with her other. Quickly unclasping Olivia’s bra, she pulled one of the detective’s nipples into her mouth, nibbling gently and pulling Olivia in close. She placed the base of her thumb against Olivia’s clit, and let the thrusting motion of her hand stimulate the detective while she sucked down on the nipple in question.

Olivia did her best to stifle her moans, but was not being very successful.

Alex grinned wickedly. She pulled her mouth away from Olivia’s chest and looked Olivia in the eye.

“What’s that?” she asked teasingly.

Olivia tried to speak, but found no words. Alex pulled her hand back, then thrust hard with each word.

“I. Can’t. Hear. You.” she said, watching Olivia’s face contort. Alex added a third finger and pounded Olivia with increasing speed.

“Oh god, Alex,” whispered Olivia. “Oh god.”

Olivia came, arching her back into Alex’s front door. She smiled, leaning in to kiss Alex sweetly.

“That was fun,” said Olivia. “Alex, I love you, but you’re wearing far too many clothes right now.”
Alex raised an eyebrow. “Then why don’t you follow me into the bedroom and pay me back?”

Olivia had gotten up that morning and gone for her normal run. She’d had her usual breakfast and made it to work her standard five minutes early.

Then, an hour later, an airplane hit the World Trade Center and everything changed.
Alex was tired and harried and all she wanted to do was go home.
“You got anything in your bag of tricks, Counselor, now’s the time to pull it out,” said Cragen.

She thought for a moment.
“I have something, but I’ll have to check,” she said slowly, “and I’ll have to involve your psychiatrist.”
Cragen shrugged. “Give him a call.”
“Get him Tate’s prison history, arrest records, whatever you can find,” she ordered.
“Leon’s rap sheet starts when he was seven years old,” said Elliot bitterly. “He had eleven arrests by his thirteenth birthday. The record was sealed because he was a juvenile.”
Cragen looked at Alex. “Let’s get ‘em unsealed.”

Alex nodded, then departed the office. She made a beeline for Olivia’s desk.
“You got any of Tate’s files on you?” she asked.
“Check Elliot’s desk,” offered Olivia. “They should be on top. As far as a more extensive history, we’ll have to go digging.”
“This is good enough for now,” said Alex, swooping up the file. “Why were you following this guy tonight anyway?”

Olivia rolled her eyes. “Because Elliot’s a nutjob who won’t go home. Believe me, I had things I wanted to do, like paperwork for the Wilson case.”
“I’m sure there’s more you’d rather be doing than paperwork,” said Alex, winking. “Though really, you think with the attacks, he’d want to be spending more time at home.”
“Everyone reacts differently to tragedy,” called Munch, jumping into the conversation.

- -

Olivia finally closed the last manila folder on her desk. “Done, thank god.”
Munch eyed the stack of files. “That all for the Wilson case?”
Olivia nodded. “Some guy makes a habit of smoking PCP and killing transvestite hookers, you’d better believe there’s gonna be a ton of paperwork.”
“Cabot better pay you back good for this,” remarked Fin.

Oh, she will, thought Elliot. He suppressed the urge to roll his eyes.
Cragen strode out of his office, coat in hand.
“Now, who else is going to the memorial service for the NYPD officers? Miller and Cavotta already left, I know.”
“Uh, I am,” said Olivia, heaving the files into her out tray.
Munch raised a hand.
“You can count me in,” said Fin.
“And me as well.”

The detectives turned to see Alex Cabot enter the squad room.
“Well, this a surprise, Counselor,” said the captain.
“Considering all you people do for me and my office, it’s the least I can do,” she said. “We driving or walking?”
“My car’s in storage,” said Munch, “and correct me if I’m wrong, but I believe I’m the only one of our party who owns a car. Unless you’re coming, Elliot?”

“Not tonight, guys,” replied Elliot. “No disrespect intended, but I haven’t seen much of my family...
lately, and after Tate’s death…”
“Say no more,” said Cragen.
Though, admittedly, Elliot had no one to blame but himself for that.

“What about a line-up?” suggested Alex.
“We risk tipping our hand,” replied Fin. He hesitated. “I got an informant, a drug dealer I busted a few years ago. He says his boys sell Malik Harris dope and coke on a regular basis.”
Alex nodded. “We’ll write the warrant for the drugs only. That’ll allow you to search almost everywhere.”

She tapped him on the shoulder. “Anything you find on top of that is gravy.”
Fin watched her walk off. He could hardly believe that an old-money white girl was cutting him more slack than his captain. Plus, she’d come to the 9-11 memorial with the rest of them.

That Alex Cabot, she was different. But not bad at all.
Tangled

The situation was different. One rape had happened on a dark street, the other in a plush home. One woman had been single, the other married. One young, the other old.

Perhaps it was the fact that it was coming up on one year now, perhaps it was the blonde hair. But regardless, watching Payton speak feebly in that hospital bed, Olivia couldn’t help but be reminded of her mother.

- 

Of course, it wouldn’t be a trip down memory lane without throwing addiction into the mix. “Well, that adds up,” said Olivia. “He started stealing from his parents four years ago.”
“Probably playing lotteries, betting on football polls,” said Elliot.

Huang shot him a side-eyed look. “Do you gamble, Elliot?”
“Only with birth control,” Elliot said honestly.
“Kids who come from a non-gambling environment are less likely to become gamblers themselves,” replied Huang. Does that mean kids who come from an alcoholic environment are more likely to become alcoholics? thought Olivia.

“How likely are they to rape their stepmothers?” asked Cragen. And kids who have rapist fathers?

Olivia clutched her neck and braced herself for the interview.

- 

Olivia finally checked her cell phone when she got home. Two missed calls. Shit. At least there were no messages. She dialed Alex’s home number.

“Hello?” said the familiar voice.
“Hey, it’s me,” replied Olivia. “Sorry I didn’t catch your calls. One of the mistresses from the Kleberg case was found beaten half to death, and we had to rush her to the hospital. I got distracted.”
“Understandably so,” replied Alex. “Well, I’m guessing I won’t see you until tomorrow evening, then?”

Olivia sighed. “Not tomorrow either. I’ve got to go to that mandated counseling for shooting Plummer.”

“The weekend, then. We’ll see a movie or something. You okay?” Alex sounded genuinely concerned.
“Yeah, just worn down,” said Olivia lamely. “I’m gonna catch some sleep. I’ll see you when I can.”
“Okay,” replied Alex, “love you. Call if you need anything.”
“Love you too, Alex. Night.”

Hanging up the receiver, Olivia sat on the couch and turned on the TV, trying not to think.

- 

Olivia never liked to cast blame on the victims, but sometimes there was more to a story than met
the eye.
“She’d just found out Max was still seeing Lara Todd, tracked her down, and threatened her.”
“Crime of passion. I could buy it,” began Elliot, “if Mrs. Kleberg hadn’t been bound, gagged, and
raped for over two hours.”

“Let’s not forget the Miller case,” said Munch, jumping in. “Phony rape at the Thorpe Palace so
she could sue the hotel.”
*Just before Serena Benson fell down the subway stairs.*
“Doctor Kleberg and his mistress were beaten to a pulp,” continued Olivia. She was going to ignore
Munch’s comment. She was not going to let her past get in her head.

- 

“They look so happy,” muttered Olivia, flipping through a photo album. “This is last New Year’s.
Do any marriages last?”
“I dunno, the warrant only covers jewelry,” called Elliot.
“God, you’ve been married for seventeen years, haven’t you?” said Olivia.
“Stop,” ordered Elliot.
“Sorry,” replied Olivia.

Less than twenty seconds later, Elliot returned with a fistful of pricey gems.
Olivia sighed. “We’re gonna need to bring Mrs. Kleberg in. If someone could escort her out?”
“I’ll do it,” offered the officer in uniform.

Elliot bagged the evidence, then headed down to the car with Olivia.
“You doin’ okay?” he asked. “You’ve seemed awfully introspective lately.”
Olivia shook her head. “Just odd similarities with this case and my life.”
Elliot chuckled. “There’s nothing about this case that’s like your life.”
“A raped mother, addiction, a mysterious violent man…” began Olivia.

“Oh c’mon Oliv –” He stopped. “The anniversary of your mother’s death is coming up, isn’t it?”
She sighed. “Yes.”
Elliot looked thoughtful. “Well, at least there’s one major difference between your life and this
case.”
“What’s that?” she asked.
“You’re in a loving, happy relationship,” replied Elliot. “Have you talked to Alex about this?”

“No,” said Olivia. “I don’t want her worrying about me.”
Elliot rolled his eyes. “She’s in love with you, Olivia. It’s her job to worry about you.”
Olivia turned to face him, stunned. “How did you know she was in love with me?”
“It’s the way she looks at you,” he offered. “Trust me, I’ve been in love long enough to know. And
that means I know that you love her too.”

Olivia whipped her head back to the window, blushing.
“C’mon Olivia, talk to her. It can’t hurt.”

- 

Olivia vacantly pulled the lasagna out of the oven when the knock on the door came.

“It smells delicious in here,” said Alex, smiling. “I brought salad.”
“Thanks,” Olivia said in a monotone.
Alex kissed her on the cheek. “Any time. Now, are you going to tell me what’s being going on?”
“Well, I dropped Lara Todd off at a women’s shelter a couple of hours ago,” said Olivia. “Just like the one my mother stayed in after her rape.”
“Your mother died a year ago next month,” said Alex.
“You remember?” said Olivia.
“Olivia, of course I remember,” replied Alex. “That’s why you’ve been distant lately, isn’t it?”

Olivia looked away. “It just brings up a lot of bad memories.”
“I understand what you mean, with this case. It reminds me of my family,” said Alex.
Olivia turned sharply. “Really?”

Alex poured the salad into a bowl and added the croutons. “Really. The overbearing, bitchy matriarch, the father with the wandering eye who just wants some peace, the deadbeat son. Add in the cold, ruthless daughter and you’ve got the Cabot household.”
“You’re not ruthless,” said Olivia.
Alex grinned. “You’ve seen me in court.”
“I guess that’s true,” replied Olivia. “Your father had affairs?”

Alex nodded. “Still does. Can’t say I really blame him. My mother is awful. Admittedly, he’s much better about hiding it than our Dr. Kleberg.”
“It’s funny,” said Olivia, shaking her head. “This case reminds me of my family too.”
“It does?” said Alex.
“For completely different reasons,” replied Olivia.

“Well, how about we turn our negatives into positives?” said Alex.
“How so?”
“Well, we’ll eat this delicious dinner, have sex, and then tomorrow, you can make history and visit the zoological geneticist with me,” offered Alex. “Justice always has a way of lifting my spirits, at least.”
“A zoological geneticist? Is that his actual title?” said Olivia.
“Believe me,” said Alex, “I couldn’t make that one up.”

“No, I got it,” said the geneticist grumpily. “It’s your cat.”
Olivia and Alex made eyes at one another.
“Pick up Vincent,” ordered the ADA. “I’ll bootstrap a warrant.”

“No, I got it,” said Alex, stroking Olivia’s thighs teasingly.
Olivia was panting hard. “Alex, please.”
“The wait will make it all the more enjoyable.” The ADA bit Olivia’s neck as she drew her fingertips lightly across Olivia’s lips and around her clit.

Moaning, Olivia bucked her hips and felt Alex grin against her neck. “How long…are you going to keep this up?”
“I don’t know,” said Alex. “I’ll stop when I feel like stopping.”
Without warning, she rammed three fingers into Olivia’s dripping sex. The detective came almost instantly.

“And,” whispered Alex, “I’ll go when I feel like going.”

Alex’s commanding tone flooded Olivia’s head with images of last night. God, it was good to be in love.
Olivia followed Elliot out of the captain’s office, then breezed right past him. “What’s our next move?” he asked, not looking her in the eye. “My next move is to meet Cabot for lunch,” she said. “Yours is to cool down.”

Elliot shot her a nasty look. “What, so I’m not allowed to be angry about what happened this morning?” “You have every right to be angry,” she replied. “But I don’t want to be around you until you get your feelings under control.” “So,” he said bitterly, “I get the tough love and Cabot gets all the comfort?”

Olivia stared him down. “Don’t make me answer that question. I’ll call you when we’re done, and if you’ve cooled off, we’ll meet at Wheaton’s.” Elliot watched her walk out of the precinct, shaking his head.

“You said you had things under control! What are you doing? You itching for a lawsuit?” asked Olivia. “Just cuttin’ through the crap,” Elliot replied nonchalantly. “He’s calling his lawyer!” Olivia fired back. Elliot grinned sarcastically. “God bless the lawyers.”

“Elliot, hey, it’s my ass too,” replied Olivia. “Don’t worry about it,” he said. “I’ll make sure it’s covered.” Olivia shook her head. “Or why don’t you call your lawyer?” he cracked. “I’m sure she’s got plenty of experience covering your ass by this point.”

“You son of a bitch,” replied Olivia, seething with rage. She stormed off towards her desk. Maybe I pushed that one a little bit too far, thought Elliot.
Your John Doe’s a white male, early/mid-twenties,” stated Steve. “Caught a slug in the gut. Crime scene’s in an alley off a bar called Puffy’s.”

Olivia balked. She knew the place – they had a biweekly ladies night. Before she’d made detective (and entered a committed relationship), she used to drop in every once in a while.”

“I’m not sure,” he continued, “but I think I saw the victim inside.”

“Inside the bar?” Olivia asked, trying to sound surprised.

He faltered. “I was on a date, set up by friends. Made a great first impression.”

“We suspect a gay bashing?” asked Olivia.

“Can’t say for sure,” Steve replied. “Victim was gang-raped, that’s why I called you. Doctors found copious fluids.”

After catching up on the rest of the details, Olivia and Elliot went to check on their victim.

“He was in a meat market bar,” said Olivia, snapping a photo. “Let’s hope his partner’s more committed than he is.”

Elliot smiled. “Man, poor Steve. First date and something like this happens.”

“I can sympathize with him,” said Olivia. “I was on a very nice date myself when I got the call.”

“Oh?” said Elliot.

“Japanese place in midtown,” she replied. Elliot gave her a look. “I didn’t pick it.”

She rolled her eyes. “Maybe I can use Steve as an example of the fact that it’s not a huge deal to be open about your sexuality.”

“She’s not okay with that?” asked Elliot.

“It’s not like I’d broadcast it, but she’s incredibly paranoid about what might happen if somebody found out,” answered Olivia.

“Any reason why?” he said.

“Haven’t asked.”

The three detectives left the captain in the elevator and returned to their desks.

“Why do you two always get so lucky to pull canvas?” asked Munch.

“I blame our charming personalities and good looks,” joked Elliot.

Munch shrugged. “Hey, I’d be scared if you two came knocking down my door.”

He pulled Olivia aside. “You asked Fin what was wrong?”

“Yeah,” said Olivia, looking confused. Elliot listened carefully as he grabbed the car keys.

“Don’t tell him I told you this, but he’s not exactly what you’d call ‘gay-friendly.’”

“Ah,” said Olivia quietly, nodding.

“These streets aren’t gonna patrol themselves,” said Elliot. “Let’s go.”

Munch saluted. “You know where to find me.”

Olivia tried not to look as disappointed as she felt. Elliot turned to her, opening his mouth.

“I know what I said,” she cut in. “Forget it.”

Alex heard a knock on her office door. She looked up to find a familiar face.

“I called your home,” said Olivia. “Figured I’d find you here if you didn’t pick up.”

“You didn’t try my cell?” asked Alex.
“Nah, you said you were in court all day,” replied Olivia. “You ready to head out?”

Alex shrugged. “Might as well.” She grabbed her coat. “So, how was your long day at the precinct?”

“Long doesn’t even begin to cover it,” said Olivia. “We started with what we thought might be a gang-rape outside a gay bar, moved to a victim we thought was closeted, and finally discovered he’s a porn actor who may not even be gay at all.”

“Sounds fun,” said Alex drolly. “A misinformed gay bashing, then?”

“My gut says something else,” said Olivia. “Why’s that?” asked Alex.

“Because my gut also says the victim’s not gay or bisexual,” she replied. “But who am I judge that?” She smirked. “I told him in the interview that plenty of people play for both teams.”

“You’re a riot,” Alex said dryly.

Sighing, Olivia continued. “The kicker in this whole day was finding out that Fin’s not exactly an ally.”

Alex frowned. “I’m disappointed, but I can’t say I’m terribly surprised.”

“I probably shouldn’t be this sad about it, but I am,” said Olivia, looking away.

The cold fall breeze whipped through Alex’s blonde hair. Shivering, she threaded her arm through Olivia’s, pulling her in close. She hated to see her girlfriend hurt.

“I don’t know about you,” she said, “but honestly, I’ve only got three things on my agenda: sex, shower, and bed.”

Olivia grinned at her. “I can get behind that.”

Alex winked.

Defeated, Olivia and Elliot left the interview room. Olivia made a beeline for Alex.

“We threatened to take her kid and she still won’t talk,” said the brunette, looking directly at the blonde.

“It’s not a threat,” stated Alex, returning Olivia’s stare. “She endangered a child, that’s enough to remove a minor from her care.” Her voice was low and sultry.

“Jayna is obviously terrified. If the mob is connected, we’re just adding more pressure,” said Olivia, trying to look away. She felt warmth spreading between her legs. “And the daughter’s terminal.”

“I don’t want to put a sick child with children’s services,” said Alex, drawing Olivia back in.

“Can’t the grandparents take custody?”

“That’s not going to help Wesley and Jayna,” answered Olivia. “Somebody is squeezing them to keep quiet, but aren’t we doing the same thing?”

“They’re jerking us around,” said Cragen. “If we have to force ‘em to cooperate, I’m fine with that.”

“Now, Wesley got very agitated when we told him we were going to Jayna,” said Elliot, at last lifting his head. “Maybe she’s been the target all along and he just got in the middle.”

Cragen thought for a moment. “If we’re thinking mob, check into this pornographer, Cal Oman, see if he’s a connected guy.”

Olivia gave Alex one last look before the detectives left interrogation. God, thought Alex, I could watch her walk away all day long.

“God, I felt shameful looking at you two,” muttered Elliot. “What on earth did you get up to last night?”
“Plenty,” replied Olivia, grinning wickedly.

The junkie’s eyes suddenly tightened with focus.
“You gave me orange juice. You’re a nice guy.”
“Yeah,” said Fin. “I’m a nice guy. Look at the pictures. You see anybody?”
Shaking, Phil pointed to Oman. “Brunette, snub-nosed revolver.”

It might be an ID, but Alex was not pleased. “I can’t take these to a judge. Your witness is coming off of heroin.”
“He was clean during his statement,” countered Munch. “We had a tox screen thanks to my partner so we’re covered.”
Alex looked at Fin. Your partner, Munch, also deeply upset my girlfriend with his bigotry.

“Can’t you call in a favor?” asked Fin.
“After working with this unit, I don’t have that many left,” said Alex, rushing off. And you can bet your ass that I wouldn’t waste the ones I still have on you.
Inheritance

Alex remembered the day she swore to break out of the Cabot aristocracy clearly. She had just turned fourteen (her birthday was in April) and had come home to find her mother yelling at their maid.

Perhaps yelling was not the right word. Margaret Cabot had been practically rabid, screaming at the poor woman until she was red in the face. She’d berated the woman’s ability to work (“Good-for-nothing, can’t even manage to dust on top of the fireplace!”), her place of origin (“or maybe that’s how they do it in your country!”) and her family (“perhaps if your whore sister would stop having kids, you wouldn’t be so scatterbrained!”)

But the worst of the situation happened when an awkward, teenaged Alex had tried desperately to find a place to hide.

“No Alex, you stay. You stay and watch, and you learn that this is how the lower people are put in their place. This is what separates us from them.”

From that moment forward, Alex vowed, after leaving the house she’d grow up in, to find a way to define herself that separated her from her family. A way to take her “us” and remove it from her mother’s “them.”

- “You got any brothers? Cousins?” began Elliot.

Olivia tuned out. Her chest sunk as her mind comprehended exactly what they were dealing with.

“Mr. Starnes, do you have any children?”

“Never had the pleasure,” he replied. “You offering?”

“You’ve raped a lot of women, so it’s possible that you have kids out there that you don’t even know about, right?” said Olivia.

_The rapist’s spawn. The children of violence, pain, and anguish._

_My kindred spirits._

- “A constant reminder of what happened to me.”

The words rang in Olivia’s head. Her dinner grew cold and the TV steadily grew quieter in the background, but it didn’t matter.

A constant reminder.

Olivia’s mother had told her the truth when she was eighteen, just before she’d left for college. After years of feeling alone and neglected, Olivia had finally understood why it was so hard for Serena Benson to love her.

And somewhere in the back of Olivia’s mind, that meant it would be hard for anyone to love her.

The phone rang again. Olivia wasn’t answering tonight.

- “Please Olivia,” groaned Alex. “Pick up.”
Her mother wanted to spend some quality time with her daughter, and Alex was running out of excuses.

The machine picked up again, and Alex sighed. Maybe some people in the office (Southerlyn? Williams?) would be willing to go for drinks tonight.

- “May I?”

It only took Olivia a few seconds to pull up the addresses on the computer.
“Find anything?” asked Elliot.
“Helen Chen and Lucy Zhang’s mother are both in here, along with their home addresses,” she replied.

She printed off the list of Quan’s deliveries for the day.
“Victim’s address at the touch of a button,” said Munch darkly.
Olivia tore the paper in half. “Call for backup.”

Munch stared at the paper for a moment, then called after her. “Hey, how’d you do that so fast?”
But Olivia was already out the door.
“She was a computer science minor in college,” said Elliot, following suit.
“That Benson,” said Fin. “Fulla surprises.”

- “Nelson’s got science on her side,” said Alex. “It’s a generally accepted theory that violence and genes are linked.”
“Linked,” said the Chief ADA. “Not causative.”
“Do you trust a jury to make that distinction?” Alex asked. “I don’t.”
“It’s your job to make sure that they can,” he replied.

Alex sighed. “I’ve got George Huang doing a psych exam. Hopefully he can prove Darryl knew exactly what he was doing.”
“Listen to me,” her boss said in a serious tone, “Nelson pulls this off, it’s a Pandora’s Box for criminal prosecution because everything can be blamed on the confluence of bad genes.”
“And then no one is truly responsible for their own actions,” finished Alex. “That’s what I’m afraid of.”
“Good,” said the chief ADA. “Then don’t let it happen.”

She wouldn’t. As someone who loathed the donor of her genetic material, she had to ensure that Nelson failed.

- “I’ll try to speak more slowly and use small words so you can keep up with us,” said Nelson.
Alex’s mouth fell open. Even though this trial was tearing up Olivia’s insides, she had to admit, she was glad they were in a courtroom. Otherwise, Nelson would be dead on the floor before she could even giggle.

- “In the end,” concluded Alex, removing her glasses, “It comes down to what it is to be a human being. We are not just a product of our genetic programming, nor are we solely molded and motivated by our childhood experiences.”
I know I’m not.

- 

When Alex unlocked the door, Olivia was there, waiting. Without hesitation, Alex pulled Olivia into her arms and kissed her deeply, passionately. When the kiss finally broke, Olivia smiled weakly. “What was that for?” she said, closing and locking the door. “As hard as this case has been on me, I can tell it’s been much harder on you,” Alex said.

Olivia opened her mouth, but Alex cut her off. “Don’t even start, Olivia. You haven’t been taking my calls and you only do that when something’s bothering you and you don’t want to tell me what.” She kissed Olivia again, running a hand through her hair. “Talk to me,” Alex murmured. “Half of my genes come from an alcoholic,” whispered Olivia. “The other half come from a violent, anonymous sadist. It feels like I keep waiting for myself to break, to begin drowning myself in booze or beating the hell out of rapists and pedophiles.”

“But Olivia,” said Alex, “look at how great you turned out.” She looked the detective in the eye. “You are more than the sum of your genes. You give people piece of mind, you protect them. You fight for those who are too scared or damaged to fight for themselves.” She kissed Olivia on the forehead. “Do not beat yourself up over some hypothetical ghost of a person that you are not.”

Olivia smiled at her. “Okay, can we sit down? I’m exhausted.” “Sure,” said Alex, laughing. “Have you eaten?” “Completely forgot,” said Olivia. “Well, I’m pretty sure the deli knows our orders by heart by now. They don’t deliver, do they?” “I don’t think so,” said Olivia. “I’m so used to picking up on my way home, I’ve forgotten.” She looked thoughtful. “Why was this case so difficult for you?”

Alex flipped through the takeout menus. “Because I’ve been trying to escape my blood my entire life. My father is a philanderer, who, by the way, comes from a long line of philanderers, and a coward, and my mother is a bitch who hates anyone that isn’t a WASP.” She sighed. “My father may have his moral shortcomings, but at least he’s a decent person. I swear my mother calls me every other day to tell me about ‘the gays’ ruining the neighborhood and the…ugh, I’m not going to use her words, they’re too disgusting. Yes, I’d like to place a to-go order.”

While Alex continued on the phone, Olivia’s mind suddenly spun with a whole new conundrum. Did Alex’s family not know?
It had been a while since they’d had a meltdown in the squad room. After restraining Glenn and dropping him off at Bellevue, Olivia returned to SVU to drop the car off and head out for the night. However, she’d forgotten about one key detail – the pile of paperwork six inches high on her desk. She was working long after even Cragen went home.

“So you’re still here,” said someone at the precinct door.
Olivia looked up. “Hey, did I miss a date?”
“No,” said Alex, smiling. “I just thought I’d drop by.”
“It’s awfully late,” Olivia said, raising an eyebrow.
“I know,” replied Alex. “I just really didn’t feel like going home.”

She sighed. “I have a lot of motions to draft, and at the very least, my mother can’t call me when I’m at your place.”
“She doesn’t have your cell phone number?” asked Olivia.
“She doesn’t know I have one,” Alex said smugly.

“You know,” began Olivia, “I didn’t always get along with my mother either, but I didn’t hate her.”
“Just because I love her doesn’t mean I have to like her,” countered Alex. “I’ve told her a thousand times, I don’t have time to cook anything for Thanksgiving, and apparently picking up bread isn’t good enough, it has to be homemade, and –”
“I’ll make it,” offered Olivia.

Alex shook her head. “You’re just as busy, if not busier, than I am, and I can’t ask you to do that.”
She bent and kissed Olivia quickly on the mouth, then moved her lips to the brunette’s neck.
“Come on, let’s get out of here. I’m famished.”

Olivia grabbed her coat, heart sinking. Why would she need to make bread anyway? She wasn’t invited to the meal.

- 

“Well, we’re headed to trial against Dorothy Rudd,” announced the captain.
“That for certain?” asked Munch.
He nodded. “Cabot thinks she’s got enough firepower to put her away, even without testimony of the previous foster kids.”
“Sounds good to me,” said Elliot. “We’re having a hell of a time finding them.”
“Does that mean Glenn’s going to testify?” said Munch.

“As of right now, all signs point to yes,” replied Cragen. “She’s arranging to have him tour a courtroom later today to see if he feels comfortable.”
Munch frowned. “She call in a favor to do it?”
“As far as I can tell, she’s taking him in on her own time,” said the captain. “I have to tell you, she’s been a real rock star throughout this whole case. If it hadn’t been for the strings she’d pulled with the legal guardian, we’d still be looking at the poor kid for the murder.”

Olivia said nothing.

- 

A triumphant Alex walked into the squad room, greeted by five glum faces.
“Who died?” she cracked.
“Dorothy Rudd,” replied Stabler.

Alex’s face fell. “Please tell me you’re kidding.”
“Just got a call from Rikers, massive heart attack,” replied Munch.
“Bitch didn’t even suffer,” Fin said grimly.
“Anybody else feel cheated?” said Cragen.

Alex’s mouth hung open in frustration.
Elliot sighed. “That’s it. No vindication, nobody pays.”

“Jane’ll do a couple of years,” offered Alex.
Elliot shook his head bitterly, blowing past her. “Slap on the wrist.”
Alex turned after him. “Her deal is done.”
“What about the foster agency?” said Cragen.
“They signed Cassie’s death warrant the day they placed her there,” said Olivia.

“No laws on the books will let me prosecute them,” said Alex, defeated, “even if they knew the house was unsafe.”
“Cassandra Adams knew,” said Munch, “and you know what bites the balls? She still doesn’t have her kids back.”
The wheels spun in Alex’s head. “Then we’re going to do everything we can to give them to her.”

Elliot spun around. “Wait, really?”
“Absolutely,” replied Alex. She pushed her glasses up the bridge of her nose. “Get me all the ammunition out there to prove Cassandra Adams is fit. I’m going to need all the help I can get.”
She gathered her things.
“Where’re you off to?” asked Cragen.
“Where else?” replied the ADA. “The foster agency.”
“Do you know where it is? Need a ride?” said Olivia quickly.
“Benson, while your enthusiasm is appreciated, you do have other cases to work,” said the captain.
Elliot tried hard to hide his smile.

But Olivia couldn’t help herself. A determined Alex out for the kill? That more than made up for her present feelings about Thanksgiving. And it also made her wet.

“The boy that helped Cassie, what’s going to happen to him?” asked Ms. Adams through her tears.
“He’s in good hands,” replied Olivia.

Benson, Stabler, and Cabot left the family behind. Olivia turned to Alex.
“What is going to happen to Glenn?”
Alex sighed. “Emergency foster placement.”
Elliot nodded knowingly. “Back in the system.”

He walked past the two women, giving Olivia the perfect opportunity to give Alex a suggestive look. The two walked off into the city, their hands painfully close. Brushing against one another, but not quite holding.
“The candles, the music,” said Elliot, looking around. “That strikes me as a seductive scene.”
“Maybe she wanted to treat herself,” guessed Olivia. “Most women don’t go this far, but they do like to self-serve.” Most women. Not all.
“I guess you want something done right, you gotta do it yourself,” cracked Elliot.

Or have Alex Cabot do it for you, thought Olivia.

- 

This lineup was going excellently.
“That’s two for two,” said Olivia, glancing back at Alex.
“Read Miss Adler her rights,” Alex said with relish.
“Looks like we’re going to be famous,” said Maddox. “See you in court.”

Oh, Alex was going to love this. She knew Pam Adler personally, and the woman was a bitch in the first degree. She thought highly of herself, sought cases that would pad her win column, and had not spoken a single friendly word to Alex during the case they’d fought against each other.

Though, admittedly, that could have been due to Alex’s first year at the DA’s office.

Pam Adler smiled while Cabot finished buttoning her blouse. What an experience.
“So, how was I?” she asked, grinning broadly.
Alex stood, grabbing her briefcase. “Lousy.”

She would never forget that look on Adler’s face.

- 

Well, maybe she wasn’t entirely going to love it.
“So, I spend the morning getting railroaded by Maddox, then I get called into Lewin’s office to be told essentially that I’m being benched for this one.”
“What do you mean?” asked Olivia, plopping down on the couch.
Alex rolled her eyes. “I’m sitting second chair for the case, because they think I’m taking on too much and thus need to be kept in check. Then, who do we draw for the hearing? Petrovsky, of all people.”

“Hey, at least you’re sticking with it,” said Olivia. “Everyone in the unit but Cragen thinks it’s stupid, and I’m tired of hearing it. I’m guessing that’s the majority of your day?”
“On a more amusing note, one of the attorneys in white collar has been really freaked out by this case,” said Alex.
“Why is that amusing?” Olivia asked.
“Because she looks almost exactly like Amelia Chase. The entire office has been cracking jokes about it nonstop.”

- 

“Turns out Peter was telling the truth,” said Olivia, walking into the squad room. “The lawyer said he didn’t want the money, just the names.”
Alex sprang up. “Did he confirm Sydney Green’s compliance?”
Olivia handed her a stack of files. “The day before death she contacted the lawyer to set up a meeting.”
Alex flipped through the files eagerly. *Olivia, you’ve saved my ass.*

“That’s convenient,” said Elliot.

Olivia returned to her desk. “Sounds like motive for murder.”

“Saves the trouble of a high-profile trial, maybe even a prison sentence,” said Elliot, looking astounded.

“I re-interviewed Andrew Green,” said Olivia, addressing Alex. “He didn’t know about the civil suit, but Pam Adler had a copy of it. How did she even know it existed?”

_Because she’s a slippery bitch. I love you, Olivia._

“The record gets expunged when abated by death,” said Alex, almost gleefully, “so Adler had to have a prior copy.”

“Sydney Green calls up her friends, tells them she’s giving in, they kill her,” completed Elliot.

Alex frowned. “I thought the medical examiner ruled the death accidental.”

Elliot shrugged. “No harm in taking a second look.”

Olivia nodded, looking Alex directly in the eye.

_Orgasms for Christmas, Olivia. You get as many orgasms as I can give._

- 

Alex walked out of the courtroom and winked at Olivia.

“Come on,” said the detective, nudging Elliot. “Time to go.”

As they hauled Pam Adler off, Alex couldn’t be more satisfied. She got to put Adler away for at least fifteen years, enjoy a drink with a damn good opponent, and early Christmas celebrations would begin as soon as she got home.
She should be concentrating harder on the poor woman with the baby cut out of her, but something nagged at Olivia’s brain. Why had Elliot stayed in Manhattan tonight?

Hopefully he was just Christmas shopping. *Shit, I’ve gotta get on that too.* Christmas was a week and a half away.


Olivia closed the door, convinced that there was still some digging to be done.

“Someone scared the hell out of her to shut her up,” said Elliot.

“Partner-in-crime,” guessed Olivia. “We need to get back in there and search for signs of that baby.”

Elliot’s cell phone rang. “Right. Stabler.” He listened a moment. “We’re on it.”


He nodded. “They think so.”

She sighed heavily.

“Something on your mind?” he asked.

“Elliot, what do you get the woman who has everything for Christmas?”

He looked at her, laughing. “Thank god, I was worried it was something serious.”

“It is serious!” cried Olivia. “Stop laughing! Her family owns two expensive homes and put each kid through graduate education with room to spare. I have no idea what she even wants.”

“Have you asked her?” said Elliot.

Olivia shrugged. “I’ve tried. She’s been kind of swamped lately with the need to close out trials before Christmas, not to mention the fact that her mother’s furious about the fact that she’s not staying at home for the holidays this year.”

“You aren’t invited to join in the Cabot family party? They probably have champagne with every meal,” joked Elliot.

“Uh, yeah, that’s the other thing that’s been on my mind,” said Olivia. “I’m pretty sure her family doesn’t know she’s into women.”

Elliot stopped walking. “Okay, forget Christmas. You’ve been dating for what, almost a year? You’ve gotta ask her about that.”

“Wow,” said Olivia quietly. “It really has been that long.”

“I’m sure she can always use clothes or something,” said Elliot, trying to lighten the mood. He turned the key in the ignition. “You can always give her one of your silly winter hats.”

“Hey! I like my hats!”


“She could’ve gotten it this morning,” said Olivia, watching the passersby.

“Nah, she’s coming,” said Elliot. “You wanna leave, go ahead.”

Olivia frowned. “Or you could just stop being a jerk and tell me what the hell’s going on with you.”

He remained silent. “This about Maureen?” she asked.

_Somewhat._ “I screwed up, I didn’t send in a check for the Columbia application.”
“Is it too late?” asked Olivia.
“Not entirely,” replied Elliot. *Not entirely.*
“Elliot, what is this?” she asked.
“I’ve been distracted,” Elliot said. *And that’s about all I’m telling you.*

“—

“She thinks I’m shutting her out,” said Elliot.
Olivia rose. “You are. You keep this up, you’re gonna ruin the best thing you ever had.”

She walked towards the elevator.
“Benson! Hold the door for me?” called Cabot.
Olivia smiled. “Sure.”
They got in the elevator together. “What’s up with him?” asked Alex.
Olivia groaned. “I’ll tell you later. How’ve you been?”

“Busy,” said Alex, shrugging. “But, I wanted to let you know I’ve made Christmas Eve reservations for us.”
“Aw, Alex,” said Olivia, suddenly in a much better mood. “You didn’t have to do that. Does this mean you successfully fought off your family?”
“All that courtroom experience comes in handy sometimes,” replied Alex. The elevator doors opened on the garage. “Oh, one more thing.”

She glanced around. “Did you want to do anniversary presents as well?”
“I’m having enough trouble with Christmas gifts,” said Olivia. “Why don’t we just make dinner or something instead?”
“Sounds good to me,” said the ADA. She smiled warmly. “See you later, Liv.”

Olivia knew she was grinning like an idiot, but she really didn’t care.

“—

Cragen looked severe. “You and your partner park yourselves in Warner’s office until she hands over that autopsy.” He turned to the ADA. “Alex, unless you’ve got other plans, I want you there too.”
“Why?” she asked.
“You need solid medical evidence,” said the captain. “Make sure Warner’s got it.”

He left the office to check on Elliot. Alex and Olivia looked at one another.
“Well, at least we get to spend some quality time together?” proposed Olivia.
“Now we just need to convince Elliot to drive so we can make out in the back seat,” joked Alex.
“Thanks for sticking up for me.”

“Any time,” said Olivia.

“—

The Manning case closed with a guilty verdict on all counts, finally relieving Elliot of his horrible mood. Olivia, too, was feeling better, now that Christmas was finally here.
“I still can’t believe Cragen gave me the 25th off,” she remarked, sipping her eggnog.
“I still can’t believe you actually drink that stuff,” said Alex, making a face. “I suppose you’ve worked the past two Christmases. He probably thinks you deserve a break.”

She kissed Olivia, then pulled away. “Ugh, disgusting.”
Olivia grinned at her. “So, do you want to do presents now, or wait until tomorrow?”
Alex shrugged. “What the hell, let’s do them now. Be warned, I’m really awful at knowing what to get people.”

“Man, you have no idea,” said Olivia, grabbing her gift from beside the tiny tree. “I’ve been racking my brain for weeks. This is the best I could come up with.”
“Well, don’t sell it too hard, detective.”

Alex removed the wrapping and smiled, pulling the scarf out of its box. “Is this cashmere? Olivia, this is so nice. My old one’s been getting holes in it, this is perfect.” She kissed the detective on the cheek. “Thank you. You can open mine, now.”

Olivia undid the bow on the bag and removed a small box. “Wow, Alex, this is really nice.” She tried on the silver watch. “It fits well, too.”
“So it won’t get in the way when you’re slamming perps against cars,” said Alex. “There’s something else in there as well.”

Olivia dug through the bag. “Oh, come on, you really got this for yourself.”
Alex shrugged impishly. “You said you’ve been needing some new underwear.”
“Yeah, but I can’t wear this to work,” said Olivia.
“Who’s going to see it but me?” Alex asked suggestively.
Olivia rolled her eyes. “Come here, you.”

She leaned into Alex and kissed her, softly at first, then more passionately. She felt Alex sliding a hand up her thigh.
“Would you like to try it on?” offered Alex, grinning.
“You’re a perv,” said Olivia, wrapping a hand around Alex’s back. “I’d love to.”
Protection

Outside, the ball dropped in Times Square and the crowds went wild. Shouts of “Happy New Year,” drunken fools yelling and cheering, horns blaring loudly into the night.

All of which was welcome, for Olivia would have died of embarrassment if anyone heard the noises she was making.

Alex was on top of the detective, sucking softly at her neck. One hand gently squeezed Olivia’s left breast; the other rubbed the outside of Olivia’s slit, occasionally moving up to tease her clit.

“Alex,” whispered Olivia. She grasped Alex’s rear, digging her nails in unintentionally. Alex looked up.

“Careful there,” she admonished, leaning in to kiss Olivia on the lips. She plunged a finger inside and Olivia moaned into Alex’s mouth.

Olivia broke away, breathing heavily. “Alex, Alex I want you.”

“I’m all yours,” said Alex sensually, rubbing Olivia’s inner walls.

“No, I want, to take you,” said Olivia. She tried to focus on moving a hand to Alex’s sex and failed miserably. Alex giggled and added a second finger.

“Come on, Alex,” Olivia panted, “Alex, please.”

Alex leaned in to kiss Olivia again, guiding her lover’s hand to its intended target. “Just for you,” she whispered. She began to thrust into Olivia more eagerly as the brunette slipped a finger of her own into Alex’s pussy.

“You’re soaked,” moaned Olivia, arching her back.

Alex flushed, still smiling. “And you’re having trouble concentrating.” She stopped thrusting and gently pressed her fingers to Olivia’s g-spot, stroking firmly. Olivia came hard, pressing her thumb against Alex’s clit and moaning over and over.

“Alex, oh Alex, Alex.”

When the haze finally cleared from her vision, she pushed another finger inside Alex and began pumping her hand in and out. The blonde flushed violently.

“Use your mouth,” she begged.

Olivia grinned wickedly. “I always use my mouth,” she replied, relishing in the slick sound of her fingers sliding in and out of Alex. “You’re so tight.”

“Shut up,” said Alex, still gigglng a little.

“No, you’re clearly enjoying this,” said Olivia. “Hmm, what if I just stopped?”

She withdrew her fingers slowly as Alex’s eyes popped. “You wouldn’t dare.”

Olivia laughed. “You’re right, you’d kill me.” Adding a third finger, she slammed her hand back into Alex, causing the blonde to cry out.

“You okay?” asked Olivia.

Alex tilted her head back. “God yes.” She reached a hand down to her clit and began to stimulate herself.

“No,” said Olivia, removing the blonde’s hand. “Let me.”

With one hand pounding her sex and the other rubbing around her clit, Olivia brought Alex to orgasm, feeling the blonde soak her hand as she called out in ecstasy.

“Phew,” said Alex, collapsing on the bed next to Olivia. She kissed her girlfriend sweetly on the mouth.
“I love you,” Alex said. “Happy Anniversary.”
Olivia smiled. “You too.”

“Maybe Miguel can tell us what happened,” said Cragen, handing off a piece of paper. “He’s awake, asking for his mother.”
Olivia looked over the paper while Elliot grabbed his coat. “We going?” he asked.
“Yeah,” she said, grabbing her scarf and coat.

“Looks like your neck’s almost healed up,” he said in a low voice.
She rolled her eyes and wrapped her scarf around her neck. “Come on, Elliot. It was our anniversary, leave me alone.”
He shrugged. “I still think you need to find out if her family knows.”

“What difference does it make?” said Olivia. She did not like the direction this conversation was heading.
“It makes a hell of a lot of difference if you’re in this for the long haul,” said Elliot. “When you’re in a long-term relationship with someone, you’re usually in a long-term relationship with their family too.”
“Well, she doesn’t like her family, so maybe not,” deflected Olivia. “Can we talk about something else?” She pushed the down arrow on the elevator.

Elliot shook his head. “This is bothering you, Olivia. Ignoring it isn’t going to make it get any better, you know.”
“Like how not talking to Kathy about work isn’t going to make it any better?” she shot back.
Elliot looked away and shut up.

It was a low blow and she knew it, but for the moment, she really didn’t care.

It was another one of those cases where Olivia had been up for over twenty-four hours, and to her, those were the most dangerous. Not only was she running on a short fuse, her brain began running in overdrive mode, meaning she had far too much time to think.

What Elliot had said to her yesterday kept spinning through her head. Olivia understood that they had to keep their relationship a secret at work – she liked this job, and wanted to keep it – but for Alex’s family not to know about them? Olivia’s mom had known about her sexuality after the long term girlfriend in college. Admittedly, as a college professor, Serena Benson had been fairly open-minded, but if Alex’s parents really loved her, what difference did it make? And all that aside, why couldn’t Olivia meet Alex’s family as just a friend?

She was tasked with finding the Ramos’ a place to stay, but right now, all she wanted was a long run, a hot shower, and the comfort of her own bed.

It had been a long night. Olivia opened the door to Cragen’s office, still sleepy. “What’s going on?”

Alex looked away.
“Alex wants to indict Maria,” explained the captain.
Olivia felt as if she’d been punched in the gut. “For what?”
“Attempted murder,” said Alex halfheartedly.
“Are you kidding me?” said Olivia, her voice rising. Every ounce of frustration she’d felt with Alex over the past week began to bubble to the surface. “Fredo terrorized Maria and her sons for two years!”

“Which doesn’t give her the right to become a vigilante,” said Alex.

“This isn’t about revenge, Alex,” yelled Olivia. “It’s self-defense!”

“No, Olivia,” replied Alex, “Fredo’s gun was two rooms away. Unless Maria had reason to believe her life was in immediate danger, she had no justification for shooting him.”

Olivia seethed with rage. And what’s your justification for keeping me in your closet? “How ‘bout extreme emotional distress?”

“Doesn’t apply here,” said Alex, also frustrated. “Maria knew exactly what she was doing!”

She banged her hand against the windowsill and went to gather her things. Olivia, why are you pushing this so hard? “She dropped Luis off at her mother’s, she ditched the Bronx detectives, she bought the gun, and she went to kill Fredo.”

Olivia came in close. “We put her in that position because we couldn’t protect her.” Look at me, Counselor. I dare you to look at me.

Alex rolled her eyes. “No one can guarantee Maria’s safety one hundred percent.”

“Look,” Olivia shot back, “she is scared for her life and her boys.” She put herself between Alex and the desk, forcing the blonde to meet her gaze.

Alex looked back at her, reluctantly. “Maria committed a crime.”

“Which we are partly responsible for,” Olivia said furiously. “Alex, cut her a break!”

Alex held eye-contact for a second longer before finally breaking away, stalking towards Cragen’s door.

“I have to enforce the law.”

“Maria is your only eye-witness to Fredo executing Joey Stapleton,” Cragen cut in quickly.

“Convict her and her credibility is shot along with your murder case against Fredo.”

Over Cragen’s shoulder, Olivia’s angry eyes burned a hole in Alex.

“The law is not always about justice,” said Alex, trying to keep her focus on the captain. “Your words, remember?”

“Maria didn’t kill anybody,” Cragen replied. “But Fredo? Fredo’s got two bodies to his name that we know about. We don’t lop his head off now, he will kill again. And if anything happens to Maria or Luis, it’s on you.”

Cragen walked away, but Olivia was still staring at Alex. Suddenly, she got the sense that she had a much bigger problem than indicting Maria Ramos. And she wasn’t the only one.

What the hell is wrong with her?

What the hell did I do?

What the hell did I just witness?

- 

“Okay, I managed to convince the DA’s office that Maria Ramos is not a threat to society at large, and I’ve been on and off the phone with your captain and witness protection all evening. We’re moving her to Dallas in the morning,” finished Alex, closing the door to Olivia’s apartment. “That smells good.”

“Curry,” Olivia replied tersely.

Alex set down her briefcase and entered the kitchen. “Come on Olivia, what else do I have to do
today to make you happy?”
Olivia sighed angrily, turning the heat down on the rice. She spun to face Alex. “Your family
doesn’t know you’re a lesbian, do they?”

An icy wind blew sharply through Alex, piercing her brain with shock. She groped for a chair and
slowly sat down, unsure of what to do next.
Olivia’s expression softened a bit. “Okay, maybe that was a bit too harsh. I’m judging from your
expression that the answer is no.”
Alex finally found her voice. “The answer is complicated.” She bit her lip and looked up. “Why?”

“Because,” said Olivia, “it’s been the holiday season, and I’ve noticed that I’ve been left out of all
the Cabot family gatherings. And you said something a while back about your mother being a
bigot?”

“Oh god, that barely scratches the surface,” said Alex, clutching her forehead. “One time, my
brother formed a study group with a boy at his school who was openly gay. When my mother
found out, she called this boy’s house to tell his parents that he was no longer welcome in the
Cabot home. I remember being eleven years old and listening her tell my father that ‘the queers’
were going to ruin New York with AIDS, that there’d be nowhere left for the ‘good, normal
people’ to live.”

Olivia searched for words and found none. She checked the pot, then sat down next to Alex.
“I’m…I’m sorry,” she offered.
Alex stared blankly ahead. “I grew up terrified that if anyone ever found out, I’d be cast out on the
street. I’m still scared that if my mother finds out, I’ll be disinherited and the few family members I
actually like will never speak to me again. So, no, my parents don’t know.”

There was something missing there. “But?” prodded Olivia.
“Wait,” said Olivia, “you told your –”
Alex cut her off. “No, I didn’t tell him. He found out.”

She blushed. “He brought a girlfriend home from college one summer who turned out to be far
more interested in me than she was in him. One thing led to another, and…he walked in on us.”

“Well that’s,” Olivia grimaced, “awkward.”
“I literally felt like the world was going to end. That’s why I can’t even bring you to something as a
friend,” said Alex sadly. “He knows. It’s the one thing he has to hold over my head. He’s been
waiting for a chance to blow the whistle ever since.”

“I know you and your brother don’t get along either,” said Olivia, grasping Alex’s hand, “but Alex,
do you really think he’d go that far? Just because you’re a bit more driven than he is?”

Alex looked uncomfortable. “Have you ever seen anything about my parents in the papers?”

“You know I don’t look that hard,” said Olivia, shrugging. “Why?”

“My father is Alexander Cabot III,” Alex said. “They waited until I was born to figure out the sex,
and by that time, it was too late to change a lot of things and my father insisted on keeping the
name.”

She looked into Olivia’s eyes at last. “I am the favored child, Olivia. The first-born, the over-
achiever, the ones the parents boast about to family and friends. My brother hates me for it,
because he should have been the next in a long line of Alexander Cabots, and I, a girl, got all the
 glory.”

She rolled her eyes. “It’s fucked up, but it’s my family. I loathe them, but I can’t disappoint them,
no matter what.”

Alex looked very, very tired.
“Wow,” said Olivia. Growing up, she’d always imagined that being rich would solve all of her and her mother’s problems. How very wrong she’d been.

She kissed Alex on the cheek. “I’m sorry. If I’d known, I wouldn’t have been this upset.”
“I never thought I’d have to worry about telling them,” Alex replied. “But I also never thought I’d fall in love.”
Olivia felt heartbroken. She couldn’t respond to that. There was just no way.

“Alex, do you want some dinner?”
“I’d like that, Olivia. Very much.”
Alex stirred her drink angrily. “I swear, Petrovsky is out to get me. Defense counsel for the Noho rapist filed for a psych exam, and she’s making us prepare arguments for it.”
“But the Noho rapist doesn’t have any sort of mental illness,” said Olivia. “There was nothing in his medical records either.”
“Exactly my point. His attorney’s trying to spin it as well-disguised multiple personality disorder,” replied the ADA. She rolled her eye. “Which all boils down to even more work for me to do.”

“Well, at least you didn’t wear a dead person’s decomposing skin today,” replied Olivia.
Alex set down her cocktail. “I think I just lost my appetite. What exactly were you doing?”
“Trying to get a fingerprint for the woman found in Riverside Park,” said Olivia. “It was weird and disgusting, but it worked.”
“You don’t really think you’re going home with me after that, do you?” said Alex, smirking.
Olivia glared at her. “I wore gloves and I washed my hands three times.”

- 

“Alright, alright, well thank you. Thanks anyway,” said Olivia. She sighed and slammed down the phone.
Alex strode up to her desk, plopping down a file. “You owe me,” she said in a slightly suggestive tone. “Harry Baker’s file.”

Olivia avidly flipped through the papers. “For what? There’s nothing here, I asked for transcripts.”
“On a juvie?” Alex asked sarcastically. “You’re lucky I got his pre-sentencing report.”
Olivia stared at the report, frowning. “Probation officer recommended intensive supervision based on Agent Tilden’s suspicion…of numerous unadjudicated prior offenses.”
She glanced up at Alex. “What do you suppose those were?”
“Lord knows,” replied Alex.
“Any way we can find out?” Olivia asked.

Alex thought for a moment. “I do have someone I can ask. But I meant what I said, Olivia. You’d better pay me back later.”
She winked and left the office, practically strutting out of the precinct. Olivia was amazed that over a year later, this woman still made her legs go numb.

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Olivia brought Harry’s mother out of the interrogation room. “Mrs. Baker needs a break. She’s waived Harry’s Miranda.”
“Let’s get you some coffee,” offered Fin.
As they walked off, Olivia shook her head. “This kid knows all the tricks.” She turned to face Alex. “Any suggestions?” She looked the blonde over with relish. God, I can’t wait to take off that shirt later. Alex returned the look with intrigue, clearly on the same wavelength as the brunette.
Olivia felt the warmth beginning to grow between her legs.

“– get him to talk about it hypothetically, third person.”
She’d completely forgotten Huang and Cragen were even there. Grateful that she’d at least caught the last bit of conversation, she returned to the interrogation room.

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Finally, she’d caught a break with Petrovsky. This was better than winning the lottery. It didn’t hurt that this had been her easiest case to argue in months. Benson and Stabler walked over to congratulate her.

“Nice snow job,” said Olivia, cocking an eyebrow. Alex smiled back at her. That look meant one thing: victory sex. “Well, I knew I had him when juror number six asked me to stop reading one page into it.” Olivia chuckled slightly, but Elliot remained unamused. “That’s a misdemeanor, one year max.”

“There’s no statute of limitations on murder,” said Alex. “That year is what I just bought you to find the head.” Stabler, you will not ruin my good mood. Not today. Olivia glanced at Elliot, then left the courtroom. Her look very clearly read “don’t follow.”

Fine, if that’s what you two ladies want to do, I can take care of myself. He needed something to hit, and it looked like Harry Baker just might take the cake.
Olivia picked at her dinner, but really couldn’t concentrate. When Alex had suggested they go out on a fancy date, dinner and the theater, she’d been enthusiastic. Now, all she wanted to do was go straight home.

They made a name for that color, and it was fuck-me red.

“That’s a nice dress,” said Alex, taking another bite of salad.
“You reading my mind?” asked Olivia. “I am dying over here, Alex. Dying.”
The blonde dabbed her mouth with a napkin. “Try not to drool, Olivia.”
“How come I haven’t seen this before?” Olivia said. She took in the beautiful plunging neckline, loving the way the cut complimented Alex’s chest.
“Because I used our nice date as an excuse to buy it,” replied Alex. “If I’d known it was going to have such a pronounced effect on you, maybe I wouldn’t have done so.” It was a hollow threat, though. The blonde loved the attention Olivia lavished on her. She drank it in happily, also losing interest in her meal.

Olivia’s eyes probed Alex as the detective bit her lip. “The things I am going to do to you in that dress when we get home…”
Her phone rang and she snapped it open. “What?” Her expression turned sour. “You have got to be kidding me…yes, I know it’s my job. I’ll be there in twenty.” She closed the phone and made an angry noise.
“I’ll try and refund the tickets, then?” said Alex.
“You can do what you want with the tickets,” said Olivia, grabbing her things. “But you’d better make damn sure you keep that dress.”

- 

Olivia stomped onto the murder scene. Thoroughly displeased did not even begin to cover it.

“Alright, nice dress,” Fin cracked.
“Yeah, it was a nice date,” she replied angrily. “Where’s Munch?”
“Rang in sick,” replied Fin.
Olivia sighed in irritation. “He’s such a hypochondriac. How many times has he had anthrax this week?”

Fin laughed. Something had Benson riled up though. Must’ve been one hot date. He’d do his best to keep from turning on the charm, but a woman looking like that? It’d be a struggle.

- 

“Rigolia’s wife’s a knockout,” said Fin, “why cheat on her with somebody like Paula Grace?”
“Maybe she had something else he wanted,” replied Olivia, looking confused.

Munch hopped past on a pair of crutches, looking more sour than ever. Okay, this was almost worth missing that date. Almost. Not that dress, though.
Fin grinned broadly. “Oh, I can’t wait to hear this.”
“Your sympathy is overwhelming,” Munch said dryly.
“What happened to you?” asked Olivia, trying not to laugh.
“Skydiving. Hard landing,” he offered.
“Said he wiped out riding his Prince Harley,” said Elliot.
“Yeah, the only thing he’s riding now is a desk,” said Cragen. “Dump on the victim’s cell phone just came back. Let’s find out who she called.”
“Sure, make the gimp do the busy work,” said Munch.
She knew exactly where her next call would be. Alex was going to love this.

The conversation had potential, but Fin put a stop to it pretty quickly. Olivia was not happy.

“Probably off handling some investigation they didn’t want your lieutenant friend to know about,” he said, after dismissing the officers.
“Yeah, well maybe you should’ve asked them,” she replied.
“What, you got a problem?” asked Fin.
“Yeah, I do,” said Olivia. “You softballing them like that.”
“I’m not gonna go hard on two good cops unless I think they’ve done something. Whose side are you on?”

“The victim’s!” said Olivia. “Where we’re supposed to be!” *I am tired, sex-starved, and pissed, she thought, and this is the last thing I need right now.*
“Yeah, and what about the truth?” said Fin, his voice rising. “The victim’s definitely not telling that.”
Because she’s a drunk? “Oh, and your cops are? You didn’t even ask them! You sounded more like their union rep than anything else.”
“I just call it how I see it!” Fin shot back.
“Yeah? Well, we just blew our chance. Now it’s IAB’s call.” She stalked off.

*Screw you, Fin.* Olivia did not play nice when angry.

“Alex, we don’t move fast on this, we lose him,” Cragen said vehemently.
“Okay,” said Alex in a quiet tone. She led Sergeant Tucker and the detectives out of the office, sighing.
“I’ll see if I can get to court before the doors close,” she said sadly. “I may have to hassle a judge on his way out, though.”
“Just do the best you can,” replied Fin.

Behind him, Olivia rolled her eyes. Alex gave her a puzzled look.
“I’ll tell you later,” mouthed Olivia.

Olivia whipped out her phone.
“Who you callin’?” asked Fin.
“Munch,” she said. “Yeah, we’re at the park…tell the captain and Cabot Tripani’s not here.”
Fin stared at her, dumbfounded. “You know this goes south, we’re both back in uniform.”
“And if we don’t try, Francesca’s dead,” she replied.

So this was why Benson had been riding him so hard. She wasn’t jumping down his throat for no reason; she genuinely cared about the job and the victims. It reminded him of narcotics, where at the end of the day, all that mattered was bringing in the dealer. How you got there was up to you.

Fin nodded at her, grinning. “And you don’t know somebody ‘til you work with them.”
The captain had been so relieved to discover Francesca was alive that he hadn’t even reprimanded them. Triumphant, Olivia returned home for some much-needed sack time. She locked her apartment door, placing her gun and badge in their usual spot by the entryway. Then, she stopped. Something wasn’t quite right.

She turned to see one Alex Cabot lounging on her bed in that red dress, complete with heels. Olivia’s mouth fell open.

“Oh my god,” she murmured.

Alex angled one leg upwards, pulling the dress high up her thighs. “I figured after today’s spectacular collar, you deserved a reward.”

“This is why you weren’t at the squad,” said Olivia, shedding shoes and socks as she walked towards the bed. “You’re blowing my mind right now.”

Alex smirked. “That’s not all I’ll blow.”

Olivia lost it. She threw herself onto the bed, kissing Alex passionately. Surprised, Alex flinched slightly, but was quick to return the kiss. Olivia thrust her tongue into Alex’s mouth while removing her own shirt and bra. However, she struggled with her pants.

“Let me help,” said Alex, quickly undoing the zipper and the clasp. Olivia stood briefly, removing pants and underwear with one quick toss. She then mounted Alex, kissing the blonde again with fervor.

“You’re going to knock me off the bed,” Alex said between kisses.

“All I have been able to think about for the past week,” said Olivia lustily, “is you in this goddamn dress.” She pressed a finger to Alex’s slit and was surprised at what she found. “You’re not wearing any underwear, Counselor. And you’re wet.”

“I had a little time to play before you got home,” Alex said in a low voice. Olivia saw the blush creeping up from her chest. Alex arched her mound into Olivia’s hand, and Olivia could tell from the flush, from the slight heaving of her chest, even from the smell, that the blonde wanted this just as bad as she did.

Without warning, she pushed three fingers into Alex’s pussy and began to thrust rapidly.

The blonde’s teasing expression transformed to one of shock, then pleasure. She began to close her eyes, tilting her head back.

“No,” ordered Olivia. “Look at me.”

Trembling, Alex refocused her eyes on Olivia, panting slightly. Olivia watched her face flush to match her dress as her breaths grew more labored and her pussy grew wetter. With her other hand, Olivia pinched Alex’s nipple through the dress and Alex let out a short, high-pitched moan. Olivia thrust harder, loving the sound of her fingers fucking Alex hard.

“You,” began Olivia, but the words were lost. Her breaths too grew heavy now. She removed her hand from Alex’s breast and began to rub it against her own clit. Alex broke Olivia’s gaze to watch the detective stimulate herself, her expression one of pure ecstasy.

“You are all I want,” Olivia moaned. “You are all I need.”

The blonde came, thrusting hard against Olivia’s hand, and Olivia came too, allowing a series of small moans to escape from her lips. After a few moments, she removed her fingers from Alex’s slit and licked each one clean. Suddenly, she felt a soft mouth on her own.

Alex pulled back, grinning naughtily. “My turn.” She leaned Olivia back on the bed, spread her legs apart, and went in for the kill.
“Here you go,” said Munch, handing Alex a cup of coffee. “Creamer? Sugar?”
She took a sip and made a face. “I don’t think either’s going to help. When’s the last time you
bought a new can of grounds?”
“An excellent question,” Munch said. “Hey Fin, who made the last coffee run?”
He shrugged. “Beats me.”

“No matter,” said Alex, sighing. “Munch, are you still available next Thursday for testimony in the
Greenburg case?”
“As of right now, yes, but who knows what fate may bring?” quipped Munch.
“Come on Munch, is Greenburg really that bad?” asked Olivia.
“It’s not the case, it’s the date,” replied Munch. “Next Thursday is Valentine’s Day. Plus, I heard
Langan’s council for the defense.”

Alex and Olivia exchanged a quick look. “Langan’s not so bad,” replied Alex. “I knew his family
growing up. We were in the same year at law school, he’s a nice guy.”
“That’s exactly why I don’t want to testify,” said Munch. “He’s not bad, he’s good, sometimes
good enough to make us lose.”
“Then I’ll be sure to go the extra mile to win this one,” said Alex. “If you agree to testify.”

Munch grumbled and Fin chuckled, teasing his partner while Alex moved closer to Olivia’s desk.
“I didn’t know you and Langan were in law school together,” said Olivia.
“I didn’t know next week was Valentine’s Day,” said Alex. “You want to do lunch?” She lowered
her voice. “Figure something out?”
“You in that dress is all I need,” said Olivia, grinning sensually. Alex laughed.

“Munch! I need a favor!”
Elliot burst out of the captain’s office.
“I’ve got three days to solve a cold case and I need you to run by the lab.”

“Elliot,” asked Alex, sitting next to him on the couch. “Why are you pushing so hard?”
“You know, I studied the crime scene photos,” he said staring at the ground. “I read the files.
Brodus mutilated twelve women, pre-mortem.”
Alex nodded. “That’s pretty horrific stuff.”
“I try to imagine the strength, the will it took to keep those women alive and feed off their terror,”
he continued. Alex looked uncomfortable. “I’m gonna need as much ammunition as possible if I’m
gonna trip this guy up.”

“And you think this prisoner will give you some leverage?” Alex said carefully.
“Well, I ain’t gonna know unless I can talk to him,” Elliot replied honestly.
Alex thought hard. “I’ll see what I can do,” she answered. “When did you first start working this
case, anyway?”
“In ’91,” he said. “With my first partner at SVU, Dave Rosetti.” He sighed. “Jesus, that was a long
time ago. Olivia wasn’t even a cop yet.”
“It’s hard to imagine you working with anyone else,” said Alex, smiling. She sighed. “To change
the topic, do you think there’s anything she’d like for Valentine’s Day?”

“You’re asking me?” sneered Elliot nastily.
“Clearly, I shouldn’t have,” said Alex, frowning. “I have some idea, but you’re her partner, you
spend the most time with her.”
Elliot groaned. “You figure it out.”
“What exactly is it about me that sets you off?” asked Alex, pissed.

Elliot looked away. “She loves you, Alex. She’s crazy about you and you’re keeping this locked up like a dirty little secret –”
“I don’t know if you’ve noticed,” Alex cut in, “but she also loves her job. And I’m not going to take that away from her.”
“You could transfer,” he offered.
“I haven’t even been here two years!” she shot back. “Besides, I love this job too.”
“I thought everything was politics for you,” he countered.
“Remember what you said about phone calls?” asked Alex. “Screw the politics, Elliot. I fight for the victims.”

She sighed. “And that’s why, even if you don’t like me because I’m dating your partner, I’m still going to wake up a judge.”

Elliot and Alex parted ways after finishing their meal in the diner.
“Hey, Counselor,” he called.
“Hmm?” she said, turning back.
He sighed. “Thanks for everything you’ve done. And I’m sorry.”

She nodded. “Don’t mention it.” Besides, I didn’t do it for you.
Opening her phone, she dialed Olivia’s number at the precinct.
“Benson.”
“Just me,” said Alex. “Your partner is a lucky man.”
“You managed to stay the execution?” said Olivia excitedly.
“What?!” yelled Munch and Fin in the background.

Alex laughed. “Tell my friends in the peanut gallery that the execution is still on, but we’ve secured an interview.”
“That’s fantastic!” said Olivia. “Hey guys, they get the interview, but Brodus still dies at midnight.”
“Aright,” yelled Fin.
“Sounds like you’re the office hero,” praised Olivia.
“I’ll take it, considering the hell I had to go through to get this,” Alex said, rolling her eyes.
“I thought you knew the EADA in Jersey,” said Olivia.

“I do,” Alex said, “that’s why this is so hard. He was one of the coordinators for my clerkship after my first year in law school. We got along well, until he wanted to get along a little too well.”

Olivia snorted into the phone.
“What?” said Alex, frustrated.
“Just imagining you turning him down,” she replied.
“I’ll have you know I haven’t always been this confident,” said Alex. “Trust me when I say it was very, very awkward.” She groaned. “Change the subject. Will make that pesto that’s so good for Valentine’s?”

“I got a confession on Debbie Cooper,” said Elliot.
He glanced at Alex, but she ignored him, focusing her gaze on Elliot. *I care,* she thought.

He read the look, knowing what it meant. *Thanks, Counselor. Alex.*
Olivia strode up to the front desk, flashing her badge. “Olivia Benson, Special Victims. I’m here to interview the rape victim.” She still wasn’t entirely sure why she was going this, but Elliot was worried as hell.

“We didn’t call any assaults today,” said the nurse. “Are you sure?”

“I just go where they tell me,” she said.

“What’s the victim’s name?” he asked.

Shit. “Uh, Munch, Margaret K.”

She wished both Alex and Munch had been flies on the wall for that one. They would’ve gotten a kick out of it.

-  

“El!”

Olivia burst in on the conversation. Thank God, thought Elliot. He snapped his focus to his partner.

“That was St. Vincent’s. Cynthia’s been admitted. Somebody tossed her down a flight of stairs.”

Kathy looked back at him. It was a loaded expression, one he couldn’t quite interpret but still dreaded.

Whatever this price was, he was sure he’d pay it later down the road. His stomach sank.

-  

“And since when is oral sex not sex?” Cragen asked angrily.

“Since Bill Clinton said so,” cracked Olivia.

It was a good joke, but Alex wasn’t laughing. She was far too distracted by sex incarnate sitting next to her. It was one of those times, and Alex could practically feel the juices dripping down her thighs.

“From what Tommy says, the older guy’s gotta be our teacher, the sister could tell us who he is,” said Elliot.

“But if he taught junior high, Tommy would’ve known him,” said Cragen.

“Are you sure?” asked Olivia. “Maybe there is no teacher and Cynthia’s just covering up.”

It was then she noticed the incredibly loaded stare Alex was giving her and stopped short. Come on Counselor, not now. “It’s still statutory rape whether or not it was consensual,” she finished, returning Alex’s look.

“Doesn’t matter,” said Alex, her smile foxy. “Without a complaining witness, the rape doesn’t exist. Unless we can tie this man to the assault, we have nothing to charge him with.”

“Tommy knows more than he’s telling,” said Munch. He turned to Fin. “You catch that look?”

Olivia panicked. What look? Our look?

Fin looked peeved. “I wish I could catch the little bastard in the act and charge him for pandering. He’s got Cynthia hooking for alcohol and drugs.” Phew.

“Yeah, what about the drugs?” asked Olivia, using any excuse to draw Alex back in.

“The ecstasy’s been consumed, so the evidentiary link is gone,” said Alex slyly. That’s it, Olivia. I’ve got my hooks in you.

“Is there any way to get the rape kit without a sixty-one?” said Cragen hopefully.

“If we can prove an adult was with the minor, her parents can request for the rape kit to be released,” said Alex.
Elliot said something, but Alex didn’t really care and Olivia was no longer paying attention. Munch and Fin gathered their things to leave, the captain returned to his office, and Elliot headed for the coffee maker.

Alex stared directly into Olivia’s eyes. “I’ll consume you later.” She left the precinct with a spring in her step.

_That was awfully ballsy_, thought Olivia. The statement had been out loud; anyone paying attention could have heard. Anyone paying attention would also notice the fact that Olivia had sunk back on her desk, having lost the use of her legs.

“Check with the Harrison principle on McKenzie’s whereabouts,” the captain ordered. “If this pans out, haul him in for a hard interview.”

Elliot stared at Olivia, wrinkling his brow. He waited for the captain to leave before speaking. “You’re walking funny today.”

She was perched on the edge of the bed, her mouth glued to Alex’s pussy, both by Olivia’s want and Alex’s fluids. Olivia lapped eagerly at her girlfriend’s warm sex, loving the breathy moans Alex emitted up above. Smiling into Alex’s slit, she dragged her lips up to the blonde’s clit and sucked.

Alex’s hips jerked unexpectedly and Olivia lost her balance, tumbling off the bed.

Alex sprang up, beet red. “Shit, Olivia, I am so sorry.”


“I fell,” offered Olivia lamely.

“Whatever,” said Elliot. “At least one of us is getting laid.”
“She didn’t have a reasonable expectation of privacy?” asked Munch.
“The issue isn’t the government’s intrusion into our right to privacy,” explained Alex. “It’s the right of the private citizen to keep the government out of his bedroom and the courts still view that as sacrosanct.”
“We’re not talking about his bedroom,” countered Cragen. “If he planted those cameras in Cassie’s apartment, it’s as good as breaking and entering.”

“That necessarily,” said Alex. “He owns the apartment. He has certain rights of entry.”
“Alex, we are talking about a predator who’s using his position to extract sexual favors and terrorize women,” said Olivia. “What if we found those cameras in your bathroom?”
Alex paled. Then this entire squad room would be seeing a lot more of you and me naked than I ever want released.

Olivia raised an eyebrow at her. We’re thinking the same thing, Alex.

“He may have taped the attack,” said Cragen, interrupting their reverie. “We need a legitimate reason to search his apartment.”
Alex still looked stony. “Okay, but you have to limit the warrant to the receiver and any videos or video equipment.”
“No worries Counselor,” said Munch. “We won’t violate any of the sacred rights guaranteed in the Constitution, even if they are inane and outdated. Oh, and are those new specs?”
“They are,” replied Alex, gathering her things to leave. “What if we found those cameras in your bathroom?”

“Oh, very nice,” said Munch, nodding. “We’ll see you tonight for drinks?”

“Wouldn’t miss it,” replied Alex. She left for the DA’s office.

Munch turned to Fin, smirking. “Wonder what she’s so worried about people seeing in her bathroom.”

“Hey, Munch,” said Olivia coldly. “Shut up.”
He threw his hands up in apology. Elliot caught Olivia’s eye and winked.

You too, Elliot.

They were supposed to be watching the interrogation, but they had distractions to attend to.
“Could you stop staring at me like that?” asked Olivia.
“Like what?” purred Alex.
“Like you’re going to ravage me in the interrogation room,” replied Olivia testily.
“Oh, just give me a chance,” said Alex, “and I will.”

Olivia turned away.
“Don’t pretend like you haven’t been staring too,” teased Alex.
“It’s a nice shirt,” said Olivia.
“It’d look nicer on the ground,” responded Alex.

Olivia turned to glare at her. “You think I haven’t thought of that? I’m having a hard enough time concentrating as is, quit making it worse.”

Alex cocked an eyebrow. You slay me, thought Olivia. “Maybe I want you to concentrate on something else.”
She took the bait. “Such as?”
Alex smiled. “How you’re going to explain the tears to the dry cleaners after I rip that dress off you.”
Olivia bit her lip. “Counselor, I am so wet right now,” she confessed. “Good,” said Alex, her voice dripping sex.

Olivia snapped. She pulled Alex in close, thrusting her tongue in her mouth and running her hand through Alex’s hair, then abruptly drew back. “Wow,” murmured Alex, her eyes still dark with arousal. “Do you want to get caught?” “Do you?” countered Olivia.

Neither woman got an answer. A moment later, Elliot opened the interrogation room door.

“Alright, lay it out for us Counselor,” said Cragen. “What are our options? We don’t have any evidence tying him to the assault or the vandalism. No forensics, no witnesses —” “What about the cameras?” asked Olivia.

“Just got a call from Cabot,” said Olivia, entering the squad room. “Amy posted Terry’s bail.” “He’s in jail for planting cameras in another woman’s apartment and she comes to his rescue?” Fin said, stunned. “How blind can love be?” asked Munch incredulously. “I’ma get a uni out on Cassie,” said Elliot darkly. “I don’t trust this guy.”

“Too late,” cut in the captain. “Cassie Germaine’s been shot.” The movement in the squad room seemed to screech to a halt. Elliot and Olivia traded glances. “Go,” ordered the captain.

They bolted from the squad room. “Isn’t it a little warm to be wearing a turtleneck?” asked Elliot. “Would you get off my case?” said Olivia angrily. “Just because the well’s run dry for you right now doesn’t mean you get to live vicariously through me.”

Well, that shut him up. “Elliot,” she began, guilt welling in her stomach. “I’m sorry, that was out of line.” He clenched his jaw. “Yeah, Olivia. It was.”
Guilt

Alex had been with SVU for a while now. God, was it really coming up on two years? In that time, she’d seen some pretty horrific things, but she’d still managed to go home every night and at least rest well, if not always soundly (thanks, in part, to one brunette detective).

But not this time. Something about Sam Cavanaugh was different, and Olivia couldn’t pin down what.

“Do you really think this is going to work?” said Olivia on the other end of the phone. “Any number of things could go wrong here, Alex.”

“The wire is our best chance to nail his abuser,” she replied. “We have to at least give it a shot.”

“You know,” replied Olivia, “it’s past midnight. If you’d wanted to stay up and talk, why didn’t you at least come over?”

Alex sighed. “Because one of us needs to sleep tonight, and it’s not going to be me. I’ll meet you and the rest of the squad in the morning.”


“Love you too.”

“Sam, what Roy Barnett did to you was never your fault,” soothed Alex. “He chose you because you are young and he could control you. When you decide you want to be with someone, whoever that person is, it will be your choice.”

Sam looked disgusted. “I’m not a fag.”

“Look, I’m telling you for the last time,” she replied. “I’m not a... a...”

“Lesbian?” he replied sadly.

“Don’t say it!” she yelled.

Dumbstruck, Alex continued “I’m not saying –”

“I have a girlfriend!” Sam cried.

“So why won’t you go out with me?” she pleaded.

“Because we both know that won’t solve anything,” he replied.

“Okay,” continued Alex.

“I’m not a fag!” he screamed.

“I don’t want to talk about it anymore!”

“Alex, I assume we’ve got enough cause for a warrant?” said Cragen.

“Plenty,” she replied, visibly shaken. “You’ll have it by the time you get there.”

She left the squad room as though someone had set fire to her heels.

“She okay?” asked Elliot quietly.

“No,” replied Olivia, “but I don’t know why.”

“Why?” asked Elliot.

“Well, I just got off the phone with Cabot,” announced Cragen. “And she’s going back to Linda Cavanaugh.”
“Her boss is breathing down her neck because we have no case,” replied the captain. “Well, it’s nice to know that we’re not the only ones subject to that,” cracked Munch.

The captain glared at him. “Oh, and Elliot, your old friend Donnelly says hello. She’s been reassigned as the bureau chief for our unit.”
“Son of a bitch, finally back from DC, huh?” said Elliot. “Who’s Donnelly?” asked Olivia.
“Liz Donnelly, our ADA for about six years, left in ’99 right before you got here. Hell of a woman,” said Elliot. “Poor Cabot.”

Poor Benson. Why had Alex called the captain? Why not her?

-

Elliot, the victim, and Alex entered the squad room.
“Who’s this – oh my god, Alex!” Olivia said. “You’re bleeding!”
Alex touched her hand to her forehead. “No, I think it’s clotted,” she said vaguely. “We had a bit of a ruckus in the courthouse,” said Elliot.

“Are you okay?” Olivia asked.
She had been knocked to the floor with no one to pick her up. Only after Sam was safely in the elevator, did Elliot turn to her. As it should be, after all, but still.
“Just shaken,” she replied.
“Come on, Olivia,” said Elliot. “We’ve gotta interview this guy.”
Olivia watched Alex up until Elliot closed the door behind her.

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“You know you got ‘em when the defense starts professing concern about the victim,” said Cragen.
“He is as bad as his client, hoping the victim is too traumatized to testify. He’s lucky I didn’t knock his teeth down his throat!” hissed Alex.

She stormed into the squad room, practically spitting ice.
“I’d pay real money to see that,” said Cragen, dumbstruck.

-

Alex leaned out of the open window, smoking a cigarette.
“So, he never really liked me, huh?”
Sam Cavanaugh’s words rang in her head. She should have insisted on taking him home.

She also should have called Olivia when she got in, but that was neither here nor there.

She took another drag on the cigarette. The taste was foul but the buzz was all that mattered right now. Something to dull the pain of the memories in her head and the ice running through her veins.

She tossed the stub into the street and lay back down in bed. If she was still up in an hour, she’d repeat the ritual again, but for now, she closed her eyes.

Less than a minute later, the phone rang. “Hello?”

-

“His mom found him, he asphyxiated,” said Olivia grimly. “They don’t know how long he stopped
“How?” asked Alex.

“Aspirin and his anti-depressants,” answered Elliot.

*Oh god.*

Linda Cavanaugh burst onto the scene, seemingly out of nowhere.

“Get out of here,” she spat at Alex. “Get her out of here!”

Elliot rushed to stop the woman’s assault while Olivia took Alex in her arms, pulling her girlfriend in close. She steered Alex from the emergency room and outside.

“Alex?” said Olivia.

Alex said nothing.

Olivia pulled her into a big bear hug. “It’s okay, Alex,” soothed Olivia. “This wasn’t your fault.”

“I know,” said Alex hoarsely. “There’s nothing I could have done.” Her voice was distant, as if she’d forgotten where she was.

“I’m taking you home,” pressed Olivia. “Come on. Elliot will cover for me.”

-  

They lay next to each other in bed, fully clothed, in silence.

“I love you,” whispered Alex. She smelled like cigarettes.

-  

“Could it have been an accidental OD?” asked Olivia.

*No.*

“Didn’t find a note,” remarked Cragen.

“They don’t always leave one,” said Munch.

*So his secrets would die with him.*

“Look, Alex,” said Cragen gently. “This kid had problems long before –”

“I want to know if Barnett had any contact with him. Dump the phones.”

*Shift the blame.*

-  

“Only offer, yes or no, *right now.*”

She might be withholding something, but god, Olivia loved this woman.

-  

Alex was livid. “Did you tell her what we were looking for?”

“Before or after she starting yelling for security?” countered Elliot.

“Does it matter? Write her a note and slip it under the door, leave a message on the answering machine.” *Do something, goddammit. Do something before I lose my mind.*

“Do you really think she cares about helping us make our case?” asked Olivia.

“Make her care!” *Sorry, Liv.*

Olivia had never heard that tone, that level of cold fury in Alex’s voice. That hurt.

“We’ve still got this other victim,” Cragen said carefully. “Ben Tucker.”

Alex shot him down. “Never in a million years.”
“Why?” asked Elliot.
“You were sitting right across from him, Elliot,” she replied. “Just based on that, do you think he is a good witness?”
“Make him a good witness,” Elliot countered in a similar tone.
Fuck you, Elliot Stabler. Fuck. You.
“I can’t make his priors disappear,” said Alex. “Besides, that case would never get past a grand jury.”
“So, all of a sudden, you just take cases you can win?” he said bitterly.

Olivia noticed the twitch in Alex’s temple. She’d been dating her long enough to know what it was, usually specially reserved for her mother on particularly heinous occasions. Everyone had better shut up now if they wanted to avoid what was coming.

“I try the cases I am handed by this squad. You don’t like the evidence I’ve got? Find me some more. I can’t do your job too!”
Elliot was stunned. “You can’t do my what?”
“Out of line, Alex,” cautioned Cragen.
“I am not out of line and I don’t work for you! You work for me at my discretion! Your sole purpose in this process is to bring me a case I can prosecute, not one I have to fix!” she screamed.

“Fine,” said Cragen quietly. “Then you tell us, Counselor. How can we help you put this man away? What would you like us to do?”
Alex suddenly looked exhausted and bitter. After an age, she answered. “Nothing. You’ve done all you can.”

Olivia’s heart shattered two steps away.

- 

“You look like hell, Alexandra. Get some sleep.”

It was the nicest thing Petrovsky had ever said to her, but Alex couldn’t bring herself to care. It was hard to sleep when she hadn’t been home in two days, though it might be worth it to go back home and get a cigarette.
You quit once, she scolded herself. Don’t fall back into this.

She hated herself for what she was about to do.

She dialed Olivia’s cell phone number. The detective picked up after the first ring.
“Thank god,” she said. “I’ve been waiting for you to call me. Are you okay?”
“Better now,” she lied. “Meet me at the Cavanaugh’s.”
“You’re kidding,” said Olivia.
I am. “Just go.”

She had to. For Sam Cavanaugh, aged seventeen. For Alex Cabot, aged twenty-one.

I fight for the victims.

- 

Olivia leaned in close to Alex. “Any restrictions on the search warrant?”
It was all Alex could do not to collapse in her girlfriend’s arms.
I’m sorry, Olivia. I’m so sorry. Kiss me, at least one last time.
“Nope, whatever you can find.”
Cragen was fuming. "You searched the Cavanaugh place without consent?"

The detectives were beyond confused.

"What?" said Elliot.

"Barnett’s attorney’s on the horn with every city official he can think of screaming fourth amendment violation,” answered the captain.

"We didn’t need consent,” explained Olivia. "Cabot had the search warrant.”

"Try again,” spat Cragen.

Elliot and Olivia glanced at one another.

What do we do?

We lie.

"Are you saying,” Cragen began, “Cabot told you she had a warrant?”

Elliot looked away. "I don’t remember.”

"Don’t give me that crap,” hissed the captain. "You better start saving your own jobs and stop covering for the ADA.”

"She didn’t actually say that she had a warrant,” said Olivia carefully.

"But she specifically told you to meet her for a search, implying she had a warrant,” pressed the captain. "She’s out of her mind.”

"Captain, it was a good faith search,” said Elliot. "As far as we knew, there was a warrant.”

"Elliot, ‘good faith’ doesn’t cover Cabot lying to you,” replied Cragen.

Olivia felt woeful. "She did that to protect us,” she said, more a realization than a counterargument.

"What are you now, her lawyer?" accused the captain.

Not her lawyer, just her lover. "Those tapes showed Barnett with half a dozen other boys. If we hadn’t found them, we’d have never known about his other victims.”

"And if a judge throws those tapes out, we know nothing!”

Elliot and Olivia let the captain chew them out for a few more minutes, then bolted.

"Call Cabot,” he said desperately.

Olivia looked pained. "She won’t pick up.”

"Then sit on her place,” he pleaded.

"She hasn’t been home, either.” Olivia was ready to burst into tears.

"You listen to me,” said Elliot. "We will fight for her. We will defend her until the ship sinks and then we will help her swim. You got it?”

Olivia nodded, a single tear running down her cheek. "Thank you.”

"The tapes are in,” said Alex, weakly but triumphantly.

"Good,” said Olivia. "And what about you?”

"Petrovsky acted like I killed her dog,” Alex joked hollowly. "Just one more enemy to add to the list.”

That’s not what I meant, Alex, pleaded Olivia.

"You took a big chance,” said Elliot.

"You were never in jeopardy,” said Alex, addressing them both. "I made sure of that. It will all fall on me.”

"You should have told us,” said Elliot. Please, thought Olivia. Not now.

Alex groped for words. "I am sorry.”

"No you’re not,” replied Olivia.
“I am sorry you were ever in the middle of this,” Alex explained. “But you’re right. I’m not sorry about the rest.”

Olivia nodded.
“I have to go,” Alex said lamely. “I have an arraignment.”
Elliot and Olivia watched her leave.
“You don’t have a key to her place?” said Elliot.
“No, I do,” said Olivia.
“Then go.”

Liz was right. She didn’t do it for justice. She didn’t do it for the victims. She did it for Sam Cavanaugh.

And, by proxy, for her.

She opened the door to her apartment to find Olivia sitting on the couch.

What did she even say? She’d never gotten to this point before.

“We both know there’s something else going on here,” said Olivia. “You can choose to trust me, or I can leave.”

“Is that an ultimatum?” asked Alex.

“Considering that you’ve been shutting me out for two weeks, it may have to be,” said Olivia, her expression pained. “But I don’t want it to be.”

She stood. “You’ve started smoking again.”

Alex looked dead. “Allow me an old comfort.”

“What about a new comfort named Olivia Benson?” she asked, getting to her feet. “What about this case got under your skin?”

“Sam Cavanaugh did.”

“You didn’t cause his suicide attempt, Alex.”

“But I understand it, Olivia.”

Olivia looked shocked. “Were you molested?”

Alex shook her head, walking towards the couch. “No, nothing like that. I – you’d better sit down for this.”

Frightened and confused, Olivia sat down, rubbing Alex’s back.

“Olivia, when I spoke to Sam, he was terrified. He both hated Barnett, and at the same time, he loved him, and he hated himself for that. And also,” she took a deep breath. “he hated himself because he was worried he might be gay. And I used to hate myself because I am.”

Alex stared vacantly ahead. “After my brother found out, that’s when everything began to spiral down. I sunk into a deep hole, and I tried, so hard, to find a way to change myself. You know Langan?” she said.

Olivia nodded.

“We’ve been friends forever. I tried to get him to agree to date me, to shake my parents off in case my brother said something. And he said no. And when I asked him why, he said it was because he knew I was a lesbian, and he wasn’t going to help me hide who I really was.”

“Okay,” said Olivia gently, unsure where Alex was going with this.

Alex squeezed her eyes shut. “A week later, he came to check on me after I didn’t return one of his calls. He found me in my apartment lying in my bathtub, along with an empty bottle of aspirin.”

Olivia’s eyes widened and the sound of her own blood roared in her ears.

“I know what it’s like to hate yourself, Olivia. I know what it’s like to be Sam Cavanaugh. I know
what it is like to really and truly wish to die because of something you can’t change."

Tears streamed down Alex’s face. She started to speak again, then choked, her sobs beginning to surface.
“This time,” she whimpered, “at least there was someone else to blame.”
Alex could no longer restrain herself. She burst, the floodgates opening, the cries loud and long. Olivia pulled Alex into her arms, rocking her back and forth, her own tears flowing unrestrained.

-

After what seemed like a million years, Alex emerged from the shower, wearing a robe.
“You feeling any better?” asked Olivia.
“Marginally so,” replied Alex.
“I got rid of your cigarettes.”
“Thank you.”

Alex plopped down on the couch, resting her head on Olivia’s shoulder. Olivia wrapped an arm around her girlfriend. “So, what happens to you now?”
“I almost forgot,” said Alex. “I’m suspended for a month. I’ll be back in the middle of April”
“You know,” said Olivia, “I have a lot of unused vacation days saved up.”
Alex looked at her lovingly. “You’d do that? For me?”
“For you, I’d do anything,” replied Olivia.
“I believe you,” said Alex weakly.

This hurt. This tore deeper than anything that had happened over the past few weeks. The strongest woman she knew was curled into a crumpled ball beside her, and it fucking broke Olivia’s heart.
“Did you get counseling?” asked Olivia.
“Yes,” said Alex. “I refused the anti-depressants. I couldn’t have pills around. Coincidentally, that’s when I took up smoking.”
“Well,” said Olivia dryly, “now I know why you never have any painkillers in the house.”
“Yes,” replied Alex. “Now you know.”

Olivia drew Alex in close, hugging her tightly. Alex didn’t question it, but returned the hug in turn.
“I love you,” whispered Olivia. “I love you so much.”
Alex looked Olivia in the eyes. “Words are not enough to express how I feel about you.” She kissed her lover soundly on the mouth.

Olivia hadn’t run. She’d chased Alex down, and when Alex had revealed her deepest shame, she’d stayed. And Olivia could never understand how much that meant. After her parents had dismissed her suicide attempt, too confused to understand, after her guilty brother couldn’t look her in the eye, after Langan had left when she’d refused to talk. After not one friend had come to visit her in the hospital that summer because she wouldn’t tell anyone the truth.

Olivia had stayed. And Alex hoped, though it was a tiny hope, that Olivia would stay forever.

So this was what love meant.
It was nice to take the week off, to have a short respite from the victims and the rapists and the broken men and women of the world. It was nice to wake up next to Alex, after sleeping next to her each night. It was nice to spend the day with her girlfriend, even if she did somehow manage to overdo the cookies she’d promised Olivia. Overdo wasn’t the right phrase, actually; completely charred was more like it.

“Seriously Alex,” said Olivia, “you were in a sorority. I’d think you could at least bake chocolate chip cookies.”

Alex pouted. “There’s a reason I have that long list of takeout numbers taped to my fridge, you know. Besides, I’m sure you knew plenty of people in college who couldn’t cook.”

“I’m just saying,” replied Olivia, “everyone I knew at Siena could at least turn out a decent baked good.”

Alex stopped along the waterfront, smiling. “Riverside Park is so beautiful this time of year. Do you want to keep going, or should we turn back?”

“I spent enough time in the south end of the park when we were working Agent Tilden’s case,” said Olivia. “Let’s go get lunch.”

She linked arms with Alex, smiling. It had taken a couple of days, but Alex was back to her headstrong, confident self.

“It’s a shame you have to go back to work on Monday,” said Alex. “It’d be nice if things could be like this all the time.”

“Hey, you’ve got continuing legal education to go to,” said Olivia.

“And pro bono work,” added Alex.

“There you go, you’ll be too busy to miss this while you’re working,” Olivia said.

Alex laughed. “Olivia, I’m never too busy to miss you.”

Olivia’s cell phone rang and Alex groaned. “Come on, you’re on vacation Liv.”

“Which is why,” said Olivia, “I’m telling whoever it is to stuff it. Benson…nah, we’re just out in the park, enjoying the weather.” She turned to Alex. “It’s Elliot.”

Alex smiled. “Tell him I say hello.”

“So, what’s up?” she continued. “You know I still have two more days off…about what?…oh, really…then I guess I’ll brace myself for the return. Good luck out there, tell the unit I say hello.”

Olivia closed the phone, frowning. “I have something to tell you, but I’m not sure you’re going to like it.”

“Oh?” asked Alex.

“According Elliot, Cragen is very suspicious of the fact that my time off coincided with your suspension,” said the detective.

Alex sighed heavily. “And so he suspects something is going on between us?”

“I don’t know,” said Olivia, shrugging. “All it means is that he’s probably going to interrogate me when I get back. I’m sure he’s still pissed at Elliot and me for covering for you with the phony warrant.”

“Well,” began Alex, “I suppose the longer we date, the harder it’ll be to keep things secret. Wait, what do you mean covering?”

“When the captain asked us if you’d lied to us about having a warrant for the Cavanaugh place, we played dumb,” explained Olivia.

“But why?” asked Alex.
“You know how I told you SVU is my family?” said Olivia. “Well, that includes you. And family watches out for each other.”

Alex smiled thoughtfully. “It’s nice to have family.”

“Alex, I’ll do my best to keep it from him,” Olivia started, “but he’s already upset with me for lying once. I’d feel bad lying to him again.”

Alex concentrated for a moment. “If it comes down to that, you can tell him. Worst thing that happens is he requests a new ADA for the unit, and he doesn’t have to explain why.”

She kissed Olivia on the cheek. “Besides, he seems like a man with experience keeping secrets. And he likes me.”

Laughing, Olivia rolled her eyes.

- 

“You wanted to see me, captain?”

The fact that Olivia had known this was coming didn’t make it any easier to do. She closed the door, her stomach tying itself in knots.

He sighed. “Did you really think I wouldn’t notice that you took a week off at exactly the same time Cabot happened to be gone?”

“Captain,” began Olivia. “The Cavanaugh case was really difficult on her. She needed a friend.”

“What exactly is going on between you two?” asked the captain.

Olivia stared at her shoes, pretending not to hear.

“Don’t pull that with me, Olivia,” said Cragen. “I need some answers.”

She snapped her gaze up. “Why?”

“Because I need to know if Cabot can stay on as our ADA,” he replied.

Olivia furrowed her brow. “Then, with all due respect captain, I can’t give you any answers.”

“And why’s that?” he said.

“Because,” said Olivia carefully, “if you don’t know anything, you have no reason to put in a formal request.”

He looked the other way. “I can’t believe you two. This compromises the integrity of our unit and you know it.”

“When did you begin to catch on?” asked Olivia, her voice rising.

“A couple of months ago,” Cragen admitted.

“Then you’re over a year late to the party, captain,” said Olivia. “And in all that time, I can’t say we’ve compromised the integrity of anything.”

Cragen felt a pang of shock run through him. Knees weak, he sunk into his chair. “Over a year?”

“Captain, I love my job, and she loves hers, and you know she’s the best ADA we’ve had in ages,” pleaded Olivia. “Don’t ruin the good we’ve got.”

Cragen sighed. “Alright, for now. If you’ve managed to keep it up for this long, I can’t really object. However, if your feelings for her get in the way of your objectivity, know that my next call will be to the DA’s office.”

Olivia nodded. “And if that’s the case, can I at least ask that you withhold the reason for the request?”

“Oh come on Olivia,” said Cragen, throwing up his hands. “I’m not going to out either of you. Have a little more faith in me than that.”

He smiled at her. “Get back to work, Benson.”

“Captain, thanks,” she said.
“No, thank you, for being honest,” he replied.

As she left his office to return to her desk, Cragen buried his head in his hands. Old age must be making him soft.

- Elliot and Olivia turned to head to the Thornburg residence.
  “No, it’s okay,” said the captain. “I’m doing this one.”

He grabbed his coat and nodded at the ADA. “Also, welcome back, Alex.”
She sighed. “This has been a hell of a first day back.”
“At least you’re still working in SVU,” said Olivia.
“I still can’t believe you managed to convince him to let her stay on,” Elliot said to Olivia.

“Please,” scoffed Alex. “Without me, this unit would fall apart and you know it.”
“I don’t know about the unit,” said Elliot, “but Olivia would.”
“Hey!”

- “Daddy’s a judge, and she’s seeking out the men he’s convicted,” mused Alex. “What is going on with this girl?”
Cragen snapped open his phone, dialing furiously. “Stabler, I need you and your partner to get over to the Thornburg residence, now. Turns out those convicts she was writing to all came through Thornburg’s court…okay, you know where to reach me.”
He headed for the office door at blazing speed.
“Don,” said Alex softly, “wait.”
He slammed on the brakes, turning to face her.
“Could you…close the door?” she said.
He did as she asked, but grimaced. “You know I need to get back to the office, Alex. This case takes priority.”
“I know,” she replied. “I’ll be quick.”

She glanced down at her desk, then back up. “I wanted to say thank you for not requesting a new ADA. I would have certainly understood if you did, and the fact that you didn’t means a lot to me.”
Cragen sighed. “Alex, I’m not going to lie to you and pretend I’m happy about this, but at the same time, you’re a promising young attorney with a bright future ahead of you. I’m not going to kill your career before it really takes off. Even though I really should ask for someone new if you two are going to stay together.”

Alex blushed a little. “We promise to be discreet. No one will know.”
“Well, I know,” countered the captain. “Who else does?”
“Only Detective Stabler,” she said truthfully. “Besides Olivia, of course.”
Now that he was paying attention, Cragen wondered how he could have missed it before. Even saying Olivia’s name made Alex’s eyes light up, changed the tone in her voice.

He nodded at her. “Then let’s all make sure it stays that way for the time being.”
Cragen placed his hand on the doorknob. “Do you remember what I asked you when you first started working with SVU?”
Alex smiled. “Who do you sleep with, Miss Cabot?”
“Yeah, well, I never would have believed this was the answer.”
The captain was thoroughly confused.
“Adopting your unwed, underaged daughter’s baby is not a crime.”
“It is if you’re the one who knocked her up,” said Elliot.
“Judge Thornburg?” asked Alex doubtfully.
The captain looked stony. “One of the most respected jurists in the state.”
“Which doesn’t mean squat to me if he raped an eleven-year old girl,” said Elliot.

“Judge Thornburg,” repeated Alex. “I can’t think of a judge who’s tougher on child molesters.”
“Maybe he’s a self-loather,” offered Fin.
“Liv?” asked Alex.

Elliot cringed inwardly. The captain’s face somehow clouded over further. Thankfully, nobody else seemed to notice.
*Can you believe them?* thought the captain, directing his stare at Elliot.
*They’re in love,* Elliot thought back.

“Ever get a colleague to fix a ticket for you, Alex?” asked Donnelly sourly.
*You could call it that,* thought Alex.

A year ago, those words would have scared her shitless. But not now. Besides, Donnelly had just gotten back. She had absolutely no idea.
“It’s nice to know I’m not the only one catching grief for working all the time,” remarked Elliot as Todd took a phone call.

“Thank god,” Todd whispered.
“Your wife?” guessed Olivia.
“It was the hospital,” he said, packing up his things. “She’s conscious. Excuse me.”

Elliot and Olivia gave him a few paces, then followed him out of the restaurant space.
“Things are still tense at home?” she asked him.
He shrugged. “Somewhat, but better. Maureen got into Columbia, so it’s hard for anyone to be upset right now.”
“Elliot, that’s fantastic,” said Olivia. “Congratulations!”
He smiled. “It is fantastic. Now I’ve just gotta figure out how we’re gonna pay for it.”
“Ah yes, the fun part,” cracked Olivia.
“Hey,” he said, “anything that keeps Kathy happy right now can be considered fun.”

“Your detectives blew their search,” said Ryan’s defense attorney.
Alex smirked. “Not likely. They had permission.”
“From the wrong person,” she countered, handing Alex a motion.

Alex looked it over, then frowned, making a noise of disgust.
Petrovsky? Really? Someone had been listening to courthouse gossip.

“Where do Jessica and Curtis stand on cooperating,” asked the captain, looking over the paperwork.
“Johansson is on board,” said Olivia, “Jessica won’t believe it.”
“Well, we’re gonna have to change her mind,” the captain replied.

Olivia nodded. “Hey Fin, you’ve been pretty handy with the paperwork lately.
Fin rolled his eyes. “My sorry ass partner gets picked for a jury and I get stuck with all of his duties.”
“I’m still amazed someone actually let a detective through after selection,” said Alex.
“Civil suit,” explained Fin.
Olivia rolled her eyes. “I bet Munch is loving that.”
“Hey, at least he can’t talk about it,” said Elliot.

Alex smiled. This was what made the job worthwhile. The fun conversations, the little moments she got to spend with the rest of SVU while prepping cases. She might not stay SVU’s ADA forever, but at least she knew she was always welcome.
Olivia’s eyes kept shifting in and out of focus. “Do you care if I make a phone call?”
Elliot shrugged. “If it’ll keep us both awake, go for it.”
“Thanks.” She dialed Alex’s home number.

“Any luck yet?” answered Alex.
“How’d you know it was me?” said Olivia.
“Who else calls me at this god-awful hour?” Alex replied.
“Yeah, I guess you’ve got a point,” said Olivia. “How were drinks tonight?”

She could almost hear Alex shrug. “Not horrible, not great. Donnelly insisted on going along, mostly because McCoy was going to be there, unbeknownst to me.”
“I think Serena dragged him along,” replied Alex. “She told me he has a tendency to get cranky if he spends too much time by himself. I don’t know who I’d rather work for, him or Donnelly.”
“They’re both hardasses,” said Olivia. “It’s not a great choice either way. Then again, it’s not a bad one.”

“We ran into the women of white collar on the way out,” continued Alex. “I’ll tell you, they seem like they have the most fun in the DA’s office. All females, all good friends.”
Olivia grinned. “Don’t you think about going to work for them. I don’t know if I can trust you to keep your eyes to yourself.”
“Come on Olivia,” said Alex, “you know I’m not leaving any time soon. Though if I did, I might be able to convince one of those lovely ladies to engage in a ménage à trois.”
“I can’t believe you,” laughed Olivia. “My partner is right here, you know.”
“Not listening!” called Elliot.

“Hi Elliot,” said Alex. “Well, I hate to leave you to the dead of night, but I do need to get some sleep, you know.”
“Alright, I’ll see you tomorrow,” Olivia said. “Love you.”
“Love you too. Goodnight.”
“Night,” finished Olivia, closing the phone.

“What did she say that was so funny?” asked Elliot.
Olivia looked shifty. “Trust me, you don’t want to know.”
They sat for a few moments in silence before Olivia spoke again.

“What is she waiting for?” she groaned.
Elliot took a long swig of coffee. “Dead of night.”


It was a risky move, but Alex was done with Petrovsky giving her the stink eye every time she walked in her courtroom.
“With all due respect, your honor, you don’t have the right or the authority to tell the District Attorney’s office who or when to level charges against.”

Petrovsky turned ugly. “Step back!”
After an awkward silence, Alex spoke. “The people have requested remand.”
“Well, you’re not going to get it,” replied Petrovsky. “$300,000.”
“Objection,” said Alex.
“Overruled,” spat Petrovsky.

“Your honor, I must object,” continued Alex. It was risky, and she knew it, but she no longer cared. “Since you’ve rebuked me from manipulating the law to my own advantage, your ruling seems…”

cclouded by the fact that you hate my guts “Hypocritical.”

“That’s enough,” fumed Petrovsky, her gaze steely. “One more word out of you and you will be enjoying my hospitality –”

“Ma’am,” Alex cut in, “I urge you to reconsider or you will force me to file a grievance.” Try me, Petrovsky.

“You’re in contempt!” snarled Petrovsky. “Bailiff!”

Well, that didn’t go entirely as planned.

Alex swallowed another forkful of fish. “This has been a truly awful week.”

“Hey, at least we managed to get Clare released,” said Olivia.

Alex rolled her eyes. “Between Petrovsky jailing me, Fin being angry about charging Clare, and the entire office whispering behind my back, it’s small consolation.” She took a sip of wine. “The fish is good, but a little dry.”

“Yeah, I know,” replied Olivia. “I didn’t get a chance to marinade it.”

She grinned at Alex. “If you’d like to try and do better, be my guest.”

Alex cocked an eyebrow. “Do you like your fish well done?”

“I swear, Alex, we have to teach you how to cook,” said Olivia, laughing.

“But that’s what I have you for,” protested Alex.

“Then what are you contributing to this partnership?” joked Olivia.

Alex leaned over the small table and kissed Olivia, tasting like wine. “Something else,” she replied lustily.
Elliot hung up the phone. “We’re all set for tomorrow.”
“What’d you have to promise her?” asked Olivia.
“Trip to the zoo,” he replied.

Alex smiled. “Can I tag along? I haven’t been to the zoo in ages.”
Elliot shrugged. “Why the hell not. Alright, it’s late, I’m heading out.”

It wasn’t really that late, but Alex and Olivia were lost in one another’s company. No way he was going to break that spell.
He sighed. The honeymoon wasn’t supposed to last this long.

“We didn’t get enough to prove the bus driver raped her, but we did get plenty to get a search warrant for his apartment,” Alex told Elliot.
The two detectives nodded. “We’ll head back to the precinct and regroup, then,” announced Elliot.
“Just give us a call when you’ve got a signature.”
“Oh, actually,” said Olivia, “do you mind if Alex and I grab some breakfast first? We woke up kind of late.”

Olivia basked in the heat of the shower, relishing the way Alex dragged her nails across her thighs.
Steam filled the bathroom and made her skin slick and sensitive.
“Mm,” moaned Olivia, “you know we have somewhere to be.”
Alex licked at Olivia’s entrance, kneeling between her legs. “I’m almost done,” she said.
“I’m not,” said Olivia.
“Then I’ll have to finish you off,” replied Alex. She pressed her tongue slowly inside Olivia’s slit.

It was then Elliot noticed Alex’s normally impeccable hair was oddly wavy.
“No time to shower either?” he asked.
“No time to blow dry,” she replied, winking at Olivia.
Benson bit her lip and Stabler groaned.

Katie rushed to go meet her mother, but Alex hung back with Huang.
“I don’t know about you, but I got a kick out of that,” said Alex.
“Please,” said Huang, “we’re talking about a rape victim here.”
“I was talking more about her calling you an idiot,” Alex replied smiling. “It’s heart-wrenching.
She’s such a sweet, nice girl.”

“You were very at ease with her,” Huang said quizzically. “Why so?”
Alex shrugged. “Just because she’s a little different doesn’t mean anyone should be uncomfortable around her.” She looked over to see Elliot waiting with Mrs. Tolliver and Katie heading back towards Huang.
“Looks like I have to go,” said Alex. “But would you like to get lunch later?”
George nodded. “That would be nice.”

The phone rang four times before she got to it.
“Benson.”
“Olivia, it’s Huang,” said the voice on the other end.
“What’s going on?” she asked.

“I tried to reach your captain, but no one picked up,” he answered. “I’ve been served to testify in the dispute over Katie’s abortion.”

Olivia’s eyes widened. “That’s not good. You’ve been called to testify on her behalf, I’m guessing?”

“That’s correct,” Huang replied, sighing. “I’m worried Alex may have the same thing happen to her. I tried –”

“I’m on it,” blurted Olivia.

She slammed down the phone and ran to the hallway.
“Alex! Huang just called, he got served with a subpoena, wanted to warn you.”
“You’re about ten seconds too late,” said Elliot.

Olivia sighed in frustration as Alex tried not to smile. As aggravating as this summons was, Olivia was awfully cute when she got protective.

“Why you and not us?” cried Olivia.
Forget cute. Make that adorable.

- 

“Respondent’s exhibit four, Counselor,” began the defense attorney. “Recognize it?”
Alex looked it over. “It’s a DD5 written by Detective Benson.”
“Yes, it’s about Katie’s interview at the Central Park Zoo, at which you were present,” he continued. “Please read the highlighted passage.”

Alex’s face frosted over. “The victim could not articulate what happened to her and expressed unconditional compliance to authority figures.”
“Now, Miss Cabot,” he said, “do you truly believe that someone who cannot accurately describe being attacked can take care of a child?”
“Objection,” called Lucas’ lawyer.
“Overruled,” replied Judge Ridenour.

Alex took a deep breath. “Many high-functioning women cannot describe the details of a rape. You’re taking it completely out of context.”
“How many children do you have, Miss Cabot?”
She winced. “None,” she replied coldly. And I probably never will, thanks to the bigotry that exists in this country.
“And have you ever taken care of a child with special needs like Katie?” he went on.
“No, I haven’t,” said Alex stiffly.
“Do you think buying diapers six months before the birth demonstrates good judgment?”
“Objection!”
“Withdrawn.”

The defense attorney moved forward. “Did you know that Katie once set fire to her mother’s apartment by trying to use the stove?”
“I set fire to my own stove last year, Counselor,” confessed Alex.

She glanced over at Olivia, who was desperately trying to suppress her laughter.

-
Alex smiled coolly. “Your money is going to take care of Katie and her child for the rest of their lives.”

Olivia stood on the other side of the mirror, lapping it up. There were few things more satisfying than watching Alex rip someone to shreds with the law.

“Come on,” said Elliot, “we’ll meet ’em in the main entryway.”

Cheney had bolted by the time they made it to the front entrance, but Langan was still there, talking to Alex.

“I have to admit, you snowballed him with that one,” said Langan. “I’m assuming I’ll hear about a trial date for the underage rape victims soon?”

“You can count on it,” she replied. She turned to face the detectives. “When can you pick him up?”

“No time like the present,” said Elliot. “You coming to the cops-lawyers ballgame, Counselor?”

Alex smiled at him. “Olivia’s giving me a ride. I’ll love watching us defend our title.”

Sure she is, thought Elliot. “Come on, I’m playing second base!”

“Don’t worry,” said Olivia merrily, patting him on the shoulder. “I’ll cheer you on. Alex, we’ll let you know once we’ve got Cheney booked.”

“Thanks,” she replied.

The lawyers watched the detectives leave, Alex's smile broad.

“You’ve changed,” remarked Trevor.

She had changed a lot, these past two years in SVU. Alex had always been headstrong and confident, but before this bureau, she’d been distant, unwilling to let anyone get close. Now, she had a great set of detectives who she considered family, a good number of friends in the DA’s office, and an amazing girlfriend. She had learned to love someone, and in turn, she had learned to love herself. With the help of SVU – the victims, the cases, the people – she had become unafraid. Maybe even proud.

“For the better,” said Alex, nodding.

Outside, Elliot was ribbing Olivia.

“Looks like this is the one time you and the ADA will be batting for opposite teams.”

Olivia cracked up, knocking him on the shoulder. “Can it, El.”
Bobby Douglas headed off to central booking as everyone packed up for the night. Everyone but Stabler.

“Come on, Elliot,” Olivia prodded. “You have to go home sometime.”

“There’s beds in the crib,” he countered.

“I know this case must be hard —”

“No, you don’t know,” he countered, “because you didn’t grow up in a place of faith.”

“That’s no reason to get upset at her for sympathizing with you,” cut in Alex.

Elliot rolled his eyes. “What do you know about it?”

“I know that you’re out of line,” she replied.

He sighed. “I guess you’re right. It’s just hard to go home and be a good Catholic father after this. What about you, Alex? Did you grow up in the church?”

“My family is about as WASP-y as they come,” she replied. “Believe me, I went through several years of Sunday school and memorized the bible verses to prove it.”

He nodded. “Then I guess I’m not the only one struggling. Night ladies.” Grabbing his coat, he headed out the door.

Olivia glanced at Alex. “It was nice of you not to tell him the full story.”

“No one really wants to hear about the fight my mother and I had when I refused to get confirmed,” she replied. “Just because you have something shoved down your throat for ten years doesn’t mean it sticks.”

“You sound like Munch,” teased Olivia.

“The agnostic calling the lapsed Protestant a cynic?” said Alex, smiling slyly.

Olivia shrugged. “I just call ‘em like I see ‘em.”

Elliot’s face turned ashen. “I’m going to see for myself.”

“You want company?” asked Olivia.

He shook his head. “No, I don’t.”

Alex sighed. “Well, this is a hell of a mess. I should call Donnelly, tell her to drop the charges.”

“Just like that?” asked Olivia. “Don’t we have any other avenue?”

Alex shook her head sadly. “Bobby Douglas was our last hope. I hate to say it, but the only thing we can do is wait for new accusations to surface.”

“Great,” said Olivia sarcastically.

She thought for a moment. “Alex, did you reject your faith for any reason besides the obvious?”

Alex adjusted her glasses. “In the end, I didn’t like the idea that I wasn’t in control of my own life. Besides the obvious, I mean. Can I borrow your phone?”

“You cell dead?” asked Olivia.

Alex winced, embarrassed. “I left it on your nightstand.”

She squeezed Olivia’s shoulder and picked up the receiver. Olivia couldn’t help but smile.

This had been a hard case for Elliot. He was having enough trouble at home without a challenge to his faith, and so Olivia had understood when he wanted to take off early. However, she did not understand, until the captain came by, that he had left behind a mound of uncompleted paperwork.
and that someone had to take care of it before business opened tomorrow morning.

She finished up the last report and glanced at the clock. 8:45? *Elliot, you son of a bitch.* He owed her for this one. The phone began blaring and she jumped. “B-Benson.”

“Did I scare you?” asked Alex.

“A little,” confessed Olivia. “What’s up?”

“I know you said you had to finish up paperwork, but I didn’t think it would take so long. Have you eaten?”

“Yeah,” said Olivia, “about two hours ago. Munch picked up pasta.”

“Good, because I didn’t bring anything with me,” replied Alex.

“Hold on,” said Olivia, confused. “Where are you?”

She heard the elevator door slide open. “Guess,” replied Alex.

Shaking her head, Olivia set down the phone and got up from her desk to be greeted by a blonde in glasses.

“What are you doing here?” asked Olivia.

“Convincing you to come home,” answered Alex. “You didn’t pick up when I called your house, so I figured you’d still be here.”

“Well, I’m done, so we can leave,” said Olivia. Her tone was vague, though; she was distracted.

“That’s some skirt.”

Alex smiled. “What do you mean?”

“I mean your legs look great in that skirt,” said Olivia, appraising the blonde and nodding in approval.

Alex glanced around. “There’s no one else here, is there?”

“No, I –” Olivia began, then stopped. “You can’t be thinking –”

“How many times have we nearly gone at each other in the interrogation room?” asked Alex, crossing her arms.

Olivia leaned in closer. “We are not doing this, Alex. There are security cameras in this building and…”

“And what?” Alex teased.

Olivia bit her lip and looked away, shaking her head.

“You can’t pretend you’ve never thought about it,” prodded Alex. “You almost lost control during the Germaine case.”

“Because you seduced me,” countered Olivia.

“Oh yes,” replied Alex, “that was definitely my fault.” She began stepping backwards.

“No, Alex, stop,” said Olivia weakly.

“No.”

Olivia fought the urge to jump the blonde and take her on the precinct floor. Did Alex know what that tone did to her? She gripped the edge of her desk furiously.

“You’re going to leave marks,” said Alex, now standing by the interrogation room. She opened the door and slipped inside.

Don’t follow. Don’t follow. Goddammit.

Olivia strode towards the door and opened it, breathing heavily. Alex was waiting, leaning against the one-way mirror, her legs spread.

“No cameras in here,” she said smugly.

“Good,” said Olivia, her voice throaty. “I can’t believe you’re doing this.”

“I’m not doing anything yet,” replied Alex playfully.

Olivia walked right up to Alex, her face less than an inch away from the blonde’s. *Walk back out*
that door, Olivia. It's not too late.
She leaned in and kissed Alex fiercely, letting her need take control. Pressing her body into the Alex’s, she slipped her tongue into Alex’s mouth and thrust her hips into her girlfriend’s, aching for her touch.
“I knew you’d crack,” whispered Alex, pulling away from the kiss. Abruptly, she planted her mouth on Olivia’s neck and pushed her back against the file cabinets, summoning a strength Olivia hadn’t known she possessed.

“It’s, uh, not sweater weather you know,” breathed Olivia.
Alex whipped her head back to Olivia, her eyes dark behind her glasses. “I can’t honestly say I care,” she replied, undoing Olivia’s belt and zipper.
“Wait,” said Olivia, panting slightly. “You’re not going to take anything off, are you?”
“Come on,” said Alex, her voice dripping sex. “Even I’m not that stupid.”

She slid her hand into Olivia’s pants and beneath her underwear, quickly bringing a finger up and into Olivia’s pussy. Olivia kissed Alex hard, wrapping both arms around her, while Alex used her free hand to brace herself against the cabinets.
“How long have you wanted this?” whispered Olivia, angling her mound into Alex’s hand.
“I don’t even know,” said Alex, through gritted teeth. It was not a comfortable or easy position, but Alex was going to pound Olivia until she finished.
“All I know is,” she continued, “whenever we’re in this tiny room together, all I want to do is screw your lights out, and this may be my one chance.”

Alex thrust impossibly hard and hot into Olivia’s sex, listening to Olivia’s juices swirl around her fingers. The detective did the best to stifle her moans, but was visibly struggling to do so.
Suddenly, she let out a small cry and finished, squeezing Alex’s hand tight. Alex felt her own pussy flood and purred, withdrawing her hand from Olivia’s pants.

“Okay,” said Olivia hurriedly, working her zipper. “Now, we are getting out of here.”
Alex leaned back against the cabinets. “You do know you’ve just made my year, yes?”
“For someone who wants to keep this a secret, you’re being awfully risky, Alex.”
Alex leaned in. “The danger is part of the thrill.”

She kissed Olivia on the nose. “Get your things. Let’s go home.”
Olivia was all too happy to comply. “You know every time we’re in that room from now on, I’m going to think about this.”
Alex smiled coyly. “There are worse things to think about.”
“Everything confirms self-defense. The guy beat the crap out of her so hard the hospital admitted her with a concussion,” explained Elliot. “The contusions from Deborah’s rape kit are consistent with sexual assault.”
“We know for a fact that Becker was a rapist and a killer,” Olivia told Alex. “So, as far as we’re concerned, killing him was a public service.”
“I’m inclined to agree,” replied the blonde, gathering her things. “Anything else?”

“Just tying up loose ends,” said Cragen. “Nothing came up when we ran her name through the system. Munch and Fin are running the ballistics on the gun.”
Alex nodded at him. “I’ll make my recommendation not to press charges.” Turning to the detectives, she smiled. “Nice work.”

The three exited the captain’s office.
“Does that mean I get rewarded later?” asked Olivia.
“As far as I’m concerned, you’ve made all of our lives a hell of a lot easier. That deserves at least a little something,” said Alex, winking.
“What about me, Counselor?” joked Elliot.
She gave him a sour look. “Don’t count your chickens, Detective.”

Elliot raised his eyebrows. “My kids would kill for that kind of treatment.”
“Looks like our pro did,” replied Olivia. She hailed the other detective. “Hey Palmieri, can we get a copy of these?”
He nodded. “I’ll have ‘em faxed over before the end of business today. And tell the captain I said hello.”
“We will,” replied Elliot. “Good to see you, Palmieri.”
“Good to see you guys too,” said Palmieri. “Stay strong.”

Olivia and Elliot walked off down the street. “He seems a lot happier than he did when he was working our unit,” mused Elliot.
“Let’s be honest, there are few things more depressing than working SVU,” said Olivia. She pouted. “Do I really look like a cop?”
“You’re tall, you’ve got a pixie cut, and you’re in great shape,” Elliot said, shrugging. “If not a cop, you at least look like someone I don’t wanna mess with.”

Olivia thought for a moment. “Do you think I scare victims?”
“Hey, if you’re really that worried about it, you can always grow your hair back out.”

- Olivia leaned against Alex on the couch, half falling asleep. “Who’s brilliant idea was it to watch a movie again?”
Alex smiled. “Yours.”
“Well, it was a stupid idea,” said Olivia, stretching. “I’m gonna pass out in a minute.”
“I did suggest we go take a walk through the park,” Alex said, rolling her eyes.
“Yeah, but it’s too hot outside for that,” said Olivia.

“If you want to take a nap, you can take a nap,” said Alex. “It’s not going to offend me.”
Olivia laid back. “Do you care if I use your lap as a pillow?”
“No,” replied Alex. She turned off the TV. “As long as you don’t mind if I read. I wasn’t really invested in a movie anyway.”
“You can balance the book on my face if you want,” Olivia said, lying down. “I'm exhausted.”

The phone rang. Alex picked it up, playing with Olivia’s hair.
“Hello? Hey dad, how are you?”
Olivia’s ears perked up. She tried to sit up but Alex pushed her head back down.

“No, just waiting on a call from the crime lab,” continued Alex. “What’s going on?...I don’t know, I’m awfully busy...I could probably go sometime in the next month, but you know she’s still mad at me for not calling on my birthday...yes, I do really believe she’s still mad.”
Olivia tried to pay attention, but she felt herself fading.
Alex looked interested. “I could do that, that might make it more fun, actually...okay, I’ll let you know...everything okay at work?”

Fifteen minutes later, Olivia was roused by a sharp poke in her side.
“Hey,” she murmured, jumping. “What was that for?”
“For being asleep,” said Alex, grinning. “I have an interesting proposal for you.”
Olivia yawned. “Oh?”
“My dad wants to take me out with him and my mother to dinner sometime next month, maybe to a show as well,” began Alex. “And he asked if there was anyone I wanted to bring along.”

Olivia sat up. “You’re asking me?”
“No, I’m asking you to ask Munch,” joked Alex. “Of course I’m asking you.”
Olivia looked shocked. “But your parents –”
Alex held up a hand. “My brother’s not going to be there. They won’t suspect a thing. I’ll even wear the dress, if you’d like.”
“Then they’ll definitely suspect something,” said Olivia. She kissed Alex sweetly. “You know what that dress does to me.”
“Believe me, I do,” said Alex, kissing Olivia back.

The phone rang, interrupting. Alex pulled away, sighing.
“Why now? Hello, Alexandra Cabot?”
She listened for a moment, then glanced at Olivia. “Lab’s back with some very interesting news.”
Olivia paced the captain’s office, rattling off the facts. “No complaining witness, no physical evidence of abuse, no independent verification other than an uncooperative housekeeper who saw a stepmother kiss her stepson.” “And no indictment based on a kindergartner’s art project,” concluded Alex. Olivia caught Alex’s eye. “There’s something going on in that house. That woman’s wrong.”

“We’re gonna need more than your gut,” said Cragen. “I could contact my counterpart at Children’s Services,” offered Alex. “At the very least, they could start a file on Gloria.” Elliot strode through the door. “I just got a call out of a patrol from the two-two responding to a domestic disturbance at the Formby Day School.” “What happened?” asked Cragen. “Gloria and her husband are fighting over who’s taking the daughter,” explained Elliot.

“Captain…” began Olivia. “Say no more,” he replied. “Go.” “At least this time, she’ll be too preoccupied to hit on you,” said Elliot. “What?” asked Alex through gritted teeth.

Olivia looked mortified, Elliot tried to suppress his laughter, and Cragen sighed. “Cool your jets, Counselor,” ordered the captain.

- 

Olivia parked the squad car and turned off the ignition. “This day is doing nothing for my confidence.” “What’s up?” asked Elliot, shutting his door. “I’m supposed to meet her parents sometime soon,” confessed Olivia.

“Whoa whoa whoa, as in meet them as her girlfriend?” he said. Olivia sighed, pushing the elevator button. “No, as a friend, but from everything I’ve heard about them, I can’t imagine it’s going to be anything less than awkward.” “Try your best not to kill her mom, okay?” advised Elliot. Olivia rolled her eyes. “I’d already figured that part out.”

The elevator doors creaked shut. “Man, they need to replace this thing,” complained Elliot. “Anyway, I hope you’re getting something nice out of the deal.” “She’s the one who’ll need a medal after it’s over,” said Olivia. “They’re not my family.” Elliot nodded. “If you’re interested, I know a number for a good jeweler. You can tell him I sent you, I get all of Kathy’s presents from him.” “Actually,” mused Olivia, “yeah. That’d be great.” “Lemme jot it down, then.”

He began scrawling on his paper as the elevator finally opened on the precinct. “Where’s the little one?” asked Cragen, lying in wait. “ACS placed her with an aunt and uncle in the area,” replied Elliot. He tore the number out and handed it to Olivia.

-
Alex stepped to the back of the courtroom as docket continued. “It’ll take him all of five seconds to come up with the cash,” she remarked. “He didn’t pull this off alone,” said Olivia, looking knowingly at Stanfield. Alex watched the stepmother leave, then returned her gaze to Olivia. “Find me some evidence and I will charge Gloria Stanfield as a co-conspirator.”

“First place I’d like to look is her hotel room,” said Elliot. “Well, I can’t send you on a fishing expedition,” said Alex, looking Olivia over. “The judge is going to want to know what you’re looking for.” “Kyle’s school uniform,” replied Olivia, Elliot watching in the background. “If he was wearing it when he killed Fuller, it’s got to have blood all over it. He had to stash it somewhere.” Alex nodded. “I’ll get a warrant.” She returned to the benches to wait for her next docket call.

Olivia grinned at Elliot as they walked out of the courtroom. “Ten bucks says I’ll get a call asking to do lunch.” “More like asking you to do her for lunch,” grumbled Elliot. “You two really need to rein it in sometimes.”

Elliot groaned. “And newsworthy.” The vultures were circling outside the courthouse. The trio formed a line, trying to make it through the press mob. “Did Gloria Stanfield abuse her children?” “Is the District Attorney planning to indict her for her husband’s murder?” “We have no comment,” said Alex, with the utmost politesse.

A reporter jumped in front of her. “Hey, does Gloria Stanfield’s pregnancy have any effect on the child abuse allegations?” Olivia spun around. Leave my girlfriend alone, prick. “Who told you that?” she asked. He chuckled. “I’m not at liberty to say.” “Lemme talk to you for a second,” said Elliot, grabbing the reporter. “Right over here.” Amidst his protests and the roar of the crowd, Olivia wrapped an arm around Alex, guiding her to safety. Alex allowed a small smile to play across her face.

“A reporter jumped in front of her. “Hey, does Gloria Stanfield’s pregnancy have any effect on the child abuse allegations?” Olivia spun around. Leave my girlfriend alone, prick. “Who told you that?” she asked. He chuckled. “I’m not at liberty to say.”

“Lemme talk to you for a second,” said Elliot, grabbing the reporter. “Right over here.” Amidst his protests and the roar of the crowd, Olivia wrapped an arm around Alex, guiding her to safety. Alex allowed a small smile to play across her face.

“Don’t give me this intimidation crap,” sneered the reporter. “First Amendment, kids. I’m a journalist.” Olivia examined his badge. “The National Probe. That’s a real respected publication.”

“You guys are just pissed because I got the goods before you,” he said smugly. “What’d you do? Stake out her doctor’s office, bribe some receptionist for medical records?” asked Elliot.

“All I’m sayin’ is she’s knocked up, three months along, and that stepson of hers is the father,” said the reporter.

Olivia didn’t like this scum. Instinctively, she placed herself between him and Alex. “How do you know that?” asked the ADA. “Because she brought ‘im with her to the appointment.” Looking Alex over, he let his gaze linger a little too long on her chest, oblivious to Olivia’s eyes narrowing in anger. “Use your brains honey. Why else would she marry the kid?”

The three glanced at one another. “Do you promise not to arrest me if I break his nose?” said Olivia. “No, I’ll even help you,” said Elliot. “Little perv.”

Alex sighed. “I feel like I need a shower.”
Alex hung up the phone, sighing. “Okay, it’s official. We’re on for next week.”
“You do realize I’m freaking out about this, right?” asked Olivia. 
Alex sat next to her on the couch. “You’re not the only one.”

Olivia rubbed her back. “So, what is the eventual plan here? We’re going to slowly introduce me to them and then tell the truth?”
“I’m not ready for that yet,” said Alex, paling. “I’ll figure it out at some point, but not right now.”
“Alex, you know we can’t hide this forever.”

Alex looked Olivia in the eye. “I know.”
Olivia tried to get a hold on that expression. Was it sadness? Frustration? Or something else entirely?
Olivia left the interrogation room, shutting the door loudly behind her. “No way we’re releasing Bess into his custody,” she told Alex. “He’s her legal guardian,” Alex replied sadly. Olivia looked at her, stunned. “He’s her abuser.” “According to whom?” asked Alex. “You have no witnesses and the victim can’t make a complaint.”

“Look,” began Cragen, “we suspect a parent of abuse, Child Services doesn’t need the victim’s complaint.” “The law assumes the child can’t speak up for herself,” said Alex. “Neither can Bess,” countered Cragen.

Olivia approached Alex, visibly upset. “And her son is strapping her to a bed!” “A lawyer could argue he believed it was a reasonable, albeit very misguided attempt to keep Bess safe,” said Alex. Olivia turned away in disgust. “Look, Alex, there’s gotta be some way to get this guy on neglect,” pressed the captain. Alex considered the facts. “In an attempt to ensure her safety, he endangered her. It’s a stretch.” “Well then, ‘stretch’ it into an order of removal,” demanded Olivia. “I’ll stall Joe.”

Watching Olivia reenter interrogation, Alex sighed. “Ridenour’s been happy with me lately. I’ll see if I can get him to sign the papers.” Cragen shrugged. “Anything you got helps, Alex.”

She hurried out of the precinct. She knew why Olivia was so stressed, and she couldn’t blame her. Dinner was tomorrow night.

“What do you got?” Cragen asked, addressing Alex. She handed him a few papers. “A notice of claim filed six months ago against Jubilee Towers. Ten million dollar negligence suit brought about by the estate of a deceased former resident.” “What happened?” said the captain. Alex gave a small shrug. “Doesn’t say.”

She walked over to Olivia’s desk and sat on the edge. “The settlement was reached with a nondisclosure clause.” “Who was named in the suit?” asked Olivia. Alex turned to face her. “Everyone the dead woman came into contact with, from the director down to the lowliest of nurse’s aides.” “Including our pal Hal?” posed Munch. “This, uh, dead woman have a name?” Cragen asked. “Dahlia Brown,” said Alex. “I’m already working on an exhumation order.” Cragen nodded at her. “Keep up the good work, everyone. We’ll reconvene tomorrow morning.”

As the rest of the squad dispersed, Alex scooted closer to Olivia. “You ready to go?” she asked. “No,” said Olivia truthfully. “But it doesn’t really matter.”
Alex squirmed in her chair. “And I thought we were late.”

“Hey,” admonished Olivia, “I told you not to wear that dress.”

Taking another sip of wine, Alex gave Olivia a coy look. “It’s not my fault that you have no self-control. And did you really have to take me up against that wall? The couch would have sufficed, even.”

Olivia swallowed a big gulp of water. “Don’t make it harder for me to concentrate than it is already.”

The detective checked her watch. “You said 7:30, right? It is now officially 8:15.”

“I can’t take this anymore, I’m starving,” said Alex. “Give me a minute.”

She pulled her phone out of her purse and stepped away from the table. Olivia resisted the urge to gulp down her wine while she was gone. This situation called for sobriety.

Olivia hailed a waiter. “Could we get an order of bread for the table? And some more water?”

“Certainly, I’ll have that right out for you,” he replied. He rushed towards the kitchen, passing an exhausted-looking Alex.

Olivia frowned. “You okay?”

Alex rolled her eyes. “They’re not coming.”

“Why?” asked Olivia, her eyes widening.

“He wouldn’t say,” she replied, sitting back down. “But if I had to guess, I’d say they’ve been fighting. They’ve got the theatre tickets too, so that’s out, even if we were going to be a half hour late.”

“Want to be the two fanciest people at the movies tonight?” joked Olivia, trying to lighten the mood.

Alex laughed. “Sure, do you have any idea what’s playing?”

Olivia smiled back at her. “Not a damn clue.”

“You’re some detective,” teased Alex.

“Hey, it’s not the Special Movies Unit.”

“It is sometimes,” countered Alex darkly.

Olivia looked ill. “You’re going to make me lose my appetite. Let’s talk about anything but work.”

“Alright, we’re in recess! Order!”

Judge Seligman banged the gavel down after the bailiffs successfully removed Hope Garrett from the court room. Alex gathered her things smugly and turned to see Olivia standing on the other side of the bench.

“Well, you chewed her out,” said the blonde.

“She called you a stupid bitch,” Olivia said. “I couldn’t just sit there and take that.”

Alex grinned. “And they say chivalry’s dead. You here to bring me any news?”

“Nope,” said Olivia. “Just came to watch you work. And offer to buy you lunch.”

“It’ll have to be quick,” she replied. “Seligman only gives an hour for noon recess.”

They walked out of the courthouse together. “Did our dinner ever get rescheduled?” asked Olivia.

“I haven’t heard anything, and I’m not going to press it,” said Alex. “Why?”

“There are probably some functions I need to attend, what with the anniversary of 9/11 being next week,” explained Olivia.

Alex nodded. “Makes sense. Will you let me know if there are any I can attend?”

Olivia smiled at her. “Absolutely. We got any evening plans?”

“Unfortunately, the office crowd is grabbing drinks tonight,” said Alex. “But tomorrow, I’ll stop
by after work and let you interrogate me,” she finished, winking.
Olivia pouted. “You have got to stop calling it that.”
“Make me,” Alex teased.
Lust

Alex and Olivia waited for the elevator. “I tell you, this is the sort of case that really gets me spooked,” said Alex. “Why? You been cheating with someone in Little Italy?” joked Olivia. “And give up the best sex I’ve ever had? Not even,” said Alex. “It’s the public health risk that gets to me. We don’t even know how many potential victims are out there.”

They boarded the elevator. “Not like I don’t trust you, but it almost makes me paranoid enough to get tested,” said Alex. “I understand,” said Olivia, nodding. “The last time I was tested was before we started dating.” “That’s about right for me too,” said Alex. “Since then, I figured I had nothing to worry about.” Olivia smiled as the doors opened. “You’ve got that right. Now, what can we do to jam this bastard up?”

Alex began listing off charges as they walked down the hall. “I’ll charge Mario with murder, reckless endangerment, add statutory rape for the underage girls.” “Victims we didn’t find?” asked Olivia. “Who warns them that they’ve been exposed to HIV?” “Same thing happened upstate. Health department went public, posted flyers, people came in and got tested,” explained Alex.

The captain hurried out of his office. “What’s up?” asked Olivia.

- Petrovsky considered Alex’s argument, then nodded. “Agreed, but I’m limiting the scope.” “Your honor, the sample in question –” Petrovsky cut her off. “I’m sorry Miss Cabot, but I’m only allowing you to test for the same battery of drugs and diseases that the blood bank would. No DNA.”

Alex’s face fell. Well, there goes our case. She traded glances with an arrogant Esterman before leaving chambers. Pulling her cell phone out, she dialed SVU. “Benson.” “Well, I just got out of a meeting with my favorite judge,” said Alex, rolling her eyes. “Do you want the good news or the bad news first?” “Let’s go with the bad,” said Olivia. “We caught a date rape this morning that we’ll never be able to prove and I’d like to end this conversation on a high note.” “Long and short of it, the DNA is out,” sighed Alex. “And the good news?” “We can still test the blood for diseases,” replied the ADA.

Olivia groaned. “I guess we’ll take what we can get. What’ll it take for Petrovsky to cut you a break?” “Short of a miracle?” guessed Alex. “Absolutely nothing.”
“Can she really stop us?” asked Olivia.
“No, but she can slow us down,” said Alex.

The trio left the AUSA’s office with nothing for their troubles, and Elliot was not happy about it.
“Hinder our investigation,” he said bitterly. “You know, I don’t care who that woman works for, we can’t let her do that.”
“Claudia Williams is doing her job,” said Alex. “She has an obligation to protect her witnesses.”
“We have an obligation to protect innocent women, so who’s side of the fence you gonna sit on?” Elliot said over her.

Olivia glared at him.
“You seem awfully sure Peter Sipes is guilty,” said Alex.
“What are we supposed to think?” Olivia asked. “It can’t be easy losing your identity, starting over. These people cost him his past. They’re threatening his survival.”
“I’m just not so sure he would jeopardize his last line of defense against the very people who want him dead,” said Alex.
“What you’re saying then is that organized crime takes precedence over rape,” Olivia said, her tone rising.

Alex sighed. “Arguments can be made for both.”
“Alex, we don’t have that luxury,” Elliot bellowed into the wind. “We’re working with a serial rapist here and the next woman, I’m telling you, he’s gonna kill her.”
*And my hands are tied, Elliot.* “I will file a habeus in the morning. Claudia Williams cannot produce the body, the judge is going to find her in contempt.”

“That’s more like it,” groaned Elliot. “Now, can we get out of this god-awful wind?”
“Ah, the perks of working in the city,” said Olivia.
“I tell you, I don’t envy that woman’s job,” remarked Alex. “I’ve heard working with witness protection is supposed to be a nightmare.”
Olivia nodded. “I can believe it. You have to coordinate completely new lives for people who are scared out of their minds and ensure that they don’t tell the truth. I can’t even imagine the hell those people go through.”

Of all the twists this case could take, Alex had never suspected this.
Elliot shrugged. “I think I’ve hit bottom.”
“IAB was here digging for dirt,” said Munch sourly.
“Think I spoke too soon,” muttered Elliot.

Olivia turned to Alex. “How bad is it?”
She took a deep breath. “US Attorneys get a lot of leeway to make their cases. The burden of proof rests mostly on the defendants.”
“But we did nothing wrong!” cried Olivia.
“As law enforcement officials, you were well aware of the risks and you disregarded them for your own benefit,” said Alex.
Fuming, Olivia turned away.
*I don’t like it either, Olivia,* thought Alex.

“Claudia could argue that sensitive information was passed on to the criminal element,” Alex
“Why would we do that?” asked Elliot, also pissed. “What’s our motive?”
“They don’t need to prove motive,” said Alex. “In your zeal to show up federal officers, a witness and a US Marshall are dead.” And you got Olivia caught in the crossfire. “That’s all a jury needs to hear.”
“The feds can’t make a criminal case, you’re still gonna have to face the brass,” cautioned Cragen. “And they could boot you.”

Elliot looked concerned. Olivia? Sorrowful.
“I’m not just handing over my tin without a fight,” hissed Elliot.
“I don’t expect you to,” replied Cragen.
“We’ve gotta find out who killed Peter Sipes to clear our name,” said Elliot.

They continued sweating the details. Munch and Fin headed out, with Alex close behind them.
“Wait!” called Olivia. She chased Alex to the elevator.

“So, tell me some good news,” said Alex.
“Well, the feds put some pressure on IAB. Our investigations have been dropped and stricken from the record, so that’s something,” replied Olivia on the other end of the line.
“And the AUSA doesn’t think the mob will retaliate against you and Elliot?” asked Alex.
“From what Williams said, Russian mob doesn’t like to get law enforcement involved,” said Olivia. “The feds came up with a pretty solid cover story for us to feed them as well.”

“Alright,” said Alex, sighing. “I’m sorry I got so upset. I was just worried.”
“I understand,” said Olivia. “I’ll see you tomorrow. I’m gonna be here doing paperwork for a while.”
“Okay,” replied Alex. “Goodnight.”
She crossed her arms behind her head and leaned back in her chair, breathing out. Now she could finally relax a little.

A knock on the door interrupted the silence. She jumped, looking up.
“Oh, it’s just you.”
Langan smiled apologetically. “Did I scare you?”
“A little,” confessed Alex. “How’ve you been?”
He shrugged. “Can’t complain. Rumors have been flying around the courthouse that your unit’s been jammed up, thought I’d offer to buy you a drink.”
“I could use one of those,” said Alex, nodding. “I’ll get my coat.”

Alex waved goodbye to Williams as they left the DA’s office.
“Well, thankfully, looks like my detectives have been cleared on all counts,” Alex said happily.
“One big misunderstanding.”
“That’s good news,” said Langan. “Speaking of, I wanted to ask you about one of them.”
Alex looked at him quizzically. “The detectives? Which one?”
He looked sheepish. “Do you know if Detective Benson is seeing anyone?”

Ice poured through her veins. “Why do you want to know?”
“Come on Alex, don’t tease me,” Trevor replied.
Alex sighed. “I’ll ask her,” she told him. And I’ll try not to kill you before the night is up.
Angels

Alex sat in her office, fuming in silence. Maybe she was overreacting, and yes, she was being a bit possessive, but this was Olivia, goddammit. Nobody tried to put the moves on her girlfriend without risking her wrath, and that included her old friend.

Trevor didn’t know it yet, but he had crossed a line, and she had to find a way to deal with it that didn’t involve criminal charges.

Grabbing her briefcase, she marched out for court, slamming the door behind her.

“Whoa, Cabot,” said Williams. “What’d that door ever do to you?”

“Yeah,” asked Taylor, one of the vice ADAs. “Something wrong?”

“What else?” lied Alex. “Petrovsky, round twenty-four.”

She stormed out of the office, frigid and unstoppable.

“So, the junkie starts trying to finesse the judge, telling the court reporter what wonderful man she thinks he is, how he truly has her best interests at heart,” said Alex. “Cohen doesn’t buy a word of it. Bumps what should have been a two-year sentence up to six.”

“Harsh,” replied Olivia. “Well, we’ve spent the morning rounding up Jansen’s bizarre batch of friends. Seems half of them didn’t even know he had kids.”

“Tell her about the secretary,” called Elliot.

“Yeah, this woman practically worshipped him. He could’ve told her he was the Great Pumpkin and she would’ve believed him,” groaned Olivia.

Alex smiled. “Sounds like a fun day.”

“We’re heading off to the ME’s office after lunch, which should only add to the festivities,” cracked Olivia.

Alex shuddered. “Ugh, sounds like a blast. We still on for tomorrow night?”

“I’ll do my best,” said Olivia brightly. “Love you.”

“You too,” replied Alex. “Bye.”

She closed her cell.

“Anyone I know?”

She turned around, frowning. “Are you stalking me, Trevor?”

“Alex, c’mon, you said you’d ask and it’s been over a week,” he pressed.

“Well, I do have a fairly demanding job, you know,” she replied, trying to rein in her fury.

Suddenly, the angry fog cleared. A light bulb switched on in her head. Even if Trevor knew the truth, it worked on Olivia. And wait staff. And random citizens on the street. Why wouldn’t it work on him?

“Okay,” she admitted. “I have talked to her. You in the mood for a nice dinner tonight? We can talk it over then.”

He grinned. “Wouldn’t miss it.”

- 

All was going according to plan until the detectives walked on scene. Olivia didn’t even try to cover her dropped jaw, and Elliot visibly gave her a once over.
“Counselor,” he said. “Uh, we need a court order to get some minors removed from a guy involved in the Jansen case. Name of Lynch.”
She sighed. “What’ve you got?” Why now? Why tonight?

She flipped through the papers. “All we have are two phone calls? That’s not enough.”
“We checked. Lynch’s three kids are boys. God know what he’s doing to them right now,” continued Elliot.
“Aren’t they legally adopted?” asked Alex. She tried to avoid Olivia’s gaze, shifting to and from her chest.
“We won’t know that information until tomorrow morning,” said Elliot.
“Does he keep them locked up like Jansen does?” she asked.

“No,” said Olivia, trying her hardest not to stare. “All three boys go to public schools.”
“Are there any complaints of abuse?” continued Alex.
“None to ACS or the local precinct,” replied Olivia, shifting awkwardly.
“Look, we already have Lynch on failing to report José’s abuse,” pressed Elliot.

“An A misdemeanor,” said a voice from behind him. “With no priors, I’d argue for a fine and no jail time.”

Trevor Langan. What the hell is going on here? thought Olivia.
She whipped around to face her girlfriend. “I, uh, think Alex is dining with the enemy.”
“Can you give us two minutes?” asked Alex. Or just go home? That’d work too.
“Yeah, the game’s on at the bar,” he said, glancing quickly at Olivia. “Why don’t I check that out?”

An awkward silence ensued.

“Look,” said Alex, returning the papers to Olivia. “We take Lynch’s kids away from him and we are wrong, a heavy hitter like him is going to drag us into court and make our lives miserable. Get me some hard evidence.”

Olivia handed her a sheet of paper. “Computer crimes found this buried on Jansen’s hard drive.”
She raised her eyebrows slightly, unable to look away any longer. Alex could tell she was pissed, but she could also tell that the dress was having its usual effect on Olivia. And that was incredibly distracting.

“Your special tour to Central America is confirmed,” Alex read. “If your friends enjoy, have them get in touch.”

“That is an email from Damon to Jansen right before Jansen’s trip two years ago,” explained Olivia, continuing to bore into Alex with her stare. “Now, that sounds like a confirmation letter.”
“And that he’s soliciting men to travel overseas to rape children,” concluded Elliot. “That’s a federal crime.”

Alex thought for a moment. “Let’s catch him in the act.”
Elliot nodded. “Oh, and Counselor? You’d better have a damn good explanation for this.”

The detectives left, Elliot livid and Olivia mystified.
“I’m gonna knock her teeth out,” he threatened. “She has no right to treat you like that.”
“No no, that’s not what this is,” said Olivia, baffled. “She’s not bisexual, and even if she was, it wouldn’t be Langan. They’ve known each other forever.”
“All the more reason they’d hook up,” Elliot said through clenched teeth. “I saw that dress. You don’t wear a dress like that unless you’re trying to get something.”
“Stop talking about the dress,” Olivia practically moaned. “I already need a cold shower. That dress does things to me.”
“Olivia, I don’t want to hear about it.”
At the end of the evening, Trevor walked Alex back to her apartment. She might not be into men, and he might not be into her, but he had to admit that she looked amazing in that dress. Gorgeous, even. He’d had trouble concentrating the entire evening.

They stopped at the door of her complex, smiling.
“Well, this was fun,” he told her, “even if business did get in the way.”
Alex shrugged. “It tends to do that more often than not.”
“We should do this again,” he started, then stopped. “Wait, speaking of business, you never told me what Benson said. Would she be interested in going out with me?”

Alex smiled. “I’d completely forgotten.”
She leaned in close to his face, grinning seductively. Trevor tried not to take notice, but he felt his heart race nonetheless.
“You stay the fuck away from Olivia Benson,” she spat, her tone turning icy. Her face was tense with cold, fierce rage.
He jumped back. “Whoa, I didn’t know you were interested.”
“Well, I am,” she said coldly. “And I saw her first.”
“You don’t even know if she’s interested in you!” he said.
“Likewise,” she countered. “Goodnight, Trevor.”

She burst through the door and up the stairs. She’d have to apologize later, but god, did that feel good.

Smiling broadly, she turned the key to her apartment and strutted in, kicking her heels off.
“Care to tell me what happened out there?” said a voice from her couch.
Alex looked shocked, then started laughing. “I should have brought him up here,” she said. “That would’ve been too perfect.”

“Look, I know you’re not cheating on me, but what the hell’s going on?” asked Olivia.
“He’s interested in you, that’s what’s going on,” Alex said.
Olivia made an interested face. “Really? That’s flattering, he’s pretty handsome. But wait, why were you out with him then? In that dress?”
“I was crushing his dreams,” replied Alex, shooting her a sour look. “The dress was to get him riled up.”
“Gets me every time,” said Olivia, cocking an eyebrow. “Are you going to come over here and apologize for not telling me?”
Alex looked at her seductively. “What’d you have in mind?”
“Get on the bed,” Olivia ordered.

Alex complied eagerly, laying back in earnest. Olivia followed her, removing her pants and shirt.
Alex purred.
“Navy lace, an excellent choice.”
Olivia shot her hand between Alex’s thighs, quickly removing her panties. She massaged Alex’s outer lips and rubbed her thighs.
“You liked doing that,” Olivia observed. “You liked leading him on, then burning him down.”
“What makes you say that?” inquired Alex.
Olivia smirked. “You’re wet.”
Alex blushed slightly, unable to answer. Olivia ran a hand through Alex’s hair with one hand, teasing her slit with the other.
“You’re horrible, Alex. He’s your friend, and you just destroyed him like that. And you didn’t even
bother to tell me what was going on.”
“I didn’t think you’d want me using the powers of the dress for evil,” Alex panted. She was so
primed and ready. Why didn’t Olivia just take her?
“You’re right,” said Olivia, slowly removing her hand from Alex’s sex. “I do not approve.” She
stepped back off the bed and crossed her arms, grinning wickedly.

Alex’s eyes widened in shock. “You wouldn’t.”
“Try me, Alex,” taunted Olivia. “If you want to be taken tonight, you’re going to have to do it
yourself.”
This was not fair. Alex was slick and aching for it and past the point of no return. Olivia couldn’t
back out now. Flushed with anger and arousal, Alex hiked up the dress, lowered her hand to her
mound, and began to play.

She wasted no time. Plunging two fingers into herself, she began stroking her walls, still holding
Olivia’s gaze. She wanted a show? She wanted to punish Alex? She’d get it alright. With her free
hand, Alex slid the straps of the dress down her shoulders, revealing her breasts. Her chest flushed
redder as she continued to pump into herself, staring at Olivia the entire time. The detective had
uncrossed her arms and was watching Alex with relish as she rubbed the outside of her own
underwear.

“You see…how I’m looking at you right now?” asked Alex panting.
“Mmhmm,” said Olivia, grinning.
“Does it look…familiar?”
A jolt ran through Olivia’s body. It was unmistakable: this was the look Alex gave her when she
wanted her, fully clothed, in the interrogation room. She returned Alex’s stare with a renewed
intensity. Alex came on her own hand, bracing herself so that she still met Olivia’s gaze when she
finished. She stood, slightly out of breath.

“The next time you see that look,” she told Olivia, unzipping the dress, “I want you to think of
this.”
“What?” said Olivia breathily.
The dress fell to the floor along with Alex, who planted her face between Olivia’s legs.
“This.”
She tore off the brunette’s underwear and sucked down hard. The ecstasy hit her like a tidal wave,
and Olivia cried out.
Dolls

Alex unlocked the door to Olivia’s apartment. “Dinner is served.”
“Thanks,” Olivia called from the bathroom. “I owe you one for leaving early.”
Alex groaned. “Don’t worry about it. I couldn’t wait to get out of the office.”

Olivia emerged from the bathroom in a white tank top and navy pants, a navy shirt hanging over her arm.
“What’s wrong?”
“Someone found out Langan and I went out to dinner,” she said dryly. “One thing led to the other, and now the rumor mill has decided we’re dating.”
Olivia smirked. “You deserve it after pulling that run-around on me.”

Alex pouted. “I continue to regret doing it, especially after the long apology he demanded. Admittedly, he’s not happy about the rumors either. We’re just hoping it dies down before anything gets out of control.”
Grabbing a fork, she opened the container of fried rice and began to eat. A police beret laying on the table caught her eye.
“What’s that for?” she asked, swallowing.
“Candlelight vigil for Cherish Doe, the girl we found in the garbage plant,” explained Olivia, attaching gold pins to her shirt collar. “Captain wants us all there, in uniform.”

“In uniform,” repeated Alex, smiling. “I’ve never seen you in uniform.”
“You were in law school back when I was on patrol,” said Olivia. She shrugged on her shirt, working the buttons. “Grab my tie from the bedroom, would you?”
Retrieving the tie, Alex drank in the sight of Olivia in uniform.

“This is cute,” she said, placing the tie around the detective’s neck. She gave Olivia a quick kiss.
“Don’t change when you get home.”
Olivia laughed. “You gonna be here?”
Alex smiled slyly. “Trust me, I’ll wait for this.”

-  

“Alright,” caved Alex. “But the only way we do this is the right way.”
Cragen nodded. “Open meetings only.”
He turned to Fin. “Disclose your presence and don’t let Violet out of your sight.”

Alex left the office and leaned over Olivia’s desk. “Drinks?” she asked.
“Thought you were going out with the office tonight,” said Olivia.
Alex shook her head. “Williams’ kid is sick, and there’s a funeral for that defense attorney who was shot in the morning, so we decided to scrap it.”

“Why not call your buddy Langan?” quipped Munch.
“Because we are not dating,” said Alex angrily. “Has the rumor made it all the way here?”
“People talk,” said Elliot, shrugging.

-  

Leaning against the cabinets, Alex watched the interrogation with interest.
“You’re staring,” said Huang.
“I’m supposed to be staring,” she replied. “It’s hard to observe if I don’t actually look.”
“I didn’t mean the interview,” Huang said.

Alex sighed. “I know.”
“Does she?” he asked.
Alex shot him a sideways glance. “Do you really think this is the best place to talk about this?”
Huang sighed. “I suppose it’s none of my business.”
“It’s what you do for a living,” she said. “You make inferences based off of people’s behavior.”

Huang looked at her. “Do you consider us friends?”
She thought for a moment. “Not close ones, but yes.”
“Then why don’t you ever talk about your personal life when we have lunch?” he questioned.
“It’s a lot to talk about,” she said truthfully. “More than I generally want to get into.”

She frowned. “That reminds me, actually, I need to call home. I haven’t heard from my family in about a week.”
“Is that unusual?” asked George.
She nodded. “Very.”

Fin swung open the door to interrogation. “He shut down,” he spat angrily.
“Still,” said Munch, “I’ve never had a keeper with a stranger rape before.”
Elliot gave him a nasty look. “John, Olivia’s mother was raped by a stranger.”
John gave her an apologetic look.
“My mother made a choice,” she explained.

Olivia wasn’t raised religious, but her mother had always had her faith. Franciscan; it was why Olivia had ended up at Siena (that and the scholarship). Serena Benson wasn’t Roman Catholic, though, but rather ecumenical. It was why they volunteered at the soup kitchen on holidays, why Olivia had been raised to be incredibly tolerant and understanding, and why there’d always been someone to take her in when her mother crawled back into the bottle. Her mother, ever the optimist, had chosen to view Olivia as a blessing in disguise, no matter how hard that had been sometimes.

However, Olivia was not her mother.
“Look, Olivia –” began Elliot awkwardly.
“Nah, save it. The same thing happened to me? Morning after pill, no question.”

Shaking his head, Elliot walked away from the hearse.
“Did you actually say ‘jonesing for a ding-dong fix?’” he asked.
Olivia grinned. “You bet your ass.”

The captain sighed. “Get him his water.”
“Okay, but I don’t see this guy giving it up,” said Olivia, “whether I’m in there or not.”

She headed out the door only to be greeted by her favorite blonde ADA.
“How’s our suspect?” asked Alex.
Olivia shuddered. “Creepy.”
“Then I take it you aren’t enjoying interrogation like you have in the past,” said Alex in a low voice. “You look nice today.”

She brushed against Olivia as she walked past, sending electricity through the detective.
“–required to penetrate, let alone impregnate,” concluded Huang.
“So you don’t need me after all,” said Alex, her expression completely out of tune with the phrase she’d just spoken to Huang and Cragen.

“Mandel actually took the stand in his own defense?” asked Olivia.
“He still doesn’t think he did anything wrong,” explained Alex. The two continued down the courthouse hallway.
“So he hung himself,” concluded Olivia.
“Not if he reaches even one juror whose parent is dying of Parkinson’s or Alzheimer’s,” said Alex.
“Well, they have no choice if you made your case,” Olivia replied.

_You have a lot of faith in my abilities as a prosecutor_, Alex thought appreciatively. “He lost a lot of ground when he admitted that he tried to abort Stephanie. And I still have my summation.”
“Afraid there’s gonna be a slight delay on that,” interrupted Langan, rushing in between them. “Sorry for the late notice, but this witness just became available.”

He gave Olivia a look and sped off.

“Who is it?” she asked.

Alex looked over the paper in disbelief. “Well, he was too sick to testify for us, but it looks like Davis Langley has made a miraculous recovery for the defense.”

Olivia shook her head. “I can’t believe this.”

Alex sighed. “Trevor fights hard, I’ll give him that.”

“I thought you two made up,” said Olivia, confused.

Alex rolled her eyes, smiling. “We’re back to being friends, but technically we’re still fighting over you.”

“And the office is still fighting over the fact that you two may or may not be dating?” joked Olivia. “No, that’s died down, thank god.”

-  

Elliot escorted the sobbing Mrs. Rawley into the captain’s office as Alex and Olivia watched.

“I don’t get it. Why would Davis Langley want custody of that baby? Guilt?” guessed Olivia, dumbstruck.

The answer clicked into place. “Survival,” said Alex. “If he’s granted custody, along with the baby comes the umbilical cord.”

“I’ve got four of ‘em,” said Elliot, rejoining the conversation. “It’s not exactly something you save for the scrapbook.”

“Cord blood is chock full of stem cells,” explained Alex.

“Half of which will be his perfect genetic match,” finished Olivia.

Alex looked at Olivia sadly. There was no winning this case, no matter who went to jail for what charge.

“I’ma go check on Mrs. Rawley,” said Elliot gruffly.

“This isn’t sitting well with him,” remarked Olivia.

“It’s not sitting well with me either,” said Alex. “I’m going to ask Donnelly if someone else can prosecute this if it goes to trial.”

“Bothering you that much?” asked Olivia.

Alex sighed. “You didn’t have to try and undermine the credibility of a terminally ill man in front of twelve jurors. Dinner?”

“Please,” said Olivia. “I’ll go get my coat.”

Alex’s cell phone rang. She glanced at the caller ID, frowning. “It’s my dad.”

“What’s up?” asked Olivia.

“I don’t know, he never calls my cell.” She flipped open the phone.

“Hi dad, what’s going on?”

“I tried your house, then your office.”

“I’m at the precinct,” she replied. “Is everything okay?”

He sighed. “Alex, you’d better sit down.”

She sank back on Olivia’s desk. “Dad, what’s going on?”

Olivia looked on from the closet, worried. She watched Alex’s expression go from concerned, to stunned, to blank. She walked over just as the call ended. “I promise, I’ll be there, just let me know what the plans are...Love you too, dad. Call me again if you need anything...bye.”

She stared straight ahead, unsure of her next move.
“Everything alright?” asked Olivia, putting a hand on her shoulder.

Alex looked up at her. “I found out why they haven’t been calling lately. They’re separating.” Olivia sat down, wrapping her arm around Alex. “Alex, I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be,” said Alex, her expression odd. “I’m not.”
The answer hit Elliot like a blow to the face. “No sperm in the ejaculate.”
“We’re looking for a kid,” said Olivia.
“Seems like,” said Warner. “I’m going to grab some lunch to go. I trust I’ll be seeing you before long?”
“You betcha,” said Elliot. “Later doc.”

He continued to munch on his sandwich. Olivia eyed her abandoned salad.
“You know, changed my mind. I want that back.”
He smiled. “Still hungry after all?”
“No, but I will be later if I don’t finish this,” she replied.
“Speaking of food, what’re you doing for Thanksgiving?” asked Elliot.

“As of right now, nothing,” said Olivia.
Elliot frowned. “You and Cabot don’t have plans?”
Olivia shook her head. “Her parents just separated, so she’s spending the day with her dad.”
“Geez, that’s rough,” said Elliot. “Well, we can set an extra place for you, if you want. Thanksgiving’s a lousy holiday to spend alone.”
“That’d be great,” remarked Olivia, taking another forkful of salad.
“I’ll check with Kathy,” he said, “see what we can do.”

Olivia was shocked. She sat up, ungluing her back from the couch.
“You actually told Donnelly you wouldn’t prosecute?”
“Don’t look so surprised. We both know Jeremy wasn’t the primary actor,” said Alex. She rolled her eyes. “She’s still making me sit second chair, unfortunately. I just can’t believe the new DA wants to prosecute this. Actually, I can, I just can’t believe he didn’t listen to me.”

Olivia looked confused. “Why? Do you know him?”
“Not well, but I do. He’s good friends with my Uncle Bill…who is my uncle on my mother’s side,” realized Alex. “I really hope this isn’t fallout from the divorce.”
“They’re officially getting a divorce?” said Olivia, shocked.
“It’s not official yet, but I’d put money on papers being filed after the first of the year,” replied Alex.
“Well, happy anniversary to us,” said Olivia.

She looked at Alex softly. “Jeremy Brice is really bothering you that much?”
Alex sighed. “I feel like it’s my chance to stand up for all the kids I saw bullied in middle school that I was too scared to reach out to. It doesn’t help that Jeremy looks a lot like a kid my brother beat up in junior high.”
Olivia nodded. “When I was in the seventh grade, a kid threw me against my locker and called my mother a drunk whore.”
“Oh my god,” said Alex, her eyes widening. “What did you do?”
“Got sent to the office. I knocked his two front teeth out,” explained Olivia.
Alex laughed, then kissed Olivia on the cheek. “Why am I not surprised?”

The scent of candle smoke hung low over the dimly lit, quiet restaurant. Only three other tables were seated, unsurprising for Thanksgiving night. Alex knew she needed to try and cheer her
father, but the Brice case had drained her spirits.

“Alex, what’s wrong?” asked her father, his face lined and tired. She sighed. “Dad, I’m sorry, it’s just work.”

“I’ll take any conversation you’ve got,” he said. “Even if it’s grim.”

“Don’t say I didn’t warn you,” she said wearily. “We caught a case of two young boys who’d broken into a woman’s apartment. One boy raped and killed the woman while the other one watched, terrified. The rapist had a complete hold over the other boy: he was cold, calculating, and manipulative. And, unfortunately, he was twelve years old.”

“Too young to be tried as an adult,” her father said sadly.

Alex fingered her necklace absently. “The DA chose to charge the other boy, who was fourteen. My office tried him and got a murder conviction.” She clutched her forehead. “Dad, I watched as my boss made this boy sob on the stand. He looked just like that boy Charlie always picked on when we were younger, the one he got suspended for. This is possibly the worst win of my career.”

Her father reached out, placing his hand on her arm. “I doubt knowing this will help you, but it certainly puts my problems in perspective.” He sighed. “Sometimes you have to do things that are difficult.”

“This wasn’t the right thing to do,” muttered Alex.

“In your situation? No,” said the elder Cabot. “In my situation, yes.”

Alex looked up at him. “Why did you finally tell her about the affairs?”

He sighed heavily. “Because I was tired of lying to her. You may find this hard to believe, but after all these years, Alex, I still love her. I owed her the truth.”

He smiled, but there was no heart in it. “That’s a nice necklace.”

“Changing the subject?” asked Alex.

“You’ve caught me in the act,” he confessed.

The conversation moved on, not returning to the necklace for the rest of the evening. For this small favor, Alex was thankful.
The shrill tones of Olivia’s cell phone jolted them both awake. Alex nuzzled Olivia’s shoulder as she reached for the source of the offending noise. “Benson,” she yawned. “It’s Fin. We gotta sixteen-year-old girl, tried to throw herself in front of a subway car. Medics found signs of sexual assault. You got something handy to write down the address?”

“Hold on,” said Olivia, grabbing the notepad and pencil off her nightstand. She scrawled down Fin’s information, then leaned back in bed. “Okay, let me get up and get dressed, I’ll be there as soon as I can.” She closed the phone, sighing. “Looks like I’m out of here. When did we fall asleep, anyway?”

“I don’t remember,” said Alex. “I’ll walk you to the door, if you’d like.” Olivia smiled. “I appreciate it, but you don’t have to.”

The detective sat up on the side of the bed, gathering her clothing. Alex snuck up behind her, planting a kiss on the back. “What happened out there?”

“I guess you’ll know soon enough anyway,” said Olivia. She took a deep breath. “Rape victim attempted suicide.”

Alex’s face fell. “How?”

“She…tried to jump in front of the subway,” replied Olivia slowly. She turned, pulling Alex into a strong hug and kissing her on the mouth.

“Be safe out there,” said Alex, smiling. She kissed Olivia again, then let the detective get dressed.

“She could win,” said Alex, trying not to fall asleep in the middle of the precinct. “I hope you have something else.”

“How ‘bout a dead body?” offered Cragen.

“Oh man, they got you up too,” called Munch from across the precinct. “Hey Olivia, get our ADA some coffee.”

He came over to greet poor Alex. “I’m guessing that was Bernardo’s doing?” he asked. She groaned. “You win the jackpot, detective.” Olivia walked up to hand off the coffee and one sugar. “Well, we appreciate it. I’m just sorry you couldn’t get a little more sleep.”

“Did you make this?” asked Alex, ripping open the packet. “I did, about fifteen minutes ago.”

“Good, then I can trust it,” said Alex, winking at Munch. She took a long draught of the coffee. “I really shouldn’t complain. Becky tried to kill herself; she’s had a much worse night than I have. Keep me up to speed.”

With that, she headed for the elevator. “It was awfully bold of her to insult my skills as a barista,” said Munch. “Say captain, did you tell her about the suicide attempt?”

“Yes, yes I did, Munch,” said Cragen, shooting Olivia a dark look. Olivia’s stomach dropped. “Anyone else want coffee?” she offered.

Elliot took a deep breath and closed the door behind him. Olivia and George returned to the mirror,
watching carefully.
“God, that poor girl,” murmured Olivia. “At least she’s somewhere safe now.”
Huang nodded. “I had to pull some strings, but this is a lot better than foster care.”
Olivia looked at him quizzically. “I thought she was transferred when she had the breakdown.”
“No,” replied George. “She had the breakdown after she got here. I had her moved because Cabot
pressured me to do so. She couldn’t believe they let Jackie go home from the hospital so quickly,
especially without finding counseling.”

“That makes sense,” said Olivia, returning her attention to the window.
“It does?” asked Huang.
Olivia bit her cheek, waiting for an excuse to come. She had none.
“How much do you know?” she asked, turning to George.
“Only what I’ve been told,” he replied. “But I do have a few guesses as to what I don’t.”

“No, he loves me!” shrieked Jackie. Jumping in surprise, Olivia and George snapped back to the
mirror.
“Why are they so eager?” asked Olivia. “They haven’t done the rape exam yet.”
“Rebecca’s parents want to donate her organs,” explained Cragen. “They wait much longer, they won’t be usable.”
“Can’t they do the exam post-mortem?” asked Alex.
Cragen stood. “ME says once there’s no blood flow, tissue deteriorates and we could lose our evidence.”

Alex looked at Olivia. Help me out, please. “She tested positive for gonorrhea. Isn’t that enough to prove our case?”
Olivia shook her head.
“Not if we want to prove that she was also raped,” said Elliot.
“We need every bit of evidence we can get. Alex, this bastard should die in his cell,” implored Cragen.
“Can you buy us some time?” asked Olivia quietly.

Alex turned to face her. This day had been hell. Ice had slowed down prisoner transfer, backing up docket, and she’d gotten into a horrible screaming match with her mother in the afternoon. If it had been anyone else, she would have turned them down. But, it was Olivia.
“I’ll try.”

- 

Olivia sat at her desk, sipping her tea. She was exhausted, but it wasn’t from the sleeplessness.

Around 10:30, just as she was leaving, Alex’s phone had rang. At 11:00, Olivia was still there, waiting for the fight to end; Alex’s voice kept rising and falling as she tried to keep her temper in check. But something Margaret Cabot said had hit a nerve somewhere deep in Alex, and Olivia had closed her eyes as Alex bellowed into the phone with the same tone she’d used to scream at the office during the Cavanaugh case.

“Maybe you’re right, mother. Maybe I don’t love you, because you’re a terrible person. You’re a racist, you’re a homophobe, you’re a classist, and you’ve treated your husband like shit for years. And you know what, I don’t blame him for cheating on you, because you’re a horrible human being, and I am not coming over for Christmas, no matter what you say!”

She slammed down the phone, and then deflated. She swallowed, then looked at the top left cabinet in the kitchen. The cabinet in which Olivia knew the cigarettes were kept, even though Alex had tried her best to conceal their existence.

“Leave,” Alex said in a low voice.
Olivia closed her eyes. “Alex, don’t do this.”
“Please, Olivia,” Alex begged. “Don’t ask me to deal with this right now.”

Olivia loved Alex, and her head told her to stay. But it was because she loved Alex that she left, going home to stay awake in an empty bed.
Did Alex know how much this hurt her too? Did she see the strain that silence caused?

Elliot walked into the squad room.
“You look like crap,” greeted Olivia.
“I didn’t sleep all night,” he said tiredly. “I kept checking in on my kids.”
She stood to hand him her tea. “Well, you should’ve called me. I didn’t sleep either.”
“Anybody page you?” called the captain.
“No, why?” asked Olivia. “What’s up?”
“Rebecca Kurtz died this morning,” he explained.
They were silent for a moment. “They do the transplant?” said Elliot.
“Kid in Philly’s in surgery right now,” said the captain, offering a small consolation. “Alex woke up a judge to lift the TRO as soon as they finished the colposcopy.”

*And I bet she smelled like cigarettes,* thought Olivia. Add Alex to the list of people who hadn’t slept last night.

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Olivia’s shoes had never been particularly interesting before, but now she stared at them as hard as she could. “If Missy lied about being raped, who do you think really planned these murders?”

“Turn it off,” spat Elliot.
Alex clutched her forehead. “This is not good. To add to the growing pile of bad news, Kressler came asking Donnelly to give Missy immunity this morning.”

“Don’t tell me she gave it to him,” moaned Cragen.

Alex nodded sadly.

“This is crap,” said Elliot, walking out of the room.

Duethorn followed him out. “I agree.”

Alex looked at Olivia. “You ready to leave?”

“Yeah,” said Olivia quickly.
She bolted out of her chair. Alex followed her slowly to her desk, where she found Olivia organizing her files.

“Will you come home with me tonight?” she asked softly.

Olivia froze. After a moment of silence, she turned to Alex. “Do you really want me to?”

Olivia looked at the golden necklace, gleaming in the low light of the precinct. It had been something to take her mind off of her parents’ separation, a reminder that even if her parents weren’t there for each other, that Olivia was there for Alex. She remembered how Alex’s eyes had lit up when she’d presented her with the box, truly smiling for the first time since the bad news.

“Yes,” said Alex. “And I’m sorry.”

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Alex’s rivalry with Judge Petrovsky had become a running joke in the DA’s office. So much so, in fact, that Williams had hung a white poster board outside her office next to the water cooler entitled “Cabot v. Petrovsky” with two separate columns, in which the office marked one’s victory over the other. Currently, Petrovsky was winning by a narrow margin, and after this morning, that remained the same: the song and dance in chambers this morning entitled both prosecutor and judge to another tally mark.

“I have a search warrant for the Kurtz’s home, please, find me something,” she begged.

“Why, because some judge put you in the jackpot?” said Elliot.

“I’m sorry, I’m not blaming anyone,” Alex apologized. “Is Missy in interrogation?”

“Yeah, with her lawyer,” said Elliot.

“Let me see if I can get out of this,” sighed Alex.

Olivia watched her rush by, then turned to Elliot. “She must’ve really pushed Petrovsky’s buttons.”
“Miss Cabot, can’t you see how damaged Missy is?”
“Yes, yes I can.”
“Then, why can’t you just put her in prison?”

“Because I have to follow the law,” said Alex bitterly.

She hadn’t screamed at her mother because she hated her. She hadn’t told Olivia to leave that night because of her family problems. She’d snapped because she’d realized that as much as she loved this job, she’d also begun to hate it.
Risk

Sitting outside the courtroom, Olivia glanced up at the clock. 11:45. As if on cue, the door opened and personnel began flooding out, one of whom being Alex Cabot. She caught sight of Olivia, then smiled.

“You didn’t have to stick around after testifying,” said the ADA.
“I didn’t,” said Olivia. “I went Christmas shopping, then came back here.”
Alex raised an eyebrow. “Cragen’s okay with that?”
Olivia shrugged. “He doesn’t have to know. Besides, Elliot called and said they’ve been running all over town trying to deal with IAB, so it would’ve been hard to reconvene anyway. Lunch?”
“I’d love some,” said Alex. “I’m starving.”

They headed down the courthouse steps, the cool December winds ruffling their hair.
“Well, in other news, I have officially made up with my mother,” said Alex triumphantly.
“That’s great news,” said Olivia, nodding. “And how long did that phone call take?”
Alex groaned. “I almost didn’t make it to court on time this morning. I’m still not spending Christmas with her, though. She’s going to the Hamptons and I don’t have a car, and you never know when you’re going to have a legal emergency.” she finished, winking.
“Very crafty of you, Counselor,” said Olivia, laughing. “So, you’re spending Christmas with your dad, then?”
“Actually, no,” replied Alex. “He’s flying to Virginia to visit some of his family there.”

Olivia stopped, looking puzzled. “So, what are you doing for Christmas, then?”
Alex smiled at her. “I guess I’m spending it with you.”
Olivia beamed.

“– and, uh, get the lady whatever she’s having.”
Scotch on the rocks?” asked the bartender.
“Yeah,” replied Olivia. It was Alex’s drink of choice during a hard case.
“You got it,” said the bartender, getting her a fresh glass.

She turned to “Elliot,” smiling. “Thank you.”
“You’re welcome, how you doing?” he asked.
“I’m not bad, how’re you?” Not good either, though.
He smirked. “Better now.”

She didn’t care if it was an undercover operation. He was her partner and her best friend, and this was making her uncomfortable. She feigned a smile and thanked god Alex wasn’t here to see this.

“Kendall could be working with DEA people,” proposed Alex.
“That’s a chance we’re gonna have to take,” said Cragen.
Elliot opened the door and beckoned to Munch, Fin, and Olivia.

“What’s going down?” asked Fin.
“I’m gonna take in a shipment of terra-cotta cocaine tiles from Mexico,” explained Elliot. “Kendall will meet me at my double’s house in Forest Hills to pick up the goods.”
Fin nodded. “You guys contacted DEA yet?”
“That’s our next move,” said Cragen. “In the meantime, we need to formulate a plan for getting
Fin thought for a moment. “We can get unmarked cars in alleyways and other driveways, narcs in
the delivery van, and we can put our people in the house.”
“Can anyone be in plainclothes just in case?” asked Cragen. “Stabler’s lip has been split enough.”
Munch shrugged. “We can always have Olivia play the doting wife.”
“What?” spat Alex.

Five heads whipped to stare her down, wearing a variety of expressions. Fin looked confused,
Munch raised an eyebrow, Cragen tried not to laugh, and Elliot rolled his eyes. Olivia’s stare
clearly read could you be more obvious?
“Alex, in case you haven’t noticed, I can take care of myself,” said Olivia, looking at her angrily.
“I just think you should both have more support,” said Alex, flustered.
“I agree with Olivia,” said Elliot, staring down the ADA. “Just the two of us should be fine.”

Alex shot him a very nasty look.

“I brought you some dinner,” said Kathy, bringing a hand to Elliot’s face.
“Now’s not a good time,” he said gruffly.
“You have got to eat,” she begged.
“Not until I find this guy,” Elliot whispered back.
She kissed him on the cheek. “It’s after midnight. Come home, get some rest.”

He couldn’t handle this. Not here, not now. This case had stirred something within him that he was
trying to bury down.

“Munch, wait a minute!” He kissed Kathy on the mouth. “Hug the kids, I love you, thanks for
dinner” he said quickly, turning back to the squad. The captain burst out of his office.
“Olivia, grab your coat! We got another one, Queens.”

Olivia didn’t hesitate. Elliot was left behind, his heart growing heavier by the minute.

Olivia sat the files down on her desk. “They making you see the shrink?” she asked.
“Yeah,” said Elliot, grabbing his coat.
“You been there?”
He shook his head. “Not yet.”

She watched him for a moment. “I thought I was okay too when I shot that guy, but even a lowlife
like Kendall’s gonna stay with you.”
“I gotta get home.”
He began to deflect the conversation, then changed his mind. “Thanks.”
She nodded silently. “How long’s that sandwich been sitting there?”
“I got busy,” he replied. “It’s all yours.”
“You sleeping?”
“Yeah.” Don’t ask me what I’m dreaming.

He turned back. “Did seeing that shrink, did that help?”
“Not much,” she said honestly.
He nodded, then headed out the door.
“Merry Christmas,” she called.
He stopped in his tracks. That was in two days, wasn’t it? “You too.”

She sighed, grabbing the sandwich and taking a bite. Well, that was depressing. The phone rang and she cheered up. This late, there was only one person that could be. “Hey,” she said through a mouthful of ham. “Did you get sandwiches without me?” accused Alex. “No, stole Elliot’s,” she replied, swallowing. “I can bring you the other half, if you want.” “I’ll pass,” said Alex. “Just bring yourself home. I finally plugged in the tree.” Olivia laughed. “Better late than never.”
Alex chased Olivia up the stairs, laughing, still a little tipsy from drinking in the New Year. They’d gone to Munch’s party this year, and actually stayed to watch the ball drop. Cragen had sipped hot cocoa and cheered while Munch and Fin knocked glasses along with the rest of SVU, and Alex had resisted the urge to make out with Olivia in celebration of the arrival of 2003. She had kissed her on the cheek though, causing Olivia to blush and laugh and smile back at her, her eyes sparkling. Alex could chalk it up to being drunk the next morning, if she had to.

Olivia locked the door, her smile still bright.
“That was so much fun,” said Alex, dropping her coat on the kitchen table.
“You are so much fun,” murmured Olivia, pulling her in close for a kiss.
The two stumbled tipsily about the apartment before finally falling back on Olivia’s bed. Alex explored Olivia’s mouth with her tongue while reaching down to unzip Olivia’s pants, smiling against her lips.

“I love you,” Alex whispered sweetly.
Olivia reached back to unzip Alex’s dress. “I love you too,” she replied, her eyes soft.
They removed layers, still kissing eagerly. Alex grinned and pulled back.
“What?” asked Olivia.
“I like to look at you,” replied Alex, lowering her hand to Olivia’s mound. She removed her girlfriend’s panties and began teasing her outer lips, still smiling.
“Mm, that’s nice,” said Olivia, tilting her head back against the pillows. She vaguely reached up a hand to cup Alex’s breast, squeezing gently. Alex let out a small noise and Olivia chuckled.

“You’re distracting me,” Alex said seductively. She pressed her fingers against Olivia’s clit and rubbed in gentle circles. Olivia’s eyes fogged over and she parted her lips slightly.
“Alex,” she whispered.
Alex lowered her head between the detective’s legs and gently spread her thighs. She licked Olivia’s slit, then pushed her tongue inside. Olivia moaned, bringing her hand to Alex’s face.
“Sit on my face,” she pleaded.

Alex raised her head slightly, still wearing that wicked grin. “My, aren’t we crude.” She unclasped her bra and positioned herself over Olivia, lowering her sex to the brunette’s mouth. Olivia grasped her hips and pulled her down, licking eagerly. Alex shuddered, then returned her own lips to Olivia, sucking her lips gently.
“You’re still distracting me,” panted the blonde.
Olivia laughed against Alex’s pussy and Alex twitched.
“Have it your way,” said Olivia.
She thrust her tongue into Alex’s slit, causing Alex to pant harder. The blonde pressed her own tongue to Olivia’s clit, pressing down and rubbing hard. Olivia moaned against Alex, licking up a fresh rush of fluids.
“I’m close,” Alex panted. She planted her mouth firmly on Olivia’s clit and came, sucking down hard. She felt Olivia twitch and heard her moan as the brunette came beneath her.

Olivia pushed Alex off of her gently, then sat up behind her, pulling her into a big hug.
“You are so much fun,” she said, kissing Alex on the shoulder.
“Hey, you’ve gotta bring in the New Year with a bang,” joked Alex.
Olivia nuzzled Alex’s neck. “Happy Anniversary, sweetheart.”
“You too,” replied Alex. “Here’s to many more.”

- 

The defense attorney took a deep breath. “Man 2, ten to twenty.”
“Fine,” replied Alex, dissatisfied. This was unfair, but she didn’t have an easy way to fix it. Rising, she walked out of interrogation room, radiating stress.

“I don’t like it,” said Cragen.
“Do I look like I’m having fun?” snarked Alex. She caught sight of Olivia standing next to the file cabinets and her mood lifted. Nice shirt, Detective.
She went to grab her briefcase, brushing against her girlfriend as she did so. “Your boss and my boss just want to make this go away.”
“So they want it business as usual,” said Olivia sarcastically. Alex grinned, turning to examine Olivia as she did so. Her eyes darkened. Really, really nice shirt.

“But there is no way Edmunds acted alone,” continued Olivia, oblivious to Alex’s gaze.
“No proof he didn’t,” the captain said.
“Our victim was a gangster and a homophobe. What Edmunds did to him is tantamount to his worst nightmare,” implored Olivia. “He would’ve kicked like a mule to make it stop.”
The captain furrowed his brow. “You’re thinking Torres was held down.” Alex continued to follow, but hung back, still giving Olivia the once-over.
“He had to be,” said Olivia confidently. “And whoever helped Edmunds do it is gonna walk.”

“Not if you find me evidence.”
Olivia turned, noting the seductive tone. That was more than a procedural request. She felt the blood beginning to drain from her legs.
“Then the deal is void,” explained Alex.
She looked at Cragen. “Let me know,” she said in a low voice.

- 

Alex was asleep on the couch when the phone rang.
“Hello?” she answered sleepily.
“I’m sorry, did I wake you?” asked Olivia.
Alex sat up, sniffling a little. “Yes. If you’re calling to tell me you’re not coming over, I’d already figured that out.”

Olivia sighed. “Not entirely. Would you come down to the precinct? I need you to do a favor for me.”
“Fine, but you have to help me clean my apartment this weekend. I’ll be there in fifteen,” said Alex groggily. She groped for her coat, pulled her hair into a bun, and headed out to SVU.

- 

“What could not wait until tomorrow morning?” complained Alex, still not entirely awake.
“I need a wiretap,” said Olivia apologetically.
Alex yawned. “On who?”
“Luke Edmunds’ former partner, Wes Cooper,” said Olivia, showing Alex his photo.
Alex looked it over, blinking. “Is he involved in this?”

Olivia looked around the precinct, then gestured towards Alex, walking towards the coffee pot.
“We think that he got paid to kill Carlos Torres and another drug dealer. He’s got way too much cash for a cop.”
“What about Edmunds?” asked Alex.
“Drug dealers killed his brother. See, Edmunds is doing it for revenge, Cooper’s doing it for business,” explained Olivia. “Problem is, we don’t know who Cooper’s working for. That’s why I need a wiretap.”

Alex stared at her, baffled. “If I’m going to wake up a judge, I need something more compelling than a theory.”
“Cooper’s finances aren’t enough?” asked Olivia.
“Not without solid evidence of where that money came from,” replied Alex.

Olivia looked away, downcast.
“Why are you still working on this?” asked Alex.
“You’re the one who told me to come to you if I had anything new,” countered Olivia.
“Well, that was before IAB got involved,” replied Alex.

Olivia looked frustrated. “Doesn’t matter how you get your evidence as long as you get it legally.”

“You are on a crusade to get Cooper,” stated Alex.
“You’re damn right I am,” confirmed Olivia. “He’s a murderer. How many bodies you think he racked up to pay for that new Mercedes?”
Alex thought for a moment. “That’s a good question.”
Olivia sighed. “What’s wrong with wanting justice, regardless of who the perp may be? The fact that he’s a cop only makes it worse.”
“No, you misunderstood,” said Alex, frowning. “I don’t think there’s anything wrong with what you’re doing.”

She looked up at Olivia, smiling softly. “I don’t know anyone who tries harder than you to do the right thing. It’s part of why I love you.”

Olivia returned the smile warmly. “I’m sorry I woke you up tonight.”
“Don’t worry about it,” said Alex, rolling her eyes. “I’m better off unconscious, though. I’m so sex-crazed right now it’s not even funny.”

Olivia smirked. “I guessed it was one of those times for you, especially after you wouldn’t keep your hands to yourself Tuesday night.”

Alex blushed. “Don’t remind me.”

“If this was about business, why sodomize him with a plunger?” asked Alex, starting in on her third cup of coffee.
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“If this was about business, why sodomize him with a plunger?” asked Alex, starting in on her third cup of coffee.
“We’re thinking that the cops were trying to plant evidence,” explained Olivia. “Torres was headed towards the tombs. The guards find drugs during the strip search, that’s an added possession charge.”
“That is another ten years, at least,” said Alex, locking eyes with Olivia. She relished watching a passionate Olivia go to work.

“But the plan backfired,” Fin cut in. “Edmunds took some licks in the scuffle with Torres and went crazy, and the plunger was just a ‘screw you.’”
“But you still didn’t answer my question,” Alex admonished him. “Where is your evidence?”
“Five dead drug dealers,” shot back Olivia. “All unsolved homicides, all with the same deep bruising pattern, and all on Edmunds and Cooper’s turf. Same as Carlos Torres.”

“Let’s see if Edmunds is up for renegotiation,” said Alex smugly, picking up the phone. She was aching for a lay, and Olivia’s conviction for her work (not to mention that leather jacket) was positively arousing.
Hearing the knock on the door, Alex looked up. “Come in.”
Olivia entered Alex’s office, closing the door behind her.
“Thank god, I was worried it was Trevor again,” said Alex. “You look like hell.”
Olivia sat down on Alex’s couch, bracing her elbows on her knees. “Edmunds committed suicide this morning.”

“Oh god,” said Alex. She went to join Olivia on the couch. “But that’s not all that bothering you.”
“I tried to do the right thing,” said Olivia. “And I unleashed a media storm, several criminals, and expensive civil suits on the city in the process.”
“Even drug dealers have rights,” said Alex, sighing. “If it’s any consolation, most of those suits probably won’t get anywhere. The city can bury the humps in paperwork, and most of them can’t afford to drag out their cases.”

“I also got ripped by the captain, lost ten days of pay,” said Olivia sadly.
“He didn’t back you up?” asked Alex.
“He said we didn’t give him enough information to back him up,” replied Olivia. “Thankfully, I’ve got enough saved up to take the hit.”
“Guess we’re not taking that Caribbean vacation after all,” joked Alex, snaking an arm around Olivia. “You did well, Olivia. You got justice, even if you don’t exactly like who you got justice for. We both know this is a hard job.”

She leaned over to kiss Olivia on the cheek. Olivia turned her head abruptly, kissing Alex on the mouth instead. She ran a hand through Alex’s hair and leaned the blonde back on the couch. Olivia wouldn’t be missed; it was lunch hour, and she needed this right now.
“We don’t even have proof the victim’s mother went to health services!” yelled Alex, drowned out by the wind.
“We understand that Alex, but this is our best shot,” pleaded Olivia.
“Well, I need more evidence before I can get a subpoena,” replied Alex.
Elliot frowned. “Sounds like you’re stonewalling us,”
“Yeah, what is this really about?” asked Olivia.
Alex’s expression turned stony. “Olivia, would you want somebody digging through your medical records?”

The suicide attempt. “I had a pregnancy scare in college. That was bad enough,” confessed Olivia. “I can’t imagine the police knocking at my door, but this is our best lead.”
“Look, Health Services at Hudson has students giving the pregnancy tests,” said Elliot.
“So?” Alex said coldly.
“Judge in Iowa ruled confidentiality does not apply when the tests aren’t performed by doctors or nurses,” concluded Elliot.
“And Planned Parenthood fought the case so hard in the courts that the county finally had to drop it,” countered Alex.
Elliot shrugged. “Still worth giving it a try.”
“Alright,” said Alex, “I’ll run it by my boss. But I can tell you right now what she’s going to say.”

Alex dropped her briefcase angrily onto the empty chair, causing the nearby waiter to jump.
“Well, we have our subpoena,” she spat, taking a large gulp from her water glass.
Olivia’s eyes widened. “Donnelly went for it? No way.”
“You happy now?” said Alex tersely.
“Alex, c’mon, we wouldn’t do this if we didn’t have to,” said Olivia. “What’s going on?”

Alex sighed. “People looking through medical records make me nervous. I know if my bosses got ahold of mine, I’d have some very interesting questions to answer. Plus, it stomps all over women’s rights.”
“We aren’t going after women’s rights, Alex,” said Olivia. “We’re just trying to find the baby’s mother.”
“I know,” said Alex apologetically. “I’m just projecting. I don’t like the turn this new right wing administration is taking. At least I’m not the only one. Southerlyn and Branch fight all the time.”
“Well, maybe the rest of the city won’t like it either when he’s up for reelection,” said Olivia.

Alex took another drink of water, staring at Olivia. “When did you have the pregnancy scare?”
“After I broke off my engagement and before the long term girlfriend,” explained Olivia. “There were about six months where I went a little crazy.”
“And the pregnancy scare put a stop to that?” asked Alex.
Olivia nodded. “You bet your ass.”

“God, it’s so weird to me to think that you almost got married,” said Alex, shaking her head.
“Well, obviously, I’m very glad I didn’t,” said Olivia, smiling. “How’s your dad?”

“"What if it was your daughter?" she’d asked Munch. "What would you have done?"
Munch had thought for a moment. "Whatever I could."
Olivia glanced over at her. “You’ve been reading the same page for ten minutes now. What’s up?”
Alex twitched, her reverie broken. “Have you ever seriously considered having children?”
Olivia’s mouth fell open. “That’s a big question.”
Alex nodded slightly. “It is.”
“I’m guessing this has something to do with the Sarah Brown case,” said Olivia.

“You’re right,” began Alex. “In some ways, having children would be very difficult for me. I don’t have any desire to be inseminated, and adoption is a procedural nightmare. But in other ways, I’m very lucky, because I can select whoever I’d want to adopt. I don’t necessarily have to worry about having a Tay-sachs baby or a child with Down syndrome.”
“Do you want kids?” asked Olivia.
Alex thought for a moment. “I can honestly say that I’m too busy to take care of a child right now. Maybe some time later, but not soon.”

She looked over at Olivia. “But you do.”
Olivia took a deep breath. “How did you know?”
“Your maternal instinct shines through whenever you talk to child victims, Olivia. It’s pretty hard to miss,” confessed Alex.
“Well, if it makes you feel any better,” said Olivia, “I don’t have time for kids right now either.”

Alex smiled. “Someday.” She ran a couple fingers through Olivia’s hair.
“You’re growing it out,” she said, nuzzling Olivia’s neck. “It looks nice.”
“Wow,” said Bishop, the homicide detective. “This your partner?”

He’d put his grubby paws on the photo of Olivia and her mother that always sat on her desk. Elliot had no love for this hump. Greedy about the collar, insensitive about the rape victim, and no stomach for the dirty work.

“Yeah,” said Elliot tersely.

“Does she date?” Bishop asked.

_Buddy, you don’t wanna open up that can of worms._ “A lot of guys,” lied Elliot. He returned to his phone call. “So, there’s just no way to retrieve it, huh?”

- 

Olivia grabbed her coat. “Is that all?”
Alex nodded. “This is a fairly open and shut case. Grand jury should take all of five minutes, especially after they see the photos.”

“At least we don’t have to put the kid on the stand,” said Olivia, shaking her head. “He’s still in the burn unit. Three and a half years in Special Victims and it never gets easier.”

“You said it,” replied Alex.

Her office phone rang. “It’s the precinct,” she said, frowning. “Alexandra Cabot.”
She listened for a few moments, her eyebrows slowly rising. “Well thanks. We’re headed to the grand jury now, I’ll let her know.”

Hanging up the receiver, she turned to Olivia. “That was Cragen. He wanted me to tell you that Elliot’s going to be unavailable for a few days.”

“Why so?” asked Olivia.

“Apparently he left for Prague early this morning.”

“Wow,” said Olivia. “SVU’s gone international.”
Alex laughed. “At the very least, it means the US Attorney’s office is involved. I suspect we’ll be hearing from them soon.”

“Anything else?” asked Olivia.

“The captain’s computer is apparently acting up again,” said Alex. “He wants you to take a look at it when you get back.”

Olivia groaned.

- 

“All we’re asking for is Nicholas Taylor,” said Cabot, pacing the AUSA’s office. “You can press any federal charges you’d like, but he still murdered two people within our jurisdiction, and he has to answer for that.”

Claudia Williams nodded. “Considering all Detective Stabler did for us, it’s only fair. Taylor’s all yours.”

Alex smiled. She gathered her briefcase and turned to leave.

“Miss Cabot,” said the AUSA, “one more thing.”

Alex looked back quizzically.

“I’ve seen your win-loss record,” said Claudia Williams. “Very impressive, considering the type of cases you try. I couldn’t interest you with a change of venue, could I?”

Alex’s heart began racing. She could practically hear the pounding in her chest. “What do you
“Next September, one of the AUSAs is accepting a position at the Pentagon,” explained Claudia Williams. “We’ll be conducting job interviews starting in August. If you’re interested, I could put in a good word for you.”

Alex’s jaw dropped. “That would be incredible. I hadn’t really thought about leaving the DA’s office, but…”

She stopped short.

“But SVU is hard work,” concluded AUSA Williams. “Believe me, I coordinate witness protection, Counselor. I understand.”

“At the very least,” began Alex, “you’ve given me something to think about. I’ll broach the subject with my girlfriend, see what she thinks.”

“Girlfriend?” said Claudia.

Alex clapped a hand to her mouth. Where had that come from? After all these years of secrecy, of careful espionage, how had she just let that slip?

And why did it feel so right?

Claudia Williams smiled at her. “It would come up in the background check anyway, but I won’t tell anyone, Miss Cabot. I keep secrets for a living.”

Something struck Alex. Perhaps it was the nose? “You aren’t related to a Daniel Williams from the DA’s office, are you?”

“As a matter of fact, I am,” said Claudia. “He’s my cousin. And he speaks highly of you.”
Olivia kissed Alex deeply, drinking in the taste of red wine and chocolate. She carefully slid a hand beneath Alex’s dress and smiled against her mound, recognizing the ivory lace by touch. Leaning Alex up against a wall, Olivia loosened her panties slightly so that her hand could cup Alex’s slightly moist sex.

Alex drew back slightly, humming with pleasure. As Olivia teased her, Alex gently pushed the straps of Olivia’s dress down her shoulders and unhooked the detective’s bra. She pinched Olivia’s left nipple gently between her fingers, causing Olivia to shudder slightly.

“God, Alex,” she whispered, pressing a finger inside to rub Alex’s slick walls. Alex squeezed harder on Olivia’s nipple as Olivia unzipped Alex’s dress with her free hand. Peeling the silver fabric off Alex’s shoulders, Olivia brought her mouth to Alex’s own breasts, licking at one nipple while she stroked Alex’s insides.

The flush crept into Alex’s face. “Oh Liv,” she moaned, running a hand through Olivia’s hair. Olivia bit down gently on her nipple, listening to Alex’s breaths grow shallow. She added a second finger to her girlfriend’s slit and began stroking faster, and when Alex tilted her mound into Olivia’s hand, harder. She moved her mouth to the other breast and sucked down, pumping fervently. Alex’s toes curled as she gasped, finishing on Olivia’s hand. She planted several quick kisses on top of Olivia’s head, then pouted.

“You’re not letting me have any fun with you.”

Olivia raised her head, laughing. “What did you have in mind?”

Alex smiled slyly. “Bedroom?”

Olivia led the way, removing the remainder of her dress. Alex stood next to her, savoring the sight of Olivia’s naked body.

“Like what you see, Counselor?” teased Olivia.

“I do,” said Alex in a firm tone.

She pushed Olivia down on the bed, causing the brunette to gasp. Alex straddled Olivia and kissed her with ardor, ripping her panties off and spreading her legs. The blonde drew back, grinning naughtily.

“Brace yourself,” she whispered.

She slammed three fingers into Olivia’s pussy. Olivia cried out sharply.

“That hurt!”

“Sorry,” said Alex, giggling. She began to thrust hard, pounding her hand fiercely against Olivia’s mound. Balancing herself carefully, she brought her other hand to stimulate Olivia’s clit. She watched with relish as Olivia’s eyes fogged over in pleasure, as her lips parted and her head tilted back. Hearing the sound of her fingers wetly entering Olivia mixed with Olivia’s own moans lit Alex’s own sex on fire.

“Alex!” called out Olivia, tilting her head back. She came hard, bucking into Alex’s hands, her eyes closed in ecstasy. Smiling, Alex slowly withdrew her fingers from Olivia and licked them clean.

“Better than dessert,” she teased.

“I thought this was dessert,” joked Olivia, her breath still labored.

“What do you call the cake at the restaurant?” asked Alex. She searched the dresser for a pair of pajama pants. “Well, I’d say this was another Valentine’s Day well done.”

“Agreed,” said Olivia, retrieving her underwear from the side of the bed. “Toss me a tank top, will
you?”
Alex complied, putting her own underwear on as well. It was then she realized she’d completely forgotten to mention the job prospect at the AUSA’s office.

*Another time.*

- 

Elliot swung open the door. “I’m not buying it. Kathy didn’t come home all night, I’d be out looking for her.”
“That’s you,” said Olivia.
“That’s everybody,” he countered.
“That’s bull,” said Olivia. “How many times have we been working on a case and Kathy doesn’t hear from you?”

*More often than not,* he thought. “That’s different, I’m on the job.”
“Well, according to her husband, so was Kunsong,” said Olivia, unlocking the car.
Elliot plopped into the seat, slamming the door behind him. He thought for a moment. “You always call Alex when we’re out late.”
She nodded. “I do.”
“Even at three in the A.M.”
Olivia started the car. “She gets insomnia sometimes, and I don’t want her up all night worrying.”

“Olivia,” he said, “where do you want this relationship to go?”
She pulled into traffic. “I honestly hadn’t thought much about it. I’m happy with where we are.”
“But doesn’t keeping it a secret get tiring?” asked Elliot.
She bit her lip. “It does, but there’s nothing we can do about that for now.”
“What about for later?” said Elliot.
“For later is none of your business, Elliot,” she replied tersely.

- 

Bernardo smugly approached the stand. “Say I had the urge to call opposing counsel an uptight, self-righteous little bitch. My frontal lobe knows that means sanctions and it keeps my mouth shut?”

Alex clenched her forehead, resisting the urge to break Berndardo’s other ankle. This whole hearing was utterly ridiculous, and she didn’t even get to keep any of the shoes from trial.

- 

“I brought sandwiches,” announced Alex, opening the door to Olivia’s apartment.
Alex smiled, sitting down at the kitchen table. “I saw that you called, but I was in court. How’d it go with Brendan?”
“Kid gave up his mother as Jerry’s abuser,” said Olivia, pouring out two glasses of water.
Alex nodded. “I’ll call Bernardo after dinner. We’ll try and make Jerry a deal tomorrow.”
“Alright, I’ll be there,” said Olivia, bringing the waters over to the table.

Alex didn’t answer right away, lost in thought.
“Something on your mind?” said Olivia.
Alex took a sip of water. “Claudia Williams at the US Attorney’s office told me that there’s a job opening up in September, and she offered to put in a good word for me.”
Olivia stared at her in shock. “You’re thinking about leaving the DA’s office?”
“No, but it’s a flattering offer,” said Alex.

Olivia sighed. “Well, SVU’s a hard racket.”
“Nothing’s set in stone yet,” offered Alex. “It’s just something to think about.”
Olivia nodded. “Yeah.” She bit her lip, searching for something else to talk about. Anything.
“Did I tell you that Munch and Fin had an argument today about Nixon?” she proposed.
Alex laughed. “I can tell I’m going to love this.”
Privilege

Elliot closed the phone. “Maybe Drew’s luck just ran out.”

They headed for the car, shivering in the cold of the late February snow.
“God, when is it ever going to get warm?” asked Olivia, wrapping her scarf tighter around her neck.
“Just you wait, you’ll be wishing for this come July,” said Elliot. “I do wish it’d melt some, it makes the traffic miserable.”
“That’s reason for it to stick around, actually,” said Olivia.

Elliot looked at her, frowning. “Why so?”
“It means Mrs. Cabot can’t get back from the Hamptons anytime soon,” replied Olivia. “She’s been threatening to come visit.”
Elliot rolled his eyes. “I’m sure Alex loves that.”
“She’s already got enough on her plate, believe me,” said Olivia, unlocking the car.
“Besides work?” asked Elliot, opening the door.
Olivia nodded. “She’s helping her dad shop for a new apartment.”

The elevator doors opened as Olivia was walking to the restroom. Catching sight of Alex, she turned sharply to follow.

“Well, it’s an impressive tactic,” admitted Huang. “Brutalization is part of criminologist Lonnie Athen’s violentization theory.”
“Another lame excuse for criminal behavior?” guessed Olivia.
George and Alex turned in surprise. Neither had seen the detective sneak up behind them.

“Not necessarily,” continued Huang. “Athens believes that violent environment and example are the cause of all violent criminal acts.”
“What, no interest in genetics or brain chemistry?” said Alex.
Huang shook his head. “No.
Alex sighed, setting her briefcase down on Olivia’s chair.
Huang pressed on. “Athens interviewed a hundred convicted violent criminals and found that they were all abused as children, all saw family members brutalized, and were all taught to use extreme violence in response to stressful situations.”

“We found nothing to suggest that that even hints Drew was abused,” said Olivia. God Alex, you look good in that low cut suit.
Alex whipped her head to face the detective, catching the tone in her voice. She regarded Olivia with interest. “How am I gonna fight this?” she asked Olivia.
“By using Drew’s own words,” cut in Huang. “Defense claims that Drew’s father abused him, but in his polygraph interview with me, Drew said that his relationship with his father was one of mutual indifference.”

Alex returned her gaze to Olivia.
“Let’s nail him,” said Olivia, staring at Alex lustily. Or I could just nail you.
Alex grinned at Olivia slowly. “Looking forward to it.”
Huang balked quietly in the background. Was he really the only one who was catching on?
“We’ll try to get Jenny White to talk,” said Olivia. “It may take some prodding, though.”
Alex sighed. “I don’t like it either, but she’s our best shot.”
“Lean on her tomorrow, but be polite,” ordered the captain. “Otherwise, everyone go home and get some rest.”

Alex, Elliot, and Olivia left Cragen’s office. Olivia ran for the bathroom, leaving the others at the detectives’ desk. Grumbling, Elliot cleaned up his papers. “Rich brats,” he muttered. “They’re all alike.”
“Including me?” Alex asked, folding her arms.

“What does that mean, Counselor?” Elliot said gruffly.
“You’ve taken ages to warm up to me,” said Alex coolly. “Has it had anything to do with my family’s wealth?”
Elliot turned away, still irritable.
“It’s been two and a half years, Elliot,” demanded Alex. “What am I still doing wrong?”
“Why don’t you ask Olivia?” he hissed.

Alex began to speak, but closed her mouth. Her eyes narrowed in furor and understanding.
“What’s going on?” asked Olivia, bounding up behind Stabler and Cabot.
“Just saying goodnight,” replied Alex coldly.

“How could you do such a thing?!” screamed Drew. He lunged at Alex. “You bitch!”
Alex fell back on the table, visibly shaken. Olivia rushed forward, but the bailiffs already had Drew under control.

Leaving SVU seemed more and more tempting by the day.
Desperate

Olivia smashed her finger into the switch hook. “Friend of mine at the DA’s office loves to prosecute slumlords.” She pulled the handset out of the bum’s reach. “Last guy got sentenced to six months living in his own condemned building.”

“Look,” confessed the landlord, “I don’t have any paper on her. It was off the books. Lady paid cash up front for three months.”

“Which we’ll be glad to pass on to the IRS in case you forgot,” said Elliot.

“I’m tryna be helpful here!” snapped the landlord.

“So far, you’re coming up short,” replied Elliot.

“Okay, wait a minute, uh, she showed me her driver’s license,” said the hack, reaching for a copy.

“Address was on Central Park West, 300 block.”

Olivia looked at him sourly. “Your memory’s a little convenient.”

“Names I’m not so good at, but I never forget a prime piece of real estate.”

“We’ll be in touch,” said Elliot tersely.

They headed out into the breeze.

“Your ‘friend at the DA’s office’ would jam that guy up, eh?” cracked Elliot.

“Hey, she can always use more pro bono work,” said Olivia.

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It was coming up on 8 o’ clock, and Alex Cabot was ready and aching to have a few drinks and head home. And if Elliot Stabler would get the hell out of her office, she could stop mixing business with pleasure and jump Olivia’s bones.

“Once he knew where Jill worked, it would’ve been easy enough to follow her home. The night of the dinner dance, he slips out, he kills her.”

A frustrated Alex eyed Olivia.

“I mean, it’s almost the perfect crime, except for the fact that his alibi has a hole you can drive a truck through,” said Olivia. “Nobody at the dance remembers seeing him for a full forty-five minutes.”

She tried her best not to smile, recognizing Alex’s look. Unfortunately, she wasn’t the only one.

“So what do you say, Counselor?” asked Elliot. “We got probable cause?”

“It’s all circumstantial, but it’s enough for an arrest,” said Alex. *Now leave.*

“Well, don’t look so happy,” Olivia said sarcastically.

“We may not survive the grand jury,” said Alex. *But that’s not the reason I’m unhappy.*

“Why not?” asked Olivia, confused.

“Dan Hoffman will testify,” explained Alex. “His ‘Father of the Year’ act has everybody fooled. He’s handsome, charismatic, and he plays the grieving widower very well. I think Mr. Wonderful is going to dirty up the victim and the jury might not indict.”

“Stop him from testifying,” ordered Elliot.

She frowned at him. “I can’t. Once he’s arrested, it’s his right.” She walked to the back of her desk.

“His attorney will serve notice at arraignment.”

“So we’re stuck,” said Olivia, walking forward to lean over Alex’s desk.

*Please Olivia, I’m having a hard enough time waiting.* “I could do a silent indictment, without arresting him. If I present the facts to the grand jury as part of an investigation into the homicide,
I’m not obligated to notify Hoffman. The defense is out of the loop, then Hoffman can’t assert his right to testify. I’ll indict him in the morning, then you can pick him up,” she concluded.

She stared Elliot down for a moment, her icy gaze meeting his furrowed brow.
He stood, shrugging. “Alright Counselor, I know when I’m not welcome.” He left the office disdainfully, shutting the door behind him.
Olivia looked back and forth. “What’s going on?”
Alex sidled up to her and kissed her firmly. “Let’s just say I’ve had a rough day.”
“What’s wrong?” asked Olivia.

“The divorce finalized today and I need to let off some steam,” said Alex. Smiling slyly, she began to undo the buttons on Olivia’s shirt.
“Right here?” asked Olivia, raising an eyebrow. She smiled and leaned back into Alex for a few more kisses.
Alex snaked her hand inside Olivia’s shirt and beneath her bra. “Lock the door,” she whispered, squeezing Olivia’s nipple hard.

“I know the law, Miss Cabot,” said Ridenour. “I also know your reputation for bending it!”

Fuck Petrovsky. So this is why her short skirts no longer held power in Ridenour’s court.

“The case is closed. You want the file, you’re welcome to it.”
“Thanks,” said Elliot quietly.
The two detectives traded a look.

“I’ll brief Cabot, see if we can get her to stall the trial,” said Olivia.

*Or debrief her, you mean?* thought Elliot.

*Olivia braced herself against Alex’s desk, her pants pooled at her ankles. She bit her lip, stifling her moans as Alex pressed her tongue against her clit. The blonde targeted her stress at Olivia’s pussy, using her mouth as a weapon to demolish Olivia’s capability to stand, to speak, to think. Olivia dug her fingers into the wood, her knuckles hard and white. Her pussy screamed in pleasure. All she wanted to do was scream in tune. Alex sucked down harder and harder on her clit until Olivia gasped and came, looking down to see the naughty grin she knew so well.*

*Elliot sat outside the entire time. He’d heard nothing, but he knew damn well what was going on. Grabbing his keys, he left for Chauncey’s, hoping no one would be there that he knew.*

“And I’ll try and find Dawn Trent,” he said. “She’s got a lot of questions to answer.”
Olivia opened the door to the smell of neon orange. Glancing at Alex’s kitchen, she smiled. “Hey, the house is still standing.”

Alex made a face. “I make dinner for you and this is the thanks I get?” Olivia picked up the blue box. “Macaroni and cheese, very gourmet.” Alex groaned. “There’s salad in the fridge too. So how was your day?” “We found a nine-year-old girl raped, murdered, and stuffed in a suitcase,” said Olivia darkly. “I’ll let you figure it out from there.” “Can’t wait to send him to prison,” said Alex, stirring in the milk.

“So why are you thinking about changing jobs?” asked Olivia, steeling herself for the answer. Alex glanced over her shoulder. “What do you mean?” “The offer from the AUSA you mentioned a couple of weeks ago,” explained Olivia.

“I think it might be a good career move, an interesting change of venue,” explained Alex. “It’s tough to get a job with the US Attorney, Olivia. It’s not a sure thing.” Olivia bit her lip. “You’d leave me behind in SVU?” Alex dropped the spoon, rushing out of the kitchen. “You think that’s what this is about?”

She grasped Olivia’s arms. “I’m not going to lie to you, working this bureau is really starting to grate on me. Between this and my parents’ divorce, you know how awful my insomnia’s been.” “Yeah,” said Olivia sadly, “I know.” “I would be lying if I told you I wasn’t tempted to take up smoking again,” said Alex. “I just don’t know how much more of SVU my mental health can take, and that’s mostly why I’m considering leaving. But, in part, it is about you, just not in the way that you think.” “What do you mean?” asked Olivia, her eyes still downcast.

Alex took a deep breath. “If I no longer work for the Special Victims Bureau, then our relationship does not create a conflict of interest.” Olivia’s eyes widened. “We could go public.” Alex smiled weakly. “It’s not fair to make you hide this anymore.” “Alex, are you ready for this?” asked Olivia excitedly. “Not yet,” said Alex cautiously. “But I should be later this year.” Olivia frowned. “But you don’t have to change offices entirely. You could always put in for a change of bureau.” “AUSA is a more prestigious and better paying job,” said Alex, “but I’m also planning on talking to Donnelly as well, once I get the nerve.”

“You really want to do this,” said Olivia softly. “I do,” confirmed Alex.

Olivia pulled Alex in and kissed her fiercely. In the background, the smoke alarm began to whine. “Shit!” said Alex, pulling back and running to the macaroni. Olivia burst out laughing.

A thought struck Alex. “Wait a minute,” she began, “if we can prove that Billings provided assistance to Tommy Hedges in the rape and murder of Cherie Lathan, then it’s facilitation.” Not that low cut suit again, Alex. “So how do we prove that?” said Olivia, her tone low.
Alex took a deep breath. “I have to make a deal with the devil.”

“How about Petrovsky?” joked Cragen.
Alex rolled her eyes. “Don’t tell me you all keep track of the running tally too.”
“Munch and Fin have a bet going as to who’ll reach 150 marks first,” said Elliot.

“I’d better get a percentage of the winnings if I’m the victor,” spat Alex. “No, I meant Langan.”
Olivia frowned. “I thought you guys were on good terms right now.”
“You know Trevor and me,” said Alex. “Love-hate relationship.”
“He still nursing a candle for Benson?” asked Stabler.
Alex’s face turned icy. “Who’s the leak in the DA’s office? I want names.”

“US v. Barnett: publishing instructions designed to aid another in the commission of a criminal offense is not protected by the First Amendment” stated Alex.
Moredock grinned. “Very good. But all my client published was a work of virtual pornography protected by the Supreme Court itself.”
“Billings is a sleazebag who turns women into little girls,” said Elliot dryly.

**Shut up, Elliot.** “He makes a mockery of the law. Jurisprudence has to evolve with the technology.”
“This is gonna be a great fight, Alex,” said Moredock eagerly. “I’m glad I taught you so well.”
Alex smiled back. “You also taught me res ipsa loquitur, the thing speaks for itself? If it looks like kiddie porn, and smells like kiddie porn, it is kiddie porn.”
“Maybe it’s you who should evolve with technology, Alex,” countered Moredock. “There was no kid in the kiddie porn.”

He left the squad room, Alex looking after him fondly.
“He was my favorite professor in law school,” she said.
Elliot rolled his eyes. “Glad to see this is the best money can buy.”
Alex spun to face him. “Last I checked, your daughter was accepted by Columbia too,” she said sharply.
Elliot’s eyebrows shot up. “You went there for law?”
Alex smiled smugly. “Olivia didn’t tell you that? I’ll be sure to mention it when we have lunch today.”

She strutted out of the precinct. Elliot resisted the urge to pound his coffee cup into a pulp.
“We know who it is?” asked Cragen.
“No, but Evan’s father probably does,” guessed Fin.
“Alright, Duethorn, you and Fin partner up for the day,” ordered the captain. “Elliot, Munch, work together for now.”
“Where’s Benson at?” asked Fin.

Cragen shrugged. “She called in sick this morning.”
“She’s had a nasty cold,” said Elliot, “probably wanted to get some rest.”

- 

“Don’t worry, captain,” Olivia said into the phone groggily. “I’ll be back tomorrow.”
She hung up and snuggled closer to Alex, pulling the blanket up to her shoulders.
“You feeling any better?” asked Alex.

Olivia nodded. “I slept more today than I have in the past three months. Believe me, I feel great.”
“Great enough to go into work tomorrow?” said Alex, frowning.
Olivia chuckled. “Alex, don’t worry. It’s just a cold. Besides, the smell of Nyquil is beginning to get to me.”
Alex shuddered. “It’s beginning to get to me too.”

She played with Olivia’s hair absently. “A spree killer.”
“Eavesdropping, Counselor?” joked Olivia.
Alex kissed the top of her head. “Come on, you would have told me anyway. You want any more soup?”
Olivia sneezed. Reaching for a tissue, she shook her head. “Trust me, I also ate more of that today than I have in the past three months. I’m good.”

- 

Swinging around to face the squad, Elliot hung up the phone.
“Maybe we just caught a break. Lab got something out of the Contour.”
“Fin, Duethorn, get over there,” ordered the captain.

Swerving through the hustle and bustle of the precinct, Olivia returned to her desk to retrieve her own phone. She dialed Alex’s home number and waited anxiously.
“Hello?” said a tired Alex.
“Sorry, I know it’s late,” said Olivia, shifting her eyes around. “I was just wondering if I can crash at your place after I get done at work.”
“Sure,” said Alex. “I’ll probably be asleep, but you can let yourself in.”
“Actually, uh, I think it’s probably best if we both stay at your place for a little while,” said Olivia.
“What’s going on?” said Alex curiously.

“Well, this guy we’re looking for targets couples in and around Central Park West, and I don’t want to take any chances,” admitted Olivia worriedly.
Alex breathed out. “I hadn’t thought about that. Yes, please, stay here. Do you think you have enough clothes at my place?”
“If we do laundry this weekend, I should be fine,” said Olivia, breathing a sigh of relief.
*Thank god.* If she’d put Alex in danger, she’d never forgive herself for it.
Williams came back with two glasses of prosecco. “You said there was good news about the Central Park Spree Killer?”

“Killers,” said Alex, accepting the second glass. “SVU got the brothers to turn on each other, and the women they kidnapped were found alive this morning. I doubt this one will see the inside of a courtroom.”

“Less work for us,” said Williams. He glanced over at the door and smiled. “Old law school buddy. I’ll be right back.”

He left Alex leaning against the table, sipping her wine and enjoying the ambience of the office party. At last, both the city and she and Olivia could breathe a sigh of relief. Admittedly, though, it had been nice to have a warm body next to her every night, even if only for a few hours. Hopefully Olivia would be there when she got home tonight. It was nice to be in love.

“That was a nice job with the Billings case.”

Alex turned sharply at the voice. A redheaded woman stood next to her, wearing a foxy smile. Wracking her brain, Alex tried to come up with a name.

“Thanks,” she said, still struggling with the details.

“I know it was a couple of weeks ago, but my office has been snowed in with paperwork lately,” said the redhead, rolling her eyes. “I had to congratulate you, though. It’s tough to go up against Moredock and win.”

Moredock. Alex knew who this woman was. She’d gone up against Moredock herself in January and won, adding another percentage point to her ridiculous conviction rate. She was the youngest of the women of white collar, and already making a name for herself in the DA’s office.

“Well, you would know,” joked Alex.

The redhead shot out a hand. “Casey Novak.”

Alex shook it, smiling. “Alexandra Cabot. I have to tell you, I would kill for your job.”

Casey grinned. “And I would kill to avoid yours. Sex crimes seems like a horrible racket.”

“Trust me, it is worse than it appears,” said Alex, sighing. “To tell you the truth, I’m hoping something opens up in another bureau.”

“Can’t say I blame you,” said Novak, nodding.

“Alex!” called Southerlyn, waving from across the room.

Alex smiled, waving back. “I should probably go see what she wants. Nice meeting you, though.”

“Nice to meet you too, Cabot,” said Novak.

Alex began to walk off.

“This office has a lot of respect for you, you know.”

Alex turned back in surprise.

“It has a lot of respect for you too, Novak.”

She walked over to greet Serena and reconvene with Williams, but continued to revisit the exchange in her head for the rest of the night.
“Son of a bitch,” muttered Olivia. She flipped open her phone and dialed.

“That was fast,” answered Alex. Olivia groaned. “I may have cancelled dinner for nothing. Victim’s in the wind. I’ll take some statements, but I’m not hoping for much.”

“She fled?” Alex asked. “I’ve heard of resisting, but not outright bolting.”

“This girl must really have something to hide,” replied Olivia.

—

“Why did you do this?” pleaded Cheryl. “Why?”

“Cheryl, stand up, come on,” said Olivia quietly. “It’s okay, c’mon. We thought that Eddie knew.”

Of course it wasn’t okay. They should have asked Cheryl first. They had no right to go around making assumptions and out Cheryl. Olivia felt ill. She knew that look in Eddie’s eyes. She’d seen it before, many times: in college, on the job, out with Alex. It was the look that marked the fear of someone different.

—

The reporters mobbed her outside the courtroom.

“The DA’s office will try this case in the courtroom, not the press,” Alex said tersely. “Thank you.”

_Besides, if I told you what I really thought, I’d be fired on the spot._

—

The three friends continued down the hall into the squad room.

“The irony is, Berger’s argument may actually work for our case,” said Alex. “People are generally hostile towards the transgendered.”

“So a jury will be too,” said Olivia bitterly.

“Berger’s gonna put witnesses up there for Cheryl or…whatever his name is,” began Elliot.

Alex and Olivia exchanged a look. _Can you believe him?_

“…to tell us all about how he grew up tormented, brutalized, and treated like a freak.”

“You know, it sounds like you have a problem with Cheryl,” accused Olivia.

“My problem is this he-she and her lies are the reason we’ve got two dead bodies on our hands and I’m the one who’s all jammed up?”

“Look,” cut in Alex, “I need background on Cheryl now.”

Elliot breathed out heavily.

“All we know so far is that she changed her name when she was eighteen years old, she used to be called Charles Avery, her parents still live in Alphabet City,” rattled off Olivia.

“So why don’t you go talk to them?” asked Alex. “They can undercut Cheryl’s abuse story.” _Or confirm it._

“I don’t know Alex, I talked to her,” said Olivia. “And unless she’s a damn good actress she’s completely in love with Eddie and was afraid of losing him.”

“So she kills Eddie’s brother? True love doesn’t mitigate murder,” said Alex sadly.
Olivia shook her head. “I don’t think she’s a violent person.”
“That’s fine,” said Alex. “Prove it.”
She glanced back at Elliot. “Give us a minute?”
He scoffed and walked off in the other direction.

“He’s just as bad as that jury will be,” said Olivia.
Alex looked at her caringly. “He’s never had to cope with something like this. He doesn’t understand.”
Olivia looked down. *I thought he might.*
Alex placed a hand on Olivia’s arm. “You know where to find me if you need me. I’ll catch you later tonight.”
*Right now, I don’t know what I need,* thought Olivia.

“Alex, this girl has been through hell,” Olivia said with conviction.
“I know she’s been a victim and I know she’s suffered,” began Alex, “but that doesn’t give Cheryl the right to kill Joe Cappilla for threatening to expose her.”
“Then at least offer her a plea,” begged Olivia.
“Not until I know her intent,” said Alex shakily. “If Berger will agree to a psych evaluation, I’ll have Huang talk to Cheryl.”

She stared off into the vast space that was her office wall. Somewhere in the background, Olivia stood to leave.
“No kiss goodbye?” said Alex lamely.
“Why aren’t you doing more to help her?” asked Olivia quietly.
“Just because I understand her pain doesn’t mean I can stop doing my job,” replied Alex.

Olivia breathed out heavily. “No offense Alex, but your job sucks.”
Alex looked up woefully. “Now do you see why I want to leave?”

Olivia’s heart sank.

“I think a jury is going to have some trouble separating the facts of the case from who you are,” Alex said honestly.
“Well if you’re so sure I’m gonna lose, then why’re you here?” said Cheryl cautiously.

*Because I understand. Because I know your terror, and I know that what that vase was to you, those pills were to me.*

“Because I want to know why you won’t take the deal.”

A downcast Olivia walked into the squad room.
“How’d it go in court?” asked Elliot.
“Cheryl pled out.”

Olivia sat sadly on her desk.
“You know that the only person that came to support her was her sister?”
“And you,” said Elliot, smiling.
“Yeah, but I’m not family,” said Olivia.
Branch knocked on her door.  
“What’s this I hear about you wanting off the Avery case?”
Alex swallowed. “I just don’t think I’m the right person to try it.”
“Now, that’s not what I heard,” said Branch, helping himself to a seat. “You’ve made several impassioned arguments on her behalf. Perhaps you’d like to defend her instead.”

Shit. “Well, she could use better representation than that self-serving snake Berger,” she spat. “Reptile though he may be, Morty Berger’s a damn good attorney,” replied Branch. “He deserves a worthy adversary.”
“I think I’m more sympathetic to Cheryl than a prosecutor should be,” Alex said slowly. “A good ADA has to think on both sides of the fence,” countered Branch. “Your empathy is a strength, not a weakness.”

I’m losing this fight, aren’t I? “You know, if Cheryl had been born a woman, the jury would have no problem acquitting her.”
“She killed a man! What do you care what sex she is?” asked Branch.
“Because that, and not the evidence, is what’s going to convict her,” replied Alex honestly.
“No,” said Branch, “what’s going to convict her is a jury of her peers. Not angels or divine ethical beings.”

He stared her down until she could no longer meet his gaze.
“I suppose it bothers me more than it should,” Alex lied. It was bull and she knew it. She had every reason for this to bother her.
“Well, I’ll reassign the case if you like,” said Branch, shrugging. “But you might want to consider who’s gonna give Cheryl Avery the fairest treatment: you or some other prosecutor who’ll put her gender on trial?”

He’s right, thought Alex. How the hell was she going to tell Olivia? It didn’t matter, really. The detective had only called on business for the past four days.

- 

Alex hated this.

“Why not?” she asked gently.
“Because I didn’t want Eddie to know I hadn’t had my surgery yet,” sobbed Cheryl.
“So, you deceived him,” said Alex slowly.
“I had to!”

“What do you think Eddie would have done if he’d found out the truth?” said Alex. She tried to block out the image of what Eddie actually had tried.
“I don’t know,” Cheryl moaned.
“Don’t you?” the ADA said softly. “You told Detective Benson that you were afraid Eddie was going to leave you.”
In the back of the courtroom, Olivia closed her eyes in pain.
“In fact, Eddie committed suicide when he found out,” choked Alex.
“And I blame myself for that,” cried Cheryl.

It was if a knife had sunk into Alex’s heart. “Do you blame yourself for Joe’s death?” Cheryl sniffled. “I was protecting myself. All I wanted to do was hit him over the head.”
“If you hadn’t killed him, he would’ve told everyone your secret when he came to,” said Alex. She silently prayed that the jury was hanging onto every word.
“Well I wasn’t thinking that far ahead,” Cheryl said, her voice thick with mucus. “Weren’t you?” asked Alex quietly. “Joe was going to tell Eddie and you couldn’t take that chance.”

Charlie was going to tell Mother and Dad and I couldn’t take that chance. Her brother was going to tell her parents and she wouldn’t take that chance.

Alex finished cross and walked back to her table. She sought Olivia’s eyes. The pain flickering within them mirrored the stinging feeling within her own.

Chewing on the tip of her glasses, Alex reread the same sentence for the fifth time. Olivia had wanted to be alone last night, after the trial, and so she’d gone home to an empty bed. At least she’d only lit up once.

Someone opened the door, interrupting her thoughts.
“Hey,” said Olivia. “I’m heading out. You wanna grab a drink?”
“Thank you,” replied Alex, relieved to see her girlfriend. “But, you know, I am just not in the mood.”
“Well, neither am I, but I don’t feel much like going home,” Olivia confessed.

Alex thought for a moment. “Do you think I pushed Cheryl too hard?”
“You did your job,” said Olivia carefully. They nodded at each other in understanding. So yes.
“Then why do I feel so lousy?” Alex asked softly.

Olivia sat down. “Because you look at Cheryl and you can’t imagine what it’s like to feel that your own body is a mistake.” And you don’t look at her and see someone else you love.
Alex looked at Olivia sadly. I wish I’d known. I wish you’d come to me, Olivia.

The detective’s cell phone rang shrilly. “Benson.”
Her face fell. “We’ll be right there.”
“What’s up?” asked Alex, concerned.
“I gotta go to Bellevue,” said Olivia, standing. “You should come with me.”
Collecting her belongings, Alex followed the detective out.

They returned to Alex’s apartment in silence, their hearts heavy. When they finally went inside, they stood awkwardly in the space, both trying not to be the first to speak.
“I would really like a cigarette,” confessed Alex, “but I know that no matter how many times I smoke, I will never burn away what I just saw.”
Olivia remained silent.
“This was a hard case for me too, Olivia,” Alex said gently, “but I’m not a mind reader.”

Olivia sank into the couch. Alex sat down next to her, placing an arm around her love.
“Will you tell me what’s going on?”
Olivia looked at Alex, blinking back tears. “Every time I look at Cheryl, I see your face.”
Alex stiffened, horrified.
“When she talks about her childhood, I hear you, telling me all your horror stories. And when I see people judging her, people like my partner, I see people judging you,” choked Olivia. “And I remember what that made you do to yourself.”

Alex pulled her into her arms, hugging her tightly. “Olivia…”
“And I’m scared,” sniffed Olivia, “of what will happen when we finally tell everyone the truth. I want us to come out, Alex. I want that so, so badly. But I don’t want anything bad to happen to you in the process.”
Alex kissed her on the forehead. “Olivia, look at me.”

Olivia raised her teary eyes to Alex’s face. Alex smiled at her.
“I’m not afraid anymore.”
Olivia gulped. “Do you mean it?”
“I do,” said Alex, nodding. “Do you remember how I acted during the Cavanaugh case last year?”
Olivia sighed. “You were a wreck.”
“Consider how I’m acting now,” proposed Alex.

Olivia thought. This case had clearly been hard on Alex, but she hadn’t cracked under the strain. She’d done her job and fought for Cheryl in the same breath. This wasn’t the same Alex she’d known a year ago.
“You’re right,” sighed Olivia. “I just wish I could protect you from all the idiots in the world.”
“Who’s going to protect you?” asked Alex.
Olivia shrugged. “I can take care of myself.”
“What’s to say I can’t do the same?” replied Alex.
She wiped Olivia’s tears away. “I swear, if anyone at work knew how much you cried, you’d be out of a job instantly.”
“Hey,” said Olivia, laughing. “I’m empathetic. It makes me good at my job.”
“It does,” replied Alex. “In regards to mine, however, I’m telling Donnelly I want a transfer the next chance I get.”

“What about the US Attorney’s office?” asked Olivia, sniffling.
Alex sighed. “I won’t lie, it’s tempting, but I’ll have a better chance of staying in touch with the unit if I stay in the DA’s office. SVU is like family to me, and I can’t just abandon them.”
She turned to face Olivia. “Do you think they’ll ever forgive me for leaving?”
“I don’t think anyone will be mad at you, Alex,” said Olivia, wiping her eyes. “I think they’ll be disappointed, but I know they’ll understand. They’d only really be upset if you cut all contact with us.”
“Well, I’ll be coming around the squad room enough to bother you,” said Alex, smiling, “so they’ll definitely still see me.”

She kissed Olivia, softly at first, then passionately. She hummed with pleasure as she felt the detective rub her thigh.
“I love you, Olivia,” she whispered.
“How did my client get hurt between his home and here?” screamed the defense attorney.
“I don’t know, how?” said Alex, giving Elliot and Fin a pissy look.
“He fell,” said Fin lamely.
“Bull!” spat the defense attorney.

“The only injuries I see are your client’s torn knuckles from punching Detective Benson in the face,” said Alex coolly. “So unless you want to add assault of a police officer to the tab, I say we move on.”
Honestly, she was glad Fin had roughed Gardner up. It saved her the trouble of knocking his teeth out herself.

She did not want to be having this conversation right now. Not after this morning’s round in court had gone to Petrovsky, and not after Donnelly had chewed her ass out for it just before lunch, giving her no chance to discuss the possibility of a transfer.

“It’s not enough,” she said quickly, trying to bolt.
“Hold on, Alex, you think this is a coincidence?” Olivia said incredulously.
“Probably not,” admitted Alex, “but a judge won’t call it a violation. She entered the establishment, so in essence, she followed him.”
“Gardner’s gotta know where Carrie lives,” cut in Elliot, “he attacked her right in front of her own building. If he’s stalking her, he’s gotta know where she gets her coffee.”
*Not helping, Elliot.* “His lawyer will argue that they live in the same neighborhood. It’s not implausible that they would frequent the same places.”
“Well, orders of protection are real helpful when you can’t enforce them,” spat Olivia.
Alex winced. It was true, but it still stung.

“Look,” said Cragen, stepping in to mediate, “he didn’t try anything and there is the chance it was a coincidence.”

“Alexandra Cabot?” said a wheezy voice.
Olivia’s eyes shot to the curly-haired man who had just entered the precinct. She’d forgotten her phone call completely.
“Yeah, that’s me,” said Alex.
He handed her a pile of blue papers. “Your office said I’d find you here.”

Olivia sprang up to join Alex, who was now flipping through the motion. “Now what?” asked the detective softly.
“Gardner’s hitting the ground running,” scoffed Alex. “Motion to sever the charges.”
In the background, Cragen looked dismayed.

“Opening statements at 9 a.m. tomorrow morning,” concluded Preston, banging her gavel.
Well, that had been more annoying than she’d anticipated. Alex turned to find Olivia waiting on the benches, a welcome sight after that song and dance. Coming forward to greet the detective, Alex leaned in close.
“Unless this guy passed the bar overnight, Erin Russ is giving him a lot of help,” she mused. “Don’t worry, we’ll still nail him with Carrie’s testimony.” Now come with me. For sex. “Well, not if she won’t give it,” countered Olivia. “I just got a message from Bethany Taylor. Carrie says she can’t face her rapist again.”

Alex stared at her, dumbstruck. “What’s our plan, then?” Olivia sighed. “I’ll try and talk to her, but I don’t really have one.” The detective shifted her eyes back and forth. “However, I do have a plan for us,” she said seductively. Alex grinned at her. “I was wondering why you showed up. Go talk to Carrie first. I’ll be waiting in your apartment.”

Did this prick really think he was going to get the better of her on the stand? Going up against the one and only Alex Cabot? This is ridiculous, thought Olivia. “It’s not uncommon for a perpetrator to lose control of himself and I have certainly been hit much harder,” she said, smirking.

Olivia was on top of Alex, straddling her and kissing her passionately. She rubbed the blonde’s clit gently, loving the way that Alex thrust against her hand. She slowly began to draw her hand away, smiling down at the blonde. Alex’s eyes popped open. “You wouldn’t.” “Oh, I would,” teased Olivia. Alex smacked Olivia’s ass, leaving a perfect red impression of her hand behind.

“Someone’s impatient,” said Olivia, breathing out heavily. Alex reached her own hand to Olivia’s soaked slit. “You liked that,” she said, pushing two fingers inside Olivia.

“This is crap, Alex,” spat Olivia. “Yeah? Because it looks to me like Michael Gardner making a really good case for tainted identification. I wish you’d told me about this, Olivia.” It isn’t like you haven’t had plenty of opportunities. “Hold on!” said Olivia. “That lineup was not tainted.” “How do you know?” countered Alex.

“What could a rape counselor possibly gain from helping a victim make a false ID?” said Olivia angrily. “It doesn’t matter what happens, only what to appears to have happened,” hissed Alex. “The judge tosses the ID, this case is screwed!”

Bethany Taylor came hurrying into the precinct. Thank God, an escape route, thought Olivia. “Bethany, what’s up?” “I just got subpoenaed to testify on Michael Gardner’s behalf,” she said, frustrated. Olivia looked at Alex, snorting in anger. “We’ll be with you in a moment,” said Alex. “We will?” asked Olivia, her eyes narrowing. “I need to talk to you,” said Alex. “It can wait,” Olivia shot back. “No, it can’t,” said Alex firmly.
She leaned in closely. “Olivia, I am on thin ice with Donnelly right now.”
“Oh, so now you just try cases you can win?” countered Olivia.
“That is not true and you know it. Listen to me!” Alex yelled.
Olivia withered slightly. Alex took a deep breath, regaining composure.
“Donnelly will not listen to my request to transfer unless I can give her a good reason, and while
continually losing my cases may be a good reason, it’s not the one I’d like to present her with,”
Alex said calmly. “I’m frustrated, and I’m taking it out on you, and I’m sorry.”
Olivia breathed out. “Apology accepted. I’m going to talk to Bethany.”

“And do what?” said Alex.
“Try and save this case,” replied Olivia.

Alex and Olivia waited anxiously outside Preston’s office.
“I hope Bethany’s doing okay in there,” said Alex, sighing.
Olivia bit her lip. “I think something’s up with Cragen.”

Alex looked up at her. “Why do you say that?”
Olivia shrugged. “He keeps giving me these really strange looks when he thinks I’m not paying
attention.” She sighed. “I hope my job isn’t in trouble. A lot of cops have been laid off in the past
few months.”
“Olivia, you have nothing to worry about,” said Alex. “Your case closure rate is through the roof.
You’re not losing your job.”
“Regardless, I’d like to find out what’s going on,” said Olivia.
“Maybe it’s just fatherly concern,” offered Alex.

Olivia chuckled slightly. The two went back to waiting for Bethany in silence. This was taking far
too long.

“You kill yourself to make something happen, or you do nothing,” said Olivia. “It doesn’t matter.
There’s always another child molester, there’s always another rapist, and it’s like you have to sell a
little piece of yourself to get the job done.”

Even as she spoke the words, she knew where they were coming from. They came from Alex, from
the woman who could no longer work in SVU because of the horrors she dealt with day in and day
out. In speaking to Elliot, she finally understood why Alex had to leave. Because no matter how
much she did, it was never enough, and Olivia could see that. She saw that in Alex’s sleepless
nights, in her nightmares, in her refusal to get rid of the cigarettes just in case she needed them. She
saw Alex’s pain and it made her heart break.

“So what the hell’s the point?” she asked Elliot.
He opened and closed his mouth several times. “I don’t know, maybe there isn’t a point. Maybe
the cost is too high.”
He steeled himself. “Olivia, no one’s making you do this. The difference between you and all the
victims is you can walk away.”
She tried her hardest to hold the tears back. “No I can’t,” she whispered.

She walked off to the squad car. Elliot watched her for a minute, his eyes following the taillights as
they faded away. Then, he hurried inside and dialed her cell phone. She picked up, saying nothing.
“What does Cabot think of all this?” he asked.
“Cabot is trying to track down Donnelly so that she can request to transfer to another bureau,”
choked Olivia.
“She’s leaving you?” asked Elliot angrily.
“No, she’s not leaving me Elliot,” said Olivia, “she’s leaving SVU. She’s doing what I’m not strong enough to do.”

Olivia hung up, leaving a very unhappy Elliot alone on the other end of the line.
Olivia knocked on the captain’s door. “Hey, Donovan Alvarez is being processed. We’ll interrogate him in the morning. You wanted to see me.”

Cragen nodded. “Close the door, would you?”

Sighing, she obeyed. “Look, captain, I know something’s been going on. Is my job at risk?”

“That depends on how you want to look at the situation,” said the captain carefully. Frowning, she stared back at him, highly confused. “What do you mean?”

Cragen hesitated, unsure of how to begin. “There’s no easy way to say this, Olivia. I think your personal relationship with the ADA has begun to interfere with your professional life.”

Olivia balked. “How do you mean?”

“Olivia, on both the Avery case and the Gardner case, the two of you interacted in a way that clouded your judgment,” said the captain. “I don’t want to have you transferred, nor do I want her to leave, but I can’t let the two of you railroad the real purpose of this unit.”

Olivia sat down, slowly. She thought for a moment, then spoke. “Captain, I’m sorry. I didn’t realize.”

The captain leaned against his desk. “Olivia, what are we gonna do about this?”

Olivia ran a hand through her hair. “Well, I have an answer if you can wait a couple of months.”

“What do you mean?” questioned the captain.

“Captain,” began Olivia, “Alex is putting in a request to transfer to another bureau.”

Cragen’s face fell. “Because of your relationship?”

“No, because she can’t work in Special Victims anymore,” said Olivia honestly.

The captain looked upset. “I wish she’d told me.”

“It’s not official yet,” said Olivia quickly. “Donnelly’s been pretty busy, and to be honest, I think Alex is having a hard time working up the courage to talk to her.”

“Why’s that?” asked Cragen.

Olivia shrugged. “We’re one big happy family, captain. It’s hard to leave all that behind, especially with her parents getting divorced.”

Cragen nodded slowly. “You’ll keep me in the loop on this, right?”

“I will,” promised Olivia.

- 

“I’m gonna go catch a few hours of sleep,” said Olivia, throwing on her coat. “See you at seven.”

***

Where are you going tonight, Olivia? wondered Elliot. Home to your own bed? Out for drinks, at a cop bar or some quiet, swanky place in Midtown? To her place on the Upper West Side?

Is Alex Cabot waiting for you? How much do you love her, Olivia? How long will you love her for, is this forever?

Are you going to leave me behind?

- 

Alex strode into the squad room, meeting Olivia at her desk. “Elliot’s gonna hate you for this,” said the detective.

Alex sighed. Elliot already hates me, Olivia. “No matter how badly I feel for Ray, vigilante justice
is not justice.”
Olivia looked at her apologetically. “I know.”

“In other news, I finally gave Donnelly an ultimatum,” announced Alex. “She has to put me on the calendar sometime within the next two weeks. You think Elliot’s going to hate me, wait until she gets ahold of me. Special Victims is stretched thin as it is.”
Olivia smiled up at her. “I’m proud of you.”
“Thanks,” Alex said quietly.

“By the way,” said Olivia, looking towards the captain’s office, “Elliot lawyered up for Ray, but you didn’t hear that from me.”
“What?” said Alex icily.
“Sounds like Cabot’s on the warpath,” called Munch.
“There’s the Alex I know and love,” said Olivia, grinning.

- 

“You sure as hell better be ready when I cross-examine you,” threatened Alex.
Looking visibly shaken, Elliot started down the hallway. Reaching the “Cabot v. Petrovsky” chart, he stopped and turned back. Hurrying into Alex’s office, he closed the door behind him. She looked up at him, eyebrows raised, unamused.

“Why are you leaving?” he asked quickly.
She looked surprised. “I’m not leaving, just transferring to another bureau.”
“You’re leaving Olivia behind in SVU,” he countered. “That’s not fair.”
“I’m not leaving her behind,” said Alex, her voice rising, “I’m leaving for her! If I transfer, we can announce our relationship.”
“I don’t believe you,” said Elliot, shaking his head.

“Did you just expect us to keep this a secret forever? Elliot, I love her. I want to spend the rest of my life with her!”
A stunned silence hung over the room. Alex’s lips remained parted, astonished by what she’d just said. Elliot looked grim, a nerve twitching in his temple.
“It doesn’t have to be a choice between us,” Alex said softly.
Elliot nodded unconvincingly and left the office, his head reeling.
Yes it does, Counselor. And I know damn well who she’ll choose.
“A new man in the squad room, much less the bedroom? Where do people come up with this crap?” said Elliot, hurrying down the steps of the Lang-Foy Clinic.
Olivia laughed. “You’re just insulted because he implied you need the help.
Elliot made a face. “I think I’m doing my job just fine, thank you.”
“Both of them?” teased Olivia, winking.

Elliot’s face grew stormy. “That’s none of your business. Just because I know about your sex life doesn’t mean you get to know about mine.”
“Ever the guilty Catholic,” said Olivia. “And you don’t know everything about my sex life, Stabler.”
“I know more than enough,” he muttered.

“Alex, we know that it’s circumstantial,” pressed Olivia, “but this guy had to have something to do with Samantha’s death.”
“I cannot get an arrest warrant based on supposition. You have to find me a direct link,” replied Alex.
“So give us something we can work with,” said Elliot. “Subpoenas for his financials, phone records, and a patient list.”
Alex sighed. “No judge is going to give us a look at a doctor’s patient list, but the rest is doable. I can also give you a look at his IRS records.”

She glanced at Olivia and jerked her head towards the captain’s office, currently vacant. Olivia looked over at Elliot, then followed her in and closed the door.
“What’s up?” she asked.
Alex smiled at her. “Liz Donnelly and I have officially scheduled a meeting for tomorrow morning. I couldn’t wait until tonight to tell you.”
Olivia’s face brightened. “I’d kiss you, but I don’t think that would be received well by the squad.”
“On the contrary,” said Alex, grinning slyly, “I think some of them would take it very well.”

Alex waited anxiously outside Donnelly’s office. Right about now, SVU would be on their way to serve the warrant on the Foundation’s brownstone. She’d have to find out the results of the search later, though; she’d turned off her cell phone.

At last, Donnelly opened the door. “Come in.”
Gripping her briefcase tightly, Alex entered the office. She placed the bag on one of Donnelly’s chairs and clasped her hands behind her back, her lips tightly drawn together.
Donnelly looked her over. “Considering that you’re still standing, I have a feeling that I’m not going to like what I’m about to hear.”
No sense in beating around the bush. “I’m here to put in a formal request for a change of bureau.”

Donnelly looked at her, interested. “No.”
Alex sighed. “Don’t make me go through higher channels to do this, Liz.”
“Do you really think Branch will let you transfer?” asked Donnelly. “After the Cheryl Avery case, you practically cemented your claim on Special Victims Bureau Chief after I leave.”
“Well, maybe I can talk some sense into him,” said Alex feebly.
Donnelly smirked. “You seem to be conveniently forgetting Branch’s ability to twist one’s words.
If you leave, he’ll have to find someone to take your place, and that creates an awful lot of work he won’t want to do.”

Alex hadn’t wanted to play this card, but it appeared that she had no choice. “He may have to fill it anyway.”
“What do you mean?” asked Donnelly, pursing her lips. “You wouldn’t quit.”
“I’ve received personal notice of a job opening at the US Attorney’s office,” said Alex slowly.

The corners of Donnelly’s eyes creased in anger. “You’d really threaten me with that?”
“You wouldn’t take my request seriously if I didn’t,” replied Alex. “I have a good record and a promising future, Liz. Does the DA’s office really want to lose that?”
They were bold words on Alex’s part, and she knew it. Donnelly stared at her with contempt.
“What’s the matter, Alex? SVU gotten too tough for you to handle?”
Alex closed her eyes. “Yes.”

Donnelly’s face finally relaxed a bit. She looked at Alex with sympathy.
“I’m not asking for homicide,” said Alex carefully. “Just somewhere else.”
Donnelly nodded, thinking for a moment. “We might be able to swap you with someone in white collar.”
Alex shook her head. “Don’t get me wrong, I’d leap at the chance, but the rest of the bureau would hate me.”
“That is true,” replied Donnelly. “Well, if you can wait a few months, Petrelli in narcotics is leaving after she has her baby.”
“When is she due?” asked Alex quickly.
“Well, don’t be so eager,” said Donnelly. “I believe in October. I’ll talk to the bureau chief over there, see what we can do.”
“Thank you, Liz,” Alex said sincerely. “Thank you so much.”

Langan parked the car and opened the door. He walked around to the passenger side to let Alex out.
“I really appreciate you agreeing to do this,” she told him.
He sighed. “Anything for an old friend, right?”
She smiled at him. “No, really. If there’s anything I can do for you, just let me know.”

He walked up to the doors of the prison and opened one for her. “I’d ask for a date with Detective Benson, but I think you’d kill me.”
“Still nursing that flame?” she teased him.
“You aren’t?” he poked.
“You’ve got a point,” she admitted.
“Well, I can’t blame you,” said Trevor, taking off his jacket for the metal detectors. “She’s an attractive woman.”
Alex steadied herself and followed him in. “She is. And she reciprocates my feelings.”

Trevor stopped walking and turned to face her, giving her a narrow, curious stare. Holding her breath, Alex waited for him to make the next move.
At last, Trevor grinned. “You always did get the girl, Alex.”
“Don’t tell anyone?” she asked in a small voice.
Still smiling, he rolled his eyes. “Have I ever?”
“Gimme the keys,” pushed Elliot. “I’m not letting you drive.”
Too tired to object, Olivia tossed him the keys to the crown vic. She stumbled into the passenger side and tilted her head back.

“Why’re you working so much overtime, anyway?” he asked.
“Central cooling’s broken in my apartment,” she offered lamely.
“Yeah, but you could always stay with Cabot,” he countered. “What does she think about all this extra work?”
“What does Kathy think about you working overtime?” she mumbled.

He sighed. “It must be nice to love someone who understands the job.”
She smiled at him sleepily. “You’d better believe it, partner. Wake me up when we get there.”

Okay, so her air conditioning was just fine. But lying to her partner wasn’t a crime. She slogged up the stairs and unlocked her door, ready for some real sleep. The smell of eggs and cheese cradled her once she stepped inside.

“I made quiche,” said Alex.
Olivia stared at her. “You. You made quiche.”
“Believe it or not, I can occasionally follow a recipe if I put my mind to it,” replied Alex. She couldn’t be upset, though; Olivia hadn’t slept in more than two days.

Olivia staggered towards Alex and threw her arms around her. “You are my favorite person right now.” She planted frenzied kisses all over Alex’s face and neck, causing the blonde to giggle.
“Okay detective, we are going to feed you, bathe you, and put you to bed,” ordered Alex. She deposited Olivia at the kitchen table and set a slice of hot quiche in front of her. Olivia dug in eagerly as Alex poured two glasses of iced tea.

“Are you joining my shower as well?” asked Olivia through a mouthful of food.
Alex winked at her. “I did say ‘we.’”

Elliot sucked down another slug of coffee. “So, you gonna tell me the real reason you’re working so much overtime?”
Olivia sighed. “Maybe I like to buy my girlfriend nice things occasionally.”
“Call me too practical, but doesn’t she have plenty of money?” he asked.
“Does it really matter, Elliot?” she countered, her tone frustrated.

He sighed. “I guess it doesn’t. This case is making you nuts, you know that right?”
“Yeah, I do,” she replied. She stared vaguely out the window. “He’s gotta come home sometime.”
“Not if one of his friends tipped him off,” said Elliot, returning to his coffee.
“Uh, these are not the kind of guys who would go out on a limb for each other,” she said. Her exhaustion crept through in her voice.
Elliot winced at the bitter taste of grounds. “You got a point.”

He crumpled up his cup. “What do you think it is, the money?”
Olivia shook her head. “Not all rich kids are like this.”
“Yeah, but these are trust fund babies,” said Elliot, “everything handed to them. No character, no conscience.”
She couldn’t help but feel like he was shooting a veiled insult at Alex. “You’re either born with a conscience or you’re not.”

“Did Mitch give you anything on Emily Owens?” asked Alex.
Olivia sighed. “Not a thing. Captain says we don’t have the time or manpower to look into it either.”
“Well, that sucks,” said Alex bluntly. “I’m sorry.”
“At least we got him for the murder,” said Olivia.

“Now, I have to warn you,” said Alex, opening her door slowly, “it’s messy in here.”
Olivia stepped into the front room. “Yeah, it is, but I’ve seen worse.” She grabbed something off the coffee table. “What are all these?”
“Photographs,” said Alex. “Their disorganization finally got to me. I decided they needed a home.”

Olivia flipped through the album, smiling. Here was one of her asleep on the couch, covered in paperwork. There was one of Alex holding her first successful tray of chocolate chip cookies. There weren’t many pictures of the two of them together, but they were scattered here and there. Alex had found ones of them from the New Year’s party, both before and after they were dating, and there was one of them in Alex’s office, hugging one another. Olivia pulled out one they’d taken in Riverside Park last winter; she was kissing Alex on the cheek and the blonde was smiling brilliantly.

“Can I take this one home?” she asked.
“That one stays here,” said Alex teasingly. “I like it too much.”
“Then I’ll just have to move in with you,” cracked Olivia.
Alex looked at her curiously. “Do you mean it?”

A speechless Olivia’s eyes widened. Alex sat next to her on the couch.
“Look, we’ve been dating for two and a half years,” said the blonde. “We were going to have to have this conversation eventually.”
“I know,” said Olivia softly. “It just…it makes me so happy.”
Alex leaned over and kissed Olivia on the mouth. “Well, hypothetically, where would we live?”
“God knows your place is nicer than mine,” said Olivia, still thunderstruck.
“Yeah, but I don’t want you to feel obligated to pay such a high rent,” said Alex.
Olivia shrugged. “We’d be splitting it, so it wouldn’t be too bad. I have to admit though, I like my building. The super’s fantastic.”
Alex looked around, smiling. “I wouldn’t mind living there.”

She pulled Olivia back in for another kiss.
“Let’s talk about this a little later,” she said in a sultry voice.
Sliding her hand beneath Alex’s skirt, Olivia was all too happy to comply. She rubbed the blonde’s mound keenly through her panties, kissing her girlfriend passionately. Groaning softly, Alex arched her hips into Olivia’s hand.

Olivia took Alex’s hand and led her into the bedroom. She carefully stripped her girlfriend, who giggled with enjoyment.
“You too,” said Alex, bringing her hands to Olivia’s belt. In turn, she removed Olivia’s clothes, and they kissed again, tangling their naked limbs. They fell back on the bed, their sexes grinding together, both eager for one another’s touch.
Smiling wickedly, Olivia drew a trail of kisses down Alex, starting with her mouth, moving to her chest, and finishing at her mound. She kissed Alex’s clit twice, then pressed her tongue against it, filling the blonde with warmth and desire. Blushing, Alex met Olivia’s gaze.

“Bring your hips up here,” she ordered.

Olivia grinned. She turned around and climbed on top of Alex, then returned her mouth to Alex’s clit. Lapping slowly at her girlfriend’s sex, she stiffened suddenly when she felt a single finger enter her slit.

“You’re wet,” remarked Alex with vested interest. She added a second finger and began to slide her hand slowly in and out of Olivia’s pussy.

Olivia returned the favor, thrusting her tongue into Alex’s own sex. Alex began breathing harder and increased her speed, letting her fingers stroke Olivia’s g-spot upon each entry. Olivia lost control first, coming on Alex’s hand and moaning hot breaths into Alex’s pussy. She could practically hear Alex smile.

Olivia latched onto Alex’s clit, rubbing it fiercely with her tongue. The fingers pounding into her now moved with an irregular rhythm as Alex angled her mound further into Olivia’s face. The blonde slammed her hand into Olivia hard as the brunette sucked down on her clit, first gently, then harder. Alex called Olivia’s name and finished as Olivia herself came a second time.

“Someone’s excited to live together,” joked a still flushed Alex.

“I’d get to do this every day,” said Olivia, resting her head on Alex’s mound. “That gets me pretty excited.”

All the jokes aside, she was truly excited. The future of one Olivia Benson had never seemed so promising until this day.

And with a little money and a little courage, an actual promise might be made.
Tragedy

Someone knocked on the window of the interrogation room. Elliot and Olivia stood, leaving to answer the call. 
“Go squeeze Lester until he gives you something useful,” said Cragen, addressing the pair. “By my timetable, we’re at twenty-nine hours and ticking.”
“On our way,” replied Elliot.

He and Olivia hurried to grab their coats.
“Well, looks like we’re not going home for the next two days,” said Elliot, sighing. “Who wants to make the first phone call?”
Olivia scooped up the keys and headed out the door. “All you. Alex’s mother is in the city tonight, so the best I can do is leave a message.”
Elliot winced. “I’m sure she’s having a great time.”
“It won’t be that bad. Since the divorce, some of the wind has gone out of the stormy matriarch’s sails,” explained Olivia.

Elliot thought for moment. “You think you’ll ever settle down, have kids?”
Olivia stared at him, shocked. “Where did that come from?”
“Something Annika’s sister said, about her being thirty-one and always wanting to have kids,” said Elliot nonchalantly. “You’re almost thirty-four. You can’t tell me the thought’s never crossed your mind.”

The elevator doors closed behind them.
“Fine, I have thought about it, and yes, I would like kids at some point,” said a frustrated Olivia.
“But it’s not a possibility right now. Alex’s lease is up in October, so she isn’t moving in until then, and even after that, we need to adjust—”
“Wait,” cut in Elliot, “she’s moving in with you?”
“I thought I told you,” said Olivia, frowning. She unlocked the car and opened the door. “You coming or what?”

“So, this is for real then,” said Elliot, his tone curious.
Olivia smiled. “Yeah, I guess it is.”
Manic

A dismayed Alex munched on her croissant. “I don’t like them.”

“Oh, come on,” protested Olivia, “they’re cute. And it’s just hair, it’ll grow back out.”

Alex sighed. “You’re right. It just means I’m stuck with bangs for at least six months.”

“I thought you wanted the bangs,” said Olivia.

“Don’t remind me,” groaned Alex. “I guess I can console myself by cleaning for the rest of the day.”

Olivia’s cell rang shrilly. “Hey, cleaning can be very therapeutic,” she said. “Benson.”

Her face fell. “I’ll be right there.” She drained the rest of her tea.

“What happened?” asked Alex.

“Sounds like a school shooting, I.S. 41,” said Olivia darkly.

“Oh god,” said a disgusted Alex. “At least it’s a Saturday.”

Olivia sighed. “I’m off to grab the squad car and go. Thanks for breakfast.”

Alex smiled up at her. “Any time. Be safe out there.”

—

“Okay, look, I feel real sorry for Joe, but I feel more sorry for the two kids that he killed,” stated Cragen. “Now, we want a confession here Doc, how do we get it?”

“You let him rest,” Huang replied simply. “You get him something to eat, you get him a paper and pencil, and you try again later.”

Cragen nodded, dismayed. “Elliot, go grab the kid some real food.”

“Deli on 34th stays open late,” offered Olivia.

“You coming, then?” asked Elliot.

“Benson stays here to update the case file,” replied the captain. “A hell of a lot has happened today, and I want us to be ready when this goes to trial. And call Cabot, get her up here to talk to Joe’s lawyer.” He entered his office and shut the door.

Elliot grabbed his jacket. “Alright, see you in fifteen.”

Olivia sat down at her desk, flipping through the stack of papers. She reached absently for the receiver, preparing to make her customary nightly phone call to Alex.

“Have you told her that you like the bangs?” asked Huang, sitting on the edge of Olivia’s desk.

Olivia sighed. “I have, but it obviously hasn’t done anything to change her mind. How was your lunch date?”

“She wasn’t in the best mood, but she wasn’t unhappy either,” said Huang, smiling. “She’s excited to move in with you, Olivia.”

Olivia examined him. “When did she finally tell you?”

“Back in March, when I finally asked her,” said George quietly. “Don’t worry, I haven’t told.”

“Yeah, well, I wouldn’t expect you to,” said Olivia halfheartedly.

“Is something wrong?” asked the doctor.

Olivia thought for a moment. “Not really. It’s just that a lot of things are about to change, and I’m not sure I’m ready for it.”

“Change is good, Olivia,” said Huang thoughtfully. “All we can do is take it one day at a time. Would you like some coffee?”

“No, but thanks,” said Olivia.
She picked up the receiver and began to dial.

-  

An angry Alex stormed into the squad room.  
“What were you thinking, turning this case over to Barry Moredock?!”  
Olivia looked down.  *Uh-oh.*  

“I’m concerned about Joe Blaine,” said Huang plainly.  “I knew Moredock would share my concern.”  
“So it wasn’t enough you had to call him in, you also handed him his defense,” said Alex angrily.  
Huang balked.  “I’m not against the use of psychiatric drugs to treat children, I just don’t think they should be used as an instrument of school policy.”  
“Then publish an article,” countered Alex, seething.  “You had no business interfering in my case.”  

“Thousands of children are being forced to take powerful drugs without psychiatric supervision,” said Huang, his tone rising.  “Before crucify Joe Blaine, maybe you should hear what your detectives found out.”  
Alex whipped around to face Elliot.  “What, now you’re working on Joe Blaine’s defense too?”  
“Alex, you weren’t there,” Elliot said slowly, “this kid is seriously troubled.”  
Olivia stood, hoping to calm things down.  “We spoke to his school counselor. She said that Joe was exceptionally creative yet extremely disruptive. They suggested counseling, medication, but Joe’s mother always resisted.”  
“Well, she said that he was special, needed special treatment,” continued Elliot, “so in the end, the school insisted that he go see their shrink.”  

“So that’s who prescribed Joe the Aptril,” guessed Alex.  
“Apparently not. Mom wanted a second opinion, so they went to go see a Doctor Engles,” finished Elliot.  
Alex nodded, thinking hard. “Alright. Find out when Doctor Engles started Joe on the Aptril. Then I can decide if I should take this defense as seriously as Doctor Huang seems to.”  

She stormed out, but Olivia chased her down. She reached out, patting Alex on the arm.  
“You know, the bangs are especially cute when you’re angry,” she called.  
Alex sighed crossly. “I can’t believe he did this to me. Moredock is one of the toughest defense attorneys in the state.”  
“You won last time,” offered Olivia.  
“Well, I might not be so lucky this time,” replied Alex, pouting.  
“We’ll do our part, Alex,” said Olivia. “I will personally make sure that you are completely prepared to take on this defense.”  

Alex gave her a small smile. “Alright. But you have to make it up to me later tonight.”  
Olivia raised an eyebrow. “And how should I do that?”  
“You can help me pack,” said Alex in a sultry voice. Olivia burst out laughing.  

Elliot watched the two of them from his desk. “Man, why does she always blame me for her problems?” he remarked to no one in particular.  
Huang smiled. He knew why.  

-  

Alex stared piteously at poor Ms. Blaine. “So why didn’t you get a doctor to prescribe it?”  
“Because I didn’t want him to get labeled,” she squeaked. “You know, those records, they’ll follow you your whole life.”
Alex knew. It was part of the reason she’d never had anything prescribed to her; that would have merited a diagnosis. Sure, anyone who snooped through her medical records could put two and two together, but there was nothing official on paper.

“I came home from work one day and there it was, sitting on the stoop, Aptril, like some kind of gift from God,” continued a shaky Ms. Blaine. “I gave it to him. I thought, you know, it’ll make him better. No one will know. And everything would be okay.”

She sobbed silently into her hand. It was all Alex could do not to give the broken woman a long hug.

“I wish you could’ve seen your face,” said Olivia, taping together another box. “I’ve never seen anyone so smug. Is that your signature?” she mocked.

Alex grinned. “I have to admit, it was incredibly satisfying.”

“I know this probably isn’t the best time to bring this up, but I still can’t believe you beat depression without any drugs,” said Olivia.

Alex frowned. “The cigarettes count. And I wouldn’t say I beat it; I just learned to live with it.”

The ADA surveyed her apartment. “I can’t believe I own so much shit.”

“Well, we can always sell some of it,” remarked Olivia, “we don’t need five lamps. And hey, at least it’s never been cleaner in here.”

Olivia glanced over at the boxes of paperwork. “These old case files have to go to your office, though. You know I don’t have room for them.”

Alex sighed. “I work out of a shoebox, Olivia. I don’t have any room for them there, either. We can put them in storage, along with my graduation robe.”

She plopped down on the couch, smiling at her girlfriend. “I still can’t believe we’re going to be living together permanently in about a month.”

A beaming Olivia kissed her on the cheek.
Mother

Elliot and Olivia trooped out of the hospital, heading for the car. “She’s pretty uncooperative,” he remarked. “Her hands are tied,” explained Olivia. “What was your take on the husband?”

“Loves her, hates her job,” Elliot said. “Well, how would you like it if Kathy was treating sex offenders one-on-one every day?” she asked. “Wouldn’t let her,” said Elliot matter-of-factly. Olivia looked shocked. “Let her?” “Did I say that? Look,” he continued quickly, “you know, these skels are only going to see Dr. H because the court ordered them to.” “Making it public record,” concluded Olivia.

He offered her the keys. “Want to drive?” She laughed, knocking his arm away. They got in the crown vic and Elliot started the engine. “That necklace looks awfully familiar,” he said. She played with the gold chain, smiling. “I’m surprised it’s taken you this long to say anything. Alex got it for me to match the one I got her last year.”

“Doesn’t matter how sane he was at the time of the attack, they’re saying he’s looney tunes now,” said the civil action ADA. “Which means he can’t help with his own defense,” concluded Cragen.

“Well, I think that he’s doing a damn fine job,” countered Olivia. “He’s faking it.” The ADA shrugged. “Okay. It’s a long shot, but I can challenge the findings.” She looked Olivia over. “Might wanna spruce up a little bit for court.”

Olivia’s jaw dropped and Elliot tried not to laugh. “It’s a good thing Alex didn’t hear that,” muttered Cragen.

She’d walked by the jewelry store every day on her way home from work for the past two weeks, which was significant considering how far out of her way it was. She’d stop, stare for five to ten minutes, and let the knots in her stomach twist until she felt sick and had to walk away.

We’re just moving in together, she always said to herself. But she couldn’t hide from the facts forever; Elliot knew it was a big deal and Huang probably did as well. They were going public soon. So, so soon. More importantly, Alex Cabot was going public. She was not the same reserved, no-nonsense defense attorney Olivia had met three years ago. She’d grown so much, and she’d rocked Olivia’s world forever; the detective could tell how much she’d changed too.

But Olivia couldn’t buy the ring. Not yet. I’ll do it soon. By our anniversary, she promised herself. After she leaves Special Victims.

Alex’s mother was chatty as usual, but she wouldn’t let it bother her tonight. Olivia had told her
about the twist the case had taken, regarding Robert’s real mother and what his grandmother had done to him. Considering everything he had been through, her own mother didn’t seem so bad.

“Well, it’s nice to see the divorce hasn’t crushed your spirits,” said Alex, taking another sip of her cocktail.
“I will admit, Alexandra, it has had an effect on me,” said her mother with her usual flourish. “I feel like I had half the energy I once did, thanks to that bastard.”
Alex winced. “Mother, please.”
“Alright, alright,” her mother said, rolling her eyes. “Enough about me and my feelings, how have you been? Is work going alright? How is Arthur?”

_She can only mean Branch_, thought Alex. _Well, Mother, I’m ending my lease and moving in with the woman I want to spend the rest of my life with, only I’m too scared to tell her or you that._

“Actually,” began Alex, “I’m transferring to the Narcotics Bureau in a few weeks. I’ve finally had enough of working in Special Victims.”

“Oh thank goodness,” her mother replied. “I never thought that was a terribly healthy work environment. But then again, I suppose it was none of my concern.”

Alex looked up. “What do you mean?”
Margaret Cabot steeled herself. “Alexandra, I am a passionate woman with strong views. I hoped to raise you the same way, and I succeeded. However, I have never taken too kindly to the fact that our views do not agree. I know that has not always made our relationship easy and…I’m sorry.”

Alex was thunderstruck. The cocktail straw she’d been playing with dropped out of her hands and rolled off the table. Of all the outlandish things for her mother to say, she’d never expected this. She pushed her glasses up the bridge of her nose and swallowed.

“Admittedly, it has not been entirely your fault,” said Alex slowly. She searched for a moment, but couldn’t come up with anything else to say. “I’m sorry too.”

Her mother smiled gently. “Apology accepted.”

A faint gleam of hope began to shine somewhere within Alex. She couldn’t tell her mother the truth tonight, but she would do it soon. _Before December, by November at the latest_, she promised herself.

_After I leave Special Victims._
Agent Hammond’s words echoed inside Olivia’s head as she dropped off a late dinner at Alex’s office. “Room service,” she said, knocking lightly on the door. Alex breathed a sigh of relief. “Thank god, I’m starving.” Olivia deposited the plastic sack on Alex’s desk. “Chicken and cheddar, extra tomatoes, just like you asked. Why’re you working so late anyway?” “I have to get all my files prepped and ready for my successor, whoever that may be,” said Alex. “Unfortunately, I’m still stuck in this hole in the wall, but at least you’ll always know where to find me.”

Olivia smiled. “You’re not hard to track down. Well, looks like your last case is going to be a nightmare, for us at least.” Alex attached a set of papers to a manila folder. “Why’s that?” “We’re investigating the murder of a hooker, Livia Tellez. Looks like her drug dealer boyfriend killed her, and we have no idea where to start,” replied Olivia.

Alex frowned. “Livia. I don’t like that.” Olivia cocked her head. “What?” “It sounds too close to your name,” said Alex, twirling her pen in her fingers. “It makes me feel like something bad is going to happen to you.” “It’s just a coincidence, Alex,” said Olivia. “You don’t need to worry. Nothing bad is going to happen.” Alex sighed. “You’re right.”

Of course it would be Petrovsky. Of course.

“Can we still keep the chart going?” Williams asked. “After you’re in narcotics, I mean.” Alex groaned. “Whether I like it or not, I know someone’s going to maintain it. Now, if you need advice, my door’s always open. I know you’ve sat second chair plenty, but trying SVU cases firsthand can be brutal.” “I know you’re not really leaving, but it’s been fun working with you, Cabot,” said Williams, smiling. “We still on for drinks every other week?” Alex smiled back at him. “Always.”

“The defendant is a Colombian national with major ties to known drug organizations. He has unlimited resources at his disposal and we consider him a flight risk. We request remand, your honor.”

Alex walked down the green halls of the precinct and knocked on Cragen’s door. “Come in,” he called. She gingerly stepped inside. “I’m really here to speak to your detectives, but I figured I should also say something to you. I’m sure you’ve been informed by now that I’m leaving.” He sighed. “Both officially and unofficially. I’ve been bracing myself since Olivia told me a few months ago.”
Alex nodded slowly. “Then I suppose I should tell you that the Zapata case will be the last case I try for SVU.”

Cragen looked at his desk sadly. “I know it’s for the best, but I’m going to miss you, Alex.”
“Don, I’ll still be around,” she said gently.
“I’ll see you personally, but Alex, you’re a hell of an ADA. Professionally, you’re one of the best things to ever happen to this unit,” he told her.
She smiled weakly. “Thank you.”

Turning quickly, she walked out of the office while a despondent Captain Cragen watched her leave.

“Well, in Petrovsky’s continued quest to make my life a living hell, she has ordered me to produce the confidential informant who provided the tip for our search warrant,” announced Alex.
“No way, not happening,” Elliot shot back.
Alex frowned. “Your informant would only have to talk to the judge in chambers. No one else would be present.” Well, I’m not going to miss Elliot cluttering up my cases with his feelings, that’s for sure.
“No good, Alex,” he replied.

“Elliot, it’s going to have to be,” she said firmly. “I put my neck on the line for you two people. I would like it back.”
“He could lose his job, worst case, he could get killed,” said Olivia, jumping in.
“Well, he should have thought about that before he talked to you,” said Alex, softening her tone slightly. “Who is he?”

Elliot and Olivia exchanged glances. This was not going to be fun.

“You can’t threaten me, bitch.”
“I just did.”

“We’re going.” Granger said nonchalantly.
Zapata remained seated. “You allow this? A woman says these things and you do nothing?” Rafael Zapata reminded Alex of the cold contempt she’d once had for the majority of the male sex. He clearly thought of women as objects, things to be used and abused. She was going to enjoy putting this one away. A sweet ending to her Special Victims days indeed.

She stood, self-satisfied. “Yes, Mr. Zapata. You will also find that a woman can say whatever she wants to about your performance in the bedroom and you aren’t actually allowed to kill her.”

Zapata sprang at her, eyes flashing dangerously. She jumped back. For the first time in ages, she’d actually, genuinely felt fear.

A collection of shocked, silent law enforcement officials sat around the table. Agent Donovan started the tape.
“Hey, how’s my girlfriend?”
“Good, very good.”
“Second guy’s an inmate incarcerated at a federal penitentiary in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania,” explained Donovan. “One of Cesar Velez’s guys. This call was recorded six hours ago. We haven’t yet identified the other man.”
“I’m gonna pick her up, maybe this week,” the tape continued. “All right, she’s living at 235 West 78th,” replied the other man. “Apartment C like Charlie. Gets home around 8:00.”

Alex and Olivia traded shocked glances. “That’s my address.” “Son of a bitch,” muttered Elliot.

“You could go jogging with her,” the man continued. “Central Park.”

Our route, thought both women.

“I was thinking I could visit her mother.”

Alex braced her head on her hands.

“That’s an idea. Mom lives Upstate, East Amherst.”

*That’s her mother’s address.*

“Oh my god,” said Alex. “How do they know this?”

She had so many unanswered questions. Why her mother, and not her father? Why hadn’t they said anything about Olivia? Donovan kept speaking, but Alex couldn’t really hear anything.

“Okay, so as of now, we get a protective detail,” said Olivia, the gears churning in her brain. “You step foot outside, you have an armed escort.”

“We’re gonna have to rig a security system at the office and the apartment,” joined in Elliot.

“Federal Marshall’s already lined up to escort you, should be here within the hour,” said Donovan softly.

The terror she’d felt earlier that day hit her again, and she began to panic. “No, I wanna go home now.”

“Okay,” replied Olivia. “We’ll take you.”

For Alex’s sake, she hid the fear lurking in her own eyes.

- 

“Alex, why don’t you stay with me tonight while we figure this whole thing out?” pressed Olivia.

“No, I’ll be okay,” replied Alex. “But thanks.” *We need to finish packing up my place anyway.*

- 

Olivia returned with coffee. One sugar, Alex knew.

“Hey, come on, let’s go.”

She continued to stare vaguely at the wreck of Donovan’s car.

“Alex, you couldn’t have done anything differently,” soothed Olivia. “Donovan made a choice.”

“We all did,” said Alex.

*I’ve put you in danger. I’ve put you in danger and I’ll never forgive myself.*

- 

“Alex, there’s no reason for you to die for this case,” pleaded Olivia.

“Men like Velez and Zapata live on other people’s fear,” she replied. “It doesn’t matter if I try this case or somebody else in my office does, the intimidation is always there. So I can either accept it as a part of my job or…concede everything.”

*You may be doing just that,* thought Cragen. *Alex, for the love of god, please don’t do this.*
Olivia and Alex walked arm in arm towards the restaurant.
“I’m so glad this is over,” murmured Olivia.
“To tell you the truth, I’m still terrified. You didn’t see the look Zapata gave me in court,”
confessed Alex. “Well, what’s one more reason for insomnia?”
“At least you haven’t started smoking again,” offered Olivia.
“Thank god for small favors,” said Alex feebly. “Or big favors, considering that my first day in
narcotics is tomorrow.”
“And that you’re officially moved out in three days,” said Olivia.

Alex sighed. “Do you mind if we wait a week before going public? It’s not that I don’t want to, it’s
just that after this case, I need a mental reprieve.”
Olivia smiled at her. “I’ve waited this long, what’s one more week?”

They broke their link and filed inside to meet the other detectives.

“Get you a cab?” Elliot offered.
“No, I’m not far, I’ll walk,” said Alex, answering for the both of them. “Look, I’m sorry I’m such a
buzzkill.”
“Oh, don’t be silly,” said Olivia.

They never saw the gun. Shots fired and Elliot and Olivia ducked. Elliot sprang up to chase after
the SUV and Olivia turned back.

Her heart shattered.

“Alex!”

Their ADA, her girlfriend, the love of her life, had been shot in the shoulder. Her face was
spattered with blood. She was unresponsive.

“No, no no no no no, no no no no no, no,” Olivia blathered. “Somebody, call an ambulance! Call 911
now!”
“Alex, it’s okay Alex,” she whimpered. She squeezed the blonde’s shoulder, trying to do
something, anything. “Alex, look at me, it’s okay sweetie, stay with me, stay with me, stay with
me Alex. They’re coming right now, you’re gonna be okay.”
Blood gushed through Olivia’s fingers. “Alex, you’re gonna be okay. Look at me, you’re gonna be
just fine, you’re gonna be just fine, now stay with me.”
You can’t die, Alex.
You can’t.
I love you too much.

“Alex, Alex, Alex, Alex, it’s okay.”

Alex stared into Olivia’s eyes until her lids finally fell shut.

The doctor finally exited the operating room. Olivia sprang to her feet, while Elliot stayed on the
bench, his arms braced on his knees.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “She didn’t make it.”

“No!” Olivia screamed. Her knees buckled.
Elliot jumped up to catch her as she fell. She clutched his shoulders and sobbed, burying her head in his chest.
“Not like this,” she choked.

- 
Alexandra Cabot finally opened her eyes.

She glanced over at the clock. 3:00 a.m. *Where the hell am I?*
Looking over, she saw a woman sitting in a chair next to her bed. *In the hospital? What happened?*

The woman sighed. “Well, I hoped the next time I saw you, we’d be coworkers.”

Alex remembered. *Claudia Williams.*

- 
“You have to let me tell Detectives Benson and Stabler!”
“Miss Cabot, your life is in grave danger.”
“And I will not enter the program unless you let me speak to them. At the very least, let me talk to Benson!”
“And why should we do that?”
“Because I love her, goddammit.”

Alex was on the verge of tears. Hammond and Williams traded looks.

- 
“Rafael Zapata Gaviria was found dead in a holding cell awaiting a hearing, no witnesses,” spat Cragen.
“There goes Velez’s extradition,” said Fin bitterly. *Please don’t say his name.*
“I long for the old days when the government would just send in the Delta Force Assassination squad,” said Munch. For the first time in ages, no one thought he was joking.

“DEA Agent Hammond wants to see you guys tonight,” said Cragen, handing Olivia a blue slip of paper. “There’s the address.”
*Does he really need to rub salt in my wounds?*
“What for?” asked Elliot sharply.
“Something about closing out the case.”

Olivia stared hard at the paper. *Why are we going here?*

- 
Elliot drove. Olivia had been too much of a wreck to do anything. He’d only slept three hours since the shooting, but she hadn’t slept at all. She’d spent the entire ride with her face fixed in a deadened stare.
“Nice location, convenient,” he remarked, trying to distract Olivia.
“Sorry, only way to do this,” replied Hammond.
“Do what?” asked Olivia.
“Wouldn’t take no for an answer, real pain in the ass this one,” he muttered.

They approached a black SUV surrounded by armed agents. Someone opened a door.
Out stepped a harried, exhausted Alex Cabot.

No. Olivia felt her eyes welling up. *You're still alive. You're still alive, thank god. Alex.*

“I am so sorry about all of this,” Alex whispered hoarsely to Olivia. Olivia could no longer hold back her tears. “Your funeral’s tomorrow,” she croaked. “And you’re both expected to attend,” admonished Hammond. “For the time being, Miss Cabot’s better off dead.”

Was this hope? Olivia didn’t believe in destiny, but this screamed of fate giving her a second chance. *I will wait for you, no matter how long it takes.* Alex glanced away, trying to hide her own tears. *I know.* “If Velez can get to Zapata, he can get to her.” “Witness protection,” said Elliot, finally understanding. “Until Velez is extradited or…otherwise dealt with,” she replied.

Pain shot through Olivia in thick, white bolts. “How long?” Alex couldn’t answer. *I love you, Olivia.* *I love you too, Alex.*

Alex nodded. “We’re on the move,” said someone, somewhere. Guided by instinct, Olivia tried to follow. Alex smiled faintly at her from the car. *It’s going to be okay.*

Benson and Stabler watched the line of cars holding Alexandra Cabot disappear into the distance. “Like hell it is,” sobbed Olivia finally.

For the second time in twenty-four hours, Olivia broke down.

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It was a grand funeral, the best that money could buy. Both Margaret and Alexander Cabot sat in the front row, reunited by their daughter’s death. Charlie Cabot wrapped an arm around his openly weeping mother, his own face wrought with grief. Trevor Langan was there, as were Dan Williams, Serena Southerlyn, Liz Donnelly, and Arthur Branch, as well as other names from the DA’s office he couldn’t place. Even Judge Petrovsky was there. All of SVU had turned out in their finest.

All except for one.

“I can’t believe this, where is she?” muttered Fin. “They were best friends,” said Munch. “This isn’t like Olivia.” Cragen exchanged a look with Elliot. “I think it’s time you all knew the truth,” said the captain. “Huh?” said Fin. Elliot’s eyes widened. But it wasn’t like there was any harm in it. The damage had already been done. Alex was legally dead.

“They were more than best friends,” said Elliot carefully. “They were in a relationship.” Munch and Fin looked at each other, eyes wide. “Well, I’m surprised, but not shocked,” said Fin. “I did have my suspicions,” said Munch gloomily. “They were in love,” continued Elliot, rambling. “They were moving in together. Alex was leaving
the bureau so they could announce their relationship.”

Now Munch and Fin were stunned. Cragen nodded along with Elliot’s speech. 
“I think,” began Elliot, “I think Olivia was going to ask Alex to marry her. Or something like it.”
“What?!” said Munch.
Fin’s jaw dropped.
Cragen nearly fell out of the pew.

“That’s why she’s not here,” Elliot rasped. “She can’t watch Alex die all over again.”

-

Olivia woke bright and early. She laced up her shoes and headed out to run the normal loop around Central Park. Instead, she turned, heading for Riverside. She tore through the park, feeling the fire consume her legs, her lungs, and her heart. She couldn’t see the other joggers or smell the dirty water or hear the boats. Everything faded into a distant dream.

Olivia ran. She ran hard and fast until her chest hurt with physical pain, something to replace the emotional anguish that kept her up all night and would likely keep her awake for the next year, if not the rest of the life.

She ran to mask the pain that would remain rooted in her soul until Alex came back to life.

Olivia staggered towards the pier and threw up.
At 5:00 in the morning, Olivia padded up the steps to Alex’s apartment – what would have been Alex’s old apartment. She wasn’t exactly paying close attention (she hadn’t slept for three days), but she had her gun and her instincts and that was enough to protect herself if need be. Olivia placed the key in the lock and quietly opened the door.

The furniture was still in its usual position, but everything else had been crammed into boxes and suitcases, prepared for the move across the park. Olivia wanted to put all the boxes into storage, to save everything so that Alex could come back to familiar sights and smells, but that would arouse suspicion. Instead, she found the packing tape next to the three boxes of things marked “To Sell” and fixed her very own cardboard vessel, ready to carry out the memories she couldn’t let go.

She found Alex’s soft blue sleep shirt, her favorite suit and the red dress – god, it was painful to look at it now, but she knew Alex would want these back. She couldn’t find the golden pendant and hoped Alex had taken it with her, or at least that someone in witness protection had thought to hold onto it. Groping under the bed, she found the photo album Alex had created of the two of them resting on top of a box she had never seen.

Curiosity got the better of her. Olivia pulled off the lid to discover a pile of other photo collections. She examined a picture of what looked like Alex and Langan in law school, studying hard in the library. Langan seemed oblivious to the photographer, but Alex glared hard at the camera. Flipping through another album, Olivia found pictures of Alex from college, wearing a hairstyle she didn’t recognize. Could her hair really hold a wave like that? It was different, but it was still gorgeous. Olivia’s hand caught what felt like plastic, and she frowned. She tugged and removed a ziplock bag, containing a hospital bracelet with the name “Cabot, Alexandra” and the date “06/29/95.”

From the suicide attempt, realized Olivia, her gut sinking. She caught sight of a slip of paper beneath the final album and lifted it to find more keepsakes, birthday cards and letters and a note. “Dinner tonight, my place, 7:30? I promise this isn’t all I got you. Didn’t want to send anything too flashy, figured the office would ask questions. See you then. XO, Olivia.”

Olivia knew Alex had been a meticulous record keeper (she color-coordinated her calendar and kept three separate copies), but she hadn’t known about this. Alex had saved everything.

Olivia dumped the albums and notes into her own cardboard box. She placed the final photo album on top, the one that told the story of their relationship. It was time for it to join its rightful place on its mantle, next to the picture of Alex and Olivia in Riverside Park looking so painfully in love.

“And what, they deliver the baby themselves?” asked the captain.
“Well, they give it the old college try, but things go south,” explained Munch. “First the mother dies, then the baby.”
“Which goes down the sewer along with their dreams,” Fin concluded.
Cragen gave Fin a look. “That’s pretty out there. Let’s run this by Warner, see if any of it floats.”

He headed over to talk to another pair of detectives.
“Olivia, got a minute?” asked Munch.
She jumped. “Yeah, what’s up?”
“I’ll get the car,” said Elliot, heading out.
Munch perched on the edge of Fin’s desk, nodding for Olivia to come closer. “What’s going on?” she asked worriedly. She couldn’t handle more bad news. Not right now. Munch sighed. “Elliot told us the truth about you and Cabot at her funeral.” “I know it’s none of our business, but we want to make sure you’re getting by,” said Fin.

Olivia wasn’t shocked or even phased. In fact, she was relieved. “Well, I can’t say I’ve been sleeping particularly well, but I’ve learned to embrace the taste of coffee,” she admitted. “If you need anything, you let us know,” said Munch softly. Fin nodded. “We’re here for you.”

Olivia stared at Fin. “I thought you were, uh –” “Homophobic?” he offered. Olivia winced. “I grew up in the hood and there was a big stigma attached to it. Working narcotics didn’t help me any; drug dealers prey on gay men because they’re easy pickings,” began Fin. “But working here has changed a lot of the way I see things. And right now, I’m more worried about how you are than who you are.” Olivia smiled faintly. “Thanks. Elliot’s waiting, I’ve got to go.”

She grabbed her jacket and headed for the elevator. “You think she’s gonna be okay?” Fin asked. “Olivia’s made of tougher stuff than anyone in this unit,” replied Munch. “She’ll make it.”

Casey Novak walked into her office with her usual cocksure cheer; it had been yet another good day in court for white collar’s youngest and most successful ADA. “Alright, day’s over ladies, time to hit the bar.”

She was greeted by five somber faces huddled around her desk. “Am I missing something?” asked Casey. Nicole sighed deeply. “Yeah, us.” “Wait, what the hell’s going on?” said Casey, dropping her briefcase in a stray chair.

Erin handed her a piece of paper. “Effective starting tomorrow. Man, I wouldn’t want to be you right now.” Casey snatched the paper out of Erin’s hand. She couldn’t be fired; the DA would have called her in personally, even if she had been in court all day. She scanned the memo and practically snarled, zeroing in on the only words that really mattered. Transferred. Special Victims Bureau.

“Okay,” she said hotly, “now I really need a drink.”

Olivia opened a small black case to discover a collection of chemicals inside. “Did your husband ever bring his work home with him?” she asked. “No!” Mrs. Wolcott replied defensively. Olivia held up a bottle. “No, then what’re these?” Mrs. Wolcott stared at it. “I don’t know.”

“Look like pharmaceuticals to me. It’s in the warrant, bag it.”
Wait, what? Some commanding redheaded woman in a suit had magically appeared next to Olivia, and the detective didn’t like her attitude.
“Who the hell are you?” she asked.
“That’s our new ADA!” cried Elliot. “Casey Novak, Olivia Benson. Olivia, this is Casey.”

New ADA? But Alex is our ADA.

Shit, she really had to stop thinking that.

- Elliot popped out of the interrogation room. “Where’s Cragen?”
“I dunno,” said Novak
He slammed the door to the hall. “Then you don’t interrupt me when I’m in there with a perp. You stand here, you watch through this one way, you see where we are!”
“Where we are is three months past the five-year statute of limitations,” she countered loudly. “We can’t touch him!”

“I know that. He’s technically not under arrest,” replied Elliot angrily.
“Then why is he in there?” asked Novak, also irate.
“He’s a person of special interest in a string of other cases,” Elliot said quickly.
“Which ones?” she spat.

Elliot spun around. “That’s what we’re trying to find out!”
“By the book?” she said sternly.

Elliot stared at her, suddenly at a loss for words. She hadn’t flinched, and she hadn’t backed down. Maybe she could cut it in this unit.
At least she wasn’t another Alex Cabot.

- Olivia stormed into the DA’s office, guided by rage. It didn’t take long for someone to point her in the direction of Novak’s office; she was apparently pretty popular around here. Why? Olivia had no clue. She found an open door and an ADA sitting on her couch.

“Could you have been any tougher on that little girl, like she hasn’t already been traumatized enough?” Olivia accused.
A tearful Casey looked up at her. “I’m sorry.”

Olivia hadn’t expected this at all. I’ve completely forgotten what it’s like to be new in SVU. Suddenly, she felt very guilty.
“Nobody thinks that they can do this at first,” she lied. Alex did.
“I wanted straight homicides, you know,” Casey confessed. “All the glory, no living victims.”
“Lesson number one: nobody can handle the children,” advised Olivia.
“How do you?” asked Casey.
Olivia paused in thought. “Well, I’m not gonna lie to you, it doesn’t get easier.”

“All this sickness and perversion,” remarked Casey. “I mean, what do you say to your boyfriend when you go home at night?”
“I don’t actually have one,” Olivia said quickly. She’s currently buried in a grave that I’ll never find. And I didn’t have to say anything to her. She knew. She understood.
“Because of the job?” Casey guessed.
Casey chuckled emptily. “It’s not exactly dinner conversation.”
“No. The ones that don’t pull away immediately, uh, lean in, way too interested, wanting to hear all the sick, twisted details.” At least, I think that’s what they’d do. “And, um, either way, it’s always a last date.”

“Must be easier for the male detectives,” Casey said. Thank god, she’s moving on.
“Well, let’s see,” said Olivia, thinking. “Fin never talks about his love life at work, and Elliot doesn’t talk about work at home, and, and Munch has just given up.”
“Then why do you guys do it?” Casey asked with genuine concern.

It hit Olivia out of nowhere. Because I found love and family through this job. I found a way to absolve my mother’s rape, to come to terms with who I am and finally discover someone who loves me despite my baggage. And until she comes home safe, I have to wait for her. I can’t leave, no matter how much I want to run.
“Because somebody has to.”

She patted Casey on the arm and bolted. Already, she could feel the tears welling up. It was time again to grieve for Alexandra Cabot.

Casey watched her go with interest.

-  

Maybe she wasn’t a cop, and maybe they didn’t respect her, but she could at least do something. Novak bolted for the cooler and threw it open.
“Courtney!”

“Elliot!” yelled Olivia. “Elliot, Casey’s got her, she was in the cooler, come on.”
The detective ran up to the new ADA. “She okay?”
“She’s alive,” offered Casey.

Olivia looked over poor Courtney. “Okay. She watched as Novak headed back towards solid ground, carrying the girl to safety.

So she wasn’t Alex. She was a fiery redhead with gumption and bluster, willing to jump into a fight at first provocation, and she didn’t back down. The opposite of cool, collected Alex, who was thoughtful but never willing to go into the courtroom without seeing everyone’s hand. But nobody in the world could be Alex, either in the courtroom or the bedroom. And something in Olivia’s gut told her that the powers that be in the DA’s office had made the right decision when they thrust Casey Novak unceremoniously on SVU.

She didn’t have to release her hold on Alex the girlfriend, but she did have to let go of Alex the prosecutor. They had to let Casey in.

Eventually.

-  

Casey knocked on Branch’s office door and opened it without waiting for an answer.
“Got a minute?”
He smiled at her. “When you rescue a little girl, you get two. Have a seat.”
She remained standing. “I can’t do it.”
“Sure you can. Just bend your knees and let gravity take over,” joked Branch.
She tried to smile. “That’s not what I’m talking about.”
“I know,” he replied quietly.

“I want out,” she pressed.
“Why? When you’ve got a slam dunk in your very first case,” remarked Branch.
She looked away, trying to mask her pain. Finally, she sat. “I can’t let go of what that little girl went through.”
Branch leaned back. “I was watching you for this job when you were in white collar. Knew you were tough, but weren’t sure you were the right person.”
“I’m not,” said Casey.
“The fact that it affects you like this tells me my first instincts were right,” said Branch.

“What are you talking about?” she asked, confused.
“This case was the ultimate test,” he told her. “And you passed with flying colors.”
“But I don’t want it.”
Branch stood. “You will.”

He turned away and she studied him sadly. So, this had been her calling all along. She’d known that Cabot was transferring to narcotics. Even if the former SVU ADA had still been alive, she’d still be here. And there was nothing she could do to change that.

She left Branch’s office and closed the door. At least she’d always been good at playing to win with the hand she was dealt.
After two weeks of constant motion, the DEA and witness protection had finally installed Alex in a quiet, sleepy town that was called Nowhere, Wisconsin, as far as Alex was concerned. Though, she was no longer Alex; she was a transplant from Oklahoma who was looking for work in insurance after leaving her job as a paralegal back home. For the first time in her life, she owned a car, a beat-up Honda that had seen better days but ran like a dream. She had no siblings and both of her parents had died in a car crash last year, and her name was Emily Roberts. She was about as ordinary as you could get.

Still, she wasn’t actually ordinary. She had no pictures in her new home, no credit card receipts and no real records of any sort of past. Ordinary people didn’t sleep with the lights on every night, and ordinary people actually slept rather than waking every twenty minutes out of fear.

Ordinary people didn’t have the healing remains of a massive bullet wound in their shoulder, something which the doctors warned her would heal, but scar.

Agent Hammond drove off after saying something to her that she didn’t really hear, and for the first time in days, she was truly alone. At a loss for what to do, she got in her car and sat there for a moment. Finally, she turned the ignition and headed to the drug store they’d passed on her way here, surprised she’d even remembered it. The DEA had stocked the house with groceries, but they’d forgotten something else she needed.

She returned home and installed herself on the back porch, letting the cool air of the Wisconsin night wrap around her. She smoked cigarettes until the sun rose, not moving even once.

-  

Elliot loaded Adam Forbes into the back of the ambulance while Olivia spoke with the EMT. “Looks fine, probably just dirty and hungry,” she said. “We’ll check him out just in case. You have a number for the parents so we can let them know?”

Olivia pulled out a notepad and scrawled something down. “Mother and Father’s homes and cells. I’ll warn you now, they’re in the middle of a bitter custody battle.”

“Good to know,” said the EMT, snatching up the paper. “Thanks.”

Elliot dropped down from the bus. “Seems like he’s gonna be okay.”

“Thank god,” said Olivia, watching the EMTs close up. “I’ll call Cabot, let her know that –”

She stopped, mid-sentence, floundering.

“Force of habit,” Elliot said kindly, squeezing her arm.

“Yeah,” said Olivia slowly.

Elliot frowned at her. “Hey, you okay?”

“I’m fine,” said Olivia, shaking her head. “Do you have Novak’s number?”

“Nah, but the captain will,” replied Elliot.

-  

Cragen eased open the door to the adjacent batting cage, eyeing their new ADA. She was the picture of concentration, hammering ball after ball into the back net. Well, this is certainly different.

“Boy, you’ve got some pop in that bat,” he offered.
She turned in surprise, then directed her focus back towards the pitching machine. “But you didn’t come all the way here to watch me swing.”
“I need you to plead Kevin Walker out,” said the captain.
“Why’s that?” she asked.
The captain looked down. “I can’t tell you.”

She frowned. God, she hated this new assignment. “Oh, well, I don’t really need to know anyway, do I?”
“You’re an officer of the court,” said Cragen.
Casey slammed another ball away. “And you don’t want whatever happened going on the record,” she concluded. “I don’t know your detective, and I don’t know you.”

Cragen nodded, thinking hard. “When you worked felonies, you had a different cop every case, right?”
“Yeah, so?” she replied.
“Special Victims, it’s just us,” he said. “We gotta trust each other.”
She spun around to him, mouth open. “You’re asking for a hell of a lot of trust.”
“Either way, Kevin Walker goes somewhere he can’t hurt anybody. You take him to trial, a good detective loses his credibility as a cop. He’ll never be able to testify in open court again.”

*I’m guessing Stabler,* she thought.
“His only choices will be to quit, or finish his career in the property clerk’s office,” concluded Cragen.
She stared him down. “What this detective did was necessary?”
“Under the circumstances, I can’t say I would have done any different,” Cragen answered honestly.
“Can you assure me the defendant wasn’t hurt and I’m not gonna get my ass kicked in court on a technicality?” she asked.
“Yes,” said Cragen.

Casey sighed. She put her helmet back on and stepped up to the plate.
“You’re stuck with us for at least six months,” called Cragen. “We might as well try and get along.”
“I know,” she replied. “I already spoke to Branch.”
Cragen stared at her. “Wow, you are different.”
She whipped her head back, glaring at him. “You mean I’m not Alex Cabot.”

Cragen winced. “Yeah, that’s exactly what I mean.”
“Then can you tell your detectives they’re wasting their time hating me?”
Cragen frowned. “Even Stabler? He and Cabot really didn’t get along. I figured he’d be happy to see someone new.”
Casey smacked another ball across the cage. She hadn’t known that. She’d thought Cabot had been revered by the detectives. Curious.
“And maybe you should ask Jennifer who she shared that romantic bottle of wine with,” said the captain, pointing at Olivia.

Olivia sighed, watching him walk out into the hallway. “Why me?” she groaned.
“A woman’s touch?” guessed Munch. “Clearly he’s trying to take advantage of your prowess with the ladies.”
Olivia gave him a nasty glare. “I knew you all would give me a hard time if I came out.”
“Just don’t listen to anything Munch says,” advised Fin. “I sure as hell don’t.”

Casey hurried down the street, flanked by the two detectives.
“You made a deal with that idiot?” asked Elliot incredulously.
So much for making friends. “I take him to trial, I’m not sure I’d win.”
“So what’ll it take to convince you? Broken bones, or maybe a dead body?” said Olivia harshly.
“Jennifer Fulton didn’t exactly help her case by fingering the wrong guy,” countered Casey.

“So now rape victims have to be perfect before you’ll bother to prosecute the rapist?” accused Olivia.
“I prosecute cases I have a chance at winning,” explained Casey.
“Well hang around, because you’ll be prosecuting him for murder,” replied Elliot. “The number one cause of death among pregnant women is homicide, usually at the hands of their partners.”
“Okay, Craig Fulton goes within two hundred yards of Jennifer, he’s in jail,” Casey began.
“Oh great, that’ll stop him,” spat Olivia. “Let’s go give her the good news.”

The two detectives headed for the squad car.
“Man, I want to like her, but she’s not making it easy,” said Elliot.
Olivia glared at him. “Well, I don’t.”
“Olivia, come on, we have to work with her,” he said. “I did some digging, she’s tough as balls and has an amazing conviction rate. Once she gets used to SVU cases, we’ll be damn lucky to have her.”
“I know,” sighed Olivia. “I know I have to let go, it’s just easier to do in theory than it is in practice.”

Olivia had been lying in bed for almost two hours now, but the insomnia persisted. It wasn’t like she and Alex had spent every night together, but it was still hard to get used to sleeping alone.

She couldn’t decide which was worse, the insomnia or the nightmares. True, the lack of sleep made it harder to do her job, but the nightmares were so vivid that she often awoke in tears. She kept considering asking Huang for a recommendation, find someone to go see, but that would be admitting this was getting to her. For her own sake, she needed to feel like she was the more powerful actor in the gut-wrenching battle against this loss.

The phone rang, a welcome distraction.
“Hello? Yeah, yeah, it’s me. He did what?”
“I’m an assistant district attorney, I can’t fight this for you,” explained Casey. “But I can recommend someone who will: Lorna Scarry.”
Olivia frowned. “I thought she only handled Wall Street embezzlers.”
“Eh, she resolves her conscience by doing pro bono work for women’s groups,” replied Casey. “I’ve been up against her twice. She wiped the floor with me both times.”

Olivia raised her eyebrows. “With your conviction rate, she must me good.”
Casey grinned. “I see the facts in evidence have hit the precinct. Let me make a phone call to Scarry, see what I can do.”

Ten minutes later, Jennifer Fulton rushed off breathing a sigh of relief.
“I’d go with her, but I have a job to do,” said Olivia, sighing. “I’ll see you later.”
“Benson, hold up,” called Casey.
Olivia turned around. “What?”

Casey sighed. “Look, I know you don’t like me. I’m new to this job, and I’m not used to it, and I keep making mistakes. But I’m trying, and I think it’ll be a lot easier on everyone if we can agree to put aside our personal feelings.”
Olivia deflated a bit. “Casey, I’m sorry. Alex and I were close, and, uh, I know that’s what the issue is.” That’s the understatement of the century.
“I don’t want to replace Alex Cabot, I can’t,” said Casey. “But this was going to be my job anyway, after she transferred, and I’m going to make the best of it. I know you won’t hesitate to tell me when I’ve screwed up, but I’d really appreciate it if you didn’t go for my throat every time.”

Had she really been that big of a bitch? She thought back to what Elliot had said in the car and concluded that yes, she’d been a gigantic jerk to Novak simply because she wasn’t who Olivia wanted. In fact, Olivia wasn’t used to confrontation like this, mostly because of Alex who’d always beat around the bush.
“Okay,” said Olivia. “I’ll give you a shot.”
Casey smirked. “That’s all I’m asking for.”

“How? Alcoholism is a disease, it’s not just something that can be switched on and off,” cautioned Casey.
She didn’t know it, but ADA Casey Novak had just scored several points with Detective Olivia Benson.
Tossing aside the sheets, Olivia ran her hands over the mattress. “There’s no blood,” she announced. “Doesn’t look like James Reed was killed at his apartment” Elliot nicked a few papers off James’ desk and looked them over. “A syllabus for a clinical psych class, Hudson University. Looks like he was going for his master’s.”

Olivia found a stack of photos from a desk drawer and smiled. It reminded her of the discovery she’d made in Alex’s place a few weeks back. “Me and Phil, Thousand Islands, June ’03,” she read, showing Elliot the picture. “They’re happy.” “Unless Phil’s the one he spent his last night with,” said Elliot, examining the photo for himself. “Look at this: four letters from Derek Singer, all unopened. I guess he was telling the truth.”

“Those two were depressing,” scoffed Olivia. “Trying to convince themselves and everybody else that they’re happy.” “Maybe they are,” offered Elliot. “Elliot, you can’t tell me that repressing your sexual desires makes a gay person a good Christian,” she replied. “I dunno, maybe some people choose to be gay, others choose to be straight,” Elliot said, shrugging.

Did he have any idea how insensitive and narrow-minded he was being? “Oh, so you chose to be heterosexual,” Olivia shot back. Somewhere, Elliot realized he’d struck a nerve. “Me? No.”

“A bunch of people left before we got their names,” said Fin, walking towards Munch’s desk. “But, we do have their pictures,” offered Munch. He held up a large, expensive camera, trying hard to contain his satisfaction.

“Where the hell is that from?” asked a concerned Cragen. “One of Reverend Shaw’s church members,” Munch answered smugly. “He must have left it behind.” Novak grinned at him. “I didn’t hear that.” “Get it back to him, John,” said Cragen. “I’ll be happy too. I’ll even develop his film for free,” Munch offered generously. “Show the pictures to the people you talked to at Reed’s funeral. Maybe they can help ID the ones that got away.” The captain stalked off, shaking his head.

“Awfully nice of Novak to look the other way for you,” said Elliot. “I like her,” said Munch, “she’s got a feisty attitude, like me.” “Feisty ain’t the word I’d use for it,” said Fin. “Yeah,” said Olivia thoughtfully, “she’s not so bad.”

The other three detectives whipped their heads around, fixing Olivia with a surprised stare. She looked back at them, confused. “What’d I say?”

Every morning, Casey Novak packed up her bike and zipped off through the Manhattan streets to work. It wasn’t a far ride from her place to the courthouse, and if she needed to go anywhere else
(say the DA’s office or the precinct), she could always take the subway or hop back on her bike. She’d never owned a car – she’d never been able to afford one – and the bike saved her a lot of money on gas and a gym membership. Plus, it was a nice distraction; she couldn’t think about cases when she was trying to avoid being hit by cars.

She’d been the butt of a fair few jokes for her persistent commitment to the bicycle. “She rides her bike to work. That is so... environmentally conscious.” However, she’d learned to ignore them all by now.

- 

A drained Casey stalked through the doors to the precinct, walking straight past Olivia. “Hey, how’d it go with Tate?” the detective asked. “Jurors eight and ten believe him,” replied Casey sourly. “Enough to hang the jury?” said Olivia. “Maybe,” said Casey. “In which case, all I’ve done is out some poor kid. Not exactly my favorite legal strategy.” “You didn’t have a choice,” consoled Stabler.

She rested her briefcase on Elliot’s desk. “You’ve got kids. You ever wonder if one’s gay?” He looked back at her, shocked. Yeah, she really cuts to the chase, this one. “I don’t know, I haven’t asked.” “Elliot, you know your kids, you’d know if one of them was gay,” replied Olivia. My mother certainly wasn’t surprised. “Exactly,” said Casey. “And Tate’s whole defense is predicated on the fact that he never suspected his son was gay.” “You don’t buy it,” guessed Olivia.

“No, but I can’t prove it,” said Casey, frustrated. “Ian had a girlfriend all through high school. For all appearances, he was straight.” Olivia looked confused. “We never found a girlfriend when we were looking in Tate’s past.” “Cause we were looking for boyfriends,” said Elliot. “Well, if Ian knew all along that he was gay, I betcha that girlfriend did too.” Olivia replied. “Find out,” ordered Casey, turning to leave.

“Hey, hold up,” called Elliot. “It’s late and we’re meeting Munch and Fin for drinks in a bit. Do you want to tag along?” Casey looked over her shoulder, surprised. “Can my bike fit in your trunk?” Olivia and Elliot traded glances. “Depends,” he said, “how big’s your bike?” “If it’s too much of a hassle, I can just meet you there,” Casey offered. “Nah, we’ll make it work,” he said. “Let’s check it out.”

- 

“It’s so weird, you know.” Ian sat tensely on the bench, as if perched to take flight at any moment. Casey could tell he was still processing what had happened. “I’ve been sitting here for a while,” he continued, “and everybody who walks by, I wonder: does he know? Does she?”

Ian smiled at last. “James always used to talk about how happy he was that he was gay. He said guys were so much more fun.” “Yeah, I agree with James,” said Casey, laughing slightly.
“Everything’s different now,” said Ian. “You know? No matter what I do, nothing will be like it was before.”

She did know. She’d never had to deal with the emotional turmoil that came from understanding her sexuality, but she’d had to deal with some very difficult relationships in her life that had changed everything. It had nearly destroyed her, but it had also shaped and molded who she was as a person, and she would never regret that.

“Ian, I had my job to do, and I made you deal with something you weren’t ready for. I’m sorry,” she apologized.
He stood, finally seeming to relax. “Yeah, I’m not.”
Now that her arm was fully healed, Alex had finally landed a job doing the most boring thing she could think of: processing insurance claims. However, it was easy, quiet work that got her out of the house, and her new boss liked her due to the amount of overtime she put in. Her coworkers seemed nice, though she didn’t know them very well yet, and she had a knack for dealing with the legal mumbo-jumbo of the claims that impressed them.

Granted, the smoking was worse than it had been in years, and on the rare occasion that Alex did sleep, she’d have horrible nightmares. She’d taken to waking before the sun rose, because if she didn’t, she’d wake up in a panic, thinking she was back in a hospital bed. Her dreams not only included visions of her shooting, but of her suicide attempt, and the two had begun to blur in Alex’s mind.

Zapata was on top of her, trying to force the pills down her throat as she writhed, desperate to find any escape.

“Why won’t you die, bitch?!”

She tried to scream for Olivia, but choked.

She’d been told Zapata had been murdered, but she knew he wasn’t really dead; he’d just taken up residence in her mind.

-

Olivia stood, more than ready to leave the grubby hotel.

“Are you protecting her?” Elliot asked softly.

She stopped, turning back to him. “You think that I’m covering for Hillary?”

Elliot began pacing. “Where’d you drop her off?”

“At her mother’s,” Olivia replied, guarded.

“They’re estranged, remember?” he said grimly.

“Hillary wanted to talk to her,” Olivia countered.

“When’d you leave her there?” Elliot continued.

“A couple of hours ago, and I don’t need you interrogating me,” said a frustrated Olivia.

“Why didn’t you come back to the squad?” said Elliot, his voice rising.

“Because I had a hunch! I checked out five hotels and this one was number six.”

“Without backup?!” he shouted. *Do you care, Olivia? Do you care about your own safety anymore?* “What the hell’s the matter with you?”

You know what’s the matter, Stabler. Get out of my damn business. “Elliot, don’t start with me.”

“You’re outta control,” he admonished.

“I never had control in this one, remember? I lost my judgment.”

“Everyone makes mistakes,” replied Elliot. “Get over it.”

She stalked out, fuming. *Alex didn’t make a mistake. Alex was doing her job. And if you think I’m going to just “get over it,” you’re out of your mind.* They both knew full well that neither of them were talking about the case.

-

Olivia was overcome with anguish. She stepped over to her locker and began loading in her
possessions, still unable to look Elliot in the eye. Cragen and Elliot traded glances, each daring the other to intervene. Finally, the captain bit.

“What’s wrong?” he asked her.
She shook her head. “I can’t do this anymore.”
“It’s not your fault,” soothed Cragen.
She swallowed hard, trying not to cry. “One of those victims must have killed Gorman. And the worst part is, none of this would have happened if I would’ve just believed Hillary.”
“These are vulnerable women no one would believe,” Cragen replied. “You can’t control what other people do; there will always be perps and victims.”

“You think you need to tell me that?” she said quietly. “The only reason I’m standing here is because my mother let herself get raped.” And according to Elliot there, Alex Cabot ‘let herself’ get shot.
“Let herself? Since when do you blame the victim?” hissed the captain.
“My mother was drunk,” said Olivia, “and so was Hillary. And that’s why I didn’t believe her. Now these women are paying for it.”
“Okay, quit. Quit. Throw away the good you’ve done and the good you’ll do over one mistake,” challenged Cragen.

But he didn’t understand. This wasn’t just one mistake. She was trying, trying so hard to make through each day without losing it. She wanted to quit, so badly, to leave New York and chase down Alex and make all the pain go away.

These weren’t the rational thoughts of a normal person. She had to stay, she had to wait. And she should probably find some sort of healthy way to cope before she had a complete meltdown, but that was for another time. She dumped her books on top of the lockers and returned to her desk.

“-”

“You and your detectives should know better,” barked Petrovsky. “Juliet Barclay’s confession is out. My courtroom at ten for jury selection.”
Casey balked. She’d never even stepped foot in Petrovsky’s courtroom before, much less tried a case in there. What the hell had she ever done?
“Your honor, I –”

“-”

“Well, he’ll never torture another woman again, will he?” said Hillary, her eyes welling up.
Olivia and Casey looked at one another. She’s right.
“Hillary, uh, I’ll take you to Central Booking in the morning,” offered Olivia.

Hillary sat back down without answering. Suddenly, Olivia felt as if she really did want to just go home. She closed and locked the cage, returning their keys to their usual spot in Cragen’s office. When she went to get her own coat, Casey was still in the squad room.

“Elliot left and I didn’t want to walk out by myself,” she said, shrugging.
“I understand,” replied Olivia. “You headed to the subway?”
“Yep,” said Casey, “heading home for the evening, trying to figure out what the hell I’m gonna do about this case.”
“You’re not actually going to try her, are you?” asked Olivia.
Casey punched the button for the elevator. “I may not have a choice. Hopefully the DA will take a look at the evidence and decide that killing Gorman was a public service.”
Olivia’s heart sank. “I really screwed up with this one.”
“Dwelling on it isn’t going to make you feel any better,” advised Casey. “Maybe today’s news will
help, though.”
Olivia gave her a strange look. “What do you mean?”
Casey shrugged. “I guess shouldn’t assume anything, but I figure most people working Special
Victims should be a fan of equal rights. Massachusetts became the first state to legalize gay
marriage today.” She smiled. “I hope it brings Ian Tate some hope.”

Oh my god. And she’d almost bought the ring, too. She could feel the tears stinging in the corner
of her eyes.
“Woah, okay, that reaction wasn’t even on my radar,” remarked Casey.
Olivia had totally forgotten Casey was even there, but she couldn’t hide it now. “I don’t want to
talk about it,” she said quickly, wiping her eyes.
“Wasn’t gonna ask,” Casey replied.
Munch had just gotten into the precinct when the phone rang.
“Detective Munch, Special Victims Unit.”
“Munch, it’s Novak,” said Casey.
“Someone’s burning the midnight oil,” he remarked.
“Trust me, wasn’t my call,” she said. “Maddox pushed through some new evidence that had been previously unavailable in discovery.”

“Well, isn’t that convenient,” Munch scoffed.
“Security camera tapes from the bar just prior to his arrest,” continued Casey. “She’s claiming it proves emotional distress. It’s complete bull, but I’ve got to answer it. Are either you or Benson available to testify to his state of mind during the collar?”
Munch sighed. “Fin and I have to grab the Nolita rapist before he skips town, but hold on.”

He placed his hand over the other end of the receiver. “Hey Olivia, Casey needs one of us to go to an emergency hearing on the Yeager case. Think you can take the morning off of busting lowlifes?”

Olivia nodded rapidly. It gave her an excuse to avoid Elliot, who had been awkward since the Gorman case and the passage of gay marriage in Massachusetts. Plus, he still wasn’t happy that she’d turned him down for Thanksgiving this year.

“I’ll be there. When does she need me?”
Munch returned to the phone. “Olivia’s in.”
“Fantastic,” replied Casey. “Tell her to be here by nine.”

Casey left the courtroom to greet a waiting Elliot.
“Judge is gonna charge the jury after lunch, then hopefully it’ll be a quick verdict,” she said confidently. “I think they’re with us.”
“I’m telling you, you can’t tell with these cases,” cautioned Elliot.
“You preparing me for an acquittal?” she asked.
“I’ve worked enough battered kid cases to know giving birth doesn’t make you a mother, but juries? They believe what they need to believe.”

He turned his attention to his ringing cell phone. “Stabler.”
His face fell. “When?...okay, I’m here with Novak, I’ll tell her.”
“Tell me what?” asked Casey.
“Lucy just had a stroke,” Elliot said grimly. “They don’t think she’ll live.”

“Oh god,” said Novak, horrified.
Elliot sighed heavily. “If Lucy dies, it’s all on Evelyn.”
“And it completely alters the trial,” concluded Casey. “I was hoping we could grab lunch, but it looks like that’s out of the question.”
Elliot forced a smile. “We’ll do it another time. Besides, I’m not that entertaining anyway.”
“Come on, I was hoping to hear stories from your Thanksgiving,” she ribbed. “I’m the youngest of four kids, it’d be like a trip down memory lane. Though I suppose you can tell me on the way to the hospital.”

He frowned. “What do you mean?”
“We’ve got almost two hours for lunch. I’m coming with you,” Casey replied matter-of-factly.
It was unexpected, but nice. He got to trade his story about Lizzie’s beyond-burnt asparagus and subsequent meltdown with her tale of the year one of her brothers had been completely stoned the entire dinner. It was nice to focus on the fun parts of the meal and avoid the empty feeling he’d had, the sensation that something or someone was missing from the Stabler family table.

Casey opened the door to Cragen’s office, zeroing in on Elliot.
“Why’d you go over my head?” she asked sternly.
Well, at least she’s not yelling yet. “I’m trying to do what’s right for that child.”

She closed the door behind her. “So am I. But it’s my case now and it’s my choice, not yours, okay? You should’ve come to me first.”
“I apologize, you’re right,” he said quickly, relieved. “You have every right to be pissed at me.”

He looked her over. “Now, you tell me, do you think it’s wrong to stop life support?”
“I’m not a mother,” she replied plainly. “I don’t know what I’d do if she were my child.”
“Welcome to Special Victims,” said Cragen. “It’s not always black and white.”

Maybe not, thought Casey, but I’ve begun to think it’s more interesting that way. White collar had no hard questions; the why was always second to the what. But SVU had cases that made her brain hum, that gave her the thrill of trying to solve puzzles with missing pieces. And it wasn’t just the cases that had secrets. The detectives did as well, and Casey was ever so curious to find out what sort of mess this place contained. She’d respected and been intrigued by Alex Cabot, an excellent prosecutor with an air of mystery surrounding her.

She must have fit right in, thought Casey. I wonder what she left behind.
Escape

Olivia stomped down the stairs, Eckerson hot on her heels. Of all the boyfriends to come back and bite her in the ass, this one was particularly annoying.

“Why didn’t you just slap her around?” chided Olivia. “It would have been more effective.”

“That woman knows a hell of a lot more than she’s saying,” replied Eckerson.

“She admitted that he was guilty,” countered Olivia. “Give her a break.”

She shivered in the brisk December air, her hot breath plain in front of her face. She’d completely forgotten a coat and was kicking herself for it.

“Olivia, she’s playing you and you’re falling for it because the sweet old lady’s dying,” cautioned Eckerson.

“God, you’re even more cynical than I remember,” she muttered.

He stared at her angrily. “Why, because I chase criminals and you babysit victims?”

She stopped short. “You know, even when you were a detective, it was never about the victims. It’s always been about the rush with you.”

“You liked that when you first met me,” he said smugly.

“Yeah, until I realized it would put you in a body bag,” she replied flatly. *And I’ve damn well had enough of that lately.*

- 

Hanging up on Andy, she led Lee forward to the stairs, her copper hair gleaming in the sun. He was a little bloody and shaken, but otherwise unharmed. *Thank god for small favors.* She stepped towards the stairs, angling her gun towards the ground floor.

Baxter appeared from seemingly nowhere, pointing a gun of his own straight at her chest.

“Give me the gun, or you’re both dead.”

Olivia blinked, facing down the weapon. Slowly and carefully, she handed Baxter her own piece. Behind her, she felt Lee began to panic, but the shock hadn’t hit her yet. For some reason, she was inches from death and unafraid.

- 

“Because he’s innocent, they’ll give him time served for the prison break,” explained Andy.

“Well, either way, your work here is done,” concluded Olivia. *And I can put this unpleasant trip down memory lane to rest.*

Andy looked at her expectantly, his eyes wide and sad. “I could stay a couple more days.”

She balked. *Please don’t do this.* “Andy, I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

He moved closer, perching on the edge of her desk, just like Alex used to do. “How about one drink before I leave?”

Olivia bit her lip. She was not going to do this. She was not going to sleep with him like he wanted because there was a picture on her mantle next to an album full of pictures that showed her love for Alex Cabot. “It’s not gonna work between us.”

“Why not?” he asked.

*Loaded question.* “Because I have enough insanity in my life,” she said honestly. “I need stability.”

Dejected, he ambled towards the precinct doors. “See ya round, Liv.”

She turned back to her computer, opting not to watch him leave. She wasn’t going home either, though; Elliot needed someone to reinstall Windows on his computer (what the hell had he done to
the thing?) and she had to go to the hospital one more time.
“Two kinds of fibers in your victim’s anal cavity,” explained Warner, gesturing to a set of prints. “It took me all day to match the samples with anything in our library. Plate A is a strand of hair.” Olivia nodded, looking over the display in the morgue. “Killer’s?” guessed Elliot.

“Only if he’s related to Seabiscuit,” Warner replied dryly, causing Elliot and Olivia to trade confused looks. “The hair found in your victim is horse hair, Mongolian stallion to be precise,” the ME continued. “So, maybe a sex toy, a whip or a cat o’ nine tails?” Olivia supposed. “Not a bad guess,” Warner replied thoughtfully. “A lot of floggers were made with horse hair, usually attached to leather, though. Our horse hair was bound to a rare wood known as pernambuco, imported exclusively from Brazil for the manufacture of violins and violin bows.”

“He was sodomized with a violin bow?” Olivia said doubtfully. Warner shrugged. “Until you can find me some more evidence, that’s my best guess.” “Alright, thanks Doc,” said Elliot. He waved to her as they stepped out of the morgue, then gave Olivia a disapproving look. “A sex toy? Really?” She smirked. “Come on, you can’t tell me that you haven’t picked that up, working this job for as many years as you have.” “Absolutely not,” he said, shuddering. “Okay, change of subject; do I have to drag you to the New Year’s party this year?” Olivia sighed. “Elliot, I told you, I’m not going. It’s my anniversary and I just want to be alone. Besides, you didn’t go last year.”

Was your anniversary, he thought.

Huang stood in Cragen’s office, having just arrived from Bellevue. He began discussing Will’s mental state, and Casey had a feeling she was not going to like what she heard. “He’s a textbook example of rape trauma syndrome,” explained Huang. “He was raped, but like most victims, he blames himself for not trying harder to stop the attack.” “Except Will didn’t fight back,” rebutted Casey. “All he had to do to stop the alleged rape was quit pledging.” “And make himself a social outcast,” offered Elliot. “None of his frat rat buddies would have gone anywhere near him. Doesn’t get worse for a scared freshman.” “Initiation is all about making the pledges prove themselves as men,” said Huang. “If you fail, you’re not a man.” Casey scoffed. “How does shoving a paddle up anyone’s tailpipe prove anything?” Elliot winced. Well, when you put it that way...

“It’s about dominance,” Cragen answered, “like a rapist wanting to feel power over a woman.” “Same reason they give the pledges girls’ names,” Elliot added. “Okay,” began Casey. “say Tyler did sodomize Will. Where’s the paddle? I’m not considering a plea without proof.” “We’re gonna need warrants, search orders, phone records,” Cragen listed. “You’ll have them,” she replied, standing up. “But find the paddle or a corroborating witness. Otherwise, I’m indicting Will for murder two.”
Heading for the door, she made a sour face. “I’m so glad I never pledged in college. Greek life sounds like a real party,” she remarked cynically.

Casey had just left Cragen’s office when a switch flipped in Elliot’s brain. He chased her out, leaving a befuddled Huang and Cragen behind.

“Casey!” he called.
She spun around. “Yeah, what is it?”

“Do you want to come to the office New Year’s bash?” he said quickly.

“Ah yes, the more the merrier!” cheered Munch.
Casey grinned at him. “As much as I’d enjoy seeing you drunk, I can’t. I’m going dancing with the other two single ladies from white collar.”

“Well, maybe you can convince Olivia to go, then,” replied Elliot.
Behind him, Olivia rolled her eyes.

“Go dancing?” said Casey, raising an eyebrow.
Elliot laughed, causing Olivia to shoot him a dirty look. “No, to the New Year’s party.”
Casey cocked her head to look at the female detective, still seated at her desk. “Why aren’t you going?”

Olivia pouted. “For reasons.”

“Alright, but I hope you’re not just going to be sitting home by yourself moping,” cautioned Casey.

She took note of everyone’s expression as she headed out of the precinct, from Elliot’s grimace to Munch’s pleading look to Olivia’s fallen face. Sitting alone moodily on New Year’s seemed to be at the top of the agenda for one Olivia Benson.

- Olivia glanced over at the clock again. 9:15. This is going to be a long night. She stared at the TV without taking anything in, sipping vaguely on her wine. As much as it sucked to be alone on New Year’s and on her anniversary, it was better than having to relive the memories of the wonderful evening she and Alex had spent together at last year’s party. There were even a couple of pictures from that night in the album.

A knock came loudly on the door, causing Olivia to jump. If this is Elliot, I’m going to kill him, she thought.

Instead, she opened the door to find Casey Novak, clad in a tight dress with gunmetal sequins. Her arms were folded and her expression was smug.

“What the hell are you doing here?” asked Olivia, dumbstruck.

“I had a hunch,” said Casey, walking into the apartment, “and it looks like I was right.”
She surveyed Olivia’s table, looking at the open bottle of wine and the leftover papers with mustard smears. “Chardonnay and deli sandwiches, unique,” she remarked.

“If you’re here to try and get me to the office party, forget it,” sighed Olivia, closing the door.

“I’m not going, remember? I’m going dancing,” replied Casey, her eyes still bouncing around the apartment.

Olivia groaned. “Then Casey, what do you want with me? Testimony in the Sweeney case doesn’t resume until next Monday.”

She placed a hand on her hip. “Correct me if I’m wrong, Olivia, but you seem like you’ve been depressed. And to answer your question, I want you to stop sulking and –’’

She cut off mid-sentence, her mouth still open, head slightly cocked. Her eyes had focused on something across the apartment, and when Olivia turned to see what, her stomach dropped.
It was the photo of Olivia kissing Alex in Riverside Park.
“**You were more than friends with Alex Cabot,**” concluded Casey quietly. “**Mystery solved.**”
Wordlessly, Olivia gestured to the photo album keeping company with the remains of dinner.
Casey began flipping through it, her eyes growing wider. **This is why she hated me when I first got here. Not to mention the reason that Elliot didn’t like Cabot.**

“**Wow, you were really involved,**” she said, examining a picture of them by a Mr. Softee truck.
“You know, no one has ever figured it out this quickly,” said Olivia, shaking her head.
“**Yeah, well, I’m a fan of puzzles,**” Casey said cryptically. **“Okay, now I really have to get you out of this apartment. You’re going dancing tonight, no buts.”**

Olivia looked pained. **“Casey, it’s my anniversary.”**
“**Even more reason not to sit at home and dwell,**” Casey shot back.
Olivia’s expression cleared suddenly. She examined Casey with interest. **“I just outed myself to you and you don’t seem to care in the slightest.”**
“**Is there any reason it should bother me?**” asked Casey, taking a sip of Olivia’s wine.

Olivia couldn’t believe this. **“You’re so…odd. How did you even get my address?”**
Casey grinned. “That’s the polite way of putting it. And it’s a matter of public record, Detective. Look, Olivia, I know I have no filter, and that rubs a lot of people the wrong way. But I’m here, reaching out to you, because you seem like you could really use a friend.”
Casey glanced back at the photo on the mantle. **“I know you’re not ready to move on, but you can still let go. Clinging to ghosts isn’t going to make life any easier.”**

Goddammit, she was right and Olivia knew it. At least she had one last line of defense.
**“You know I’m in my mid-thirties, right?”** Olivia said slowly.
Casey raised an eyebrow. **“And you’re really going to let that stop you from having a good time? Get changed, I’ll wait here.”**

Olivia gave in, finally loosening up. Besides, when Alex had originally been assigned to Special Victims, all Olivia had wanted was a sassy friend to kick ass and take names with. It looked like three and a half years later, she’d finally gotten her original wish.
“**Alright, I’ll be out in fifteen.”**
Alex couldn’t bear to spend New Year’s alone, thinking of that fateful day three years ago when a coy, bolder woman had kissed Olivia Benson in her apartment and started something that transformed into the most wonderful relationship, romantic or otherwise, that Alex had ever experienced. Instead, she’d driven to Milwaukee and invented an impromptu vacation. She stayed in a nice hotel and went to the spa, found a place to ice skate, and even visited Milwaukee’s own Riverside Park.

It wasn’t anything like she’d dreamed of for this coming anniversary, but as long as she could keep herself busy, she could keep her head out of Manhattan and away from Olivia. She went to bed early and took a double-dose of antihistamines to knock herself out, ensuring she would be in dreamland when the ball dropped. She’d been using the antihistamine trick a lot lately, which she was sure wasn’t healthy, but for now it provided her with at least a few hours of the dreamless sleep she so desperately craved.

*I’ve developed a lot of unhealthy habits,* she thought, lighting a cigarette on her balcony in the below-freezing morning mist. *But they dull the pain.*

A nagging voice in the back of her head reminded her that she’d attempted suicide for the same reason. She took a heavy drag of the cigarette and blew out the voice with the smoke.

“*If he was abusing her, Mira had a lot of courage calling the cops,*” remarked Olivia.
“*Well, let’s find this neighbor and see what the shouting was about,*” ordered Cragen.
“*Mind if I use your office?*” asked a disgruntled Casey. “I want to call the DA, bring him up to speed.”
Cragen nodded. “After you.”

Munch eyed them as they walked off. “She’s a firecracker, that one. I’m still heartbroken over the fact that she couldn’t attend our soiree.”
“*Aw c’mon, you would’ve really subjected her to that liquored-up version of Auld Lang Syne?*” Fin asked him.
“Sounds like you guys had a good time,” joked Olivia.
Munch nodded. “It wasn’t as rollicking as last year, but we made our fun. And how was the interior of your apartment?”
Olivia laughed. “Actually, Casey showed up and dragged me out dancing. It was kind of fun to pretend I was in my early twenties again for the night.”
“And you didn’t think to call me?” Munch replied, in mock disappointment.
“Maybe next year,” said Olivia, winking.

She tried to return to the case files, but noticed Elliot staring at her.
“*What?*” she asked.
“*Was it just the two of you?*” he said.
“No, a couple of her friends from white collar were there,” Olivia said slowly. He deepened his frown. “*Why’d you go with her anyway?*”
“Because she showed up offering to pull me out of my funk and I took it,” said Olivia, her tone rising.
“*Moving on from Alex already?*” he asked, his upper lip curling.
Olivia’s jaw dropped. Munch and Fin were now observing the exchange with interest.
“Sorry to destroy your disgusting little fantasies, Detective, but I’m as straight as they come.” Elliot practically fell out of his chair. An angry Casey Novak stood behind him, her arms folded. God, how did she sneak up on him like that?
“I was just trying to be a good friend, something you’ve obviously forgotten how to do,” she spat at Elliot.

She stormed out of the precinct, her red hair flashing behind her.
“Two points for Novak,” muttered Munch.
Elliot glared at him.

The door to interrogation opened and Elliot nearly cried with relief. *Finally, a break.*
“Detective Tutuola, this is Sean Webster.”

Sean visibly recoiled as Fin gave him the stink eye.
“What’s he doing here?” asked Sean, disgusted. “You invited him?”
Fin slowly advanced on Sean. *What a racist piece of crap.* Elliot tried not to roll his eyes. Olivia still sat in the back of the room, a dissatisfied look playing across her face.

“You don’t like me very much, do you?” Sean asked her.
“Actually, I’m not all that invested either way,” she replied nonchalantly.
“What do you see in her?” Sean charged Elliot.

*Oh boy, you do not want to go down that road.*

Casey paced her office, muttering to herself. She was trying to come up with an appropriate closing argument for the Webster case and failing.
“You will realize that it’s based on speculation, on maybes and could bes, and maybes and –”

A knock on the door interrupted her reverie.
“Practicing your summation?” asked Elliot.
“Yeah,” she sighed, “it’s not working.”
He smiled back at her. “May not have to. I think I found what you wanted.”

Elliot took out his notes. “Seth Webster, Sean Webster’s father. Fought in Desert Storm. Didn’t die there.”
Casey cocked her head. “Really? Then what actually happened?”
“He left his wife for a woman he met while overseas,” Elliot said smugly. “An Arab woman in Kuwait.”
“I shouldn’t be happy about this, but you’ve just won this case,” she said, grinning.
Elliot shrugged. “I do what I can.”

“Then can you try being a little nicer to Olivia?” she said nonchalantly.
Elliot recoiled, totally caught off guard.
“Elliot, I’ve been where she’s been,” said Casey. “The last thing she needs right now is someone giving her hell while she’s trying to pick up the pieces.”
“Casey, I’m sorry, I apologized to her,” said a shaky Elliot. “Things aren’t the best at home right now and I…have a tendency to take it out on her because her own relationship worked so damn well.”

Casey sat back on her desk. “They really loved one another, huh?”
Elliot nodded. “Oh yeah. They would’ve probably gotten married if Alex hadn’t got shot.”
Casey closed her eyes and grimaced. “That sucks.”
“Yeah,” Elliot replied. “It does.”

Elliot looked at her curiously. “You said you’ve been where she’s been?”
She gave him a look. “I’ll tell you when you tell me the truth about why things are bad at home.”
Ritual

Elliot stalked out of interrogation towards his desk and a waiting Olivia. She jumped up when she saw him coming.
“Marian give us anything?” she asked.
He nodded. “Address of a warehouse in Long Island City. I’m calling Novak now to make sure we can get warrants.”

As he punched the buttons on his phone, Olivia turned back to see Fin hauling the elderly woman into the cage and Langan walking towards the doors of the main squad room. He hesitated, then gestured towards Olivia. She looked around, then walked over to greet him.

“Can I help you with something?” she asked, her tone not entirely pleasant.

He sighed heavily. “I’ve been trying to have this conversation for a while, but I really didn’t know where to start.”

Olivia frowned. “What are you talking about?”

“You didn’t show up to Alex’s funeral,” he stated, “which I’m guessing means you’re even more torn up about her death than I am.”

Olivia felt as if she’d been hit in the face with a blast of icy water. “Yeah,” she said slowly, “I haven’t been taking it well.”

Trevor looked away, grimaced, then looked back. “Benson, we had our bad moments, but for better or for worse, she was my oldest friend. She knew me better than anyone, and I’m having a hard time letting go.”

“Look, Langan,” Olivia said softly, “I completely understand. But I don’t see what that has to do with me.”

“I just want someone I can talk to about it,” he said, pleadingly. “I’m not asking you out; I wouldn’t disrespect her memory like that, but I feel like no one can comprehend what I’ve been experiencing for the past few months.”

Olivia sighed. “Langan, with all due respect, I miss her very, very much. But I’m trying to get to a point where I don’t stew over it every day.” Or dream about it every night. “I mean, I was there when…when it happened.”

Olivia felt herself beginning to tear up. Goddammit, I thought I was done with this. “I don’t see how talking about her is going to help me do that,” she finally choked.

“Then we don’t have to talk about her,” Langan said quickly, “but can we at least talk? Can I buy you dinner sometime? You can buy me dinner sometime, if that’s what suits you.”

Olivia chuckled. “Calm down, Langan. Okay, okay, we’ll get dinner. I’ll call you.”

He fetched a business card from his pocket and handed it to her, smiling. “Thanks.”

In the chaos following Alex’s shooting, Olivia had completely forgotten about her friendship with Trevor. As horrible as it sounded, it was nice to know someone else was riding the exact same emotional rollercoaster, even if the tracks of his followed a slightly different path.

Elliot snuck up behind her just as Langan turned the corner for the elevator.
“You okay?” he asked sternly. “Do I need to smack him around a bit?”

She laughed. “Nah, he’s not worth your time. Besides, he was actually trying to be nice.”
Alex made herself two promises regarding Valentine’s Day: not to smoke for twenty-four hours and not to turn into a sorrowful lump. Surprisingly, it had been fairly easy to go without a cigarette the entire day, but she knew once she got home from work, she’d have to do something to distract herself. She began flipping through takeout menus when the solution hit her: she would take on a true challenge and cook herself dinner.

Glancing through the refrigerator, Alex took stalk of its contents: a half-eaten loaf of bread, an empty bottle of wine (why on earth did she put it back in there?), a pot of Dijon mustard and a couple of apples she’d bought back in December. Grimacing, she glanced over the takeout menus and settled on chicken satay in peanut sauce and coconut rice – it seemed difficult enough to keep her focused but not so hard that she’d create something completely inedible. At least, that was her hope.

An hour later, she was home from the grocery store and cooking. She managed to prep the chicken without contaminating her entire kitchen and, thanks to the discovery that her pots had clear lids (she hadn’t even known she’d had pots), she was able to keep an eye on the rice while she threw together the sauce and cooked the chicken. By 8:30, dinner was finally ready. She sat down and took a tentative first bite.

It wasn’t Olivia-quality or restaurant-quality, but it sure as hell wasn’t bad. In no time, Alex gobbled down the entire meal. Taking a long drink of hot cider, another grocery store purchase, she suddenly realized how little she’d been eating lately. **Damn cigarettes,** she thought, **appetite suppressants.** So this was why her clothes had begun to seem so loose.

_I have to get my life back together,_ she thought vaguely. Alex couldn’t deny that she was still an emotional basket case, but at least if she tried to maintain some semblance of a normal, well-adjusted person, maybe some of that would rub off on her psyche. She made a mental note to look for cooking classes in the area. That would challenge her enough to at least take some of the edge off.

Perhaps if she succeeded in keeping her mind busy, it wouldn’t feel so weird to sleep with the lights on any more.

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“So, we’re talking about incest,” concluded Olivia. “With who?”

“Most likely her brother, but possibly her father or uncle or first cousin,” guessed Warner. Elliot leaned back against the two-way mirror. “Well the pregnancy’s enough motive for any one of them to want to shut Shannon up.”

Olivia glanced at him. “Aidan still could’ve killed her.”

“Until we can prove it, there’s nothing to hold him on,” Cragen said plainly. “You better tell Shannon’s mother.”

Olivia went in to talk to the Connors while Cragen, Warner, and Elliot departed interrogation. “You know, Doc, you didn’t have to come all the way down here to let us know about this,” said Elliot.

Warner shrugged. “I was heading out to pick up my daughter from school anyway.” She waved goodbye to Cragen, who had just gone to answer a phone call in his office.

Elliot sighed. “Must be nice, getting to take them home every day.”
“My husband and I trade off days,” she told him. “When both parents work, you have to do what you can.”
“Believe me, I know,” replied Elliot.
She smiled at him. “I trust I’ll be seeing you soon?”
“Sorry Doc, there’s no getting rid of us,” cracked Elliot. “Have a good night.”

Just as Warner left, Olivia came bounding through the door on the opposite side of the precinct. Behind her, the Connor family stalked towards the elevator.
“Well, can’t wait until we get to talk to them again,” she said sarcastically. “You ready to head off to deliver the news?”
Elliot shook his head. “This is gonna be a blast. I’ll get the car, no reason for us both to freeze.”

Olivia went to the closet to fetch her winter things. She was just about to follow Elliot out when –
“Benson! Hold up a minute!”
She skidded to a halt, responding to the captain’s call. “What’s up?”
He gestured to her, beckoning her inside his office.

“Do I need to close the door?” she asked, gingerly walking inside.
“You might as well, but it’s not bad news,” said Cragen.
Olivia sighed with relief. “That’s good to hear.”
He smiled at her. “I just got off the phone with the brass. Your breakthrough on the Baxter case finally reached the big guys upstairs at their latest meeting.”
“That was two months ago,” said Olivia, slightly confused.
“Yeah, well, the speed of bureaucracy doesn’t exactly match that of everyday life,” replied Cragen, rolling his eyes. “The point is, they’ve seen it fit to grant my request to promote you. As of now, you are Detective Olivia Benson, second class.”

Olivia’s eyes popped. “Captain…wow. I don’t know what to say. I mean, thank you.”
“You deserve it, considering all the hard work you put in around here,” he told her. “Think of it as my Valentine’s gift to you. Believe me, I know how hard it is to spend that first February alone.”
Olivia remembered that Cragen’s wife had also died, in a plane crash many years ago, and her face fell.

“Well, you’re no romantic,” she joked, trying to lighten the mood. “I appreciate it, but what, no candles, no dinner?”
“There’s a pack of crackers in my desk if you’re hungry,” Cragen replied slyly.
Olivia couldn’t help but laugh.

Through one of her coworkers, Alex found a local home goods store that offered cooking classes every Wednesday night. The woman had also pressed Alex to join her scrapbooking club, but Alex had politely refused the offer. After all, what did Emily Roberts, with no past and no real present, need with a scrapbook?

Twirling her pen in her fingers, Alex considered committing to some sort of exercise as well. She’d vaguely thought about trying to take up running again, but that had mostly been Olivia’s activity of choice anyway. Alex had trained for and run one miserable 10k in college with her sorority sisters, and when she and Olivia ran in the mornings, her portion had always been shorter. Besides, considering the amount of smoking she’d been doing, running would probably be damn near impossible now.

Alex sighed. She genuinely loathed team sports, which didn’t help. Maybe she could join a gym, with the monthly fee as incentive to go? Unable to focus on work, she let her ears wander towards


the conversation at the desk behind her. Nathan was telling Lisa about his latest sprint triathlon.

A light bulb turned on in her brain. “Nathan,” she said starkly, “you do triathlon.”

He gave her a weird stare. “Yes, Emily, I do.”

“What means you have to know the location of a good pool,” she concluded.

He relaxed. “Yeah, I know a place.”

“Could I get the name and address?” she pressed.

She’d been on the swim team in high school. It was familiar, it was low-maintenance, and she wouldn’t have to quit smoking to do it. Granted, she should quit anyway, but baby steps.

Elliot and Casey turned away from Mrs. Connor, speaking in hushed tones.

“Susan stole the guns, she stole the diamonds, she had the motive,” concluded Casey. “I have all I need for an indictment.”

“Then do it,” commanded Elliot. “I can’t wait to put this case down, it just makes me think about my own kids.”

He rolled his eyes. “Thanks to Valentine’s, it was drama central with Kathleen. She broke off her date hours beforehand, then spent the entire night regretting it while sobbing and eating chocolates with Maureen. It was the icing on the cake for the restaurant’s failure to record our reservation.”

Casey punched the elevator button. “Hey, at least you didn’t spend the evening with a bottle of wine and the Fast and the Furious series.”

He gawked at her. “Really?”

Shrugging, she grinned. “What can I say? I’m a sucker for bad action movies.”
It was around 10:45 when all the techs made it to the Nesbitt apartment. Elliot walked out, trying to get away from the sight of Jacob's limp body on the floor.

“Elliot, this is not your fault,” soothed Olivia. “You didn’t send that boy home. ACS did.”

“Yeah, well screw ACS,” he cut in. “I knew something was wrong. I watched that boy walk out that door.”

He sighed heavily and turned away.

“You want a cup of coffee?” she offered.

“Nah, I’m wired enough,” he replied. “Thanks for coming out here this late.”

“Hey, any time,” she replied. “I’ve been staying up pretty late anyway.”

He choked out a laugh. “Olivia Benson, queen of New York City nightlife.”

She shot him a dark look, but there was no malice behind it. “If I’m going to sleep poorly, I figure I might as well put it off as long as I can.”

Olivia looked back into the Nesbitt’s place. “I can hardly believe it’s been this long and I’m still having trouble sleeping alone. We didn’t even sleep together every night either.”

“You doing okay?” Elliot said sadly.

She grinned at him and slugged his arm. “Yeah, just complaining. Let’s go.”

If you don’t count the fact that my brain replays her shooting every night in my sleep, then sure.

Elliot turned to see Casey walking into the squad room.

“What’s the word on the Nesbitt case?” he called anxiously.

“Ridenour went for it. We’re going to the grand jury,” she said. Smirking, she turned to Olivia.

“This was after Nesbitt’s lawyer made a very compelling argument for why the case should be thrown out, too.”

“Told you, skirt works on Ridenour every time,” replied Olivia.

Casey rolled her eyes. “I used to think I’d do anything to win a case, but this is a little lower than I’d usually stoop.”

“So why’d you do it?” asked Elliot.

Casey grumpily pulled a rumpled bill from her pocket and handed it to Olivia. “Because your partner here bet me twenty bucks that it would work, and I didn’t believe her.”

Olivia plucked the bill from between Casey’s fingers. “You should have. On the weeks when Alex was trying cases in Ridenour’s court, she wore every skirt she owned.”
“Wow, did you see the Times this morning? Sixteen-year-old girl was found dead in a trunk in Manhattan.”

Alex jumped at the voice behind her, then let herself settle. It didn’t seem to address her particularly, but she was curious. The case sounded like something SVU might be interested in. “What made her particularly newsworthy?” she asked, turning to join the conversation.

Her coworker shrugged. “Pretty, upper-class white girl who everybody loved. Sounds like she might’ve been murdered by some psycho. They found her in the trunk of her father’s car after she bled to death.”

Alex frowned. “Sounds suspect. Have they looked at the father, or at boyfriends?”
“Didn’t say,” replied the coworker. “Why’re you so interested?”
“Because anything sounds better than processing this paperwork right now,” said a surly Alex.

She sighed. The girl sounded like she could have been Alex several years ago; well-liked, good-looking, and wealthy, never having to worry about bullies or her grades or her social life. That was the reason Alex thought there had to be something else to this case; someone like that definitely had secrets to hide.

*Stop thinking like a prosecutor and get back to work.*

- 

Olivia opened the door to the spare classroom.
“Hey Agnes,” she said softly. “I’m Detective Benson.”
“I know,” Agnes said sullenly. “You were at my house last night. I don’t know what happened to Emily, we’re not friends.”

Olivia didn’t need to be a mind reader to tell Agnes had been mercilessly bullied. She recognized that flat affect in her voice, the same tone she used to take on with her own teachers. Olivia hadn’t had many friends in grade school, partially due to her home circumstances and partially because she’d been a moody kid who pushed everyone away. She’d lashed out by having an endless string of romantic encounters, getting into trouble in school, and generally giving her mother hell.

However, unlike Agnes, she’d gotten into trouble for fighting her bullies, not the other way around.
“Well, actually when I was in school, I pretty much kept to myself,” she told Agnes honestly. “I didn’t want anybody to find out about my mom. She, uh, used to drink a lot. It’s easier not having friends, but it doesn’t make it any less lonely.”

- 

Granger was pushing this hard, and she was tempted to take it.
“They’re us, Casey. Our sisters, our daughters, our high school girlfriends. No one wants to believe _—_”
“No, they’re monsters,” countered Casey. “They’re mean, vicious little girls who think they can do whatever they want and up until now, they’ve gotten away with it, but not anymore. No deal.”

Casey hadn’t been popular in high school, or ever, really. Running her mouth had gotten her into trouble more than once, and Catholic school had been a particularly hostile environment for speaking her mind. She’d always run with the guys, a tomboy through and through, and she’d watched the Andreas and the Paiges of the world and hated them for being perfect little princesses.
They had the world handed to them on a silver platter, and as the last of four kids in a military family, she’d gotten nothing and worked hard for everything. It was time to take revenge.

A tap came on the door.
“Well, maybe these two will change your mind,” Granger said dryly.

“Guilty on all counts,” Casey announced, leaving the courtroom.
Elliot checked his watch and grinned. “That’s a fifteen-minute jury verdict. That’s very impressive, Counselor.”
“Remind me to give you the names of all the girls I hated in high school,” said Olivia. She and Casey walked off, leaving Elliot behind with his phone call.
“Takes you back, doesn’t it,” said Casey, understanding Olivia’s sentiment completely. “I hated it the first time around.”

Olivia nodded her head in agreement, trying not to smile. Of all the things she’d expected from the new ADA, she’d never considered her as a possibility for an understanding, damn good friend.
Olivia walked into the precinct, absolutely exhausted. She glanced at the clock and saw that it was already past 5:30; no way she was getting anything else done today. She grabbed her coat and walked up to the door of the captain’s office.

“Hey, just thought I’d let you know that the jury convicted Meyers on all counts,” she said. “We’ll be back to work tomorrow morning.”
“Well, that’s some good news,” replied Cragen. “Munch and Fin arrested Jamie Semple’s ACS case worker today. Looks like she neglected her home visits.”
“Which would make her liable for his death,” concluded Olivia.

Cragen sighed. “Olivia, did you read the paper today?”
“No, I used my time in between testimony to catch up on my own work,” she said honestly.
“Why?”
“Well, I don’t suppose you’d read this section anyway,” he said sadly. “This is just one of the perks of aging, along with a bad back and a pharmacy’s worth of medications.”

He passed her a section of the paper labeled “Obituaries.” Olivia scanned the first few and immediately found what he’d been alluding to.
Margaret Cabot, age 59.

“But she was in good health,” murmured a shocked Olivia.
“I made a call to the DA,” said Cragen. “As of right now, cause of death is undetermined, but it’s looking like some sort of brain damage.”
“A stroke?” questioned Olivia.
“I can’t say,” said the captain, “but I thought you should know. Funeral’s being held in a week and a half, open service.”

Olivia wanted to ask if someone had notified DEA, but she quickly bit her tongue.

Alex usually met with DEA Agent Purcell in a coffee shop on the south side of town. The visits never lasted longer than fifteen minutes because Alex had nothing to report; she hadn’t met anyone threatening or oddly familiar lately, she hadn’t been followed, and she hadn’t experienced any problems with her phone service, especially since she only ever called restaurants. Today, she answered the usual slew of questions and prepared to leave when Purcell stopped her.

“Emily, wait,” he said grimly. “There’s something you should know.”
She sat back down, frowning. “Okay.”
“I’m sorry to have to tell you this, especially since you’ve been doing so well lately, but, uh, your mother died of a stroke last week.”

Alex blinked.
What?
“She wasn’t even sixty,” she said slowly.
“I’m sorry,” he repeated.
“It’s okay,” Alex replied hollowly. “Really, I’m fine. I’m going home now.”
“You sure?”
“Yeah, I’m sure.”
She got in the car and began driving with no real destination in mind. Alex had spent a long time hating her mother, and had indeed wished her dead on more than one occasion. But she’d never meant it.

And yet she couldn’t be sad. He hadn’t even said anything about a funeral, though she knew she’d never be allowed to go. What did one even do in this situation? Should she send flowers? She couldn’t call New York.

Alex stopped somewhere she didn’t recognize, some sort of public park, and got out of the car. Lighting a cigarette, she watched the haze of clouds travel across the sky.

She hoped her dad was doing okay.

- 

Olivia had done a lot of strange things in her life, but going to a funeral for a woman she didn’t know had to be close to the top of the list. She’d sat in the back, suffering through the long, overly religious service and imagining Alex next to her, grief-stricken but still rolling her eyes at the extravagance. It made Olivia feel slightly better and reminded her that she was doing a duty; one of them had to go, and it certainly couldn’t be Alex.

She skipped the burial to chase down a couple of leads with Elliot, but came back later that day. It was March now, and the city was finally thawing after a cold, hard winter. Olivia slunk quietly into the graveyard and found her way to the headstone.

Margaret Cabot, placed right next to Alexandra Cabot, 1974-2003. The corpse of a woman buried next to the empty grave she’d grieved for. Olivia still didn’t entirely believe that Margaret Cabot had suffered from a stroke, but who was she to question?

She knelt next to Alex’s grave, realizing that this was the first time she’d come to visit, mostly because Alex wasn’t actually dead. If she really had died, Olivia would be here every day. Okay, the job wouldn’t permit that, but every day that she could be here, at least. She wished she’d brought flowers; Alex’s grave looked so empty compared to her mother’s.

She hoped Alex was doing okay.

“Can I help you?”

Olivia turned and pushed off the ground, standing back up. The man standing before her looked despondent, his elderly face tired and lined. Despite this fact, he still commanded an air of authority, and his eyes shone the same blue she saw in both her dreams and nightmares. His gray-white hair had probably once been blond.

“You’re Alexander Cabot,” she guessed.

“That’s correct,” he said sadly. “Are you looking for me?”

Not entirely. “Sir, my name is Olivia Benson.”

What did she say next? What did one even do in a situation like this? She bit her lip, then took the plunge.

“Would you like to get a cup of coffee with me? I think we really need to talk.”
Olivia soon realized that her suggestion for coffee was a bit misplaced due to the lateness of the day, and so she found herself sitting in a small Chinese restaurant she’d never been to with Alex’s father. It was still a bit early for dinner, so they sipped tea and sat awkwardly in silence, both trying to figure out what to say. Olivia half-hoped that he would get tired of this and leave, but she remembered that he only had an empty apartment to go home to. An apartment that Alex picked out.

“As I said,” she began nervously, “my name is Olivia. But at work, I’m known as Detective Olivia Benson, Special Victims Unit.”

Alexander Cabot sighed. “You worked with my daughter, then. I’m sorry if I don’t remember you from the funeral; it was a hard day.”

“No, you wouldn’t remember, because I didn’t go,” rambled Olivia. “That’s, uh, why I was in the graveyard today, we found out your wife, uh, ex-wife died and I took it as a chance to make things up to Alex.”

Make things up to Alex? Where was this coming from? Okay, we’ll go with that.

Alex’s father stared at her curiously. “What do you mean?”

“I couldn’t go to her funeral because I couldn’t accept what happened,” said Olivia. “I was, uh, I was there when she got shot and I blamed myself.”

“So you didn’t attend my daughter’s funeral because you could not accept that she was dead?”

Alexander asked, trying to piece together what Olivia was saying. “But you can now.”

“No, I can’t,” said Olivia, sighing. “I can’t move on because, because I’m still in love with her. We were in love, uh, we were dating and…she was my girlfriend.”

Alexander Cabot’s eyes widened slightly, but he didn’t look horribly shocked.

“For how long?” he said slowly.

Olivia took a deep breath. “For over two and a half years.” She closed her eyes, willing the tears not to come. Two and a half wonderful years.

He leaned back in his chair. “Well, I can’t say I never had my suspicions. It explains a lot.”

“What do you mean?” said Olivia, jolting back to reality.

“Why she never had a boyfriend, why she refused to let us set her up with someone, why she fought her mother constantly about gay rights,” he listed. “She was a lesbian.”

“Yeah,” said Olivia quietly. “She was.”

Alexander stared down into his tea. “I know why she never told us, but I wish she had. I would have loved her anyway, even if her mother would not have done the same.”

Olivia winced. “With all due respect, do you really believe that?”

“It’s part of the reason I started ‘looking around,’ so to speak.” He stared at her. “I’m guessing Alex told you all about that, though.”

Olivia gave him a small smile. “She told me everything, Mr. Cabot.”

He smiled back at her. “Miss Benson, so much of my daughter’s life was a mystery to me. She only ever talked about work when we got together. Would you mind…telling me more about what she was like? It would help bring a silver lining to the events of the past six months.”

“No, I wouldn’t mind,” replied Olivia. “Wow, where to start. Well, I’ve never met a more lousy cook…”

Olivia sat and ate dinner with Mr. Cabot, trading stories about Alex with him late into the evening. When they finally parted ways, Olivia felt as if some small part of her had healed.
Elliot loved his children to death, and he’d gladly do anything to protect them. But that misguided Jeremy Ostilow was in no way looking out for his poor son by sitting in jail. “I’ll see that he sits there until the boy turns twenty-one if I have to,” the former Judge Clark said smugly.

Elliot glanced at Casey. “They didn’t call you the hanging judge for nothing.”

“Who?” she asked sternly. “Who called me that?”

Casey. “No one.”

“Why wait for dad?” Casey said quickly. “Let’s find JJ ourselves.”

“We’re doing the best we can,” said Elliot. “We’ve pulled the phone records, credit card records; so far, nothing.”

“I’ll tell you the good thing about working for a rich law firm,” Clark cut in, “we’ve got resources you civil servants can’t even dream about, including a slew of P.I.s on retainer. They’re at your disposal.”

Elliot watched her walk out. “Well, that was awfully nice of her.”

“She’s been awfully nice to me,” said Casey. “She’s the whole reason I’m working for the DA’s office now, said I was the best clerk she’d had in ten years.”

“Is that where you picked up your aggressive streak?” he joked.

“Nah, believe me, that’s been around since the day I was born,” replied Casey. “God, you know, this whole case makes me sick.”

“Casey, I’ve got faith in you, but I gotta tell you, I have a bad feeling that he’s gonna get away with it,” confessed Elliot.

She growled. “That same aggressive streak makes me want to take my baseball bat and wrap it around Tripley’s forehead.”

“Don’t say that too loud,” said Olivia, popping out of the squad room. “Elliot got in serious trouble for that one time.”

Casey looked at him. “Really?”

He rolled his eyes. “Back in 2000, I got in trouble for telling a shrink sent by the Morris Commission that I thought about killing pedophiles.”

“What’s wrong with that?” asked Casey.

“Apparently, a lot,” replied Olivia.

“Almost lost my job,” said Elliot plainly.

“Well, if this isn’t how I’m supposed to feel, then I’m not sure I want this job,” said Casey grumpily.

“Hey, I’m with you all the way,” said Elliot.
Jeff York? It couldn’t be.
“Let me see the body!”
The medical examiner’s team zipped open the body bag.
And it is. What in the hell.

“He’s an assistant DA in the Bronx,” she said breathlessly.
“You know him,” concluded Elliot.
She swallowed and looked back up. “I dated him.”

They stood in silence for a moment, letting the action of the crime scene team swirl around them.
“That’s it, I’m never dating an ADA again,” she said dryly. “Every time I do, something bad happens to them.”
“Come on Olivia, this was in no way your fault,” reprimanded Elliot. “It’s gotta be years since you’ve gone out with this guy. You know, I’d honestly forgotten you used to date men until Eckerson showed up last year.”
She scowled at him. “Don’t remind me.”

Elliot dropped off the side of the dumpster and turned to Olivia.
“Now, I don’t ever remember you mentioning Jeff York,” he said.
“It was five years ago, we worked a case together. It wasn’t that serious,” she deflected. And what, it’s your business to know all about my sex life?
“How long’d you date?” asked Elliot.
Well, he did know a lot of things about Alex, her brain countered. “About a month. Nice guy. No chemistry.”

Plus, I was going out with half the city around that time.
“Got your blue vinyl gym bag!” yelled O’Hallaran.

Olivia watched the tape of York vaguely, not entirely focused. It reminded her of the interview Alex had done during that school shooting case back in 2000. They had the same focus, the same commanding tone. They might have even died for the exact same reason.

“Jeff loved being a DA,” said Abbott. “The ethics for him were almost biblical.”
Well, they’re different in that respect. “Sounds like you were more worried than he was,” supposed Olivia.

Abbott led them down the hallway, still talking about the hit.
“Takes a pair of balls to order a hit on a prosecutor,” said Elliot, glancing at Olivia.
They said their goodbyes and headed out, ready to make the trip to Rikers.

“Well, seems you’ve got a type,” remarked Elliot, starting the car.
“Really, Elliot?” she snapped.
He looked over at her. “You doing okay?”
“No, I’m not,” Olivia spat back. “There are too damn many similarities in this case.”
“You want to have fun? Go to Coney Island and ride the cyclone. I don’t find dead prosecutors all that amusing.”

-

_HIV Positive._

“You okay?”

_No._ “Yeah, I, uh –”

“You know, if you slept with Jeff, you might –”

“I’m gonna get tested!” she said, cutting him off.

“Alright, well you don’t want the results in departmental records, insurance,” he continued, “so go to an anonymous clinic, okay?”

“I know, like Jeff did.”

They stood awkwardly in front of the car.

“Look, you want me to go with you?” offered Elliot.

“No! I’ll be fine,” she said hollowly. “Let’s just focus on the case. Jeff’s date book said that he was having drinks with Andy Abbott the night he was killed, so why didn’t Andy tell us that?”

Elliot stared at her for a moment. “I dunno. Let’s find out.”

They got in the car wordlessly and Elliot started the engine.

“If I’m positive, someone has to tell DEA,” she blurted. “And I’ll never forgive myself.”

“Olivia, don’t beat yourself up about something that you don’t know is true,” ordered Elliot.

It was the first time since Alex’s shooting that either had admitted she was still alive.

-

“Could Jeff have been HIV positive back then?” Olivia asked Huang.

“Yes, but your risk of exposure is very low,” he soothed.

“How could I have missed this?” she said, her face lined with worry.

Huang pulled her aside. “Liv, you’re not the first woman to sleep with a closeted man.”

She ran a hand through her hair. “Maybe he didn’t know.”

“Sexuality is very complicated,” said Huang. “Just because he was gay doesn’t mean he wasn’t attracted to you.”

_That’s not what I’m talking about._ She knew she wasn’t going to sleep until Warner came back with those test results.

-

“Olivia!”

It was what she’d been waiting for, what she’d been dreading, and she knew it. She spun around to face the ME.

“What’s up?”

Warner walked towards her and leaned in close. “You’re negative.”

_Oh thank god. Alex, or whoever she is now, doesn’t need any more shit to deal with in her life._

-

“She’s telling you the truth,” Novak said to a fuming Mrs. Abbott. “Your husband was having an affair with Jeff York.”

“I don’t believe you,” said the shaking woman. “You’re sick.”
“You don’t have to believe me. But for your own sake, get an HIV test,” advised Casey. “Jeff York had AIDS.”

Mrs. Abbott stared at them, dumbstruck. Then the furor reappeared in her face.

“Go to hell!” she hissed, storming out of the precinct.

Olivia stared at Casey. “Should you have done that?”

“She needed to know,” said Casey sadly. Absolutely not.

Olivia watched Casey walk across the precinct, then turned back to look at the door.

“You did the right thing,” Olivia said with conviction. “If it was me, I’d want to know.”

“Gotten the test results back?” Casey asked bluntly, shrugging on her coat.

Olivia sighed. “Yeah, I’m in the clear. You know, these past few days, I’ve been killing myself over the fact that I might have infected Alex.”

Olivia, Alex is dead, thought Casey, but she bit her tongue. “And now you’ve got some piece of mind. You wanna get drinks tonight? This case seems like it’s been tough for you.”

“Understatement of the year,” groaned Olivia. “Let’s do it.”

“Just don’t go to the Carlson, or one of you may end up dead in a known hooking spot,” cautioned Munch.

“Munch, Benson’s not on the downlow anymore,” said Fin, rolling his eyes. “We got nothing to worry about.”

Casey laughed loudly and Olivia glared at her.

“Come on, you know we’re too poor to go there anyway,” said Casey, smiling.

“Yeah, that’s sure true,” replied Olivia.
“Go back through Rebecca’s files,” ordered Cragen. “There’s gotta be something that points to the professor.”
He slammed the door to his office. Olivia and Elliot could see him pacing inside.

“He’s convinced,” muttered Elliot.
“I’m not,” stated Olivia. “It fits, but my gut says it wasn’t him.”
“Well, we won’t know for sure until we do some more digging,” said Elliot. “Grab your coat.”

They walked out of the precinct together.
“We all set for drinks tonight?” asked Elliot.
“Looks like no,” replied Olivia. “Fin’s having dinner with his son, Casey has softball practice, and Munch has some imaginary illness that’s going to turn into scarlet fever, I’m sure.”
“They don’t call it Munchausen’s for nothing,” cracked Elliot. “Well, what about you and me?”

“Well, if you really want, you can celebrate Alex’s birthday with me,” said Olivia. “It’s her thirtieth, so I’m buying myself sushi and cake, drinking fancy wine, and going to see Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind.”
Elliot grimaced. “Sushi? I’ll pass. What’s that movie about, anyway? I heard it got some good reviews.”
“From what I can tell, it’s about a man who erases the memories of his girlfriend and then realizes how much he loves her during the process,” answered Olivia. “Considering that we’re two people who’re supposed to forget about one another, I figured it was appropriate.”

Alex had felt like she was making progress, finally getting some semblance of sanity back, up until her mother’s death. Now, she was no longer moving forward, but at least she wasn’t slipping either. She’d simply stalled.

She was still swimming, and attending cooking classes, and refusing to be nice or make friends. The smoking hadn’t gotten better, but it hadn’t gotten worse unless you counted that one horrible night she saw Olivia hauling that pedophile toy mogul out of his office on the news. At least she knew Olivia was still alive, though she supposed that DEA would inform her if something happened.

After a week, she noticed that she’d flat-out missed her thirtieth birthday, and vaguely thought about doing something to celebrate. Then again, she had no one to celebrate with and she’d felt too exhausted to cook more than a couple of times a week lately. She went down to the grocery and got freshly sliced turkey breast and Swiss and bought herself a half loaf of fresh bread, then went home to take advantage of her own mustard and make herself a sandwich. It was a poor substitute for the real thing, but she’d yet to find a deli in town that wasn’t the lone subway off by the highway.

Alex finished putting together the sandwich, then wedged a single candle in the top of it. She took out her lighter, hummed the tune to “Happy Birthday,” and blew the candle out.
I wish I could just go home.
Painless

Olivia lingered in the background, watching Munch and Fin interrogate Amy Solwey about her website. The last thing the world needs is a road map that shows suffering people how to kill themselves, she thought. Olivia had gone to some pretty low places in her life, but she’d always found somewhere within the will to survive, the need to keep living because her mother had granted her this life.

However, she hadn’t forgotten that at one time in her life, Alex was in so much pain that all she wanted was to die. She’d been absorbed in self-hatred and looking for an escape, and a website like Amy Solwey’s would likely have caused Alex’s plans to actually work. SVU had to bring this woman down, for the sake of many possible victims, still unknown and unforeseen.

“She’s lying,” said Olivia.
“How do you know?” asked Munch.
“Her coat, it’s Burberry, I’ve seen it before.”

A defeated Munch approached his desk in the evening gloom hanging over the precinct.
“You okay?” asked Olivia.
“Amy Solwey deserves to be put away, but convicting her is not gonna change a damn thing,” Munch said bitterly.

“John,” said Elliot quietly, “she broke the law.”
“Amy goes to prison, someone takes over her website, more people die who don’t have to,” countered Munch.
“Gotta be some way to shut it down,” offered Fin.
“Maybe not,” said Olivia in a low voice. “I just read about this website where they’re teaching young girls how to become anorectic and hide it from their parents.”
“There’s always gonna be hate and racism on the internet, but what are you gonna do about it?” asked Elliot. “Freedom of speech, man.”
Munch nodded. “Someone talks, there’s always somebody there to listen.”

Casey dragged herself into the squad room, looking like she’d been hit by a truck.
“You look like you could use a drink,” greeted Olivia.
“Wish I had time,” replied Casey. She turned to face Munch. “I’m headed over to Bellevue, thought you might want to come. Amy Solwey’s refusing dialysis.”
Munch looked at Casey grimly. “I’ll get my coat.”

Elliot watched the two of them walk out. “You know, I gotta be honest, I don’t know who I feel worse for: Munch, or poor Christina’s sister.”
“Yeah, is Munch okay?” Olivia asked Fin.
Fin shrugged. “Dunno. He hasn’t said anything to me about it.”

Fin thought for a second. “Hey Liv, I know it wasn’t a suicide, but how’d you keep getting by after Alex died? You two bein’ together and all that.”
Olivia sighed. “I’m not going to lie, I’m still torn up about it, but I’m not going to spend the rest of my life mulling over it when there’s so much more I can do.” Plus, she’ll probably be a different person when she comes back. I need to keep moving with my life too.
At least, I need to start trying.
“Amen to that,” said Elliot.
Someone rapped on Casey’s door loudly. “I’m coming, I’m coming,” she called. She opened the door, surprised. “John, what’re you doing here?” “Why didn’t you call me?” he said, his tone accusatory.

Casey rolled her eyes. Oh boy. “There’s nothing anyone can do. Amy’s made her choice.” “Which is?” Munch asked. “If we’re just gonna put her in prison, it’s a waste of a kidney,” replied Casey. “Then plead her out to a lesser charge!” ordered Munch.

“I can’t believe this. You’re the one who wanted me to jump through hoops to retry her! Why’re you so invested in this?” Casey said in a low voice. “Don’t let her do this to herself!”

“I stick my neck out for him and this is how he repays me? she thought, watching him walk out of her apartment. He owes me for this. He owes me a lot.

Casey paced her office, completely dumbstruck. “I can’t believe you actually convinced her to take the kidney,” she said to John. He sighed. “Will you plead her out now?” “Look, I’ll talk to Moredock, see what I can do,” she began, “but you need to give me an explanation.”

“Why do you care if I live or die?” asked Amy. “Because my father killed himself!” yelled John. “He managed to calm his temper, then sat down. “When I was a kid, I thought it was my fault.”

Munch took a deep breath. “Alright, but what I’m about to say doesn’t leave this room.”
“Maybe she’s the one who forged Duvall’s signature on the nursing logs,” guessed Elliot, following Casey across the park.
“That would make her a coconspirator,” concluded Casey.
“So, let’s bring her in for a chat,” proposed Olivia.

“Let me know what you get from her,” said Casey. “Thankfully I drew Seligman for the trial, but it’s going to be an uphill battle no matter what.”
“You know what’s going to be an uphill battle? You lawyers against us cops Saturday afternoon,” joked Elliot.
Olivia looked shocked. “Is that really this weekend?”
“It is, and I’m not the one who should be worried,” Casey said smugly. “You know I play with a club league, Detective.”
“So does Ken Briscoe, and we got him to play third base this year,” countered Elliot.
“Whatever, us lawyers play like a well-oiled machine,” taunted Casey. “It’ll be our fifth year in a row to win, trust me.”

“Hold up guys,” interjected Olivia, “I have a serious problem.”
“What’s that?” asked Casey.
“If you’re both playing, who’s going to go to the game with me?” said Olivia, genuinely concerned. “Alex always used to go, but obviously…”
Casey frowned. “Neither Munch or Fin will go?”
“Munch is paranoid about getting sunburned, and Fin isn’t a baseball fan,” explained Elliot.

Casey thought for a moment. “Why not ask Cragen?”
Elliot and Olivia looked at each other.
“Why hadn’t we ever thought to do that before?” said Elliot.
“Uh, because he’s our boss?” replied Olivia.
Elliot shrugged. “C’mon, SVU’s family. It’d be like one of my kids inviting me to go to a school play.”
“Yeah, I guess,” said Olivia, considering the proposal.

“Oh, but back to the important things,” Casey said quickly. “If you’re so sure you’re going to win, then loser buys the winner all the drinks they want after the game.”
Elliot grinned. “Casey, you’ve got yourself a deal.”

Oh. My. God. This is almost terrifying.

“I believe you all know ADA Novak,” said Judge Terhune brusquely, sitting back down at the poker table.
“Judge Ridenour, Judge Petrovsky, Judge Wyler, Judge Bradley,” she said as respectfully as she could manage. “I’ve had this nightmare before, only I was naked.” Shit, now Ridenour’s imagining it.
“Charming,” said Petrovsky in her usual frosty tone.

“What could be so important that it couldn’t wait until morning?” demanded Judge Terhune.
“An exhumation order,” Casey replied.
“You better sign it, Joe,” cautioned Judge Wyler. “Corpse might be a flight risk.”
The judges began chuckling. Do not blow up, Casey. Do not blow up.
“Your honor, this body may be the key to solving six murders,” she continued. “I’m in,” said Judge Terhune, addressing the table. “And I take it the family won’t consent?” “The suspect is the sole survivor,” explained Casey. “We want to exhume her mother.” This was a shitty idea, in retrospect. “We think she killed her too.”

“Was the mom’s death ruled a homicide?” Judge Ridenour said drolly. “No,” answered Casey, fighting to keep her voice down, “but we have new evidence.” “And you want me to disturb the sanctity of the dead on your say-so?” asked Judge Terhune. Casey approached him. “I have a very convincing but long argument. It’ll disturb the sanctity of your poker game.”

The disgruntled judge took her motion and signed it quickly. “Thank you,” said Casey, breathing a sigh of relief. “Go, go!” he pressed.

Casey practically warped out of Judge Terhune’s home, her heart still racing. She flipped open her cell phone and dialed Olivia’s number.

“Benson, what’s up?”

“Okay, I’ve got the exhumation order, but I need a drink. You are not going to believe what I just did.”

Olivia grinned. “Don’t tell me, you showed Ridenour a little more than just some leg.” “Worse,” Casey replied darkly.

- 

“You know what the problem is? Women shouldn’t be cops!” he yelled. “They shouldn’t be doctors. They’re too weak and stupid.”

She felt as if she’d been punched in the gut. Olivia knew that he was just playacting, but damn, that still really hurt.

- 

“I still can’t believe you let her beat you,” Fin muttered to Elliot. “Let her? Let her?” he asked. “C’mon man, if you’d gotten that last fly ball, cops could’ve closed it up,” said Fin. Elliot pouted. “I thought you didn’t like baseball.” “Just because I don’t like it doesn’t mean I don’t know the rules,” replied Fin.

After hearing about Elliot and Casey’s little bet, Cragen, Munch, and Fin had turned out at the game alongside Olivia. All of them had gotten to enjoy watching the cops lose 9-4, mostly thanks to Casey’s grand slam in the bottom of the 7th. It didn’t help that Olivia kept taking pictures either. At least Alex isn’t here to see this, thought Elliot, burying his head in his hands.

“Hey Elliot! I want another round of drinks for my friends!” said Casey, slurring her words slightly. “Come on, I’m not made of money,” he groaned. “You think I am?” she laughed. “You’ve seen what I wear to court.” “Casey, I’ve gotta admit, you own some ugly suits,” said Olivia honestly. “That’s what happens when you’re poor!” called Casey, raising her mug. “To scraping by with what we have!” “Okay, even I’ll drink to that,” said Elliot, raising his glass.

He sipped his beer slowly, watching Casey try to goad Munch and Fin into lifting her onto their shoulders to do a “victory lap,” as she called it. He hadn’t wanted to admit it to Olivia, but he’d liked Casey immediately, mostly because she wasn’t Alex. But as he got to know her better, Elliot
realized exactly how much Casey was not Alex – last of a host of military kids, still paying off law
school debts, hotheaded, straight, loved sports and jokes and going out with her friends. They had
their similarities, of course; both hard-working, career-oriented, and beautiful, but they even fit
those categories in different ways.

Elliot watched her laugh yet again, her red hair creeping out of its messy ponytail. Casey definitely
was not Alex. But then again, she wasn’t Olivia either. He really should be getting home.
“You alright?” Casey asked angrily.
“I’m great,” Elliot replied, getting to his feet in the cell. “Thanks for getting me a couple hours off.”
“You are not blaming this on me,” she said accusatorily.
“Well, you did let that defense attorney trash me pretty good in that courtroom,” he said, shrugging.
“Yeah, and that stunt that you pulled, that’s gonna help ensure that Judge Taft is gonna screw me in the trial, but hey, at least your ego’s still intact,” Casey spat.

He pulled on his jacket. “My ego? You get me out of there to talk about my ego?”
“I did not get you out of there,” Casey said irately.
“I called in a favor,” said an exasperated Mary Clark. “The contempt citation is withdrawn. So if you could possibly stop acting like a petulant child, that’d be thanks enough.”
She turned to Casey. “And you! You need to start playing nice with Oliver Taft.”
“This guy is an arrogant prick,” muttered Casey.
“True,” replied Clark. “And he completely takes issue with young attorneys who think they know more about the law than he does.”

Elliot laughed. “And you’re worried about my ego. This guy abuses his power and gets away with it.”
“You didn’t help the situation by mouthing off to the trial judge,” replied Clark. “This isn’t law school, Casey. This is the real world. Pick your battles. Winning the trial is more important than wearing a skirt.”
Elliot sighed. “You know…thanks.”
Clark looked peeved. “Save it. I’ve got work to do.” She left the two of them behind in the entrance to the holding cell.

“So, do you hate me more or does Cragen?” Elliot asked after a moment.
“I don’t hate you,” replied Casey. “I’m mostly pissed because what you did messed up my afternoon. I wish I’d been able to say it myself.”
“What’d Clark mean by that comment, the wearing the skirt thing?” he said, looking at her funny.
“Well, she probably meant that I’ll have to give in to sexism a little to win this trial, or she could have meant something else,” said Casey, avoiding his gaze.

He pushed open the door to the prison. “Something you won’t tell me about?”
“I haven’t had enough drinks yet,” replied Casey. “Elliot, go home.”

Casey stalked out of the courthouse to find Elliot waiting for her.
“I’m sorry,” she said plainly.
“Don’t be,” he replied. “Look, I know you went to the mat on this one. Sometimes, it just doesn’t work out.”

He stood, walking up close to meet her. She looked down, thinking for a moment.
“I want Taft off the bench,” she said quietly.
He clapped her on the arm. “And I want a ’65 Stingray.” And to save my marriage, he thought, walking away.
“No, I’m serious!” she called after him. “I’m going after him.”
“Casey, it’s not worth it,” he told her. “Look, what good does it do anybody for you to kill your
“If this is justice, I don’t want this career,” countered Casey.

She walked past him, leaving Elliot behind with his thoughts. He was about to head back to the precinct when she called out to him again.

“Hey, where are you going? I’m buying you lunch!”

Elliot stared at her. “You lost the trial. I should be buying you lunch.”

“You bought me enough drinks after the game,” said Casey. “Besides, you look like you’ve got more on your mind than this trial.”

She handed him a hot dog and a packet of ketchup. “Thanks,” he muttered.

“You talk to Olivia about it?” she said, applying yellow mustard to her own.

“Nah,” he said, “I don’t want her worrying.”

“So what’s going on?” she pressed.

Elliot looked grim. “Things aren’t good at home.”

“I’m all for getting an innocent woman out of jail, if she’s innocent,” began a tired Cragen, “but we don’t have the manpower to fuel a vendetta, Casey.”

“Well, you know, Captain, it’s really not that much work,” said Elliot, standing. “I think we can swing it.”

Munch caught Elliot’s eye quickly and nodded.

“Count me in, too.”

“Thank you for being such a real helper, Elliot,” Cragen said bitterly.

“It’s two interviews,” pressed Casey. “The mother and the genetics professor who was supposed to testify. If nothing pans out, I’ll drop it.”

Cragen looked stony. “Make it quick.”

Thanks and relief melted over Casey.

“Don’t worry,” said Olivia, “we’ve got your back.”

Casey turned to her and beamed. So the SVU family had finally welcomed her inside.

Casey and Elliot watched as Judge Taft hurried out of the courthouse, flanked by cameras and reporters.

“Now that’s justice,” Elliot said smugly. “And how many bruises are you leaving this mess with?”

She shrugged. “Branch docked me a week of pay, but nothing else. Apparently the majority of the Manhattan criminal justice system hates him, so my conduct may have been outlandish, but not unwelcome.”

“Well, everything worked out in the end,” he said. “You got any plans for the evening?”

She nodded. “Drinks with a couple women from white collar and Olivia to celebrate. I’ll see you tomorrow?”

“I’ll be there,” replied Elliot.
“We understand that you had a little mishap at the game,” said Olivia. It was a strange déjà vu. Shane’s mother was certainly not as straight-laced as Olivia’s had been, but she was practically a mirror for the drinking problem.

“Some idiot knocked me in a mud puddle,” she replied.
“Where’d you go to clean yourself up?” asked Elliot.
“Bathroom,” she said, confused.
“Happen to run into your son there?” Elliot said casually.
“No,” she said unconvincingly.

“Okay, would you mind if we took a look at your nails?” asked Olivia.
“Why?” said Shane’s mother. Suddenly, the pieces fit together. “What the hell are you implying?!?”
“Just that you both were in the restroom at the same time,” replied Olivia plainly.
“I used the one at the Boathouse Café and then stayed for a drink,” she said angrily.
Elliot smirked. “Alright, how long were you there for?”

“Oh, let’s see, I was finishing my second beverage when Shane came and pulled me out,” she told him.
“Did he say anything about what had happened?” Olivia asked her.
She gave Olivia a disgusted look. “No. But who talks about sex with their mother?”
I didn’t, thought Olivia. And that was entirely my problem.

Meredith Rice threw herself at Elliot, planting a kiss directly on his mouth.
He was shocked, frozen in place. It was the first time in ages that someone had shown him want and desire, and he fought the impulse to respond, even though he knew what Rice was. You’re in the precinct. You’re at work and this woman is crazy.
At last, he twisted away. “That’s a bad idea,” he croaked to himself.
“Come on, let’s get it on,” she panted, grabbing his ass.
“Are you crazy?!” Elliot yelled, throwing her off. “You’re out of your mind!”

She hit the fencing across the window hard and slammed to the ground, groaning. Somewhere behind Elliot, the door opened.
“Is there a problem here?” asked Olivia.
“No problem,” he said breathlessly. “She’s going for an insanity defense.”

Elliot looked back at Meredith Rice and was once again filled with shock.
“She’s having a seizure. Call 911.”
He placed her on her back, feeling incredibly guilty about the whole ordeal while Olivia hurried back to the squad room.
“Already on it,” waved the captain, the phone to his ear.

“What the hell is going on with this woman?” said Olivia, shaking her head.
Munch and Fin traded looks.
“What?” asked Olivia.
Munch sighed. “Olivia, is Elliot having any problems at home?”
She looked at Munch, confused. “Not that he’s mentioned. Why?”
“Nothing,” said Fin. “Sounds like EMS is here.”
“That was fast,” remarked Olivia, rushing off to meet the medics. She left Munch and Fin behind with the exact same thought.

*He took a little too long to break away from that kiss.*

-

Olivia went with Elliot to the hospital, as she always did. She hurried out to him with the doctor’s results.

“The tox screen is clean. They’re still waiting for the head CT,” she reported.

“Olivia…” he began. “I don’t even know what the hell happened.”

“That was an accident. She assaulted you and you have witnesses, Elliot,” she reminded him.

*That’s not what I’m confused about,* he thought. *I don’t even know what I should be apologizing for.*

*Who should I be apologizing to?*

-

Alex found herself traveling a lot, ironic for someone who had really never left her home town except on family vacations. After clearing the trip with DEA, Alex used a week of vacation time that was otherwise never taken to go to Chicago and take advantage of all the city had to offer: restaurants, museums, boating on the lake. She’d been allowed to go on the condition that she drive rather than fly, which was fine by Alex; though it was a long trip, she bought a handful of books on CD and allowed herself to catch up on some literature, something she found so hard to do nowadays if she wasn’t reading nonfiction.

Leaving the bathroom of her hotel room, she wrapped herself in a fluffy white robe and turned on the TV, hunting for something to watch. She settled on *NCIS,* a fairly new crime drama that she’d grown to enjoy watching over the past few months. It was different enough from her life in New York not to make her long for Manhattan (more than usual, anyway), but similar enough that it allowed her brain to whir and hum in the prosecutorial manor that she missed so much.

Plus, it didn’t hurt that *NCIS* was humorous, and that there was no one like Olivia on the show.

Alex hadn’t smoked the entire trip, as awful and grumpy as that had made her. She’d been trying to cut down as she slowly eased herself out of her depression. She figured she would always live with dread until Velez was dealt with, but she couldn’t let that control her. She might not ever move on from what happened to her, but she had to let go of the notion that fear of dying ruled her life.

She thought back, as she so often did, to the heartbroken look on Olivia’s face right before Alex had been loaded into that black SUV and whisked away into the shadows. Alex knew that part of the reason she had revealed herself to the two detectives was so that Olivia would be able to hold on to Alex, not to let her go, to wait for Alex as long as she could. It was selfish and unfair but Alex had never regretted her choice. She reminded herself that the other reason she had shown herself was to be a comfort to Olivia and a warning to Stabler, proof that Alex wasn’t really dead.

Vaguely, Alex considered the fact that she had once made a serious attempt to take her own life. Now, she wanted nothing more to be alive. The irony.
“So, someone hired them to snatch Patty,” concluded Cragen.
“Well, that makes sense, but nobody’s talking,” said Olivia.

The captain turned to address the Branson family, all of whom were waiting outside his office.
“Mr. and Mrs. Branson?”
The mother sprang to her feet. “Is this really necessary? I could do it. I might recognize him.”
“Your daughter is the only one who saw the man who attacked her in the park,” explained Cragen.
“We can’t charge him or his partner without Patty’s ID,” added Elliot.

“If you’ll follow me,” said the captain, gesturing towards interrogation. Olivia and Elliot followed them down the hall.
“Did I hear you right?” she muttered. “$3,000 on the car?”
“Hey, at least I’m not paying for it,” he whispered back.
“At least it’s not my skin,” she countered. “I’d make you pay my hospital bills.”

“Come on Olivia, you said you were fine,” he groaned.
“Yeah, and you’re lucky I am,” she told him. “Otherwise, I can think of a ghost that’d go after you if I wasn’t.”

Dickie tried to shoot the ball, but Elliot blocked his shot.
“Dad!” he cried.
“I was wide open!” complained Lizzie.
“Why didn’t you give the shot to your sister?” asked Elliot.
“Elizabeth can’t shoot as good as I can,” said Dickie plainly.
“Yeah, but you didn’t have the shot. She did,” replied Elliot, pointing to Lizzie.
“If you would’ve passed, I would’ve scored, dumbo,” Lizzie said angrily.

She looked up. “Who’s that lady staring at us?”
Don’t tell me I’ve got a Michelle Osborne of my own, Elliot thought. Then he relaxed.
“Afternoon.”
It was only Casey Novak. “Hey, your wife said I could find you here.”
“Dickie, Elizabeth, this is Miss Novak,” Elliot said cheerily. “We work together.”
“You guys look like a couple of pros out there,” complimented Casey.
“Yeah, so go practice,” said Elliot, herding them away. “And you don’t hog the ball!”

He turned back to Casey, bumping into her. “Lemme guess, you just happened to find yourself in the ass end of Queens?”
“Michelle Osborne trial prep. I need a reality check,” she replied.
“Okay, for what?” he asked, slightly annoyed.
She looked up at him. “There’s no way to win it.”

Elliot patted her on the back. “You’ve got her cold on the evidence.”
“Well, the defense has already won the jury. Once they hear about what happened to Michelle, no one’s gonna care about evidence,” she countered.
“Are you worried about losing this case or are you having second thoughts?” he asked her.
Casey thought for a second. “I don’t think the law can do anyone justice in this case.”
Elliot scoffed. “Are you just figuring that out now?”
He sat down, wiping his brow. Casey’s eyes followed him to the ground. “Michelle gets convicted, she goes to prison. If Michelle gets acquitted, she’ll never let go of Patty and there’ll be no end to this,” she explained. “Either way, somebody loses.”

“Right,” said Elliot. “What’s the question?”

Casey sat down next to him. “If you found out you had another kid out there, would you want it?”

“You’re damn right I would,” he replied quickly.

“So, you know why she’s so upset,” guessed Casey.

“It’s not an obsession. It’s a love, it’s a connection that transcends everything and anything,” he rambled. “It’s…I would die for my children. And there’s nothing in the world that would ever change that. Ever.”

She looked at him sadly. “So Michelle and Sarah will never stop fighting over Patty.”

Elliot took a deep breath. “And King Solomon said ‘Bring me a sword. Divide the living child into two. Give half to the one and half to the other.’”

“Except I can’t split the baby,” muttered Casey.

Elliot stared at her. “Solomon didn’t have to.”

Her eyes narrowed, then she nodded.

Elliot got to his feet and offered Casey his hand. “You wanna stay, play a round?”

“You sure?” asked Casey. “I’ll tell you, your wife didn’t seem too happy to see me.”

“It’s just because you showed up on my day off,” said Elliot.

Casey raised an eyebrow. “Alright. She wouldn’t think you’re cheating with me anyway.”

She turned to face his kids. “Hey, Elizabeth! Girls versus boys, you and me!”

Elliot grimaced. He hated Casey’s sense of intuition.
Debt

How the hell did she let herself get talked into this? They could’ve used any of the younger girls in SVU, but no, it had to be her. Who even owns this much pink?

Olivia rifled through the bags, wearing a pink and white polka dot skirt, pink heels, and a pink jacket. None of it was actually hers; she’d told Cragen that she was not going to buy any of this crap for an undercover operation, so it had come out of the department budget with the promise that she would return it once she’d finished. Like I’d actually keep this, she thought to herself. Fin had insisted on getting a picture, and to his surprise, Olivia had consented on the condition that she get a copy.

“How about the two of us, candlelight, bottle of Cristal…” he said. “Such a beautiful woman with such a foul mouth,” he said. “What a turn on.”

Yeah, Alex used to like that sometimes too. “Shut up and wait for your lawyer.”

The gears whizzed in Elliot’s brain. “Kathy’s cousin works Central Booking. Mistakes happen.” “He could get on a bus to Attica,” offered Olivia. “Give us time to talk to those hookers,” finished Elliot. “We gotta get to Ping before he gets to a phone.”

Olivia watched Elliot scurry from interrogation, then followed him out. She found Casey leaning against her desk, grinning.

“Okay, you said the photo was ready, let’s see.”
Olivia laughed back at her, then pulled the copy of her pink ensemble out of her desk. “Good lord, it looks like peptobysmal threw up on you,” said a stunned Casey. “Hell, I’m just glad it wasn’t me. Can you imagine all that pink with my hair?” “Hey, it’s not like it’s a great color for me either,” said Olivia, still laughing.

“The sassy pose is my favorite part,” remarked Munch. “Why’d you want a copy of this anyway?” asked Fin. Olivia smiled at him. “For my photo album, of course.” “I don’t believe that for a second,” said Fin.

“I do,” said Casey. She’d seen the photo album of Olivia and Alex. She knew exactly what Olivia was doing.
Olivia sat at the gate, waiting for her plane to arrive. There’d been some sort of terrible thunderstorm delaying the flight coming into La Guardia, meaning that she’d be boarding her flight to Canada a half hour later than expected. *I should have just taken the train,* she thought, pulling an envelope out of her carry-on.

Inside were pictures and a few sheets of photo sleeves that she’d started to assemble. She looked over the pictures from the cops and lawyers baseball game and tried not to laugh, remembering how smashed Casey had been. She’d gotten a phone call the next morning (if you count 11:30 as morning) asking her to run by the drugstore and bring some ibuprofen by Casey’s place because “it feels like woodpeckers are attacking my goddamn head.” Olivia had made the journey to Alphabet City and been repaid with chicken lo mein, Casey’s own version of the breakfast of champions.

Looking at the photos reminded Olivia that Casey’s birthday was coming up and that she had to get some more film when they went out to celebrate. She’d been assured that this would be a less drunken affair, but she still wasn’t entirely sure what Casey had in mind.

All she knew was that everything would be well-documented for Alex by the time she returned home.

-  

“What’s best for her son?” asked Elliot incredulously. “She’s all about morals and decency until it’s inconvenient.”

“I can bully BJ onto the stand, I can present all the evidence that I want, but without Jessie, I got nothing,” stated Casey, starting down the hallway.

“Any chance of talking to Danny without Carolyn running interference?” Elliot said in a quiet voice.

“And say what? Ignore your mom, listen to me, go to jail?” cracked Casey.

“Okay, well, look,” said Elliot, thinking, “maybe the guilt has been eating away at this kid. Make him face what he’s done.”

Casey stared back at him for a long moment, considering his idea.

“You willing to help me make it work?”

He smiled back at her. “Consider it your birthday present.”

“Did Olivia tell you?” she asked.

“Yeah, she did,” replied Elliot, shrugging. “Really though, it’s next week, right? You wanna get lunch or something?”

“Why not?” replied Casey. “You can’t go to my actual celebration, which Olivia is going to have to try and take an afternoon off for.”

“Oh?” he said curiously. “What’s that?”

“Paintballing, at a place an hour north of the city,” Casey answered. “Though Olivia’s probably going to kick all of our asses, so I’m still not sure why I invited her.”

-  

Someone behind Alex groaned. She looked back to see Nathan at the file cabinet, digging through stacks of papers.

“Why haven’t we switched to an all-electronic system yet?” he lamented. “Has anyone seen the
Randall’s slip-and-fall file?”
Alex sighed. “Sit down. I’ll find it.”
He laughed. “I’ve been looking for forty-five minutes. Knock yourself out.”

Less than five minutes later, she plopped the file on his desk.
He stared up at her, amazed. “Emily, how the hell?”
She shrugged. “Back when I was a paralegal, I spent entire days doing this. It’s not that hard if you put your mind to it.”

Alex stalked over to the water cooler and glanced up to see one of the new claims adjusters trying not to laugh. She couldn’t remember his name. Owen-something or other. Not thinking much of it, she sat back down.
Olivia collapsed onto the picnic bench, splattered with paint, mud, and welts. She was having a damn good time.

“It would rain the day before we came up here,” Nicole said grumpily.

Casey grinned at her. “You can’t tell me you weren’t having fun out there.”

Nicole gave her a sour look. “I was, until you and your partner there clobbered us.”

“Hey, it’s my birthday, I get whoever I want on my team,” replied Casey.

She plopped down next to Olivia and gave her a high-five.

“You brought your camera, right?” asked Casey.

Olivia nodded. “Never leave home without it.”

“Then get it!” said Erin. “We’re about the light up the cake!”

They lit up the awkward novelty “2” and “8” candles and sang a rousing chorus of Happy Birthday while Olivia documented the entire thing. Casey dug into the cake eagerly and they all sat around laughing and joking. It was the most fun Olivia had had in ages.

Three days later, RDK returned to terrorize New York City.

- - -

John checked his watch, not wanting to waste another second. Casey came bolting around the corner as if hitting a cue.

“I just set a new world record getting these warrants, not to mention risking my life by interrupting Judge Terhune’s poker game, again,” she announced breathlessly.

“Open it,” ordered Munch. “Poor baby. I’ve been up forty hours,” he said dryly.

The clerk keyed open Humphrey’s locker and Munch rushed to check the contents.

“What’ve we got here…cigars, more cheap cigars…bingo! We got journals.”

He handed one to Casey and they both began flipping through the pages.

“This one’s a proposal for a ripper book,” she stated. “This one’s full of story ideas, bad ones.”

“This one’s a how-to book on taking over RDK’s identity,” said Munch triumphantly.

He joined Casey to show her the contents.

“It’s a diagram of the Central Park running map,” she realized.

“Yeah, complete with descriptions of women with babies, all boys. This one sounds like Julie Leeberg.”

Casey looked up at him. “This guy does his research. Uh, skip to the third victim.”

Munch ran a finger down the page. “There are a long list of musicals here. Here’s one starred: Prairie Days.”

“This is it,” said Casey, grabbing a playbill. “Leggy redhead, two-year-old named Jake, stage name Red Watts.”

“She’s number three,” realized Munch. He immediately dialed the captain to explain the situation, looking very worn out.

“Maybe now I’ll actually be able to get some sleep,” groaned Munch, hanging up the phone.

“Happy Birthday, by the way.”

“Thanks,” she said. “Buy you a drink to celebrate?”

“Ask me tomorrow night,” yawned Munch.
Cragen and Elliot watched Huang break down Humphrey while Olivia rushed off to see if his mother was still alive.

“That was a dumb move, Elliot,” Cragen said quietly.
“Yeah, I know,” Elliot replied quickly.
Cragen sighed. “I don’t think you do. IAB just tossed the case on your shooting in that Chinese brothel. Two days earlier and you would’ve given them something else to investigate. You’d better watch your ass.”

Elliot said nothing.

Olivia was so exhausted after over two sleepless days that she passed out straight away when she got home. She didn’t even bother to shower.

Then the nightmares began.

They were rushing into the apartment TARU had found from the trace.
“It’s already 12:35,” muttered Fin.
“Don’t say that,” barked Elliot.

They bust open the door to find a woman’s body hanging from the ceiling, covered in blood. Only it wasn’t Julie Leeberg – it was Alex.

But this time, she was so tired that she couldn’t wake up. And so she slept through hours of horrible visions in her head, finally waking sometime later that evening.

Almost a year later and she still wasn’t sleeping well. She jumped out of bed and into the shower, trying to wash away the images behind her eyelids. Olivia hadn’t told anyone this, but she kept waking at least twice a night due to these horrible dreams. They didn’t always involve Alex – sometimes they just involved the cases, but they were soul-sucking nonetheless.

Olivia didn’t have to reveal anything life-threatening, but maybe she really should consider seeing a shrink.
“I’d ask you how the Tandi case is going, but I know you can’t tell me any of that,” said Langan, munching away on a tuna melt.

“Damn right,” said Olivia. “You know, I never figured you for much of a diner guy.”

He smirked. “My parents paid for my education, but my living expenses were all my own. I know every good cheap place to eat in Uptown.”

Olivia and Langan caught up around once a month, just to see how the other was doing. Things had been going slow at Trevor’s firm lately, and work in Special Victims was the same as always, so they mostly exchanged weird stories and tried not to talk about Alex. Though that wasn’t always an avoidable subject.

“I’m having dinner with her father in a couple of weeks,” Olivia told Trevor. “The, uh, the anniversary of her death is coming up and he didn’t want to be alone.”

“It really has almost been a year, huh?” he mused. “Wait, I didn’t think you knew her family.”

“I met her dad after her mother’s funeral,” confessed Olivia.

Trevor looked surprised. “That must have been awkward.”

“Yeah, it was, at first. But –”

Langan’s eye suddenly caught the TV behind her. “Hold on. Isn’t that your partner?”

Olivia turned to see Elliot and Fin hauling Tandi McCain out of her house and cuffs.

“I’ve got to go,” she muttered. She tossed ten bucks on the table and ran out of the restaurant.

-

Alex was just packing her things away when she looked up to find Owen standing in front of her desk. She blinked. “Can I help you?”

He smiled at her. “No, but maybe you can help me. I understand you’re also fairly new in town?”

“Yeah,” she replied, shifting her purse. “I moved from Tulsa about a year ago. Why so?”

“Well, I’ve been feeling kind of lonely ever since I moved here, and I was wondering if you’d be willing to go to dinner with me sometime,” Owen said sheepishly.

Alex shrugged. “Sure. Not on Wednesdays though, I’m busy those nights.”

“What about next Thursday?” he asked her. “You can pick the place, I really don’t know anywhere good to eat yet.”

“I’ll think about it and let you know,” Alex told him.

Owen beamed. “Great, I’ll see you then. Uh, have a good evening.”

“You too,” she said.

Alex watched him practically skip out of the office. How nice.

“I can’t believe you actually said yes,” said Lisa at the next desk over. “We thought for sure you were gonna turn him down.”

“Why would I –” Alex broke off mid-sentence, her eyes widening. “Oh god, he just asked me out, didn’t he?”

“Oh, yeah,” said Lisa, a little confused.

“He just asked me out. And I said yes.”
The captain looked forlorn. “We got the wrong guy.”

“Looks that way,” said Munch. “Lab says the cat hairs from Billy’s apartment don’t match the ones on Henry Morton.”

“We gotta let Billy go,” Casey sighed. She glanced at Elliot. “We keep him here much longer, we’ve got one hell of a lawsuit.”
Elliot nodded. “I’ll tell the perv he’s going home.”

Casey watched him walk towards the cage. Something wasn’t right. She trailed him to the hallway of the precinct.

“Got a minute?” she called.
He sighed. “I guess, Billy will wait.”
Casey gave him a curious look. “Is everything okay?”
Elliot frowned back at her. “Forget it, I’m not gonna wait just for this.”

_So, everything isn’t okay._

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After hearing the news about Jake’s death, Elliot couldn’t take it anymore. He stalked out of interrogation to get some fresh air, and Olivia turned to follow him.

What she didn’t know was that Elliot’s marriage was on the rocks. She’d been so wrapped in the anniversary of Alex’s death that she hadn’t noticed Elliot’s emotional state. _Or maybe Elliot hasn’t told her_, thought the captain, though that was unlikely. Elliot told Olivia everything. Didn’t he?

“Olivia, don’t.”

---

“Charge him,” snarled Donnelly. “Murder 2.”

“His son was killed by a psychopath who was gonna walk,” spat Elliot.

Donnelly was livid. “And that gives him the right to kill a kid? I want him arraigned by tomorrow morning.”

Donnelly tramped off, leaving Elliot and Casey alone.

“And you just gonna cover her ass, huh? Just sweep it all under the carpet?” Elliot muttered to her. Casey couldn’t believe it. “My job is not to protect my boss!”

“Then do the right thing!” he pleaded angrily. “You saw Morton, the guy was out of his mind! It’s not Murder 2, it’s Manslaughter.”

Casey watched as Elliot marched furiously back into the precinct. She had a sick, but undeniable feeling writhing in her gut.

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Olivia took a long gulp of her beer. “Happy to have the Morton case behind you?”
Casey rolled her eyes. “Incredibly. There was no winning that one. Either I took the acquittal or Elliot hated me forever.”

“He wouldn’t hate you forever,” soothed Olivia. “Just for a week and a half.”
Casey laughed. “Okay, that’s probably true.”
Olivia spun her glass. “Do you think Morton regrets what he did?”
“Absolutely not,” replied Casey.
“Do you regret anything?” asked Olivia quietly.
Casey frowned at her. “Where is this coming from?”
Olivia bit her lip. “I’ve just been thinking too much lately. It was a year last week, and I keep going over Alex’s death in my mind, wondering if I could have done anything differently.”

Casey sighed. This wasn’t something she liked to think about, but maybe Olivia needed to hear it.
“You know, I was engaged at one point, and it didn’t work out.”
Olivia spun to face her, staring. “Really?”
“It’s not something I really want to get into,” said Casey, shaking her head. “The point is, after it didn’t work out, I began sleeping with a lot of people.”
Olivia tried not to let her jaw drop.
“It wasn’t a wise decision, or a rational one, and I did a lot of regrettable things,” admitted Casey. “But I believe in living a life of no regrets. And so, yeah, it was self-destructive, but it helped me move on with my life, so something good came out of it.”

Olivia thought for a moment. “Were they all in the DA’s office?” Shit, of all the things to say. Casey grinned at her naughtily. “You want names?”
“Ugh, I don’t think so,” replied Olivia.
“The biggest age difference I hit was thirty years,” said Casey smugly.
“Casey, shut up.”
They stepped inside the house to find nothing but dead children.

Great, another scene to add to Olivia’s nightmares.

“Look, I’ve got my own kids, and eventually you realize you can’t always protect them,” said a disgruntled Elliot.
“What made you think about your own children?” asked Huang.
Elliot gave him a look. “Why do you think? The victims were kids.”
“Lots of victims are children,” reminded Huang. “You think about your own family on every case?”

All I think about lately is my damn family. “It’s not, you know, I don’t, it’s…” Elliot stumbled over his words. “Look…the one girl was wearing a teddy bear shirt and my daughter…”
Huang stared up at him.
“Whatever, it’s done,” Elliot dismissed with a whisper. “You move on.”

“How are you feeling now?”
Olivia stared off into the darkness of the precinct. “I don’t know.”
“This was an extremely traumatic event, Liv,” Huang reminded her. “The grief that you’re feeling is completely natural.”

She took a deep breath, trying not to cry. “I know that.”
“But you feel like you shouldn’t be feeling anything,” guessed Huang. “Is that how you feel?”
She shrugged and sighed.

“Tell me what you did last night after you went home,” Huang continued.
“Uh, I ate dinner, watched a little TV.” Olivia concentrated hard on reining in her emotions. “I went to the gym a little later, then I took a shower.”
Huang nodded. “And when did you go to bed?”
“Late, sometime after midnight,” she told him. “I fell asleep reading.”
“And how did you sleep?”

Olivia bit her lip. “Every night, I wake up with these horrible nightmares.”
Huang looked concerned. “About what?”
“About the cases,” she said shakily. “About…about Alex.”
Huang nodded slowly, a look of sympathy on his face.
“I know it’s been a year now, I know,” said Olivia. “And I don’t dwell on it in my daily life, I just can’t sleep without thinking about it.”
“You two were in love, and she died in horrific circumstances” replied Huang. “It’s normal that you would have trouble letting go.”

Olivia breathed out. “Sometimes I feel like…like it didn’t even happen. Like one day I’m going to walk into the precinct and there she’ll be, leaning on my desk. I feel like I’m still in denial, and even though I’ve let go of her, I can’t move on.”
“Some never do,” said Huang. “Some people never remarry after they lose a spouse to an untimely death, you know.”
“But what if I never stop having these nightmares? I’m afraid that…that I won’t be able to handle it,” Olivia confessed.

“But you are,” Huang said sadly, “by acknowledging it affects you. That’s the way you handle something traumatic.”

She nodded tearfully. “Well, I guess the real problem is that I’m afraid that…that it’s not working.”

“I’m afraid that she’s never coming home.” Olivia finally broke down and cried.

Huang made a mental note to look into finding something that would allow Olivia to experience a dreamless sleep.

“…”

“No, Sarah, it was your will!” she screamed. “You can blame God, and you can blame Abraham, but we all know the truth!”

She angrily jabbed a finger in Sarah’s direction. “YOU did this! You sat there, and you watched as a man raped one of your children and then murdered the other! You might as well have killed them YOURSELF!”

You fell to the ground, unaware of what happened to her. And then you sat next to Alex and watched her bleed because you couldn’t protect her. You did this. You might as well have killed her yourself!

“Olivia!” called the captain, interrupting your thoughts.

Olivia grounded herself, still livid. “He has one of your children. He has your unborn grandchild.”

“This is a test,” whispered a teary, shaky Sarah. “I won’t be tempted.”

“…”

“Every horror, every torment, afflicts your body like a cancer. It’s devouring you and you can’t see it.”

And what makes you think I can’t?

…”

After accompanying Melanie to the hospital, Olivia finally made it back to the precinct. It was late, and the 1-6 was nearly empty, save Captain Cragen and Doctor Huang.

“I want you to know you did some really excellent work with this case,” greeted Cragen.

Olivia nodded. “Just doing my job, Cap.”

“No, you went above and beyond the call of duty with this one,” he continued, “and the department will hear about it. You’ll probably get a commendation, or maybe even the medal for exceptional merit.”

“Captain, I don’t need any medals,” Olivia said honestly. “All that matters is that Melanie is safe. But thank you.”

Cragen patted her on the shoulder. “Alright, you get some rest. Goodnight, Olivia.”

“Goodnight, Captain.” She waved to him as he walked out towards the elevator, then turned to face Huang.

“Well, I’m surprised to see you here this late.”

He approached her cautiously. “I have something for you.”

Olivia gave him an odd look. “Okay, what is it?”

He handed her a piece of paper. “This is a prescription for prazosin. It’s generally used to treat hypertension, but has also been shown to have significant positive effects on those who experience PTSD-related nightmares. When you first start taking it, you might experience dizzy spells and...”
lightheadedness, but it should allow you to sleep better than you have been.”

Olivia gingerly took the paper out of Huang’s hands. “And you’re allowed to just give this to me?”
“I cleared it with psych services,” he explained. “I understand your hesitancy to seek treatment, but I believe this will do you a lot of good.”
She stared at the prescription, this little scrawled miracle that would allow her, after a year, to finally get a good night’s rest. Commendations, Melanie, the dissolution of the cult – that didn’t matter now. This was her true reward for this case.

“Liv, you know Alex’s death wasn’t your fault,” whispered Huang.
“I know,” she murmured back. Tears in her eyes, she looked up at him. “Thank you so much.”
Casey looked over the list of men that Emmett handed her. “I don’t know how you got this, but it’s irrelevant,” she said, smirking. *At least it’s longer than mine. Damn, it’s even stapled.* “Miss Denning’s truthfulness, or lack of it, is a matter of public record,” Emmett explained smugly. “After rear-ending a van on the BQE last year, she told a heart-wrenching tale about being upset about her grandmother’s death, so upset she couldn’t walk a straight line when the officer asked her to.” “Well, if her grandmother died—” began Olivia. Emmett gave her a nasty look. “Her grandmother miraculously came back to life and bailed her out.” Elliot and Olivia traded glances. *This isn’t good.* “This time I understand she smashed a cab window with a bottle?” asked Emmett. “She was distraught,” said a frustrated Olivia. “She was drunk!” countered Emmett. “And I know this because my client was with her when she got herself that way. He didn’t force her to drink or to have sex.” Emmett grabbed her briefcase and turned to leave. “Let me know when you drop the case!” she called eagerly. Casey shot Emmett a nasty sideways look. “Better look at the list.” Olivia took the paper from Casey’s hand. “So Ron Polokoff wants to play dirty.” “How did Emmett get those names so fast?” asked Elliot. “That’s a good question,” replied the captain. “Send Myra home and get to those people before Emmett does.” “First name on the list is Justin Wexler,” said Olivia, still reviewing the evidence. Elliot bolted from Cragen’s office, seemingly to get the car. Casey, sensing something was amiss, followed him out. “Hey, what’s going on?” she asked quietly. “Not a good Thanksgiving?” “Walk with me,” he muttered. He tromped towards the elevator, Casey in tow. “Shouldn’t we wait for Olivia?” she asked. Elliot sighed. “No, no I don’t want her finding out. Not yet.” The elevator doors closed around the two of them as Casey understood. “Divorce papers?” she asked quietly. “Legal separation,” Elliot replied gruffly. “As for a divorce, well…” He broke off and screwed his eyes shut tight. From the darkness, he felt a comforting hand on his shoulder. “Elliot,” whispered Casey, “I am so sorry.” “Yeah,” he said quietly. “Me too.” — “Maybe he didn’t even see it as rape until he told her to leave,” Elliot said dryly. *Oh no, I do not need a lover’s quarrel right now.* “Guys, I can’t prosecute this until you agree,” Casey said quickly. “Call me when you get on the same page.” Olivia shot Elliot a very foul look. *What the hell is wrong with him?* “What is your problem with Myra?” she asked, getting to her feet.
“She’s neurotic,” spat Elliot. “Look, she chased after a guy whose life was falling apart.”
“So that gives him the right to force her to have sex?” Olivia said angrily.
Elliot scratched his neck. “She was the one who wanted to have sex.”
“Really? Did she want to be strangled too?” barked Olivia.
“A lot of people do,” Elliot said quietly. Too far, he thought.

“Elliot, what’s wrong with you?!”
Please Olivia, don’t. You don’t need to know. I can’t act on my urges if you don’t fucking know.

“Men change,” hissed Scarry. “Especially when their wives file for legal separation. My investigator checked the court documents. He also found out that your wife took the kids and moved in with her mother.”

Olivia stared. Elliot’s face contorted with rage.
“You have no right to use my personal life to make your case,” he growled dangerously. And you have no right to tell Olivia.
“I don’t give a damn about your personal life unless it affects my client and it does,” muttered Scarry. “Stay away from her!”

Elliot stalked out of Cragen’s office. Scarry was still speaking, but Olivia didn’t hear her.
Separation? I thought things were…what’s going on?
She bolted out of Cragen’s office after Elliot.

“Elliot, Elliot stop!” she yelled, grabbing him by the shoulder. “Hey, what’s going on?”
“I touched her in an inappropriate manner,” replied Elliot, brushing off Olivia’s comment. “Didn’t you hear?”
“I don’t believe that, forget that!” shook off Olivia. “What’s going on at home?”
“Nothing,” he said unconvincingly, continuing down the hallway.
“Hey, would you talk to me?” yelped Olivia.

He stopped. Dammit, he had to tell her something or she was going to push this.
“Kathy left me.”
It was the bare minimum, but it was something.

Casey popped her head into Cragen’s office to deliver the news.
“Grand jury came back. They just voted to indict Ron Polokoff.”
Olivia looked back at her. “Does Myra know?”
“I’m on the way to tell her now,” replied Casey. “You wanna come?”

Olivia hurried out of Cragen’s office, leaving Elliot and the captain behind. She joined Casey in the hallway, wearing her jacket and an off-put expression.
“Something on your mind?” asked Casey nonchalantly.
Olivia squinted in thought. “Did you know Elliot and Kathy separated?”

Shit. “Uh, yeah, actually, he mentioned it that morning,” Casey said quickly. It wasn’t going to do her any good to lie.
Olivia nodded slowly as she stepped into the elevator. “Why do you think he didn’t tell me?”
“Liv, you’re on this new medication, you’ve got enough going on in your life, he probably didn’t want you to worry about him,” explained Casey.
“But people don’t just separate out of the blue,” Olivia said ardently. “Things must have been bad at home for a while. He knows he can trust me, I told him everything about my relationship –”
“Yeah, but you and Elliot are different people,” Casey cut in. “Just because you shared with him doesn’t mean he has to share with you.”
Olivia sighed. “I guess you’re right. It just makes me feel like he has no confidence in me.”
*Thank god, she bought it.* “That’s not true, and you know it,” Casey said firmly.

Olivia still looked skeptical, but she dropped the subject. “Alright, if we’re driving, you need to take the wheel.”
“Still having dizzy spells?” Casey asked.
“Not as bad as I have been, but I don’t want to risk it,” answered Olivia. “I’m telling you, that very first morning, I lay in bed for an hour. I thought I’d never get up again.”

“Attempted suicide, drug overdose,” Casey said into the phone.

Thank god Olivia was on the prazosin now. This was actually a scene from Alex’s life, and not one she’d ever wanted to experience for herself.

Alex had been out with Owen a couple of times now, though he knew her as Emily. He was witty, charming, and they had plenty to talk about. They’d even spent Thanksgiving together at a small, quiet bistro in town, bonding over their lack of family to pass the time with.

His eyes sparkled every time he looked at her, and Alex could tell he was attracted to her. She was flattered; he was a nice guy who genuinely meant well. But she was a lesbian, and moreover, she was still in love with Olivia Benson.

There was just no chemistry.

“Elliot…” began Olivia, unsure of what she was saying, “what happened with you and Kathy?”
Looking uncomfortable, Elliot shrugged. “Uh, the job. Makes me kind of hard to live with.”
“She should try working with you,” cracked Olivia.
Elliot smiled back at her. *And you. You happened to me.*
“Get Doctor Hendrix!” called the nurse.
“Rebecca Hendrix?” asked Olivia.
“Yeah,” said the nurse, continuing on with the stretcher.

Elliot glanced over at Olivia. “Who’s Rebecca Hendrix?”
“She used to be a cop,” explained Olivia. *We went to the academy together. And I asked her out. And she turned me down, because she doesn’t swing that way.*

“This is exactly the problem with the mental health profession,” said an exasperated Olivia. “You medicate them just enough so you can cut ‘em loose, then nobody monitors them. They go off their meds, and then next thing you know, they either become a victim of a crime or they commit one. Either way, we have to clean up your mess.”

Elliot stood awkwardly by his desk. He knew Olivia wasn’t a fan of the mentally ill, but this was taking it a little too far.

“So what, we lock them up to make your life easier?” Hendrix said sarcastically. “Is that your solution, Olivia?”
“If it keeps them safe, yes,” Olivia shot back.
“I left the job because I got sick of locking them up,” replied Hendrix. “I’d rather treat the criminals than help the victims.”
“Do you think Miranda’s being helped right now on the street?” asked Olivia.

“I think we all can agree the answer to that is no,” Cragen cut in. “So let’s find her. Any relatives?” Hendrix thought for a moment. “She mentioned a sister. I’ll check her old medical records, see if I can find a contact number.”
Cragen started back to his office. “Check public records too.”
Hendrix nodded, then turned to leave.

“Where’re you going?” asked Elliot.
Hendrix spun around. “To work.”
Elliot took a deep breath. “We’re gonna need a shrink if we find Miranda. She trusts you.”
Olivia gave him the stink eye. *You son of a bitch.*
Hendrix looked awkwardly at Olivia. “I already have a job.”
“So what’re you doing here?” he said playfully. “You may not be a cop anymore, but I know you want to find this guy as badly as we do.”
*He’s buying me lunch for the next week,* seethed Olivia.

“Then why didn’t you tell your boyfriend that you went to your mother’s?” asked Olivia.
Thomas looked revolted. “He’s not my boyfriend.”
“Oh. Because you live with him, you sleep with him, you have sex with him,” listed Olivia.
“That is disgusting,” muttered Thomas.

“What’s disgusting?” cut in Doctor Hendrix.
“That. I don’t want to talk about that stuff,” replied Thomas quickly.
Elliot shifted in his chair. “Now Tom, the only person in this room who’s got a problem with
homosexuals is you. Get over it.”

Ordinarily, Olivia would have considered that to be an awfully nice gesture, but Elliot was still giving Hendrix the side-eye every chance he got.

- Elliot cautiously approached Olivia’s desk. “What’s your problem?”
“If Miranda is taking her meds now, then she’s gonna be more lucid and maybe she remembers something,” guessed Olivia. “I want to talk to her without Rebecca.”
“What’s your problem? She’s a cop,” said Elliot plainly. “That’s all I need to know.”
“No, Elliot, she didn’t think that being a cop was good enough, so she quit,” Olivia shot back.

Elliot looked bewildered. “Is that what this is about? Some sort of inferiority complex?”

Olivia was furious. Screw you. She’s always had a stick up her ass, she lorded over all of us at the academy, and if you had seen the piteous look on her face when she turned me down, you’d hate her too. Like being bisexual made me less than her. Screw her and screw you.

“You know, I get that you’re on the rebound and everything, but if you could keep it out of work that’d be great.”

Olivia looked into Elliot’s shocked face, masking the hurt and anger, and felt her stomach drop. This is what I get for running my mouth. Goddammit Olivia, could you be more insensitive? Not to mention hypocritical.

Elliot left the precinct and she let him go.

- “You can’t save everyone, Olivia. I’m sorry.”

Olivia lingered sadly in the courtroom. I know that, Rebecca. I know.

“Is that the bitch that Elliot’s been eyeing?” Casey said casually.

Olivia tried not to burst out laughing. “You know, you never fail to cheer me up. But you’re right, she’s not doing his marriage any favors.”

Olivia turned to face Casey. “I’ve got some, uh, bad news. Miranda Cole, victim number one, committed suicide today.”

Casey frowned. “Ugh, that’s awful. I wasn’t going to put her on the stand anyway, but I might see if I can swing a murder charge now.” She thought for a moment. “The rape pushed her into a psychotic break causing the suicide. Think I can swing it?”

“Are you seriously considering this, or are you just trying to make me laugh?” asked Olivia.

Casey smiled at her. “A little bit of both. Would you want to cook dinner with me tonight? I’ve got some cauliflower in my fridge that’s going to go bad if I don’t eat it.”

Olivia frowned, following Casey out of the courtroom. “I thought tonight was drinks night with white collar.”

Casey looked away forlornly. “No, no drinks tonight. You know, a year later, only Nicole is still there. Erin’s been hired by high-powered defense firm, Jenn left when she got pregnant, Steph’s taken over as bureau chief for robbery, and Abby was fired about a month ago.”

“And you’re in SVU,” finished Olivia.

“It’s weird, you know,” Casey mused. “For some reason, I thought we’d all be together in white collar forever. We were a big team, and once I left, we all scattered to the wind. SVU has turned my life upside down in ways I couldn’t even imagine.”
“It does that to everyone,” said Olivia plainly. “You’re not alone. But that’s why we’re all family, because we support each other with what we go through.”
She frowned. “Except for Elliot right now. He should be trying to save his marriage, not sniffing around for someone to fill the void in his bed.”
“Harsh,” said Casey, wincing. “So, are you gonna help me cook dinner or not?”
Shattered glass lined the store floor. The cashier was dead, as were two unknown boys. At least, Olivia supposed they were dead. She was a little preoccupied with someone else. “Fin! Fin! My partner’s been hit, I need a bus now!”

Olivia knelt in front of him. He was leaning back against the racks, not on the ground, and it was the wrong shoulder, but the sickening wave of déjà vu hit her full force. She fought the urge to vomit. So it wasn’t enough that she’d now chased the demons out of her head; now they followed her into her real life.

“Fin! Fin!” she breathed heavily. Turning back, she checked on the boy. “You okay? You stay down!” She glanced around the bodega and found a wad of napkins which she immediately pressed to Fin’s shoulder. “Fin, you alright? Stay with me. Stay with me, Fin. Stay with me baby, stay with me.”

She applied more pressure and reality blurred. “Stay with me baby, stay with me sweetie, it’s going to be okay. Stay with me, stay with me, they’re coming, it’s going to be okay. Stay with me Alex, Alex, look at me Alex, stay with me. No no no no no. Not this time. Alex! Alex!”

The medics had to pull her off screaming when they finally arrived.

- 

“But he’s gonna make it, right?” pleaded Olivia.
The doctor grasped her shoulders. “As soon as I know anything, I’ll tell you.”

That was what they said last time and they lied. They lied.

- 

“I’m looking for a baby,” Fin explained to Casey. “Birth certificate says he was born at Mercy Hospital, mother’s name is Tricia Knowles. Might be a lead in the charts.”

“Missing child?” asked Casey, frowning. “I just talked to Captain Cragen, he didn’t mention it.” She glanced over at Sandoval. Oh, hello.

“It’s not an SVU case,” explained Fin. “I’m helping out narcotics.”

He gestured to Sandoval. “Mike Sandoval, ADA Casey Novak.”

Smiling, Sandoval shook her hand. Casey beamed. Shit, he is cute.

“Nice to meet you,” he said politely.

“Same here,” she replied eagerly. Casey glanced over her shoulder, then returned her attention to Fin. “I gotta arraign this case, then I’ll fax a subpoena over to the hospital for the medical records. Turns into something, you’ll let me know?”

“You got it,” said Fin.

Casey shot Sandoval one last grin, then stepped in front of the benches. She could practically feel his eyes on her as she walked away. God, it has been too damn long since I’ve gotten laid.

- 

Owen shivered in the winter Wisconsin night. “I’m so happy you finally let me drive you home.” “It had to happen sometime,” Alex said shyly. “I had a really nice time tonight.”
Owen smiled at her. “I did too, Emily.”

Alex gave him a small smile. “I’ll see you next Monday. Goodnight.”
She reached in her bag for her keys.
“Emily, wait.”
Alex stopped and looked up right into his face. And his mouth.

He was kissing her.

“You love me?” asked Olivia, after a very long silence.
“I love you,” said Alex, slowly. She grasped for words. “And it scares the hell out of me, because I’ve never loved anyone before.” She locked eyes with Olivia. “Not like this.”

Alex sprang back in horror.
“No, don’t touch me!” she yelled.
Owen was shocked. “I’m so sorry, Emily. Are you okay? What’s wrong?”

Alex had never felt so violated, but she didn’t know how to explain this away. She gripped her right shoulder and wracked her brain. Stomach sinking, she landed on an excuse, but it was a horrible thing to lie about. No one will know. I’m sorry.

“I don’t want to talk about it,” she lied.
Owen looked at her sorrowfully. “Emily, please. I’m sorry, I won’t try anything again, but please tell me what’s going on.”
Alex shoved the key in her front door and unlocked it, opening it up.

“I was raped,” she choked, slamming the door behind her.
Goddammit, Alex Cabot would never lie about something like that. Who the hell was she? Who had she become?
Contagious

“You’re the shrink, you got anything?” Elliot asked.
Hendrix thought for a moment. “There is something I haven’t tried yet.”
Back at her desk, Olivia rolled her eyes. *Oh, get a room you two.*

She knew what was going to happen when Elliot finally asked Hendrix out. Rebecca would give Elliot that same piteous look and turn him down gently, saying that it wouldn’t work out between them when in reality, it was because she felt she was too good for him. Olivia knew she should warn Elliot, but he hadn’t told her about the separation, so why bother? Let him figure it out for himself.

She’d expected an ugly fallout, an awkward end to what had been a good friendship. But Owen, a sweetheart through and through, was incredibly nice about the whole deal. He came by the next afternoon, wanting to have an open, honest conversation, something Alex hadn’t had in the entire time she’d been in Wisconsin.

“I’m not going to lie to you, Emily, I’m attracted to you,” he said woefully, sitting on her couch. “But I don’t want to hurt you in any way.”
Alex stared out the window. “It’s why I moved here out of the blue. I couldn’t stand being in Tulsa anymore; I was a mess.”
Owen nodded slowly. “Is there anything I can do?”

“Can you teach me how to sleep without the lights on?” Alex said bitterly.
Owen looked at her with so much sadness in his eyes that Alex couldn’t stand it. She had to turn away.

“What if I stayed with you?” he offered. “Not romantically, but as a bodyguard of sorts?”
“Owen, you’re too damn nice,” she murmured. But maybe, just maybe, it would help her out.

Elliot stumbled down the Dobbins’ front steps.
“I gotta get out of here, I’m losing it,” he mumbled.
“It’s okay Elliot,” placated Olivia. “You’ve gotta calm down.”
“I nearly punched that woman in the face in there,” he rambled. “I can’t do this anymore, I can’t do this.”

Olivia steeled herself. “You know, this is tough on all of us.”
“Never this hard,” replied Elliot, still pacing. Olivia watched him, back and forth, back and forth.
“Look, you’re under a lot of stress right now,” she began. “Why don’t you go home and get some rest?”
Elliot continued to pant. “The house is empty.”

“Call Kathy, call your kids, and go see them,” pressed Olivia.
“It’s not the same,” he whispered. “How do you walk away? Just to walk away after twenty years, how do you walk away?”

Tears lingering in his eyes, Elliot wasn’t sure if he was addressing Kathy or himself.
A birthday cake and his four smiling children gathered around his desk. It was the happiest sight he’d seen in ages.
“Happy Birthday, Dad,” said Maureen, smiling.
“Think you got enough candles on that cake?” cracked Elliot.
“We always have a cake,” said Lizzie.

Elliot swept Maureen into a big hug. “Olivia called and said you’d be here,” she told him. “Mom lent me the car.”
“Of course she did,” replied Elliot. He turned to Kathleen. “How’re you doing?”
“Okay,” she said, leaning in for a hug. “How ‘bout you?”
“Great,” Elliot said quickly.

“You have to make a wish,” pressed Dickie.
Elliot smiled down at him. “‘Course I do.”
I wish that you four could come home and live with me forever, and that I could be there for you whenever I wanted.
I wish I was still in love with your mom.
I wish none of this had ever happened.
“To the New Year!” yelled Munch. “Begin the countdown!”

For the first time in ages, everyone had turned out at Munch’s New Year’s party. The captain and Elliot, the two teetotalers, sat smiling quietly in the corner. Olivia and Fin shouted out the countdown, and at the drop of the ball, Munch launched into Auld Lang Syne but was quickly cut off by shock when Casey kissed him on the cheek. Busting out laughing, Casey knocked glasses with Fin as Olivia snuck into the corner to check on Cragen and Elliot.

“You all doing okay?” she said, slightly tipsy.
“Yeah, fine,” murmured Elliot, actually meaning it.
“It’s nice to see everyone here for a change,” Cragen said thoughtfully.
Olivia looked away wistfully. “Not everyone, Captain.”

“Oh yeah,” said Elliot, grinning. “Happy Anniversary.”
Olivia smiled back at him. “Thanks.”

Once again, Alex spent the New Year alone. Owen had wanted to come over, but not tonight.

She sat in front of the TV with an open bottle of wine and watched the ball drop. Finally, she was ready to look at New York City again.

_They’ll get him, Alex_, she reassured herself. _They’ll get Velez and you’ll be able to go home._

Sighing, she lit a cigarette and counted down along with Dick Clark.

“Happy Anniversary, Olivia.”

Dr. Hendrix came barreling into the precinct, a concerned expression on her face.

“You’re looking at the wrong person,” she announced. “It wasn’t Logan on the roof.”

Cragen looked confused. “Well, who do you think it was?”

“Lindsay,” said the doctor.

The squad exchanged befuddled looks.

“Well, that’s not possible,” said the captain. “DNA doesn’t lie.”

“The twins were born July 14, 1990,” continued Dr. Hendrix. “Lindsay’s birth certificate was reissued six months later.”

“Why is that?” asked Munch.

“That’s what I wanted to know,” Hendrix explained. “I had no right to, but I pulled Amelia Stanton’s hospital records.”

Cragen took the file from her hands. “Baby Boy A and Baby Boy B? She gave birth to identical twins.”

“Lindsay’s genetically male,” concluded Hendrix.

“Well, was there any defect or deformity?” said a skeptical Fin.

“No, Amelia Stanton gave birth to two perfectly healthy boys,” explained Hendrix.

“What did they do to her?” Olivia whispered in horror.

Elliot’s eyes widened. “You mean him.”
True, the news about the Stanton twins shocked Elliot, but he was almost as shocked by Hendrix’s blatant disregard of procedure. She was willing to do whatever it took for these children, no matter the risk. And she wasn’t his partner.
*I really should ask her out,* he thought.

- 

“I’m sorry,” said Olivia.
“You did the right thing,” Elliot said quickly.

Hendrix gave him a look. “For a cop. But the good news is, Lindsey has stopped taking estrogen. She’s decided – he’s decided to change back to his true genetic gender.”
Elliot nodded. “Lot of painful operations ahead for her.”
“At least the right person’s finally making the choice,” replied Hendrix.

Olivia snapped her phone shut. “Cragen wants us back at the house.”
Elliot stepped cautiously towards her. “Take care.”
Hendrix smiled at him warmly, even flirtatiously. Olivia stood awkwardly watching, not sure what to do. She followed Elliot out of Hendrix’s former office and started down the hospital hall.

Elliot turned back, staring at her door. “Hold on.”
Olivia rolled her eyes. “Go get ‘em, champ.”

Elliot gently opened the door to Hendrix’s office. “Uh, Rebecca? One more thing.”
She smiled up at him. “Yes?”
“Would, uh, you like to have dinner sometime?” he said quietly.
Hendrix sighed heavily. “Elliot, I’m really sorry. With the hearing and all of the calamity involving SVU, now just isn’t a good time.”

His face fell. “Yeah, I suppose going on a date with me would only give fuel to the disciplinary committee.”
“But honestly? I would love to. Can I get in touch with you after this entire mess clears up?” asked Rebecca.
Elliot tried to read the look on her face. Was that sorrow? Disappointment? Pity?
“Sure thing,” he said, crestfallen. “Good luck.”
She nodded. “Same to you.”

Elliot turned and left her office, slogging dejectedly back towards Olivia. The detective was leaning against a wall, her arms folded.
“So?”
Elliot pursed his lips. “She said after the hearing clears up, she’ll call me.”
“She said no, Elliot,” charged Olivia. “And then she looked at you like she felt sorry for you.”
He stared at her. “How did you know?”
“I asked her out when we were in the academy,” said Olivia.
Elliot’s eyes widened. “Why didn’t you tell me?”
Olivia shot him a dirty look. “Oh, like you’ve been so forthcoming with information lately. Come on, let’s go.”

Elliot frowned and turned away.

- 

“Blair made bail this morning,” announced Casey.
“He can afford it,” muttered Elliot. “I’m surprised he sat in jail for three days.”

Casey Novak, you are a godsend.

It was late, but it wasn’t like Elliot had anywhere to go anyway. Most of the DA’s office had gone home, but he and Casey were still going over trial prep for the Midtown rapist, who had finally been caught after three months of searching.

“I think we’re set,” she said, fishing a couple of noodles out of a takeout container. “Thanks for coming in so late. I was tied up in court until six.”

“No problem,” Elliot replied, looking up at the clock. 9:30. They were probably the only people left in the DA’s office. “I’d say I should be heading home, but, y’know.”

Casey nodded. “Yeah, I do.”

Elliot leaned back into Casey’s couch. “I asked Doctor Hendrix out.”

Casey’s eyes snapped to his face, laser-focused. “What?”

“She turned me down,” he admitted. “I dunno, I guess I thought I saw something there.”

“I can’t believe you,” Casey murmured, livid.

He frowned at her. “What?”

“Well, I guess she is a nice surrogate,” Casey said dryly. “Pretty, a former cop, obviously cares more about helping the victims than treating the perps. She’s short, though. You can’t pretend she’s Olivia, even if you close your eyes.”

Elliot felt as if he’d been slapped in the face. “Casey…what…what the hell is this?”

“You know exactly what this is!” she snarled. “You can pretend your wife left you because of the job, but we both damn well know your marriage fell apart because you’re in love with Olivia Benson!”

Finally, someone confronted him with the truth. Getting to his feet, Elliot rubbed his eyes and began to pace.

“How long?” spat Casey.

Elliot sighed. “Too long, Casey. Alex…Alex figured it out, that’s why she couldn’t stand me.”

“You know she’ll never go to you,” stated Casey. “She’d never betray Alex like that, even if she is dead.”

“Goddammit Casey, I know!” he yelled. “And that’s why I’m losing it, because before I restrained myself due to my marriage, but now that’s in shambles and I’m looking, I’m looking for someone else because otherwise…I can’t quit my job and I can’t change partners and I can’t let her know.”

Casey slowly got to her feet, pushing her chair out behind her. She approached Elliot until she was mere inches from his face.

“Elliot, you wanted a surrogate, all you had to do was ask.”

Casey leaned in and kissed him Elliot on the mouth.

He responded immediately, kissing her back hard and grinding his hips into hers. Casey could feel him hard and wanting and dear lord, it had been too long since she’d done this and it felt fantastic. Elliot had wrapped his arms around her, but she snaked her arms between the two of them and undid his belt, practically tearing off his pants. Hastily, she hiked up her own skirt and was surprised to feel his hand wind between her legs, ripping her panties down to her ankles.
Casey took Elliot’s tie in one hand and led him towards the back wall, bracing herself against the bookcase.
“You’ve done this before,” he panted in a moment of realization.
She bent, exposing her pale sex for him to see. Taking in the sight, Elliot tried not to make any noise. Casey was definitely still a dark redhead downstairs.
“Hurry up and take me,” she ordered. “And if you say her name, I’m going to be very insulted.”
“Protection,” he groaned.
She shot him a very naughty look. “What a bad Catholic. And for the record, I’m on the pill. You can blow in me all you want and it won’t do a damn thing.”

Elliot unbuttoned his boxers and plunged his cock deep into Casey, at last allowing a moan to escape from his lips.
“Mmm,” she hummed. “Night janitor finishes here at 8:30. Make all the noise you want.”

And so he fucked Casey Novak hard into her bookcase. It wasn’t romantic and it wasn’t pretty. It was visceral, it was sensual, and god, she was tight and sweet and amazing and she wanted him. With every thrust, Casey ground her hips back against Elliot, aching for more. She came over and over and Elliot was astounded. He felt like he was seventeen again, when sex was new and exciting, but even Kathy had never been like this. She’d always been so shy and reserved, not like Casey who was…god, she was animal.

With a stifled moan, Casey came again, her walls squeezing Elliot’s cock hard. It sent him over the edge and he blew, practically collapsing on Casey’s back.
Casey purred. “God, you are something else. Grab the tissues from the desk.”
Still basking in the afterglow, he handed Casey the box and groaned as she slowly slid him out, using the tissues to clean herself up.

“Wow, that was a lot,” she remarked casually, pulling up her panties. She raised an eyebrow at him. “I take it it’s been a while?”
“Yeah, I suppose it…has.” Reality hit Elliot like a slap in the face. “Oh god.”
Casey smirked. “Don’t let the guilt eat at you, Detective.”

She grabbed her coat and her briefcase and headed towards the door.
“It locks automatically from the outside,” she explained. “Take all the time you need. See you tomorrow.”

Casey disappeared into the night, leaving an overwrought, still pantsless Elliot alone with his thoughts.
Olivia jumped in the squad car and dialed Casey’s office. “Casey Novak.”
“Hey, it’s Benson,” greeted Olivia. “I need a search warrant for Lucas Biggs’ storage locker.”
“That child molester they’re about to fry in Virginia, right?” asked Casey. “Should be a piece of cake. Don’t tell me we’re reopening one of his cases.”

“Officially, no,” said Olivia. She sighed. “Man, I tell you, he’s my partner and all, but it’s nice to have a break from Elliot. He’s been so damn moody lately, and I get why, but he’s really bringing me down.”
“Well, maybe spending some time with Dickie will do him some good,” said Casey with a twinge of guilt. “I’m just heading to court now, I’ll give you a call when I’ve got the warrant.”
“You’re the best,” said Olivia happily. “See you later.”

Olivia shut her phone and turned the ignition, slightly confused. Had she told Casey about Dickie’s appendicitis? No matter.

- 

The first night Owen stayed over, he slept on the couch, but that made Alex even more scared than usual. An unseen presence in the house was too much to bear, so when he woke up the next morning, he found her camped out in the chair next to him, looking very tired and very uncomfortable.

After that, he slept in her bed.

Alex felt practically consumed by guilt, but for the first time in over a year, she was sleeping through the night, even with the lights off. It was nice to have a protector by her side, and in her dreams, she could imagine it was Olivia next to her, comforting her and keeping her safe from Velez and anyone who might try and hurt her.

But when she was awake, the body and the voice and the smell were all wrong. “Emily,” Owen murmured sleepily, pulling her into his arms.
Alex rested her head on him, feeling slightly sick. He’s only doing this so he’ll get what he wants in the end, she thought. All he wants is my vagina, nothing more.
In spite of herself, she smiled. That was a very Alex Cabot thing to think.

- 

“Have you ever been afraid of what might be inside you?” croaked Avery.
Olivia’s eyes widened. Yes. “What do you mean?”
“But I can’t help thinking there’s like a switch inside of me,” continued Avery, “waiting to be flipped. Just like it did in Deacon. And that I’d start hurting kids. And that’s why I left my son.”

“You’re not a monster, Avery,” reassured Olivia, just like she’d been reassured so many times before.
“How do you know?” he sobbed.
Olivia sat next to him. “Because you didn’t shoot Deacon. Because you love your son so much that you were willing to give him up to protect him.”

Because you didn’t go rogue, go out killing Colombian drug dealers and looking for Alex. Because you poured all the alcohol down the drain the night after she was shot.
“And the truth is, you didn’t have to.”

“How’s Dickie?” asked Olivia, pulling on her coat. “A handful,” replied a tired Elliot. “He’s demanding cookie dough ice cream and Jackass 24/7. Reminds me so much of me, it’s scary.” “Didn’t know you were a Jackass fan,” cracked Olivia. Elliot swallowed his coffee. “I mean getting what I want. According to Kathy, it’s not one of my more endearing qualities.” *Casey seems to like it, though.*

Olivia thought for a moment. “Before you had kids, you ever worry what they’d be like?” “All the time,” said Elliot, smiling. “I still do.” “At least you and Kathy know what you’re passing on,” said Olivia, tossing her bag over her shoulder. “Half my genes are drunk and the other half are violent and cruel.” “And look how great you turned out,” Elliot said fondly.

Olivia stopped short. She’d heard that somewhere before, but couldn’t place where. “But Olivia,” said Alex, “look at how great you turned out.” She looked the detective in the eye. “You are more than the sum of your genes. You give people piece of mind, you protect them. You fight for those who are too scared or damaged to fight for themselves.”

Elliot was still speaking, but Olivia wasn’t paying attention anymore. She now felt very uncomfortable and was unsure why.
Casey stormed out of the US Attorney’s office. *If looks could kill,* thought Elliot, trying to suppress his grin.
“I can’t believe him. ‘You can’t have no tape because there is no tape?’ Who the hell does he think he is?” she snarled.
“He’s doing his job,” said Elliot, shrugging.
Casey gave him a nasty look. “Just like you were? Getting that tape on the condition you wouldn’t use it in trial?”
Elliot winced. “Yeah, just like I was.”

Casey folded her arms. “You owe me,” she purred.
Elliot blushed. “Casey, c’mon, you know I’ve got Dickie this week and we really need to stop doing this.”
“That’s what you told me last time you were buried deep inside me,” she said smugly.
Elliot’s face turned an even deeper shade of red. “Casey, don’t do this.”
“You can’t deny you’re attracted to me,” Casey said accusatorily. “You’ve been flirting with me for ages, even before your marriage went down the tubes. I saw those pictures Olivia took at the cops-lawyers game last summer. I saw how you were looking at me, Elliot.”

“Alright, alright, just shut up,” moaned Elliot. “Yes, I’m attracted to you. But Casey, I’ve gotta be at least ten years older than you, and I’m technically still married.”
“Not in bed and not in board,” quoted Casey. “And for the record, the age difference is twelve.”
She leaned in close to him. “Elliot, this isn’t a relationship. We’re just two people who occasionally enjoy screwing each other’s brains out.”

Elliot finally met her gaze, trying as hard as he could to suppress his arousal. “You know your voice is sexy as hell when you whisper, right?”
A dirty grin flashed across Casey’s face. “We take the bridge back into Manhattan, it’s a short drive to Alphabet City. You’ll be in and out of my apartment in thirty minutes, and technically still on the clock.”

Breathing heavily, Elliot mulled over the situation. At last, he pulled out his cell phone.
“Captain, it’s me. US Attorney stonewalled us, I’m gonna call it a night.”

“First, kicking a woman to death is a game, and now this is a joke? Do you think this is funny?”
Casey asked angrily.
Perle shifted on the stand. “You’re, you’re confusing me.”
“Well, you weren’t confused,” spat Casey. “You knew exactly what you were doing. You were afraid Larry was gonna turn you into the police, so you preyed on him until he killed himself!”

Sitting in the benches, Elliot watched the interrogation and nodded slowly. *God, this is a rush.* He wondered vaguely if this was what Olivia felt like watching Alex in the courtroom.
“Larry Tauber, murderer, LMAO,” continued Casey. “What does that mean, LMAO? Why don’t you tell us?”
Perle looked extremely uncomfortable. “It’s laughing my ass off,” he said quietly.
“What? I’m sorry, I can’t hear you,” said Casey, mockingly raising a hand to her ear.
“Larry’s dead, Melanie’s dead, and you’re laughing your ass off,” Casey said scornfully.

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**Game**

Casey stormed out of the US Attorney’s office. *If looks could kill,* thought Elliot, trying to suppress his grin.
“I can’t believe him. ‘You can’t have no tape because there is no tape?’ Who the hell does he think he is?” she snarled.
“He’s doing his job,” said Elliot, shrugging.
Casey gave him a nasty look. “Just like you were? Getting that tape on the condition you wouldn’t use it in trial?”
Elliot winced. “Yeah, just like I was.”

Casey folded her arms. “You owe me,” she purred.
Elliot blushed. “Casey, c’mon, you know I’ve got Dickie this week and we really need to stop doing this.”
“That’s what you told me last time you were buried deep inside me,” she said smugly.
Elliot’s face turned an even deeper shade of red. “Casey, don’t do this.”
“You can’t deny you’re attracted to me,” Casey said accusatorily. “You’ve been flirting with me for ages, even before your marriage went down the tubes. I saw those pictures Olivia took at the cops-lawyers game last summer. I saw how you were looking at me, Elliot.”

“Alright, alright, just shut up,” moaned Elliot. “Yes, I’m attracted to you. But Casey, I’ve gotta be at least ten years older than you, and I’m technically still married.”
“Not in bed and not in board,” quoted Casey. “And for the record, the age difference is twelve.”
She leaned in close to him. “Elliot, this isn’t a relationship. We’re just two people who occasionally enjoy screwing each other’s brains out.”

Elliot finally met her gaze, trying as hard as he could to suppress his arousal. “You know your voice is sexy as hell when you whisper, right?”
A dirty grin flashed across Casey’s face. “We take the bridge back into Manhattan, it’s a short drive to Alphabet City. You’ll be in and out of my apartment in thirty minutes, and technically still on the clock.”

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“Larry’s dead, Melanie’s dead, and you’re laughing your ass off,” Casey said scornfully.
Casey had mounted him on her couch at home, rocking back and forth while Elliot tilted his head back, smiling contentedly. He wrapped an arm around her and pulled her in close, kissing her neck.

“If you leave a mark, you’re going to pay,” she cautioned, slowing her thrusts. Elliot stopped kissing and stared up at her, eyes dark. “God, you are not nice.” Casey smiled cruelly down at him. “You mean I’m a bitch, don’t you.”

She began to slowly raise her hips off his cock, letting him slide out of her.

“No, I don’t mean that,” Elliot replied quickly. “You’re not a bitch, Casey. I swear, you’re not a bitch.”

Leaning in close, Casey bit Elliot’s lip, her mound still perched at the very tip of his cock. “We both know that’s not always true,” she teased. Casey slammed her hips back down to his hilt and Elliot cried out.

“You bet I am,” hissed Perle. “Because you are a joke, this whole damn thing is a joke.” Believe me buddy, she’s no laughing matter, thought Elliot.

Casey stared Perle down smugly. “Nothing further.”
Elliot linked arms with Kathleen. “I need to talk with you.”
“You and mom are getting a divorce?” she asked worriedly.
“No, no,” he said quickly. “I wouldn’t tell you this way anyway. That boy Jed you were going out with, what’s his last name?”
“When did you go out with him?” continued Elliot.
“And couple of months ago,” Kathleen said cautiously. “Why are you asking me this?”

Elliot looked pained. “I don’t want you to get the wrong idea, but…did you do anything with him?”
Kathleen stared at him. “You mean did we have sex?”
“Yes,” Elliot replied.
“That’s private!” Kathleen shot back.
“I know,” said a forlorn Elliot.
“Why are you asking me?”
“I can’t tell you,” he said sadly.

She looked put out. “Then why should I tell you?”
“Because I’m your father and it’s really important,” pressed Elliot.
Kathleen sighed. “I didn’t have sex with Jed.”
“Did you do anything else with him?” Elliot continued.
“No, that’s why he broke up with me, because I wouldn’t,” explained Kathleen. “You okay dad?”

I hope to God she’s telling the truth. “Yeah, I’m fine.”
He pulled her into a big bear hug. “I love you. I’ll pick you up Saturday.”

A small voice in the back of his head said you should get tested too.

“Maybe she had a sugar daddy,” said Olivia. “We can start with the bags in her closet from Her Boutique.”
“Hopefully he got her something nice for Valentine’s,” offered Elliot.

Olivia looked at him funny. “Valentine’s Day? When was that?”
He chuckled. “It was almost a week ago. I swear, you forget every year.”
“Yeah, well, it wasn’t a big part of my life when I was growing up,” replied Olivia, pouting. “I only ever remembered when Alex reminded me.”
“Well, just so you know, I persuaded Kathy to let me take Lizzie out for a very special dinner,” Elliot said proudly.
Olivia smiled at him. “Elliot, that’s great. Good for you.”

Plus, he thought, shifting uncomfortably, Casey didn’t call.

Alex had spent the last week sleeping off a bad bout of food poisoning, contracted on Valentine’s Day of all days. Owen had taken her to a nice seafood place, but three hours later she was bent over the toilet, vomiting so often that he brought her a pillow and blanket to make herself comfortable. He’d tried to insist on staying, but Alex, who hated being babied while ill, pressed him as hard as
she could to leave.

She woke up around eight that morning, her stomach still wobbly but hungry, a positive sign. She slowly ate plain, salted rice and sipped at Gatorade, feeling better than she had in several days. Then, it hit her. She’d spent the past week sleeping alone, by herself, in the dark, and hadn’t had a single nightmare.

Maybe it was the illness, or maybe Alex was finally beginning to overcome her fears.

-

“What a world,” gasped Elliot, sitting up on the bench. “Same as always,” Olivia said slowly. He shook his head. “No, things have changed.” “Maybe you have,” she said quietly.

- Olivia hauled Max Long off to the cage, flanked by Langan. “Max, don’t say another word until we have a chance to speak after booking,” ordered Trevor. He turned to Olivia. “Dinner next Wednesday?” She tossed Max in the cage and locked the door behind him. “Wouldn’t miss it.”

Back in the squad room, Elliot watched them curiously. “Hey, Casey?” he asked. “Hmm?” she replied. “What makes a teenage girl start sleeping with dozens of people out of the blue?” he said carefully.

Casey looked up at him sadly. “Loss, frustration, anger at something she couldn’t control. The need to feel validated. Low self-esteem.”

She hurried over to talk to Munch, leaving a despondent Elliot behind.

*What happened to this poor woman?*
“Same gun, makes sense that they’re identical,” said Olivia, looking at the two slugs.
“Now look at this,” said O’Hallaran, pulling up a third image.
“It’s a perfect match,” said Sandoval. “Same triple twist. Is that the bullet from Antonio’s bed?”
“No, from an unsolved homicide,” replied O’Hallaran.
Olivia’s eyes widened. “What case?”

O’Hallaran pushed a button and the face of a ghost appeared on screen.
Oh god. Olivia went weak in the knees.

“The murder of Alexandra Cabot,” replied Elliot stiffly.
Oh my god. It’s the bastard who shot Alex. Oh my god. Olivia felt like she was going to pass out.
Sandoval looked confused. “Who’s that?”
Olivia took a deep breath. “Our old ADA.” And so, so much more.

She stared at the screen for a moment longer. Alex’s beautiful blue eyes stared back.
“I need some air,” she gasped. Olivia ran out of the room and straight to the bathroom, leaving three very confused men behind.
She’s not really dead Olivia, it’s okay. She’s not really dead.

-“The people have failed to meet the deadline,” announced Preston.
Oh hell no, thought Novak, her jaw dropping. We are not putting this murdering scum back on the street.
“I’m ordering the defendant released until the trial,” Preston concluded.
“Your honor, Connors is a flight risk,” pressed Novak. “If you let him go, we will never get him back.”
“I give you my word,” schmoozed Kressler, “my client will make all of his court appearances.”
“I would like something stronger than his word,” countered a frustrated Casey.
Preston looked at her for a long moment. “I’m sorry. You’re free to go, Mr. Connors.”

Casey spun to face Elliot and Olivia. “Arrest him.”
The detectives traded glances. What in the hell?
“Your honor, my detectives are here to rearrest the defendant,” announced Casey.
Kressler looked stunned. “On what charges?”

Elliot’s jaw dropped. Oh god, Casey, no. He looked down at Olivia to find her staring back up at him.
What the hell do we do?
We keep her cover.
They moved towards Connors and took him into custody.

-“I just came to tell you that you’re on your own. I’m not gonna ruin my career by committing perjury. Do we understand each other, Captain,” hissed Hammond.
Cragen stared at him for a long moment, then the light bulb went on. “She’s alive.”
Hammond looked thoroughly confused.
“You son of a bitch,” continued Cragen. “You stashed Alex in witness protection.”
“You didn’t know,” realized Hammond.

Cragen stared at him harder. “Why the hell would I?”
Hammond glanced around the office. “You should ask Benson and Stabler about that.”

“Alex, if you go back, they will try and kill you again,” cautioned Cragen.

Alex took a deep breath. “I have lost my home, my job, my friends. My mother died, and I couldn’t go to the funeral. Liam Connors is not going to take my conscience too.”
She swallowed hard and looked down. **And as selfish as this is, it means getting to see Olivia one more time.**

- 

Casey opened her door, staring angrily at Olivia. “We work together. You should’ve trusted me.”
“We made a promise,” Olivia said softly.
“You hung me out to dry in court,” Casey replied.

Elliot breathed out. “We gonna need lawyers?”
“I hope not.” Casey glanced up, staring at someone in her door.

Into the room stepped a ghost, the most wonderful sight Olivia had seen in her entire life. It felt like her entire being had been flooded with warmth and light. She hadn’t been this happy since… well, since before Alex died.

“Alex,” she breathed.
“You didn’t have to come back,” said Elliot.
“I know,” Alex replied. “But who else is gonna get you out of trouble?”

Olivia beamed, fighting her tears. **Come on, she’s back now, you don’t need to cry.**

“Before everyone gets reacquainted, they’re waiting for us in court,” Casey said crossly.
Elliot watched her go.

- 

Alex breathed out. “We should keep preparing my testimony.”
“You know, we’ve gone over all my questions,” said Casey, settling back on the couch. “I think you’re ready.”
“Are you?” charged Alex.

Casey stared at Alex as if she’d been slapped. **You have got to be fucking kidding me. Did I really say that out loud?** “Casey, I’m sorry,” said Alex, wincing. “That was out of line.”
“It’s gotta be hard to be on that side of the desk,” Casey said in a low voice, trying to mask how upset she was.
Alex nodded.

“If Antonio doesn’t testify, we’re screwed,” Casey told her.
“I know,” replied Alex, nodding.
Casey bit her cheek. “We met each other once, at an office function. Do you remember?”
“Yeah, I recognized you immediately,” replied Alex.
“Do you remember what I said to you?” asked Casey.
Alex thought for a moment. “You told me that the DA’s office had a lot of respect for me.”
“What I meant was I had a lot of respect for you,” said Novak, her voice rising. “I kept an eye on you, watched you take on all those SVU trials and remained perfectly composed at a time when my life was falling apart. I was jealous of you. I admired you. I looked up to you. And for you, my role model, to question my abilities as a prosecutor, that hurts.”

Alex’s mouth fell open.

“I have been as nice as I possibly can, because Olivia is my friend,” said Casey through clenched teeth. “But you are trying my patience.”

“I’m so sorry,” murmured Alex. “I had no idea.”

“You don’t,” continued Casey. “You don’t have any idea what it was like to waltz into SVU and be treated like crap. Compared to you, I was just second-rate. Olivia hated me, Alex. She hated me.”

Casey took a deep breath, calming herself down. “This isn’t fair to say to you, and I know none of it is your fault and you’ve gone through horrors I can’t even imagine. It’s just…been building up inside me. This resentment towards a ghost.”

“You know, if it makes you feel any better, I wasn’t perfectly composed,” Alex said slowly. “I was leaving the bureau because I was too depressed to deal with the cases. I loved being a prosecutor, but I hated every case I tried, even though I wanted to be in SVU in the first place. Ironic, huh?”

Casey gave her a small smile. “Honestly? That does make me feel a little bit better. I tried to get Branch to rotate me out when I first got here, but now I feel like it’s what I was meant to do.”

Alex studied her. “Is Olivia doing okay?”

“Well, she’s a lot better than she used to be,” Casey said plainly. “She hasn’t moved on from you, if that’s what you’re asking. I understand because I’ve gone through the same thing.”

“You’ve lost someone you loved?” asked Alex.

Casey nodded. “My fiancé. Almost two years before I was transferred to SVU. Look, Alex, I’ve tried to be a good friend to her, to keep an eye on her. She still loves you more than anything in the world, and I don’t want anything to get in the way of that.”

Alex frowned. “What do you mean?”

Casey took a deep breath. “You should know that Elliot and his wife have separated.”

Alex’s eyes widened with shock, then narrowed with anger. “It’s only a matter of time.”

“Before he tells her?” guessed Casey.

Alex gave her a hard stare. “How much do you know?”

“All of it,” Casey replied. “And trust me, I am doing everything I can to keep him at bay.”

“How?” Alex spat with an anger directed at Elliot, not Casey.

Casey looked at her awkwardly. “Uh, I’m screwing him.”

Alex fought the urge to retch. “You’re kidding me,” Alex said quietly.

“You’re kidding me,” Alex said quietly.

“Your loyalty knows no bounds,” she said to Casey, smiling. Then she made a disgusted face.

“Even if it means sleeping with…ugh, I can’t say it.”

“Hey, he’s not bad,” said Casey, smirking.

Alex fought the urge to retch. “You are aware I’m a lesbian, right?”
“He beat you again?” asked Olivia.
“Ugh, like a rug,” replied Alex.

Olivia dropped her bag on the couch. “You wanna keep playing?”
“Nah,” Alex said quietly, looking out the window. She sighed in frustration. “I wish these windows opened. I want to smell the city.”
“You mean, the, uh, rotting garbage and the diesel exhaust,” cracked Olivia, moving close to Alex.

It was too good to be true. Alex was back, she was here in the flesh and Olivia almost couldn’t handle it. She felt as if she reached out to touch Alex, to try and make it real, that Alex would disappear.

“Wisconsin is so quiet at night,” Alex began. “Sometimes when I get homesick I hum the Mr. Softee song.”
Olivia chuckled warmly. “You making any friends?”

I have to tell her, thought Alex, dreading this conversation. She took a deep breath. “There’s a claims adjuster at the insurance agency where I work. And we’ve been seeing each other. He’s a good man. He thinks I’m from Tulsa. And when we’re in bed together, he whispers my name… Emily.”

Olivia stared at her in horror. No, this is wrong. She’s a lesbian. She hates men. Did DEA tell you to do this, Alex? Did DEA make you pretend?
“It’s hard to be someone that you’re not,” Olivia whispered.
“I can’t stop thinking like a prosecutor,” Alex said emphatically, trying to change the subject. “Connors is going to sit in that court room tomorrow, looking like a choir boy. He is going to charm the jury with his Irish brogue and, and I have to make them see who he really is but…I don’t even know what makes him tick!”

Olivia retrieved a folder from her bag. “Alex,” she said softly, “you didn’t see this file.”

Alex pored over the paperwork, glancing back up at Olivia. “He is absolute filth.”

Olivia took a deep breath. “So, you actually had sex with a man?”
The file fell out of Alex’s hands. “Oh god, no, I just realized how that – no, Olivia, you can’t think I would ever do that.”
“I can’t,” said Olivia, shaking her head. “That’s why I asked.”
“He was so nice, and I couldn’t sleep,” rambled Alex. “And he wanted to be sexually involved but I said I was raped, so he offered to stay nights so I wouldn’t have to live in fear and sleep with the lights on and, no, Olivia, he kissed me once but I just couldn’t because I’m still in love with you.”
“You said you were raped?” Olivia asked incredulously.
Alex threw out her arms. “Well, I had to tell him something, and I know how rape victims act. I still feel awful about it.”
“So you used him for your own personal gain,” mused Olivia. “That sounds like the Alex Cabot I know and love.”

Alex stared at her for a moment, then smiled. “Jerk.”
Olivia grinned. “Right back at you. You terrified me there for a moment, making me think you’d cheated on me.”

Alex looked ill. “Please. Even the thought of a penis anywhere near me is nauseating. Sometimes I still can’t believe you’ve actually had heterosexual intercourse, it’s such a turn off.”
Olivia pouted. “Hey, don’t judge me for my past. The only person I want to have intercourse with is you.”
Alex raised an eyebrow at her. “Is that still true?”
Olivia knew that tone. A rush of warmth flooded to her sex. “Yes, Alex.”
Alex placed her hands on her hips. “Then prove it.”

Olivia gently wrapped her arms around Alex, leaned in, and kissed her sweetly on the mouth. Alex kissed her back, gently, but with building intensity. Alex pressed her tongue to Olivia’s lips and Olivia allowed it entry, bringing a hand to Alex’s head and messily undoing her bun. She breathed in the scent of Alex’s long, blonde hair, still the same as always. They broke the kiss and stared into each other’s eyes, hungrily, but lovingly.

“Your hair’s gotten so long,” whispered Alex.
“I see you grew out those bangs you hated so much,” Olivia said playfully, nibbling at Alex’s ear.
Alex arched her hips against Olivia and, on impulse, Olivia thrust back against her. Again, they stopped, staring at one another.
“This isn’t real. I can’t believe it,” murmured Olivia.
Alex pushed a hand beneath Olivia’s shirt, squeezing her left breast. “Believe this,” she said, smirking.

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“This isn’t real. I can’t believe it,” murmured Olivia.

They pulled each other’s shirts off, kissing eagerly as they removed one another’s bras. Alex broke the kiss to suck one of Olivia’s nipples, causing Olivia to cry out.

“There has to be a bedroom somewhere,” Olivia said breathlessly.
“Let me look at you,” Olivia pleaded. “Let me take you in, Alex.”

Her eyes roamed Alex’s naked body, as beautiful and pristine as she remembered it, even with the scar now etched into her right shoulder. Olivia fought the urge to cry and pulled Alex into her, kissing her again and again and again.

“Lay down,” Alex ordered, bringing a hand to cup Olivia’s ass.

Finally making it to the bed, Alex hastily undid Olivia’s pants, pulling them off with one swift stroke. Olivia did the same to Alex, but more tenderly.

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Alex positioned herself between Olivia’s legs, staring down at Olivia’s pussy in wonder. “It’s been so long,” murmured the blonde.

Alex lowered her face so it hovered just above Olivia’s slit. “Oh, I remember,” she said, her warm breath tickling Olivia’s mound.

Alex pressed her tongue into Olivia’s slit, causing the detective to thrust against Alex’s face. Alex lapped at Olivia’s walls with ardor, bringing her right hand to squeeze Olivia’s left breast and thumb against her nipple. Olivia moaned loudly as Alex positioned her mouth directly over Olivia’s clit and pressed her tongue against it again and again and again. Alex’s other hand found its way to Olivia’s slit, and she extended her middle finger inside. She removed her right hand from Olivia’s nipple and pushed herself up, taking a momentary break to settle above Olivia, but quickly returning her finger to her girlfriend’s tight, wet pussy.

“You always did get off on taking me,” groaned Olivia, feeling herself near orgasm.

A flushed Alex smiled down at her. Olivia could smell Alex’s own arousal. “I love to watch you come,” replied the blonde. She added a second finger and rubbed Olivia’s g-spot, fiercely but tenderly all the same. Olivia came hard, moaning a name that had been burned into her memory forever.
Alex smiled down at her warmly, slightly out of breath herself. “I love you, Olivia,” she murmured, her fingers still inside Olivia’s pussy. “I love you too,” Olivia replied, beaming. “And now, it’s my turn.”

On cue, Alex rolled onto her back and let Olivia kiss her hard, allowing the detective to taste herself in Alex’s mouth. Olivia could feel the heat, feel Alex’s trademark blush and kissed her greedily. She wanted to keep going and never stop. She wanted to go forever.

Olivia kissed a trail down Alex’s stomach, stopping to nibble at each breast. Her mouth quickly found its way to Alex’s mound. “You’ve stopped shaving,” remarked Olivia, pressing her tongue to the nest of blonde curls. “There was no reason,” gasped Alex, pushing against Olivia’s face.

Olivia grinned against Alex’s flesh, then kissed her way down to Alex’s slit, brushing her lips against it. Then Olivia kissed it, sucking it inside her mouth, hearing Alex pant up above her. Olivia pushed her tongue inside Alex and then out, and then back in. Alex thrust into Olivia’s face wildly, and so Olivia, after using her tongue for a little longer, moved her mouth up to Alex’s clit and sucked down gently.

“I remember this,” Alex moaned. “Oh god, Olivia, I remember this!”

Olivia sucked harder and brought Alex to climax. Alex shuddered hard and ran her hand through Olivia’s hair, pulling slightly as she rode her orgasm to its finish. Olivia climbed up next to Alex and took her into her arms, cradling the woman she loved against her. “I feel more like Alex Cabot than I have in ages,” Alex murmured, kissing Olivia’s cheek.

Olivia planted a row of kisses on her forehead. “I could do this all night, you know.”

She looked down at Alex, still smiling. “You’ve changed.” “Being scared of your own shadow tends to do that,” replied Alex feistily. “True. You’re still the Alex I love, though,” said Olivia, nuzzling her neck. “Even if you’re smoking again.”

Alex pouted. “Can you really blame me for that one? And I’m trying to quit. I haven’t smoked for five whole days.”

“Yeah, but I’m not going to let you survive a shooting just to kill yourself with cancer,” admonished Olivia.

Alex looked into her big, brown eyes. “You’ve changed too. You were always emotional, but you wear your heart on your sleeve now.”

Olivia nodded. “I know. I, uh, turned into a big wreck after you left. Huang finally had to prescribe me something for the nightmares so I could get a decent night’s sleep.”

Suddenly, Alex sat up. “Does it work?”

“Like a charm,” replied Olivia. “Prazosin. I’m sure DEA has a shrink that would prescribe you some.”

Alex smiled at Olivia warmly. She knows I’ve been having nightmares too. She knows me inside and out.

“God, Huang,” said Alex thoughtfully. “I wonder how he’s doing.”

“Same as always,” replied Olivia. She smacked her forehead. “That’s right, hold on.”

Olivia hurried out of the room, returning a minute later with her bag and both of their shirts and bras. She quickly pulled on her underwear (as Alex did the same) and withdrew something from her bag.

“After you left, I went to your apartment to salvage some things, and I found your photo albums,”
explained Olivia.
Alex stared at her. “All of them from college and law school?”
Olivia nodded. “Yep. I’ve got them, every last one.”
Alex breathed a sigh of relief. “Thank god. I was worried what would happen if my parents found them.”
Olivia winked at her. “You slept with some hot women in college.”
Alex smiled at her. “No regrets. Trevor gave me hell for it, but I think he was just jealous.”

“I’ve been having dinner with him every so often, actually,” admitted Olivia. “He was just as torn up by your death as I was.”
“I miss him,” Alex said sadly. “Thanks for being a friend to him.”
She looked at Olivia curiously. “It sounds like Casey’s been a friend to you, too.”
“I don’t know what it is with Casey, but it’s almost like she can read minds,” said Olivia, shaking her head. “She saw I was suffering and she pulled me out of my hole. I’ve never had a friend like her. Plus, she’s nuts and a hell of a lot of fun to be around.”

Olivia looked at Alex adoringly. “But you know that she’ll never replace you.”
Alex smiled back at her. “I know.” And you don’t know it, but she’s an incredible friend to you. And to me too.
“So, what’s this?” asked Alex, looking down at the leather album.
“Well,” said Olivia, “I picked up where you left off.”

Olivia opened the book and Alex flipped through the pages, letting the photos and Olivia tell her stories of the year and a half she’d been gone from SVU.

“Guilty on all counts,” Casey said gleefully.
Elliot wrapped his arm around her. “I never doubted it’d be anything else.”
She grinned at him. So, victory sex, then.

Olivia opened the door, clutching two bottles of champagne. “Let’s get this party started!”
“Ooh, that’s what I’m talking about,” said Sandoval.
“Alex knew just how to push Connors’ buttons,” Cragen said happily
Prosecuting from the witness stand. That’s my Alex. “She’s a great prosecutor,” Olivia said smugly.
“And you gave her the ammunition,” concluded Cragen.
Oops.

“Now, don’t let me drink too much, penalty phase starts first thing in the morning,” Casey cautioned Elliot.
“Slam dunk, live a little tonight!” he said, brushing her off. He glanced towards the door. “Is that her? Is that her?”

The door opened on a severe Agent Hammond.
Olivia glanced out the door. “Where’s Alex?”
“Marshalls are moving her and Antonio to new identities,” he replied darkly. “She asked me to say goodbye.”

The other five faces in the room fell. Olivia turned towards Casey’s desk.
“Leave,” she choked to Hammond.
A single tear ran down her cheek.

Cragen put a hand on her shoulder. “She’ll be back, Olivia.”
Olivia smiled weakly up at him. “I know.”
“He has no self-control, like a baby. Like a stupid, selfish, whiny child,” spat Rickett.

Elliot silently evaluated the truth of that statement.  
Mention Rickett’s onto something there.

-  
This time, Alex was relocated to Portland, Maine, a cold, gorgeous, metropolitan town that was worlds different from Wisconsin in that she could actually get used to living here. DEA had drawn her up a résumé that would allow her to get work as a librarian, and Agent Hammond, gruff but warm-hearted, had advised her about an opening at the University of Maine School of Law. Alex, or, rather, Rachel Jameson, planned to apply for the job once she settled into her new apartment.

True, Portland wasn’t horribly far from New York City, but it housed no Colombian drug activity. However, Agent Hammond had insisted that she either cut her hair or dye it, so Alex’s long hair was now a gorgeous shade of dark auburn. *I can always dye it back once I go home.*

After facing down Connors in court, Alex was no longer afraid. They’d gotten Connors, they’d get Velez too. Alex had complete faith in Olivia and SVU, in the DEA, and the justice system. Reading in bed, she glanced out the window. She hoped Antonio was okay, wherever he was. Yawning, she turned out the lights and closed her eyes.

-  
Elliot stopped, glancing at Olivia’s locker. He looked at himself in the mirror she kept there, to fix her hair which she was still growing out and lamenting every single day.

And he punched it. He beat the crap out of that metal door because he was angry. He hated Rickett, and sometimes he hated Olivia.

But mostly, he hated himself.
Alex received a call less than an hour after her interview with the law library; she’d gotten the job. Smiling, she hung up the phone and went to go walk down Exchange Street, enjoying the way that the frosty March air nipped at her face.

It hadn’t taken long for the nightmares to return, but this time, Alex was ready. At her first meeting with her new DEA agent, she’d asked him about a prescription for prazosin, just like Olivia had advised her. If she was honest with herself, yes, Alex was still scared and yes, she still worried that Colombians were going to show up at her door and gun her down. But now that she knew she had a better chance of going home, she was ready to face that fear head on.

“I promise, I will talk to our captain,” Sandoval muttered to her, right before they went in to hear the verdict. “I will get our energy focused on Velez. I want to see this bastard go down as much as you do. That’s a promise.”

Phone to her ear, Olivia stared awkwardly at Casey. “Uh, we need a warrant for Ballantine’s apartment.”
Casey nodded. “Alright. Get me some evidence and I’ll swing by Seligman’s office after my hearings, see what I can do.”
“We kind of need it now,” Olivia said, squirming. “Elliot kicked his door in.”

“Has he lost his mind?” yelled Casey. “You tell them to get out of there.”
“But you can get us a search warrant, right?” pleaded Olivia.
“No,” Casey spat angrily.

Every night Alex was back, I banged him until he passed out. I fucked him dry, until he couldn’t feel the pain anymore. And this is how he repays me? This?!

“Casey, please,” Olivia pressed. “This is Sister Peg. He could be assaulting her right now!”
“Do not make me the bad guy on this,” snarled Casey. “I’m not the one who just violated someone’s constitutional rights.”

“How many patient rapists do you know?” asked Cragen.
“None. Luckily, I know a judge with a drinking problem,” announced Casey.
Cragen gave her an odd look. “Come again?”

“I stopped by his favorite watering hole and I assured him that my search warrant contains sufficient cause,” she explained. “He signed it without reading it. Now, this gets you into the van and the residence.”
“Go!” barked Cragen.

Fin barreled past Casey.
“Hey, I fixed this, you fix the door!” she called to him.
Fin looked horrified.
“What door?” asked Cragen.
Casey and Olivia sat in the small Indian restaurant. Olivia was avidly munching on curry while Casey stared at her.

“Why’d you go to bat for Elliot with that warrant?” she questioned.

Olivia took a big gulp and rolled her eyes. “Come on, Casey. Sister Peg’s life was at risk. We needed that warrant.”

“That didn’t give him any right to do what he did,” Casey muttered angrily. “Besides, that’s not what I meant.”

Olivia sighed. “Okay, I was trying to make nice. You know things have been tense ever since the separation, and I haven’t exactly been understanding. I just wanted him to feel like he could trust me again. Like we were best friends again, like it used to be.”

“Well, of all the acts to defend, that was the most stupid choice you could make,” Casey said plainly, taking another bite of tikka masala.

Olivia looked at her for a moment. “You defended him too, though.”

“What do you mean?” asked Casey.

“You tracked down a drunk judge to cover his tracks,” said Olivia, shrugging. “Fin told me.”

Casey cocked her head from side to side. “I suppose I did.”

She grinned at Olivia. “The things we do for family, right?”

Olivia knocked beer bottles with her. “You’ve got that right, sister.”
“Get me a subpoena to dump Simone Bryce’s phone,” pressed Olivia.

“And when the DA asks me why I need to know who’s calling the Mother Teresa of children’s rights, what do I tell him?” asked a frustrated Casey.

“That you’re trying to save a young girl’s life,” Olivia replied.

Well, it was the truth. Casey didn’t know why Olivia was pushing this so hard, but she resolved to give it a shot. *I’ll find out later anyway.*

“Simone Bryce’s conversations are privileged,” began Casey, starting up the courthouse steps.

“The numbers of her incoming calls aren’t.”

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“Examine Carrie,” Casey charged Huang. “Find me a way to beat Simone Bryce.”

He nodded. “I’ll talk to her, see what I can do.”

Olivia leaned against her desk and let out a deep breath. “This is my fault. I called Simone Bryce. I got this whole mess started.”

Casey frowned at her. “You didn’t murder her mother, Olivia. Sure, you put me up against one of the tougher defense attorneys in the city, but I could use the challenge. Kressler is beginning to bore me.”

Elliot chuckled, but Olivia remained downcast.

“You want to get dinner or something?” Casey offered. “Both of you?”

Elliot smiled at her. “Come on, let’s grab a bite to eat.”

Olivia shook her head. “Actually, I think I just want to go home. See you tomorrow.”

They watched as Olivia scooped up her coat and walked out, still looking depressed. Elliot sighed, then turned to Casey.

“So, do you want to get dinner?”

She grinned at him. “You gonna want dessert afterwards?”

Elliot blushed. “Casey, I swear, you’re the worst.”

- 

Olivia went to the Eldridge apartment alone. It was time to get to work.

She remembered all the hiding places, all the spots where her mother would secretly stash booze and all the nooks where she had to look in order to pour it down the drain yet again. She remembered how her drunken mother would get so angry when she couldn’t find anything more to drink, and how she would take that anger out on Olivia; more than once, Olivia had shown up for school with a black eye.

And as she pulled yet another bottle out of the oven, she remembered, one year after her mother died, telling Alex the truth about how she felt. About how she felt sad about her mother’s death, but knew, in the end, it was her only way of escape. Serena Benson was incredibly kind-hearted when sober, but incredibly nasty when drunk.

Olivia heard Elliot come into the apartment, and looked up to address him.

“No wonder I hated Denise so much. All along, Carrie was just trying to get me to protect her.”
Olivia looked up sadly from the bar stool. “Plead her out, Casey.”

Casey gave her a confused look. “You just won it for us. Why?”

Olivia was silent for a long moment. “My mother was an English professor, and when I was sixteen I started dating one of her students. He was a senior, he was twenty-one years old, and he asked me to marry him. And I said yes, because I wanted to get away from my mother.”

Casey’s face fell as she realized where this story was going.

“She found out,” continued Olivia, “and told me that if I didn’t stop seeing him, she would have him kicked out of college. I told her that I was moving out. She was halfway through a bottle of vodka and she dropped it. It shattered all over the floor, and then she picked up the jagged edge of the bottle and…she came at me, screaming ‘I’ll never let anyone else have you.’”

On Casey’s face was an expression of sorrow. Olivia, oh my god.

“And so I kicked her, hard,” Olivia murmured. “And then I kicked her again, and she went…flying across the room, into a wall, and she slid down to the floor. I’d never hurt her before. I ran out. I was so afraid.”

“You didn’t kill your mother, Olivia,” whispered Casey.

Olivia was stony-faced. “I know what it’s like to want to.”

A dead silence hung between the two of them, neither sure what to say.

“That’s how I know Simone Bryce,” Olivia offered at last. “I called her back then. She was a law student, and she helped me survive it.”

“Why didn’t Carrie say something?” asked a confused Casey.

“Because then the abuse becomes real,” said a tearful Olivia. “If you keep quiet, you can pretend that it’s not.”

Casey looked at her sorrowfully, nodding. “What did Alex say, when you told her?”

Olivia took a deep breath. “She understood. My mother drove me crazy, but I still loved her. Alex…I’ve never met anyone who hated their mother more than Alex did. Why?”

“Oh, because tomorrow is Alex’s birthday, and I was wondering if you wanted to celebrate somehow,” Casey said quietly.

For the first time all evening, Olivia smiled. “You remembered?”

Casey gave a small shrug. “What are friends for?”

Unexpectedly, Olivia pulled Casey into a big bear hug.
Night

Olivia examined the condom wrapper. “This could be consensual sex gone bad.”
Elliot gave her a strange look. “How’d you get that off the wrapper?”
“It’s from the Box,” explained Olivia. “It’s a sex club run by women.”
O’Hallaran’s look mirrored Elliot’s. “Come again?”

“Well, that’s the idea,” explained Olivia. “It’s a party where women live out their sexual fantasies. This place is three blocks from the crime scene.”
“If you say so,” said O’Hallaran, shaking his head. “I’ll let you know if I find anything more.”

Elliot and Olivia headed out of the lab.
“Okay, so, we canvas this ‘Box’ place?” he asked her.
“Uh, I’d better take this one alone,” said Olivia. “They’re not exactly big into men.”
He frowned at her. “You’ve been there.”
Olivia looked away awkwardly. “Okay, maybe Alex and I went once. It was not my idea.”
“Sure,” muttered Elliot, rolling his eyes.

“Can you get a client list?” asked Elliot.
Casey tossed her bag over her shoulder. “Sure. You know what firm Jason Whitaker works for?”
“Wait, wait. As in Lionel Granger?” said Casey, turning quickly.
Elliot cocked an eyebrow. “Yeah, why?”

Casey smirked. “Time to play the ‘schoolgirl with a crush,’ card.”
Elliot gave her a nasty look.
“Come on, Elliot,” said Casey, exasperated. “I’m not actually going to ask Whitaker out.”
He looked down at his shoes for a moment. “You know, why don’t we ever use protection?”
“Uh, because I’m on birth control and I know you’ve only slept with one other woman,” Casey replied plainly.
“Remind me how many you’ve slept with again?” he poked.

Casey marched right up to him, staring at him maliciously.
“I don’t do that anymore and you know it. I stopped about six months before I landed in SVU, and I’ve been tested multiple times. I’m clean.”
Elliot sighed. “Casey, I’m sorry, I know breaking off your engagement was hard on you –”
“You don’t know a damn thing!” she yelled.
Deflating a bit, she stepped backwards.
“I’m late for softball practice. I have to go.”
Elliot gave her a small smile. “That’s a cute shirt.”
“Sex crimes?” she replied, smirking. “It was Olivia’s idea.”

“Novak, Sex Crimes,” Casey said cheerfully, answering the phone. She listened a moment. “Yeah, send ‘em up.”
She gave Olivia a look. “Flowers.”
“You holding out on me?” asked Olivia.
“No, I’m not seeing anyone,” said Casey. Technically, that’s true. We aren’t dating. “If they’re
from Jason Whitaker, they’re going straight in the trash.”

“Hey, you feel like a cup of coffee?” asked Olivia, getting to her feet.
“Every second of every day,” said a smiling Casey.
She watched Olivia leave and hoped the flowers weren’t from Elliot either. That would be a tough one to explain.

One minute later, a shadow arrived to beat the hell out of her.

When Casey woke for the second time, she was still in the hospital, sunlight streaming through the window. Everything hurt, but she managed to sit up, blinking. It was then that she saw Elliot sitting in a chair next to her bed.

“I told Olivia that I didn’t see the guy who attacked me,” she choked. “Or at least, I think I did. My memory’s still fuzzy.”
“I know, we got him, Casey,” Elliot said quietly. “It was Nina Zirgan’s brother.”
She pushed herself up, groaning in pain. “Shit, that hurts. Did you arrest him?”
“He’s being processed as we speak,” replied Elliot.
“Then what the hell are you doing here?” she asked, wincing.
He looked at the wheelchair next to her bed. “I’m here to take you home.”

She gave him an angry look. “I don’t need your help.”
Elliot looked down. “Is this because of what I said the other day?”
“No, it’s because I’ve been knocked down before and I got up all by myself,” Casey replied curtly.
Unsteadily, she got to her feet.
Elliot’s eyes widened in realization. “Your fiancé beat you.”

“Oh hell,” said Casey, collapsing back onto the bed. Elliot rushed to her side, putting an arm around her to steady her. She looked at him sadly.
“Only when he was off his meds,” she whispered, beginning to cry.
“You’re in enough pain right now,” muttered Elliot. “You don’t have to tell me.”
“I should tell someone,” she sniffed. “We, we met in law school, and…god, I loved him so much, and we were going to get married but, he was a paranoid schizophrenic and he refused to take his medication.”
Casey took a deep breath, shuddering. “He didn’t know who he was, or who I was, and he couldn’t be reasoned with. And after my neighbors called the police one night, I had to end it. I tossed him out. I just, just couldn’t deal with him anymore.”

She gulped, looking up at Elliot. “And to this day, I, I have no idea where he is.”
Casey broke down, crying into Elliot’s shoulder. He pulled her in close, rubbing her back.
“I couldn’t help him,” she sobbed, “and I hated myself for it.”
“And you tried to fill the void by sleeping with people in the DA’s office,” he concluded.
Casey only cried harder.

“Casey, I’m sorry,” Elliot whispered sadly. “Will you let me take you home?”
Elliot pulled back, breathing heavily. “Why?”
Elliot took a deep breath. “Just because we’re not in a relationship doesn’t mean I’m not allowed to care about you. Casey, I’ve been working your assault all damn night. Let me do something for you, just once.”

Slowly wiping her eyes, she managed a smirk. “Well, it doesn’t look like I can walk that well anyway. Alright, you know the way. Take me home.”
“Why didn’t you call me? Why didn’t you tell the officers who I am?” Elliot asked Kathleen. “I was scared,” she said honestly.

He pulled her in close. “I’m sure you were, baby.” “No,” she said, recoiling. “I was scared what you’d do.”

Elliot froze.

Casey opened the door to the precinct expecting to find Elliot alone. Instead, she discovered Elliot and Cragen staring each other down. “Am I interrupting something?” she asked awkwardly. Cragen gave Elliot a hard look. “No.”

Elliot turned around to look at Casey. “Arraignment go okay?” asked Cragen. “Yeah. Kevin was denied bail. I’m gonna need your reports as soon as possible,” replied Casey. “Detective Stabler will type up his DD5s now,” Cragen said bitterly.

Both Casey and Elliot watched Cragen return to his office. Then, Casey hurried over to his desk. “I thought no one else was here,” she muttered. “So did I,” spat Elliot.

Casey perched quietly on Olivia desk while Elliot typed. “Goodnight, Captain,” she called. Cragen gave her a curt wave and stormed out.

“Should I go home?” asked Casey. Elliot looked up at her angrily. “You really gonna taunt me right now?” Casey smirked. “You like it.” “No, you like it,” he spat back. “You like making me twist and I’m sick and tired of it.” “Then why do you keep calling me?” teased Casey. “I can stop any time I want. You’re the one who’s chasing me down.” “You started it,” muttered Elliot. Casey raised an eyebrow. “So, should I stop it?”

Elliot pursed his lips. “I thought not,” Casey replied smugly. Tossing her briefcase on Olivia’s desk, she headed towards the stairs. It took Elliot all of five seconds to follow her up.

He found her waiting on the couch, her hand splayed playfully across the crotch of her pants. Elliot stalked towards her and Casey stood to greet him, leaning in to kiss him hungrily. He kissed her back, giving into his anger and frustration but standing stock still. “Give into the rage,” pushed Casey. “You know you want to.” She pulled his hand towards her pants. Automatically, he unzipped them. God, she wasn’t wearing any underwear.

“What do you want from me?” asked Elliot. “How long are we going to keep doing this?”
“I told you,” Casey said plainly. “I can stop whenever I want to. You’re a consistent lay with no strings attached.”
“Don’t tell me there are no strings attached,” muttered Elliot, undoing his belt buckle. “That’s a lie.”
“For you,” countered Casey, placing his hand on her slit and pushing one of his fingers inside. “Olivia’s not happy that you’ve been distant lately. Tell me, is it because of your family, or is it because you feel guilty for ‘cheating on’ the woman you love?”

Elliot rammed his finger inside her harder. “Sometimes I can’t believe I give a damn about you.” Casey wrapped her fingers around his cock and began to stroke. “Then show me how much you hate me.”

“Dammit, not now.”

“What’re you doing here?” asked Elliot. Dammit, not now.
“I called your home, I called your cell, I called the desk. They said you signed back in,” replied Olivia. “Why didn’t you tell me what you’re doing?”
“I didn’t want you to get in trouble,” Elliot replied lamely.
Olivia gave Elliot an odd look. “You haven’t done anything stupid.”

I’ve been breaking procedure left and right. I’m sleeping with Casey. I’ve fallen in love with you. Olivia, that’s the understatement of the century.
Even with Casey not at 100%, the lawyers won against the cops for the sixth year running. Elliot was moody about it, but he was moody about everything these days; no surprise there. Lately, he’d even had trouble looking Olivia in the eye. What had she ever done to him?


She smiled at Olivia, Munch, and Cragen. “Guys, thanks for coming out.” “Wouldn’t miss it,” said Olivia, waving her camera happily. Casey snapped her fingers. “That reminds me, I have some good news for you.” “What’s that?” asked Olivia.

Casey grinned at her. “On Monday, Liam Connors officially belongs to the federal government.” “You turned him over to the feds?” said a confused Cragen. “Why?” “Because Liam Connors has a lot of enemies in federal prison,” replied Casey smugly. “He’s unlikely to survive more than three months.” Olivia stared at her in awe. “You signed his death warrant.” “And ensured that he’ll never assassinate anyone again,” finished Cragen.

Casey raised her glass. “To Alexandra Cabot.” “To Alexandra Cabot,” replied the other members of SVU, clinking glasses.

Elliot rounded the corner to be greeted with the sight of Casey Novak, lingering by the squad room doors. “Thanks for coming in,” he said. “Where are they?” asked Casey. “What’re you talking about?” replied Elliot, looking around the precinct. “I just spent the last fifteen minutes looking for Munch and McGovern and the doctor,” said an exasperated Casey.

Elliot looked befuddled. “They’re not here?” “No. I checked interrogation, interview, upstairs, the only place I didn’t try was the men’s room,” cracked Casey. “You try Munch’s cell?” charged Elliot. “Yeah, no answer,” she shot back. Elliot thought for a second. “You know, Doctor Swann had to make sure Kyle and the donor were okay. Maybe there was a problem. Come on.”

They headed back down to the elevator and down to the car. “You look cozy,” remarked Elliot. Casey smiled back at him. “Gotta admit, when I saw you calling this late, I thought you had something else in mind.”

It was a very awkward car ride back to Amy Solwey’s apartment. Elliot drove, trying not to look at Casey. Casey sat in the front, trying not to look at Elliot or Munch. Amy Solwey and Munch held
hands for the entire trip.
“Let me be very clear, Detective Benson. I’d be more inclined to have an affair with you,” Officer Vaill replied awkwardly.

Olivia nodded in understanding. *If I were ten years younger and single, I might take her up on that.*

“Got it.”

“I’m convening a grand jury,” announced Casey, rummaging through another box.

“For what?” asked Elliot.

Casey continued flipping through papers. “Indict the US Army for rape and murder.”

Munch and Elliot traded stunned looks.

“Casey, that’s insane,” said Elliot.

“I know I’m not gonna get an indictment,” she said quickly, “I just want someone to pay attention. Think this’ll do the trick?”

DA Branch threw open her door. “Conference room, now!”

Elliot watched him storm off. “What was that about?”

“Uh, that’s probably just about another subpoena I sent out,” Casey said awkwardly.

“For what?” asked Elliot.

“Donald Rumsfeld,” replied Casey dismissively.

Elliot and Munch watched her rush out of the office to calm Branch down.

“You know, twenty years ago, I would’ve married that woman,” quipped Munch.

Elliot opened his mouth, then closed it. *Not going down that road.*

“And it must be very cozy in your Upper West side apartment, sipping chardonnay with your friends and talking about how evil the military is while young men and women are getting blown to smithereens by car bombs!” yelled Branch.

*Upper West side? Chardonnay? Has he ever paid attention to who I am besides my name and conviction rate?*

“I’m going to have to object to any insinuation that I’m somehow anti-military or anti-troops,” snarled Casey. “My father was a door gunner on a Huey in Vietnam. He was in three chopper crashes and he earned a purple heart. Listen, I support our troops, and that’s why I want to stop the Pentagon from prescribing a pill that could kill them!”

This was a tough loss for Casey, even if the investigation got people talking. Sherm Hempell promised a big write-up in the paper next morning, but in the end, nothing changed. She let Elliot take her home after the diner and then she took her clothes off. Tonight, she was wild, trying to bury that feeling of emptiness creeping in, a sensation that had once controlled her life.

Elliot sighed. “Are you gonna pay for the dry cleaning bill?”

Casey rolled off the bed and smiled at him, buttoning up her blouse. “I’m sorry. I liked that shirt.”

“Yeah, well, now all my buttons are scattered to the wind,” he grumbled.

“I’ll give you some safety pins. If you keep your coat buttoned up, nobody will know,” she replied.
He rolled his eyes. “Yeah, like I’m not going to look stupid in a trenchcoat in June.”
“Well, if you want to go home shirtless, be my guest,” said Casey, winking.

Casey grabbed a handful of safety pins from a drawer in the kitchen. “You know, you’re Marines. Why haven’t you been called to serve?”
“Medical discharge,” replied Elliot. He pulled down his boxers so she could examine the jagged scar on his leg. “I guess you never would’ve noticed, seeing as we usually leave these on.”
Casey smirked. “Sorry for being impatient. What happened?”

“I was involved in a bad shoot in ’97,” explained Elliot. “Me and my partner at the time were going after a rapist hopped up on PCP and I got caught in the crossfire. Bullet exploded inside my leg. I can only run about a mile before it starts hurting, and I still can’t stand on it for long periods of time. Kind of rules out marching across the desert.”
“Well, after everything we’ve been through with this quinium nonsense, I think you’re still safer in New York,” remarked Casey.

Elliot pinned his shirt together and took a deep breath. “Casey, I think we should stop doing this.”
She nodded. “Okay, fair. If you want to pick it back up, you let me know.”
Elliot gave her a dumbstruck look. “Really, just like that?”
“I told you a while ago, no strings attached,” Casey said plainly. “If you want to end it, it’s fine by me. It’s more important to me to have you as a friend than as a bedmate anyway.”
“What do you mean?” asked Elliot.
Casey smiled back at him weakly. “It’s like you said: just because we’re not in a relationship doesn’t mean I can’t care about you.”

Elliot studied her for a moment. “Why’d you kiss me, that night in your office?”
“Because I believe in true love,” Casey replied cryptically.
“But you’re not in love with me,” Elliot said slowly.
Casey shook her head. “Absolutely not.”

“You’re a mystery,” muttered Elliot, heading for the door. He rested his hand on the knob, then turned back to face her.
“Hey, Casey?”
“Uh-huh?”
“Thanks.”
“Fine, but turn over the case,” ordered Cragen. “Watching Ray Shenkle is parole’s job, not ours.” He looked Elliot over. “And change your clothes.”

Olivia smirked. “Is it really that dirty down in the basements of 1PP?”
“I don’t think they’ve dusted down in twenty years,” muttered Elliot.
Elliot smiled at her. “Glad to see you’re talking to me again.”
“Glad to see you’re being less moody,” she countered, also smiling.

“I wanna be pulled out, I’ll ask to be pulled out,” yelled Elliot, shutting Huang’s door. “If I wanna see you, I’ll ask to see you.”
“I need to brief you,” Huang countered calmly.
“I’ll ask for a briefing if I think I need one,” retorted Elliot.

Huang gave him a concerned look. “Elliot, are you okay?”
Well, my marriage isn’t any better, but Olivia’s speaking to me again. And I haven’t had sex with Casey for two and a half months.

Two and a half long months.
“What do you wanna tell me?” asked Elliot.

“I hate myself,” muttered Elliot.
“And what do you do with all that hate?” asked the therapist.
“I get mad and I wanna hurt someone.”
“If you can’t learn to control that hate, you’ll lose everything.”

They were the first true things he’d said all evening.

“Rage and lust are hungry beasts inside of us. The more we feed them, the stronger they get. Stop fighting things you can’t change.”
Life in Portland was no more eventful than it had been in Wisconsin, though generally more pleasant. The upside to this was Alex didn’t spend any extraneous time fearing for her life (more than usual, anyway). The downside was she had an awful lot of time mulling over the fact that Elliot and Kathy were likely headed for a divorce.

The one bright light in this otherwise dim situation was that Olivia would never suspect anything. She thought of Elliot like her brother, not her lover. Alex thought back to part of the conversation she’d had with Olivia back in March, the night they’d stayed up for hours.

“He’s been a mess since the separation,” Olivia lamented. “I keep pushing him to reach out to Kathy and the kids, but he doesn’t seem to listen.”

“Liv, you can’t fight his battles for him,” Alex reminded her.

“But he won’t fight them himself,” said Olivia, snuggling a little closer to Alex.

Alex sighed. “Maybe he doesn’t want to be a part of the marriage anymore either.”

That was exactly what she was afraid of. Every day, Alex hoped Elliot didn’t tell Olivia the truth. A lot had changed in a year and a half, and things would continue changing until she went back home.

- 

“Find some evidence she was going to turn down the settlement, and I’ll use it to bluff Barclay into a plea,” said Casey.

Olivia sighed and thought for a long moment. “Okay.”

Casey got to her feet. “You okay?”

Olivia shook her head. “I just, just get so lonely sometimes, you know?”

“Yeah, I know,” replied Casey. “Come on, let’s go grab some dinner.”

- 

“You owe me,” admonished Barclay Pallister.

*Dammit, he’s right.* Casey turned back to look at Elliot. “Do we have any other leverage on her?” Elliot faltered. It’d been a while since he’d seen that look.
Fin looked up from his desk to see Olivia at her locker, looking...absolutely stunning.
“Wow, hot date?” he asked her.
Olivia rolled her eyes. “Not really. This morning, I’m sitting down to my eggs and toast when my
phone starts ringing. It’s Trevor Langan. His girlfriend broke up with him last night and he’s
incredibly torn up about it, and he starts babbling about how he’s got tickets for a musical and a
nice dinner reservation. I tried to calm him down, but he was a wreck, so I finally agreed to go out
with him tonight so he wouldn’t waste his money.”

Fin gave her a weird look. “I don’t believe that story for a second.”
“Langan, interested in me? No way,” replied Olivia. “He knows my heart belongs to Alex at the
end of the day.”
“I meant the bit about the eggs and toast,” said Fin. “Who has time to make a nice breakfast on this
job?”
Olivia laughed. “Have a good night, Fin.”
“You take care,” replied Fin, giving her a small wave.

Fin returned to his DD5, smiling. It was nice to see Olivia in a good mood.

Two minutes later, Cragen burst out of his office.
“Where’s Benson?” he barked.
Fin sighed. “Just left. You can catch her if you hurry.”
Sorry, Olivia.

“Captain?” said Casey. “This is Julia Ortiz, dialect expert. I’ve worked with her in court.”
“Donald Cragen, Olivia Benson,” introduced the captain. “Tell us what you need.”
“A sample of the tape would be a good place to start,” remarked Julia. “Do you have anything
where she’s speaking for a solid twenty to thirty seconds?”
“Hold on, I’ll see what I can do,” replied Morales.

Olivia leaned over to watch him work. “You’re going to have to show me how to do this after we
find Maria.”
“That’s right,” mused Morales. “I always forget you’ve got a background in computers too.”
Casey shrugged. “There aren’t a lot of geeks that hot.”
Olivia gave her an irritated look.
“What?” said Casey. “It’s a nice dress.”

“Sometimes I have dreams where I am back home, and my mother is with me,” Maria sniffed. “But
when I wake up, I know it is a lie. My mother is dead.”
“Maria, sweetie, I’m so sorry,” said a distraught Olivia. “I understand how hard it must be for
you.”
“Did your mother die too?” Maria asked in a tiny voice.
“Someone I loved very much did, Maria,” replied Olivia. “My friend Alex died. And like you,
sometimes I have dreams that she’s alive and we’re together again.”

Unfortunately, the medication doesn’t help with that.
Olivia ran into the road, weapon drawn.
“Police! Stop the car!”
*Go ahead, hit me. What have I got left to lose?*

Olivia wanted to stay with Maria at the hospital, but the captain wouldn’t allow it. She could go
tomorrow morning, he said, when she wakes up. Her hands and clothes still covered in dirt, Olivia
sat at her desk in the squad room, unsure of what to do next.

“Figured you’d be here.”
Olivia looked up to find Casey, clad in jeans and a sweatshirt and holding a grocery bag.
“What’s up?” Olivia said weakly.
“You didn’t eat dinner,” replied Casey plainly. “I brought ice cream.”
“Eating my feelings, that’s real healthy,” said Olivia.
Casey sat down on Elliot’s desk. “Truth be told, I really didn’t feel like going home either.”

“Hey!” Fin called from upstairs. “You guys staying? Munch finally got the DVD player working
up here, we’re gonna watch some movies.”
“All we have are Disney DVDs,” Olivia yelled back.
“Better than leaving and seeing everything that’s in my head,” Fin shot back. He squinted down.
“Hey, is that ice cream?”
Casey grinned up at him. “You like cookie dough or rainbow sherbet?”
“Rainbow sherbet?!” shouted Munch.

Casey gripped Olivia’s shoulder. “Come on, let’s go.”
They sat on the couch upstairs eating ice cream and watching Aladdin until they all finally fell
asleep.
“As of right this minute, you are on vacation,” spat Cragen. “Just get your ass out of my sight before I do something we both regret.”

Elliot stalked back towards his desk. The entire squad was mad at him, Olivia probably wouldn’t speak to him for a few days, and Kathy hadn’t returned his last three calls.

Where was he even going to go?

Elliot opened the door, and there was Olivia on the stoop. What, am I dreaming?

She stared him down. “You gonna invite me in?”

Elliot turned away, allowing her to come inside. “I don’t wanna talk about it, though.”

“You sound like Pamela Sawyer,” quipped Olivia. “And that’s not why I’m here.”

“Well, why are you here?” he said bitterly.

“I came to apologize,” she replied. “You were right about Luke Breslin. He’s been juicing up on steroids for the last six months. Pamela says that it’s because of the pressure that his father’s been putting on him.”

Elliot looked at her, confused. “His father know about the drugs?”

“No, Luke begged us not to tell him,” said Olivia, shaking her head.

“Someone’s got to,” muttered Elliot.

“Don’t do it,” urged Olivia. “Calling Breslin is only gonna make it worse.”

She walked towards the door. “He’s going to court tomorrow. Arraignment’s first thing in the morning.”

Elliot heard her close the front door behind her. He stood stock still, fighting the impulse to chase her down.

Outside, Olivia lingered on the stoop and looked back towards the door.

_We used to be best friends, Elliot. What happened?_

“I came here because –”

Elliot broke off. _You’re the one person I thought might still care._

“This was a mistake.

“Where are you going?” asked Doctor Hendrix. She chased him to the door.

“How many times have you thought about eating your gun?”

He looked back at her, disgusted. “Suicide’s a sin.”

“So’s divorce,” she countered.

“It must’ve really hurt when he did that,” Hendrix said carefully.

“He took off his belt and he beat me with it,” croaked Elliot, “because I cried and only pansies cry.”

He broke down and wept into his bloody hands.
Doctor Hendrix handed him a sheet of paper with a few names written on it.
“These are all good doctors, people I’d highly recommend,” she told Elliot. “Give any one of them a call if you want help on a more permanent basis.”

He sighed. “I dunno if I can afford this, but thanks. Guess I’m not getting that date now, huh?”
In spite of herself, Doctor Hendrix laughed. “Well, you know, it’d be unethical for me to go out with a patient.”
Elliot’s eyes widened. “You’d really do that for me?”
“Let’s just say I owe your partner one,” replied Hendrix.
Strain

Fin shambled out of Ken’s apartment, looking defeated. He got into the car and slumped down in his seat. “He didn’t know Robin Weller, didn’t recognize him from the picture.”
Olivia nodded. “Crime scene’s on their way to Robin’s apartment.”
“Let’s go,” Fin said quickly.

Olivia started the car and drove off, trying not to look at Fin. After a couple of blocks, Fin finally broke the silence hanging over the two detectives.
“Hey Liv, when you finally told your mom you liked girls, how’d she react?”
Olivia sighed. “It took her about a week to process, but in the end, she told me she wasn’t terribly surprised. She’d begun to suspect something after I stopped talking about boyfriends for a good six months.”
Fin gave her a confused look.
“Alex wasn’t my first long-term girlfriend,” she explained.

Fin nodded slowly. “So she’d suspected something?”
“Yes,” replied Olivia.
“I never had a clue,” lamented Fin.

“Back to the house?” asked Fin.
Olivia looked around narcotics. “You know, it’s almost lunch time, I’ve got an errand to run. I’ll see you later.”
He nodded at her. “Alright, that’s cool. See you ‘round one.”

As Fin headed for the door, Olivia snuck up to Sandoval’s desk.
“Hey Mike.”
He jumped and turned around. “Olivia! Good to see you. Can I help you with something?”
Olivia smiled down at him. “Not really. Just passing through, wanted to say hey.”
“I getcha.” Sandoval glanced around the room, then gestured for her to lean in close. “I really shouldn’t tell you this, but I think you might be interested to know.”

Olivia frowned. “What is it?”
“Well, it’s premature,” Sandoval said slowly, “but there’s talk of a turf war between the Colombians lately. Apparently Velez has been in power a little too long for comfort. I’ll let you know if anything pans out.”
Olivia took a deep breath. “I appreciate it. See you later, Mike.”

He waved goodbye as Olivia pulled out her cell and dialed Ken Randall’s number.

“Guilty, Murder 2, both counts,” announced Casey.
Olivia glanced over at Fin. “Guess the jury didn’t buy his tears.”
“Sentencing report will ask for the max. Consecutive, Gabriel gets fifty to life,” Casey continued.
“Judge could still drop it down,” said Fin.
“Not after she hears Robin Weller’s father,” countered Casey. “He’s looking for revenge, she’ll give it to him.”

Olivia sighed, leaning back on her desk. “I’ve got to admit, you got to me a little with that closing
argument.”
Casey thought for a moment, then nodded. “That’s right, Alex used to smoke.”
“I didn’t know that,” remarked Fin.
“She gave it up mostly, but she still had her bad moments after tough cases,” Olivia said sadly.
That’s why I still get STD tests every three to four months.”

“Damn, didn’t know you were getting so much play,” cracked Fin.
Casey looked frustrated. “Right now, unfortunately I’m not.”
“What are you offering, Casey?”
Casey sized up the idiot skinhead across the table. “You first. What does your client have to offer?”
Redding gave her a sappy stare. “Just my undying love and affection. We’d make pretty white babies together, don’t you think?”
Casey didn’t blink. *That’ll be pretty difficult after I rip off your nuts.* “Who else was involved, Brandon?”

On the other side of the window, Olivia raised her eyebrows. “Wow, she’s really keeping her temper under control.”
“I’ll punch the racist scumbag for her later if she wants,” offered Elliot.

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Fin sat down on Munch’s hospital bed, grinning. “So where is it you got shot?”
“That would be in the ass,” Munch said snidely. “You want to kiss it and make it better?”
“Hey, you be nice to me,” replied Fin. “You won’t get the shake I smuggled in for you.”

Munch’s eyes lit up. “Fig, from McKenzie’s?”
“Of course,” said Fin.
Munch smiled. “Thanks, man.”
“Thank you for not making me have to break in another partner,” Fin said. “I’m glad you pulled through, bro.”

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Elliot heard the handle turn and his eyes shot to the door. In walked Olivia, looking harried.
“Hey,” he muttered.
“I’d ask how you’re doing, but I think I know the answer to that,” she cracked.
“Well, I’m better than Munch. I got hit in the arm, not the ass,” said Elliot.
Olivia nodded, smiling. “That’s true.”

Elliot was silent for a moment. “Olivia, how did you move on after losing Alex?”
“Elliot, you saw me. I didn’t move on, I still haven’t,” said a confused Olivia. “For ages, I thought it was my fault and I let that eat at me. I’m still holding on to the idea that someday, she’s coming home.”
“Yeah, but,” Elliot sought for words. “But you did a hell of a lot better job coping than I am.”
Olivia sighed heavily. “Elliot, I know you don’t want to hear this, but for once in my life I actually acknowledged what I was going through and I let people help me. I talked to you, I went out with Casey, I let Huang prescribe me some medication. When Trevor Langan reached out to me, I let him in, even though the last thing I wanted to do was focus on my pain. Hell, I even reached out to Alex’s father.”

Olivia walked towards the bed, giving Elliot a reproachful look. “You’re keeping it locked up, and it’s seeping through the cracks. We’ve all seen how fast and loose you’ve been playing, Elliot, and you can’t keep it up forever. Now, I am here, trying to be a friend to you, and you keep acting like you don’t need my help and pretending that nothing’s wrong –”
“I’m not, I’m not doing that anymore,” Elliot cut in quickly. “I’m seeing someone. A shrink. And I’m sorry that I’ve been shutting you out.”
Olivia looked him over. “Friends?”
Elliot nodded. “Friends.”

Olivia stood next to him in silence for a moment. “Has anyone called Kathy yet?”
“No, don’t,” shot back Elliot.
“Elliot,” said a frustrated Olivia. “Don’t be like that.”
“She started divorce proceedings,” he countered.

“When?” asked Olivia calmly.
“A couple weeks ago,” Elliot said honestly. “I have the papers at home, I just haven’t signed them yet.”
Olivia was at a total loss for what to say. Well, you wanted him to start talking again. You may not like what you hear.

“How’d they get the guns in?” asked Elliot. It was time to change the subject.

The next morning, Elliot was feeling considerably better, both mentally and physically. He squinted into the sunlight to see someone standing at the door.
“Casey, what’re you doing here?”
She stared back at him, arms crossed. “I believe you asked me the same thing a few months ago. I’m here to talk you home. Doctors said you could be discharged this morning, unlike poor Munch who’s stuck here for the rest of the week.”
“Did you see him?” asked Elliot.
“Munch? Yeah, he’s taking this whole thing in stride,” replied Casey, shrugging.

She continued to fix Elliot with that piercing stare. Elliot stared back.

“Why do I get the feeling that you’re mad at me?”
Casey looked put out. “I broke off our little arrangement believing that we would still be friends. You’ve barely spoken to me since, even at work.”
Elliot looked away, feeling guilty.

Casey sighed in frustration. “I know it’s not just me, you’re not speaking to anyone else either. But, as much as it pains me to admit this, I liked our friendship a lot. I miss you.”
Elliot snapped his gaze to Casey. He thought for a long time.
“Casey, I miss you too.”

Casey nodded. “She finally served divorce papers, huh?”
“What, did Olivia tell you?” asked a shocked Elliot.
“You told Olivia?” replied an equally surprised Casey. “And no. I can read minds, remember?”
“Yeah, you did always have that charming attribute,” muttered Elliot. “Our very own Sebastian Ballantine.”
“You know, Montreal SVU still owes me a favor for handing him over to them,” mused Casey.

“Alright, well, enough about our favorite phony psychic,” groaned Elliot, getting to his feet. “I’ll get changed and we’ll head out. Give me a minute, will you?”
“You’re not going to let me stay and watch?” joked Casey.
Elliot gave her a dumbfounded look. “What?”
“Hey, our friendship’s not the only thing I miss,” Casey replied coyly.
Elliot laughed. “Wait outside for now, but I’ll make it up to you when we get back to Queens.”
Munch opened the worn, dirty book and began to read.  
“But he felt oppressed by a vague sense of impending calamity.”
He thought for a second. “As do I.”

-  

Alex was sitting at the usual table in the café when the door opened and someone unusual walked in. Someone she recognized. Casually, he seated himself at her table and smiled.
“Agent Hammond,” she said, confused. “It’s strange to see you so far north. What happened?”
“Nothing yet, but give it a month and a half and something big,” he replied eagerly, but quietly. “I wanted to tell you myself. There’s a major turf war going down amongst the Colombians, new blood against old. My agents have managed to bring in a lot of guys, and we’ve got some good intel saying that Velez won’t be alive much longer.”

Alex was shocked. “So,” she said slowly, “where does DEA move from here?”
“Well, we could arrest Velez, but he’s still got enough muscle to avoid any hard time. One of my guys is pretty high up the ranks of the newer drug lords. We’re thinking we let them whack Velez, then pull them in on possession, intent, and murder.”
“Wow,” Alex said quietly.
“Which means,” Hammond concluded triumphantly, “that either way, you’ll be home next year.”
“I honestly can’t believe it. First Connors dies in prison, now this,” murmured a stunned Alex.

Hammond smiled back at her. “Well, you know the drill by now. Anything to report?”
“No followers, no phone issues, nothing out of the ordinary,” replied Alex in a small voice.
“You gearing up for Halloween?” asked Hammond.
“Don’t talk about Halloween,” Alex said curtly. “My first Halloween in the program, I’d just been placed in Wisconsin and completely forgotten about the whole ordeal. Trick or treaters knock on my door, I scream, terrified. I turn off the lights and hide in my bathroom.”
Hammond winced. “Unfortunately, that’s not the first story I’ve heard like that.”

-  

Carlos sat down next to Anna and Elliot saw the look on his face. Elliot knew that look. It was the way a person looked when someone they loved dearly, someone they believed to be dead, came back to life and healed all the sorrows inside their lover’s heart.

It was the look on Olivia’s face when Alex walked into Casey’s office this past March.

-  

Elliot returned to his desk, piling thirty year old files back into the box. Casey came up next to him and looked over his shoulder.
“She suckered you in, didn’t she?”
He glanced over at her. “Millie? Yeah, I guess she did.”
“Well, she is pretty cute,” teased Casey. “If you want to ask her out, you have my blessing.”

Elliot groaned. “Now I remember why I stopped sleeping with you the first time,” he said, his voice barely above a whisper.
“You know you missed it too,” said a smug Casey.
Elliot glanced around the room. “Yeah, I told you that when you were sitting on top of me last
Saturday night. Casey, come on, stop giving me hell.”
“Ah, but it’s so much fun,” she said, clapping a hand on his back.

Elliot chuckled. “I must be some crazy masochist, but yeah, it is. By the way, is that suit new?”
“I’m flattered,” replied Casey. “A bunch of them are, actually. Branch gave me a nice bonus for closing out the Summer Strangler. I decided it was finally time to return those rags to the thrift store where they belong.”
“Please tell me you saved the lime green one,” pleaded Elliot, grinning.
Casey looked revolted. “That one I burned, kid you not. No one needs to wear that thing again.”

Elliot looked her over. “What’re you doing tonight?”
Casey thought for a moment. “Chinese takeout and game four of the world series. And you, I suppose.”
She leaned in close. “I’ll fuck you if the Astros win.”
“And I’ll screw you if the Sox close it out,” replied Elliot. She’s so damn fun. And she’s going to be the death of me.
“Romeo just signed up for tonight’s event,” announced Cragen.
Olivia looked at Huang. “He’s looking for a new Juliet.”
“Can you be ready to go by eight?” asked the captain.

“Wait, what?” said Olivia. “Me? Captain, there’s gotta be someone else.”
“You fit his type,” said Huang. “Thirties, successful, self-confident.”
Olivia rolled her eyes. “Come on, you two. Do I really have to do this?”
“Olivia, you’re the most badass woman in this squad,” replied Cragen. “Besides, all dolled up,
you’d knock any man’s socks off.”

Cragen smiled at her. “Can you think of a better way to put it?”

“The only men I meet are either colleagues or clients, and, uh, I don’t like to mix business with
pleasure.”
Well, that’s a damn lie, she thought, still grinning ear to ear. How many cops have you dated? And
there’s also the subject of that ADA whose picture is still front and center on your mantle.

Jim cracked another bad joke and Olivia forced a laugh.
I miss Alex so much.

“Well, maybe you’re not his type,” said Elliot, grabbing the mail from his locker.
“Oh no, he was interested,” said a smug Olivia. “I could feel it, you know?”
“Yeah,” muttered Elliot flatly.

Jim, or whatever his name was, placed his hand on her thigh.
“What are you thinking right now?”

Olivia fought the urge to shudder.
I’m thinking that there are some times when it’s better that Alex is still in witness protection,
because you’d be missing your teeth if she ever saw this happening.
“I’m thinking that it’s late and I’ve got a long day tomorrow,” she replied truthfully.

Olivia met Casey coming out of the courthouse. “Some rain, huh?”
“Tell me about it,” lamented Casey. “My hair hates this weather.”
Olivia grinned at her. “Why did you go blonde, anyway?”
“Blondes have more fun?” joked Casey. “I dunno, something different. Blow off some steam.”
“You been under a lot of stress?” asked Olivia.

Casey sighed. “More than usual, I suppose. What with Donnelly joining the bench, Branch is
scrambling to find a bureau chief, but no one wants to touch SVU.”
“What about you?” suggested Olivia.
“In my dreams,” said Casey. “I’m barely twenty-nine; half the department would have to die for
me to get the job."
“I’d make a joke about sleeping with the boss…” began Olivia.
“But you know I’d make you pay for our next month of drinks if you do,” finished Casey. “What’s
the situation with Cora Kennison?”
“Awful. Virginia Kennison won’t accept the diagnosis,” Olivia answered. “She wants to keep
Cora’s body alive even though her mind is dead.”
Olivia walked into the squad room. “I dumped the roach motel’s pay phone. Nothing too interesting in the last two days except for eight calls to the Manhattan Women’s Sexual Health Clinic.”

Elliot shrugged. “Doesn’t exactly narrow it down. I mean, you got twenty hookers working out of that hotel.”

“It’s the best lead we’ve got,” sighed Cragen. “Let’s check it out first thing in the morning.”

Elliot hurried to grab his coat and keys. “Well, good news everyone. Kathy has kindly agreed to allow me to join the family for Thanksgiving dinner.”

“How generous,” remarked Munch.

Olivia smiled. “That’s great.”

“That it is. I’ll see you guys tomorrow,” he replied.

“Night,” called Olivia.

Munch turned to her. “I’m supposing that means we’re on for Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Thanksgiving again?”

“After last year’s roaring success? Wouldn’t miss it,” said Olivia.

Casey had a rule about the couch. It was a gift from her father, something to brighten up her office when she got the job at the DA’s office. She would never forget the beaming look on his face when she announced that, thanks to Judge Clark’s recommendation, she’d secured a job as a Manhattan ADA. So, much to Elliot’s disappointment, they never had sex on the couch.

The desk? Well, there were no rules about that.

Casey lay flat on her back, sprawled across the now-empty desk. Elliot was on top of her, kissing her as he thrust his cock into her, over and over. Her pants long abandoned by her door, she wrapped a leg around his back, drawing him in nearer. Elliot began to pump into her harder and she gripped the edges of the desk with all the strength she had.

“I needed this,” Casey groaned, finishing around Elliot’s dick. “God, I really needed this.”

Casey crossed her ankles and pushed him in further. Wrapping an arm around his neck, she pushed herself up to change the angle ever so slightly so that he hit the perfect –

“God!” Casey orgasmed again, this time bringing Elliot to climax with her.

Elliot panted, bracing himself against the desk. “Rough day?”

“I had to ask Donnelly to recuse herself and she accused me both of being pro-choice and curled up in Branch’s pocket,” replied Casey, reaching for the tissue box. “So yeah, rough day.”

“Ouch,” muttered Elliot, grabbing a handful of tissues and pulling himself out. “You know, this reminds me of the time I caught Alex and Olivia having sex in her office.”

Casey barked out a laugh, then clapped a hand to her mouth. “Sorry. Is that how you found out?”

Elliot nodded, wide-eyed. “Oh yeah. I’ll never forget it. There’s Alex, legs spread wide, her hand gripping Olivia’s head…which is buried in her crotch.”

“Burned into your memory forever, eh?” said Casey. “Well, obviously they weren’t very good at it if they let themselves get caught.”

“I dunno,” muttered Elliot, shaking his head. “In retrospect, if it hadn’t happened when it did, I’d think Alex did it on purpose.”
Casey gave him a puzzled look. “What do you mean?”
“I wasn’t, uh, in love with Olivia at that point in time,” confessed Elliot.

“So, you think your job’s still intact?” asked Olivia.
“Without a doubt,” Casey replied confidently, sipping her cocktail. “I finally got Branch to pay attention to who I am. He’ll be keeping a closer eye on me from now on, which is exactly what I want.”
“What do you mean?” asked a confused Olivia.
Casey smirked. “What you said about being bureau chief? It got to me.”

Olivia’s eyebrows shot up. “You really think you’ll get the job?”
“Well, I mean, not for a while,” replied Casey dismissively. “Branch transferred in Adams, this poor sucker from homicide. But I mean, it’s only a matter of time before he leaves, and I’m the best ADA the bureau has.”
“Could you be any less humble?” cracked Olivia. “Well, at least you enjoy your work.”
“Wait, you don’t?” said Casey.

Olivia took a deep breath. “You know, I almost quit after Alex’s shooting. At first I thought the memories of her were too much to bear at work, but I slowly began to realize that it isn’t just Alex. It’s the cases.”
“So, why haven’t you asked Cragen to transfer you?” Casey asked slowly.
“Well, at first, I figured I would wait in SVU until Alex came home,” Olivia explained. “But then I realized that she’ll find me, even if I leave. Now, I’m trying to help Elliot sort out his mess, and… and I really don’t have a good reason to go. SVU is my family. I’ve done good work there.”

Casey gave her a hard look. “You have to take medication so you don’t have nightmares about the cases you work, Olivia. In my mind, that’s a good reason to leave. And don’t get me started on Elliot. This isn’t your battle to fight; it’s between him and his wife, and he’s working on it.”
“It was a good family,” lamented Olivia. “What happened?”
“Again, not your concern,” Casey lied.

Casey sat there stewing, torn between her loyalty to her best friend and her friend with benefits. At some point, this dam is going to burst. And I’m going to have to tell her the truth.
“We’re gonna need a photo of Tasha,” remarked Elliot. “A real heartbreaker.”
The captain thought for a moment. “I’ll call the hospital, see if they have anything from when she first arrived.”

An exhausted Olivia collapsed into her desk chair. She’d been walking around Harlem for over five hours today and all she wanted was to soak her feet in a warm bath. No way she was running tomorrow morning. Her mind wandered to the conversation she’d had with Munch over Thanksgiving dinner.

“Civil service exam?” Olivia asked.
“Why not?” replied Munch. “I’ve been on this job since the dawn of time. I pay enough alimony that, at the very least, the pay raise would be welcome.”

Olivia ate another forkful of potatoes. “I guess I’ve just never thought about it.”
“Well, you should take it with me,” suggested Munch. “We can hit the books together.”

Olivia sighed. “Munch, I don’t know.”
“Olivia, you’re still young. You’ve been a detective for what, six years? If you get started on these exams now, you could be looking at a very promising future with the NYPD,” said Munch.
“You’re just looking for a study buddy,” ribbed Olivia.

But honestly, it was something to think about. Olivia didn’t want to spend the rest of her life as an SVU detective.

- 

“He said the magic words,” said a frustrated Casey.
“And while we wait for Legal Aid to waltz Mr. Corman out the door, god only knows where Nicki is and what shape she’s in,” concluded the captain.
“You think she’s still alive?” asked Casey.
“He’s antsy, sweating. If he’d hidden the body, he’d be calm,” replied Cragen.

Elliot opened the door. “Casey, you’ve gotta help us out here. I’m not cutting this guy loose.”
Casey nodded. “Print him.”
Cragen looked befuddled. “Counselor, without grounds to arrest we need a court order to compel his prints.”
“Do you think he knows that?” countered Casey.

The captain thought for a moment. “I’ll go get the necessary materials.”
“Casey, you’re the best,” said Elliot, shaking his head.
Casey smirked. “So you’ve said before.”

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“If they prove you leaked this, they will take your job, your pension, and your freedom,” hissed the captain. “I don’t want to visit you in a federal lockup, Olivia.”
But it wasn’t justice, it wasn’t fair, and it didn’t set anything straight.

“Dismissed.”
*Sign me up for that civil service exam.*
“Anthrax scares the hell out of me,” said Casey. “It takes a lot of balls to go to jail for the truth.”
“How long can they hold him?” asked Olivia.
“Until he names names,” Casey said plainly.

Olivia remained silent for a long moment. He saved my job. I owe him.
“You know,” Casey began, “in all this hubbub, there are other trials going on unnoticed, ones that would normally be hushed up. Ones that I heard about from that same friend in the US Attorney’s office.”
Olivia gave Casey a strange look. “What do you mean?”
Casey took a deep breath. “I mean that, as of yesterday, a Colombian drug lord was indicted for the murder of Cesar Velez.”

Olivia’s jaw dropped.
Casey looked sheepish. “Merry Christmas, Olivia.”
Olivia threw open the car door. “That woman is ridiculous.”
Elliot shifted uncomfortably. “She has a point. If I were gay or one of my kids were, no way I’d be looking at Catholic school. That’s part of the reason I didn’t send them anyway, I didn’t want them exposed to bigotry like this.”
“Yeah, well, you’re a lot more understanding than most,” snapped Olivia. “Come on, we need to get to the hospital.”

Elliot looked at her. “You’re taking this personally.”
“Of course I’m taking it personally,” said Olivia, pulling out of the parking lot. “If Alex and I had a kid—”
“Okay, this stops here,” cut in Elliot. “First of all, you and Alex weren’t even married. Second of all, you didn’t have a kid. And third, you wouldn’t send them to Catholic school.”
Olivia sighed in frustration. “I guess I’m just on edge. You know that Cesar Velez was murdered?”
“Uh, no, didn’t know that,” muttered Elliot.

“…And that means Alex is coming home. Fantastic.”

“We’ll be able to get you back after the trial finishes, probably the beginning of the new year,” said Agent Hammond. “You can stay in DEA custody while we find you an apartment, or you can stay with family, but reintroduction is always very quiet. DEA leaves it up to you to inform family and friends about your return.”
“I still can’t believe this is actually happening,” murmured Alex. She glanced out the window at the howling snowstorm. “I also can’t believe you made it here in this weather.”
Agent Hammond smiled. “We have our ways.”

“It’s okay, sweetie,” soothed Zoe. “It’s just for a couple of days.”
Olivia watched the whole scene play out in family court and tried not to cry. If she was honest with herself, she’d once dreamed of a future where she and Alex could live together happily, raising children.
This case was making her reconsider that idea entirely.

Despite her angst regarding poor Emma Boyd, Olivia did her best to have fun at the New Year’s party. It was quiet this year, but everyone turned out. Even Huang, who Elliot of all people had seen fit to invite.
“What can I say? My opinion of shrinks has shot up,” he explained.
“Still, you surprised even me,” said Huang, shaking his head.

At the next table over, Munch and Casey were trying to cheer Olivia up.
“Come on, at the very least, Decker will lose his license,” said Casey. “It’s New Year’s. It’s your anniversary!”
Olivia sighed. “So, where’s Alex?”
“The trial on Velez closed Wednesday, Olivia,” explained Casey. “She probably hasn’t even left Bumfuck, Montana or wherever the hell she’s staying.”
Munch suppressed a laugh. “Sounds like someone’s had a few drinks already.”
Casey gave him a dirty look. “It’s New Year’s, it’s a Saturday night, and I am still going dancing after this, mark my words. You gonna bust me for public intox?”
Olivia looked up at Casey and smiled. “What the hell, I’ll go with you. Maybe it’ll even cheer me up.”
“One last hurrah before we buckle down and start studying,” said Munch.
Olivia high-fived him. “Absolutely.”
Listening in, Elliot drained his beer glass and pouted. *Guess this means I’m not getting any tonight.*

January 5, 2006. A car door opened in front of the DEA, and a tall, gorgeous woman with hair recently re-dyed blonde stepped out, taking in the sounds and smells of the city.

Alex Cabot was back in New York.
“You know, I could stay if you want to,” offered Olivia. “I know sometimes it’s hard to sleep in a strange place.”
“I don’t think I slept the first six months I lived in Wisconsin,” Alex murmured sleepily. “I just sat up all night, waiting for something terrible to happen.”
“And smoking,” teased Olivia.
Alex groaned. “Until I was sick.”

“You know, I couldn’t sleep either,” said Olivia. “Every time I closed my eyes, I’d see you, lying on the ground.”
Alex looked up at her sadly. “I know.”
“No, you can go,” replied Nathan.

Olivia nodded quietly. “Okay.”
“It’s weird,” mused Alex. “So much has changed, and I feel like I’m lost. I’m not the person I have to pretend to be, but I’m not Alexandra Cabot either.”
“We can always figure it out when you come back for good,” whispered Olivia.
Alex closed her eyes. “When I’m ready.”
“Goodnight.”

Alex took a deep breath. She remembered the address; she’d picked the place out herself, after all. Closing her eyes, she knocked three times and waited.

After a few moments, Alexander Cabot opened the door.

“No,” he mumbled, his eyes widening. “It’s not possible.”
“Witness protection,” Alex said quickly. “I was never really dead. Dad, I’m sorry.”
He broke into a smile, tears streaming down his cheeks. “That doesn’t matter now.”

Alexander pulled his daughter into a big hug, quietly crying onto her shoulder.
“I’ll call people,” he rambled, “family. We’ll all have a big dinner tonight. Alex, I, I am so, so happy you’re home.”
Alex returned the hug. “So am I.”

“Casey!” called Olivia, hurrying after her friend.
“You here to ambush me again?” asked Casey casually.
“I’m here to apologize,” said Olivia quickly.
Casey didn’t blink. “You gave the jury a reason to acquit.”
“I was trying to tell the truth,” clarified Olivia. “I’m sorry. What’re you gonna do?”

Casey finally stopped walking and turned to face Olivia. “Draft a plea bargain.”
“I damaged your case that much?” Olivia asked guiltily.
“You changed my mind,” replied Casey. “And I’ll bet you convinced a juror, too.”

Casey opened the door to her office. After a moment, Olivia followed her in.
“You haven’t heard anything from DEA, have you?” Olivia said quietly. “Or the US Attorney’s office?”

Infected
Casey took a deep breath. "You’re not going to like what I’m about to say, but we have to consider the possibility that Alex may still be in danger, even if Velez went down."
"I know," Olivia said quietly.

Casey looked at Olivia sympathetically. "You want to get dinner later?"
"Sorry," said Olivia, shaking her head. "Munch and I are buckling down. Well, I am, at least. They’re offering the exam really early this year, so he’s already been preparing. I’m the one who has to cram."
Casey grinned at her. "Come on, Liv. You’re gonna nail that test to the wall."
*Just like Elliot is gonna do to me tonight.*

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Sitting at the dinner table, Alex smiled warmly. She was surrounded by a small gathering of family, mostly on her father’s side, but her favorite Uncle Bill was there as well. Charlie was with his wife – god, she couldn’t believe it, a wife! – and had successfully cleaned up his act and joined the family firm to do accounting.

"Can I hire you to help me with my taxes now?" she joked.
"For you, I’ll do ’em for free," Charlie replied, smiling. "Though I don’t see what a corpse needs tax help for."
Alex shuddered. "You know, I went to visit mother’s grave, and there was my headstone, right next to hers. It was creepy."

Alex pursed her lips, looking around the table. "Is that why Aunt Dora and Uncle Jacob aren’t here? She dies and they decide cut us off? The cousins, too?"
The rest of the Cabot family traded awkward glances.
"Alex," began her father, "after you died, I met a woman named Olivia Benson."
Alex’s eyes widened in realization. Olivia had never mentioned that. "And she told you I’m a lesbian."

Mr. Cabot sighed. "I didn’t tell anyone but Charlie."
Alex glared at her brother. "Who knew. And then decided it was okay to tell the rest of the family."
Charlie shrank back in guilt. "I’m sorry. I thought you were dead! I didn’t think it made any difference."
"Well, it’s nice to see you’re still a jerk deep down," ribbed Alex. "But, I suppose I always knew this would happen if I came out. Uncle Bill, thanks for still being here."

Judge Hermann smiled at her. "No matter who you are, Alex, you’ll always be my favorite niece. Apologies to everyone else, by the way."
Her cousin Diana laughed. "It’s okay, Uncle Bill. We all know. Alex, have you found somewhere to live yet?"
"Yeah, DEA gave me a few listings, and I think I’m going to close on a place," replied Alex, "but what I’m more concerned about is work. I can’t just march into Branch’s office and demand he give me a job."

Uncle Bill smiled mischievously. "What if I march with you?"
Alex cocked an eyebrow. "What do you mean?"
"I happen to know that there’s a felonies bureau chief retiring at the end of the month," he said smugly. "Who better to fill the position than a young, bright, talented ADA? Trust me, Alex, I’ll pull some strings."

Alex didn’t know what to say. She didn’t care that she hadn’t prosecuted a case in two years. She
didn’t even care about what she was going to tell the DA.  
My job. I’m going to get my job back.
“I still think I’m seeing things every time I look back at you,” muttered Branch grumpily. “Alright, this is where you’ll be working. It’s a young bureau, but they’re good people. Everyone, front and center!”

A ragtag crew of young ADAs lined up in front of Branch, looking uncomfortable.

“Alex, you’ve got Peluso, Finn, Desmond, Rossi, Steele, and Potter,” listed off Branch, pointing each of them out in turn. “Everyone, this is Alexandra Cabot, your new Bureau Chief.”

Alex smiled coolly at the ADAs. “Nice to meet you all.”

“Your office is this way,” said Branch, leading her to the back of the hallway. “I sure wish you’d been around a couple months ago, Alex. It was hell trying to find someone to take over the Special Victims Bureau.”

“What happened to Donnelly?” asked a confused Alex.

“Appointed to the bench,” grumbled Branch. “Well, what do you think?”

Alex looked around her new office and grinned. “Too many windows. I got used to that old shoebox, you know.”

“Oh yes, that lovely corner office,” remarked Branch. “We actually turned that into a storage room after you left.”

“Can’t say I blame you,” replied Alex.

Branch turned to leave. “Well, you know where to find me if you need me. Good luck, Alex.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Alex, smiling.

She dropped her briefcase on her desk and stepped out into the office, folding her arms.

“All right, I want everyone’s case files for the past two weeks. If I’m going to be in charge around here, I need to be brought up to date on a consistent basis.”

“If you’re going to be in charge,” muttered Steele.

Alex looked over at him, smirked, and folded her arms. “If you choose not to respect my authority, you have two options; you can transfer, or you can shove it and get back to work.”

Steele balked.

“I like her,” muttered Rossi.

Finn glanced over at the TV, frowning. “Hey guys, check this out. Amber alert.”

Elliot and Melinda sat in the kitchen, waiting.

“Thanks for coming in on a Saturday,” she said quietly.

Elliot shrugged. “House is empty, least I could do. Thank you for staying.”

Melinda nodded. “I called my family, let them know what’s going on. They’ll understand.”

She opened the fridge and retrieved the orange juice. “You want some?”

Elliot shook his head. “Nah, just wish I’d brought something to kill time, like one of those damn books Olivia’s always poring over. She’s studying to take the civil service exam in April.”

Melinda smiled. “Good for her. I’ve got crosswords, if you’re interested.”

“I’ll pass. I’m horrible at those things,” said Elliot.

Melinda pulled the book out of her purse. “No better time to learn.”

“You going home?” asked Olivia.
“Yeah, I gotta get some stuff out of my locker,” lied Elliot. “I’ll see you in the morning.”
A confused Olivia looked after him. “Goodnight.”

Elliot wandered the precinct and finally found himself in the crib. He lay on the bed for about half
an hour, then dialed Casey’s number.
“Timing’s good,” she said, picking up. “Just got out of the shower.”
Elliot sighed. “I’m in the precinct, it’s completely empty. You wanna come by?”
“Can’t you come here?” she pressed.

“Will, uh, will you let me crash on your couch?” Elliot asked carefully.
“No, Elliot, I won’t, we’ve been through this,” groaned Casey.
Elliot evaluated his options. “Alright, see you in twenty.”
“I’ll leave my pants off,” Casey replied smugly.

Casey was on the warpath, striding through the halls of the DA’s office. Well, sort of. More like
limping down the halls.

Elliot had spent the last four nights boning her brains out, something that had never happened
before. They never hooked up more than two days in a row, and for good reason.

“I’m not going to be able to walk tomorrow,” moaned Casey, bent over her kitchen table. “And it’s
all your damn fault.”
Elliot panted, slamming his hips hard against hers. “For once, just shut up and let me do this.”
“You’re the…the worst,” gasped Elliot, blowing inside of Casey.
Bracing her head on her arm, she turned back to grin at him. “You don’t mean that, and you know
it.”

Casey stumbled by to find Brian Peluso sitting at his desk. She remembered him, and from the
look on his face, he remembered her.
“Casey,” he stuttered, blushing.
“Save it,” she spat. “Where’s your bureau chief?”
Gulping nervously, he pointed to the back office.

The shades were drawn. Perfect. Casey marched over and threw open the door. Inside, sitting at her
desk, was Alexandra Cabot.
“You’ve got a hell of a lot of explaining to do!” snarled Casey.
Alex looked like she was going to throw up.
“How did you find out?” stammered Alex.
Casey shut the door and leaned against the wall, folding her arms. “I happened to overhear a
conversation between Branch and McCoy, talking about their surprising new addition. You want to
explain why you haven’t contacted SVU yet?”

Alex rubbed her temples. “I was kind of hoping to stabilize myself first. I’ve been back a month, I
have a new place, a new job, I’m still trying to explain things to my family –”
“That’s all very nice,” simpered Casey. “Now, tell me the real reason.”
Alex stopped mid-sentence, her mouth still open.

“I’m scared,” she choked.
Casey gave her an odd look. “Scared of what?”
Alex thought hard. “I don’t know. Everyone has moved on with their lives, Casey, and…I don’t
even know who I am anymore. I don’t feel like I can go back until I do. Olivia loves the Alex
Cabot she knew, not the Alex Cabot I am now. What if we try and, and she doesn’t love me?”
“Well, it’s a lousy excuse, but it’s a valid one, I suppose,” grumbled Casey. “But you can’t hide
from your problems and your friends forever, Alex. You have to talk to her eventually or I will.”

Alex sprang up from behind the desk. “Casey, please, don’t let them know I’m back. Not yet.”
“Why the hell does everyone want me to keep their secrets?” cried Casey, throwing up her hands in
defeat. “Don’t you people know I’m not infallible? Don’t tell Olivia I love her, Casey. Don’t tell
Olivia I’m back, Casey. Don’t tell Elliot I’m thinking about leaving, Casey.”
Alex’s eyes widened. “What?”

“Okay, so she hasn’t said as much, but I know that’s her end goal,” admitted Casey. “She wouldn’t
be taking the civil service exam if it wasn’t. Olivia’s fed up with SVU, Alex, the cases have finally
gotten to be too much. When she passes the exam, it will be the final push she needs to get out.”
Alex studied Casey. “What else is going on that I need to know?”

“Well, I can’t think of anything that you really need to know,” Casey said sourly, sitting down.
“But if you ask me questions, I might be able to give you answers. On one condition.”
“Well?” asked Alex.
“You have until the results of the sergeant’s exam to tell Olivia you’re back. That should give you
enough time to get your emotions sorted out,” stated Casey. “Otherwise, I’m going to shout the
news of your return to all five boroughs.”

Alex considered the offer, then nodded. “Deal. Let’s start with the DA’s office. Are Williams and
Southerlyn still around?”
Casey shook her head. “Dan left for the US Attorney’s office, seems his cousin got him a job. And
Branch fired Serena about a year ago.”
Alex frowned. “Was it because she’s a lesbian?”
“Actually, no,” said a surprised Casey. “She is?”

“No judge is gonna order an invasive procedure based on a whiff of circumstantial evidence,”
scoffed Casey.
“Well, then she is gonna bolt!” Cragen said angrily.

Casey thought for a moment. “She had to tell someone. Find me somebody quick who knew she
was pregnant.”
Someone like me. Casey Novak, Secret-Keeper for the Special Victims Unit.
Casey was a closet Harry Potter fan.

-

Munch hung up the phone. “Liv, that was Warner. She wants you to stop by the lab.”
Olivia cocked an eyebrow. “Alright, I’ll get my coat. We still on for tomorrow night?”
“Ah, my first Valentine’s Day in years with a woman by my side,” Munch said fondly.
Olivia grinned. “See you then, Munch.”

Cragen looked Munch over as Olivia headed off to the morgue. “Hot date?”
“We’ll be spending a lovely candlelit evening studying procedure and working practice questions,”
replied Munch. “What could be more romantic?”

-

“It’s gonna be okay,” Olivia whispered to the baby. “You’re gonna be okay.”
But Casey could see the tears.

“Olivia,” she said slowly. “Who are you really talking to?”
Olivia’s face shot up, her eyes blinking rapidly. “This week, I found a big bouquet of flowers on
my desk, no card. Valentine’s Day.”
Casey watched Olivia and waited for an answer.
“She’s never coming home, is she? Velez is dead and it doesn’t matter. She’s never coming
home.”

Casey was going to kill Alex Cabot.
Okay, so she sent the flowers. Maybe that was a mistake.

She’d gotten an earful for it. Casey came banging down her door again, yelling about how Olivia’s heart was broken and how Alex had better make good on her promise because Casey was near her breaking point and she didn’t know how much longer she could take this.

At Alex’s suggestion, they’d gone back to her new apartment and gotten incredibly drunk.

Casey woke up on the couch, still in her suit from the previous day. “My mouth tastes like death and whiskey,” she groaned. “Do you have mouthwash? We’re both going to be late.”

“Just toothpaste,” croaked Alex, sprawled across the bed. “Why on earth did I think this was a good idea?”

“Because we’re both depressed and losing our minds,” said Casey, pushing herself up off the couch. “Can I borrow a set of gym clothes? I keep a spare suit in the office.”

Alex waved her hand vaguely. “There’s a t-shirt and shorts in the top drawer. Just wash them and bring them back to me.”

Casey braced herself on the walls and hobbled over to the bedroom. “I swear, my life gets stranger and stranger every day.”

“You’re not the only one,” said Alex.

“Inman wasn’t trying to get back at Tessa,” realized Olivia. “She hired him to frame her husband.”

“My ex-wives have done some cold things, but nothing this drastic,” remarked Munch.

Elliot sighed. “Well, I hope mine doesn’t either.”

Olivia spun, staring at Elliot. “You signed the papers?”

“Not yet, but I’ve begun to accept that it’s time to give this up,” he said honestly.

Olivia sat down at her desk, stunned.

Munch glanced at Warner. “I think it’s better if we give them some privacy,” muttered Melinda.

Elliot leaned across her desk. “Why are you so torn up about this?”

“Because you and Kathy kept my belief in love alive,” Olivia replied. “After my own love disappeared, at least you still had yours. Now, I don’t know what to believe anymore.”

Elliot felt the guilt seeping into his mind. Believe me, Olivia, I’ve still got someone I love. Just not Kathy.

“You should believe that no matter what, you’ve got to keep moving forward with your life. That’s what I’m doing. That’s what we’re both doing.”

“But I’m not, Elliot,” Olivia whispered. “I still love her. I’ll love her even if she never comes back to Manhattan.”

“You don’t have to stop loving someone to move on from them,” Elliot said quietly.

Olivia shot him a hurt look and jumped out of her chair, heading for the bathroom. That was a lousy thing to say, Elliot thought to himself. This is never going to work.
“Jason, you did the right thing,” soothed Casey. “You told the truth.” *Like I wish so many others would.*

“Nicky was like my brother,” croaked Jason.
Casey placed a hand on his shoulder. “I know, I know.”
“I never, ever meant for any of this to happen —”
“It is not your fault that Nick and Doug murdered Jennifer,” interrupted Casey.

Jason broke down. “I’m sorry that I didn’t…”
Casey pulled him into a hug. “Everything’s going to be okay.”
After a moment, his parents pulled him off and guided him out of the courthouse.

Casey looked sorrowfully at Elliot. “My turn.”
She wrapped her arms around him and tried not to cry.
“Casey, what’s going on?” he whispered.
Closing her eyes, Casey leaned her head into his shoulder. “I don’t know. This case.”

She was pushed to the brink and had no way to cope.

-  

Alex returned from the monthly meeting with all the bureau chiefs, which she had thoroughly enjoyed. It was nice to see familiar faces and do some hard work. It even looked like she’d be back in the courtroom in a few weeks, something she was eagerly awaiting.

What she was not looking forward to was the date circled in red on her calendar. The date of the Sergeant’s Exam. Her birthday.

She hadn’t called Trevor. She hadn’t called Williams. She hadn’t called Hammond, even. Some of her furniture was still lying unassembled on her apartment floor and she hadn’t bought utensils, though she did buy pots, pans, and a paring knife (but no cutting board? Nice move, Counselor). She hadn’t called anyone in SVU, not even Casey.

Alex walked into the common area and saw Steele sitting at the table, a pack of cigarettes next to his briefcase.
“There’s no smoking in government buildings,” she reprimanded. “Put them away, now.”

He grumbled and stuffed them in his pocket as Alex strode proudly back to her office. Right now, she was living for the minor victories.

-  

“Roadmaster Excelsiors,” announced Elliot, pinning up a photo of the tire tracks. “Used on any one of a couple dozen compacts.”

Olivia looked back at Casey. “Doesn’t match our boys. None of their families own anything smaller than a C Class Mercedes.”

“And there was no sign of a struggle in or around the house. Jason must’ve known whoever came to get him,” concluded Elliot.

“It had to be Nick and Doug,” said a frustrated Casey.

“Houdini couldn’t make people disappear like these guys can,” remarked Cragen.

Casey looked crossly at Elliot and Olivia. “How did they find where Jason was staying?”
An irate Elliot leaned in close to her. “Are you saying they found out from us?”

“Why are you hanging around here when you should be out looking for Jason?! Jason is missing and Nick and Doug are gonna walk unless you call in the troops to find him!” screamed Casey.

“We call in the troops and everybody finds out Jason is gone,” reasoned Cragen. “Now you want to think about that for a second? Or just keep playing your blame game?”

Casey looked as if she were about to cry. “Is that what this is? A game?”

She ran out and Elliot tried to follow, but Cragen stopped him short.

“I got her.”

Elliot watched as Casey fled to Cragen’s office. He tried to pretend he couldn’t see the tears. He tried to ignore the wrenching feeling in his chest.

Olivia closed her eyes and let another scene replay itself on her eyelids.

“I am not out of line and I don’t work for you! You work for me at my discretion! Your sole purpose in this process is to bring me a case I can prosecute, not one I have to fix!” Alex screamed.

“Fine,” said Cragen quietly. “Then you tell us, Counselor. How can we help you put this man away? What would you like us to do?”

Alex suddenly looked exhausted and bitter. After an age, she answered. “Nothing. You’ve done all you can.”

- 

“Well, it is late,” said Branch, stepping out of the courthouse. “Would you like a ride home?”

“I’d love one,” replied Casey. “Sir, thanks.”

Branch smiled down at her. “Anything for one of my rising stars.”

For the first time in days, Casey’s heart soared.

- 

This was a hard loss. Harder than usual. Made harder by the fact that Casey was truly beginning to loathe herself for keeping her mouth shut.

At first, she had Elliot lie on her office floor and take it. She rode him fast, bouncing back and forth and up and down and finishing, over and over. Casey took in that look in his eyes, stunned but hungry. But tonight, she saw reflected in his eyes that same hatred she harbored for herself. So she made him drive her home, removed her suit, and leaned over on the couch.

“Harder,” she ordered, feeling his cock push in and out of her.

“I don’t want to break you,” Elliot replied.

“You can do better,” Casey growled. “Fuck me like you mean it.”

She reached a hand back and slapped his ass.

And then he drove to the point that Casey wanted. To the point where it was both enjoyable and painful. She buried her face in the couch cushions and let the tears drip down her face as she came, the walls of her pussy squeezing Elliot hard.

You know the truth. You play the sadist, the torturer, but in the end? You’re the real masochist.

“Casey?”

She felt him press the tissues to her slit. He’s cleaning me up.

Casey rolled over to face him.

Elliot looked forlorn. “You’re not okay.”
“The police academy taught you well,” she cracked dryly.

He sat next to her on the couch, wadding the dirty tissues into a fresh one. “I know you don’t want to talk about it. We won’t, not tonight.”

“Thanks,” she said weakly.

Elliot bit his lip. “Olivia said something the other day and it got me thinking. Last summer, you said you started this because you believe in true love?”

Casey stayed quiet. Don’t test me now. She sought for an excuse.

“What I really meant is we’re the same. We’re damaged goods. Neither of us can be with the person we really love.”

Elliot nodded, considering her statement. He rubbed a finger across your hairline. “Your red’s showing through.”

Casey sighed. “I know. I’ve been sloppy.”

“It’s in your eyebrows, too. I’ve gotta be honest, I liked you better red.”

Casey looked at him, intrigued. “Do you believe in true love?”

“No, Casey, I don’t,” Elliot said honestly. “Not anymore. Look, get some pants on. We’ll call for Chinese and make a game plan. I’ll help you interview Donnelly’s staff tomorrow morning.”

Casey did believe in true love, but she also believed that true love was everywhere. All you had to do was look.
Casey sat in the bar outside the courthouse, finishing up her drink, when a familiar face sat down next to her.

“That was a good job with the Jason King case,” Alex said quietly.
Casey smiled weakly at Alex. “Thanks. I may have gotten my conviction, but I don’t think I’m going to let go of this one for a long time.”

“Ginger ale, please,” Alex said to the bartender. She returned her attention to Casey. “He’s your Sam Cavanaugh. Everyone has one that they can’t let go.”
Casey gave Alex a strange look. “Sam Cavanaugh?”
“Olivia wouldn’t have told you,” Alex said, looking down at the bar. “The case against his molester essentially rested on his testimony, and he committed suicide during the course of the trial. I thought it was my fault. I still feel guilty about it, to this day.”
Casey sighed. “I keep telling myself that they might have killed Jason anyway, but I compelled him to testify. I signed his death warrant.”

Alex glanced over at Casey. “You’ll move on, eventually.”
“I know,” Casey said in a low voice. “But I need to start moving now. I can’t keep moping around. SVU needs me.”
Alex looked over Casey curiously. “You’ve never thought about leaving?”
“Well, in my first month, yeah,” explained Casey. “But not now. It’s where I’m needed.”

Alex sipped her ginger ale and smiled. “I’m beginning to believe you’re fearless.”
Casey grinned. “You’re just now figuring that out?”

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“If it’s a custom job, Diamond Duv can tell us who he made it for,” said Fin.
Elliot glanced over at Olivia’s desk. “Sounds good. Where’s my partner?”
He looked over at Munch’s desk, equally confused. “Where’s your partner?”

Fin pointed up. “Upstairs. They’re cooking the books for that exam.”
“Sounds miserable,” muttered Elliot. “You ever thought about taking that thing?”
“No way,” said Fin. “I like being a detective too much.”

---

Elliot braced himself. “Would you consider pleading him out?”
Casey gave him a stunned look. “He confessed to murder.”
“No one’s denying that. I just think he deserves leniency,” explained Elliot.
“What have they done with the real Detective Stabler?” scoffed Casey.

Elliot chased her out the door. “Hey, c’mon, look, I know this kid. You know him.”
“How so?” countered Casey.
“Look, we come from the same place,” said Elliot. “The guy works his ass off to get into Hudson and these rich kids treat him like crap. You know how that feels.”
Casey stopped, sighing. “Yeah, I waited tables in law school and served my classmates. It sucked, but it didn’t make me kill anyone.”

Elliot watched her stalk down the hall. Please, Casey. Do it for me.
“Would you at least make sure that he gets a good legal aid attorney?”
She threw her arms out in defeat. “Yeah, I’ll make a call.”
“Ken lied to us, Olivia,” said Elliot.
“Kids lie,” countered Olivia. “Whether you live with them full time or not.”

“How we doing on potential murder victims?” asked the captain, approaching their desks to interrupt.
“We have two possibles: a twenty-seven year old woman went missing from her work two years ago, uh, car was left abandoned.”
Cragen walked over to Olivia. “Any blood in her apartment or vehicle?”
“Uh-uh,” she replied.
“Well, if this guy raped her with a knife, there’d be blood and a lot of it,” said Cragen.

“Which leaves us with Nina Stansfield, thirty year old female and her toddler son,” explained Elliot. “Disappeared three years ago from their apartment.”
The captain looked confused. “Doesn’t fit Ken’s statement either. He never mentioned a baby.”
“Well, listen to this,” proclaimed Olivia, “approximately seven pints of blood belonging to the victim were left at the scene, along with a bloody four-inch knife with an engraved hilt.”
“And the lab found vaginal epithelials on the blade,” finished Elliot. “There’s foreign DNA on the carpet, and although it didn’t match her husband, Steven, he’s still the prime suspect.”
“Lemme guess, he has a history of domestic violence,” said Cragen.
Elliot nodded. “Three DV calls six months before she disappeared.”

“Have Munch check with the husband, see if he frequents the Deuce,” ordered Cragen, returning to his office.
Elliot looked over at Olivia. “Were you suggesting my kids are liars?”
Olivia rolled her eyes. “No, Elliot, I’m suggesting that they’re kids. I told my share of lies when I was younger, and I’ll bet you did too.”
“You know, I may be giving up on my marriage, but I’m not giving up on my family,” said a disgruntled Elliot.

Olivia smiled at him. “Elliot, I know. You’re a good dad.”
Elliot returned to his computer screen, trying to hide his blush.

Casey let Ken and Summers walk out the door without looking back. Sighing, she turned to face Munch.
“She’s right. All we’ve got is circumstantial evidence. We don’t even have a body.”
“And my gut says we don’t have our murderer either, regardless of the fact that he’s my partner’s son,” said Munch. “Not that there was ever a good time for this to happen, but why now?”

“That’s right, exam’s in two weeks,” remarked Casey. “Olivia’s cancelled on me for drinks three times now.”
“She’s astonishing,” said Munch. “The way she’s studying, it’s almost like she’s working another case.”
“Hey, if there’s one thing I’ve learned about Olivia Benson, it’s that she’s dedicated to everything she does,” noted Casey.

Elliot sat across the table from Olivia at the small Italian place near the precinct. She balanced a
fork in one hand and a practice test in the other, downing bites of chicken Caesar salad as she answered questions.

“You gonna talk to me, or you just gonna work those problems?” cracked Elliot.
“Well, I could read the problems to you,” offered Olivia, looking a little guilty. “Sorry.”
He waved her off. “Don’t worry about it. You’re going to do great. Just promise you won’t boss me around too much when you make sergeant.”
She grinned at him. “My only demand is that I always get to drive.”
Elliot rolled his eyes. “You would ask for that.”

Olivia stared at him for a moment. “Elliot, thanks.”
“Thanks for what?” he asked quizzically.
“When I first told you I was taking this, I thought you were going to be upset with me, but you’ve been really supportive and helpful. You even found Munch and me that study group that meets on Thursdays.”
“Olivia, you’re my partner,” said Elliot. “And I’m going to support you no matter what you choose to do. I’ll always be here for you, no matter what.”

Olivia broke into a smile. “Just like you always have been. Thanks for being my friend.”
“Don’t get all sappy on me,” said Elliot.
“Come on, humor me, this one time,” pressed Olivia. “You know that I never had a father. I haven’t had a lot of healthy relationships with men, and most of them have been romantic. You’re like the best guy friend I always wanted but never had around. You’re practically my older brother. You’ve always been there when I’ve needed someone to talk to, and I hope I’ve done the same for you.”

Elliot felt his heart sink. “Yeah, you have. Now come on, finish that salad, we’ve gotta pick up that guy in Mott Haven.”
“Hey, I’m just glad I’m not Fin right now,” said Olivia, gathering up a forkful of greens. “Casey told me Preston threw Darius’ confession and the bodies out.”
“Speaking of throwing things out, have you decided if you’re leaving your apartment yet?” asked Elliot.
Olivia sighed. “Landlord raised the rent again and fired the night doorman. It’s only a matter of time.”

Munch and Olivia stood outside the testing room with all the other hopefuls, anxiously looking at the clock.
“I heard Darius Parker wants his day in court,” muttered Olivia, trying to distract the both of them.
Munch nodded. “Casey’s doing everything she can to delay the trial and bury him in paperwork. Even though we’ve found the bodies, they’re not on the record, so she’s using that as an excuse to stall.”
“So that we can ‘look for them,’” concluded Olivia.

She took a deep breath. “Today is Alex’s birthday.”
“Some present,” Munch said bitterly. “At least you’ve got someone to do well for.”
Olivia smiled. “You’re right, I do.”

The door to the testing room opened.
“Everybody, please, if you would come this way.”
Alex had used her alumni privileges at Columbia to secure a gym membership there, mostly so she could use the pool. The location was convenient, she received her own locker, and the pool was Olympic-sized and open year-round, even when the swim team wasn’t practicing. On the downside, Columbia was located in Morningside Heights. Close to where Olivia lived. Meaning she walked past restaurants they’d eaten at and really had no excuse not to stop by. *Except my own cowardice, of course.*

Alex came to a stop to discover a dress shoe standing at the end of lane eight. “Agent Hammond,” she said, looking up. “I’m hoping it’s not bad news.”

He offered her a fresh towel. “No worries, it’s not really news at all. I called your office; one of your ADAs said you’d be here.”

Alex smiled, wrapping herself in the towel. “They’re a good bunch. Well, what’s going on?”

Hammond pulled an evidence bag out of his pocket. “When you were shot, you were wearing this gold necklace. We had to seize it; it’s an identifying marker and Velez could have used it to track you down. But now that the threat against you no longer exists, I had a clerk pull it from our storage room. I thought you’d want it back.”

Alex gingerly removed the bag from his hand and examined the necklace. It was her pendant. The pendant Olivia had given her when her parents separated. She’d worn this every single day. *Next week. I will talk to her next week.*

“Thank you,” Alex said quietly.

Elliot turned to see Olivia, gun drawn, stalking towards a cluster of unknown screams. On impulse, he bolted after her, fighting his way through the crowd. After pushing his way forward, he found Ryan Clifford, looking like a dead boy walking.

“Ryan! Hey buddy!” Elliot yelled.

Ryan stood stock still until he heard a shriek. Following Ryan’s lead, Elliot turned to see Gitano holding the girl and Olivia, gun pointed at his chest.

“Freeze!” she commanded.

Gitano swung his arm, cutting her throat with his knife.

*No. No, not Olivia. Get the boy, Elliot, get the boy. No, please. I love her.*

Elliot ignored Gitano, rushing to her side. *I love you, Olivia. I will not let you die, I promise you.*

“It’s okay,” she gasped. “I’m okay, I’m okay. Where’s Gitano? Go Elliot, go! I’m fine! Go! Go!”

After many precious, wasted seconds, he finally listened to her and took off.

Olivia looked up to see Elliot standing at the end of the terminal. *What the hell was he thinking? What was that tone, even? I’ve never heard him use that tone of voice before.*

Cragen walked up to a distraught Elliot. “I don’t suppose you want a day or two off.”

Elliot looked mournfully at Cragen. *I screwed up. She knows something’s wrong. I’m going to have to invent something.*
Or I’m going to have to tell her the truth.
“Yeah, I didn’t think so.”

“He doesn’t know anything,” Elliot said dismissively, still walking down the hall.
“You got something you wanna say to me because if you do, let’s hear it!” Olivia yelled back.

I love you, Olivia. And that love has finally gotten in the way of my job.
“Why didn’t you shoot Gitano?”
Olivia was taken aback. “He was using the child as a shield.”
“How could you let him get so close to you?”
“There were innocent civilians around! I couldn’t get a shot!”

“Well, he got close, and Ryan’s dead,” spat Elliot.
“So this is my fault?” said a stunned, angry Olivia.
“No, I can’t do this anymore! I can’t be looking over my shoulder making sure you’re okay!” Elliot admonished himself.
Olivia’s face twisted with rage. “You son of a bitch! You know that’s not true!”
“I need to know you can do your job and not wait for me to come to the rescue!” Oh sure, Elliot, blame her. That’s gonna make her love you back. Love you as something that’s not her brother, not her best friend.
Love you like she loves Alex Cabot.

“All right, that’s enough!” shouted Cragen. “Knock it off!”
Olivia tried to mask her hurt and failed miserably. Did he finally sign the papers? What the hell is going on?

“Sometimes, all that brooding intensity is just annoying,” remarked Melinda.

Elliot couldn’t talk to Hendrix. Not about this one.

“You had to choose between saving the little boy and saving Olivia,” said Huang.
“Yeah, but she didn’t need me.” She never needs me.
“You didn’t know that,” Huang countered.

Elliot tried to make the words come. “I wish I didn’t… love her. It screwed everything up. And I’ll never stop hating myself.
“Didn’t what? Didn’t…care so much?”

Elliot looked up to meet Huang’s gaze. He knew. He always knew. Huang walked towards him. “Elliot, that’s what makes you a good partner.”
“She made me turn away,” growled Elliot.
“How?” Huang asked plainly. “How did she make you do anything?”

I ruined my marriage. I ruined my family for something I’ll never have. And I’ll never stop hating myself. “She didn’t. It was my choice. Nobody else was responsible for it but me.”
Huang gave Elliot a sad look.
Elliot shifted awkwardly from side to side. “Thanks.”

“Elliot…” Huang tried to stop him, but Elliot closed the door.
"This isn’t going to end well, thought George.

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Olivia kept rambling. She couldn’t hear half of what she was saying. All she knew was that she had to keep Elliot alive long enough for backup to get here. There was no other way.


Olivia tried, but she couldn’t get a good shot; her hands were shaking too much.

“Yeah, do that!” taunted Gitano. “But, you better make sure you take me out with one shot. One, perfect, perfect shot. ‘Course, my reflexes are pretty tight. I could pull the trigger before the bullet even hits me. Or maybe you miss me altogether. Either way, there’s an eighty percent chance I’m gonna take this guy’s head clean off. But you try it, definitely, it’ll probably turn out great.”

_Shut up, you bastard, shut up_, pleaded Olivia. “You can kill us both, Victor. You’ll still never walk out of here.”

“Right, right ‘cause, uh, ‘cause you got some buddies coming, huh? When’s that going down?”

“Any minute.” _Not fast enough._

“Great,” sputtered Gitano. “Great.”

“Just tell us where you hid her,” Olivia said calmly.

“You know, you could put the gun down,” Gitano suggested. “At least then you might find her. Otherwise, she’s gonna die. She’s gonna die, he’s gonna die, and it’ll be all your fault. Just like the little boy. How’s your neck?”

This bastard is good, thought Olivia. _It’s working. Just keep him talking, Olivia. Don’t let Elliot die._

“It’s not the same thing, Olivia, you know that,” implored Elliot.

“Yes it is, _Olivia_. God, you two couple of screw-ups. How could you let that little boy go? Maybe you’re just incompetent.”

“Olivia,” Elliot said quietly, “Olivia, look at me. You can do the right thing, alright? I didn’t. I made that choice with Ryan and it was wrong.”

“Elliot,” she whispered. _You are family. Don’t do this._

Elliot’s eyes were dead. “It was my fault. Don’t do it. Don’t make that mistake.”

Gitano kept yelling, but Olivia didn’t really hear him anymore. She finally understood what Elliot was asking. Now, it really was about keeping Elliot alive.

“I would’ve done the same thing,” she murmured, but she was lying and he knew it.

Elliot shook his head. “Don’t make my mistake.”

They heard clamors, outside. Backup.

“Drop it! Drop the gun! Drop it now!” screamed Gitano. “Put the gun down NOW!”

He kept screaming while Olivia and Elliot stared each other down.

Shoot me, Olivia.

Elliot, I won’t shoot you.

Kill me.

I won’t kill you.

“He’s lying,” choked Olivia.

“I know,” replied Elliot.

_Elliot, why do you want this?_ “He’s never gonna tell us.”

“You’re right,” Elliot said evenly. “It’s alright.” _Because I’ll never stop hating myself._
No, Elliot, it's not. That's a lie.
“I’m sorry,” she whispered. I won’t be the one to kill you.

A gunman took Gitano out and Olivia tried not to faint.
I survived, Elliot realized, his head reeling.
Now I really do have to tell her the truth.

“You know you would’ve taken the shot, Olivia.”

Olivia shook her head. “What about me?”

“You and this job are about the only things I’ve got anymore,” Elliot confessed. “I don’t want to wreck that. I couldn’t take it.”

He stood and walked out of the hospital. Close enough.

Olivia watched him go. I can’t believe this. I can’t believe him. He’s my brother, my best friend – He’s in love with me.

When it finally hit, Olivia felt her whole body shaking and she felt a deep, stabbing pain inside of her. It hurt her to her core, like it had when Alex died, but this was different. It wasn’t the pain of loss; it was the pain of betrayal. No. No. No no no no no no no.
She stumbled into the bathroom and threw up.

Casey Novak heard a knock on her door. Putting down her book, she frowned. Elliot knew by now to call first. She opened the door to find Olivia Benson, a sobbing, hysterical wreck.

“Oh my god, Olivia,” said Casey, grabbing Olivia’s shoulder and pulling her inside. “What happened?”

Olivia began to cry harder. “Elliot, he, he –”

Casey’s entire body stiffened. “He finally told you the truth.”

“I figured it out on my own,” Casey said truthfully. “Come on, sit down, we’re going to get you a blanket and some tissues and you’re –”

“I trusted him!” she cried. “I thought we were friends and he, and he –” Olivia’s words broke off into choking sobs.

Casey’s cell phone buzzed. She knew exactly who would be. Guiding Olivia onto the couch, she grabbed the phone and headed for the door.

“I have to take this, hold on,” she said lamely.
Shutting the door behind her, she whipped open the phone and tried not to breathe flames.

“Casey –”

“You crossed a line, Elliot! You broke the rules! She is here, right now,
crying in my apartment. I don’t care how bad you’re hurting, this is done!”
So much for not losing control. Slamming the phone shut, she hurried back to comfort Olivia. 
*Looks like I've finally decided where my loyalties lie.*

The next morning, before the rest of the squad arrived, Olivia knocked on Cragen’s door and stepped inside.
“Olivia? What’s up?” he asked.

She clenched and unclenched her teeth. “I want a new partner.”
Cragen sighed heavily, giving her a moment to compose her thoughts. “Am I allowed to ask why?”
“Because Elliot Stabler is…in love with me,” she spat bitterly.
Cragen braced his head in his hands. “I know.”

Olivia winced. *I can't take much more of this.* “Did everyone know but me?”
Cragen looked up at her sadly. “Isn’t that the way it always goes?”
“These are my sins. I was selfish, I was disrespectful, I lost my temper…” I fell in love with someone else
“…for these and all my sins I am truly sorry.”

- 

“Why’d you land this blowhard on me?” asked Elliot.
“He’s a good cop,” Cragen said passively. “Queens SVU speaks highly of him.”
Elliot rolled his eyes. “Yeah, that’s why they dumped him on us. Hey, where’s Benson?”
“Computer Crimes,” replied Cragen. “You needed a break from each other.”

Elliot looked at Cragen, dumbstruck. “In whose opinion?”
Hers. Cragen gave him a dismissive nod. “Decision’s made.”

- 

Munch stopped by Casey’s office and knocked on the door.
“Just wanted to know if I’m needed to testify for the Eastside rapist,” he said. “I was actually down here to take care of a parking ticket, courtesy of my partner.”
Casey laughed. “You couldn’t get a buddy to fix it for you?”
“I said ‘take care of,’ didn’t I?” Munch replied slyly.
“Well, no, we’re not taking the Eastside rapist to trial. We made a deal,” explained Casey. “Life in prison, no parole. Saves me time and saves the city taxpayer money.”

“Nice one,” said Munch, nodding. He thought for a moment. “How’s Olivia?”
Casey sighed. “Well, she moved past the weepy stage surprisingly fast. Now, she’s mostly just angry. She feels betrayed.”
“Who can blame her? I would,” admitted Munch. “The only bright spot in all of this is that it happened after the sergeant’s exam.”
“The worst part of it is, she wants to find a way to save the friendship,” said Casey, rolling her eyes.
“Ah, calamity,” quipped Munch. “The only way to heal that wound is time.”

- 

Olivia stood at the entrance to the locker room, trying to think of something to say. Even though she had good reason, she still felt guilty for running off without telling him. Because he’s family, she thought, trying to suppress the revulsion in her stomach, even if he doesn’t think of you that way. Come on, Olivia, say something.

“I liked that shirt.” Something less lame.
Elliot tried not to look at her. “What’re you doing here?”
“ Heard what happened between you and Blaine,” she explained. When I got here.
“What can I tell you? He’s a prick,” spat Elliot.

Olivia nodded awkwardly. Elliot approached her, and she tried not to flinch.
“Why didn’t you tell me?” he asked plainly.
Did you really deserve to – no, come on, be nice. “Elliot, we’ve been partners for seven years, longer than anybody else here. We needed a change. I’m sorry. I should’ve talked to you. It’s just…”
That I don’t love you. Not like that.
“It’s just too complicated.”

They’d both always been bad at expressing their feelings.
“Thanks for dropping by,” said Elliot, hurrying out of the room.

The trio watched Assemblyman Molina stomp out.
“Well, that was a lovely speech,” remarked Crag. “How do we fight this defense, Counselor?”
“By presenting the evidence,” Casey said plainly. “He had motive, he had intent, he had means and had had a dozen police officers watch him commit the crime.”

Casey glanced around the room. “Elliot still here?”
“Last I checked, still moping upstairs on the couch,” said Blaine.
Casey smirked. “I can see why you’re so popular around here.”
Leaving Blaine behind to pout, she hurried upstairs to find Elliot in exactly the state Blaine described.

He glanced over at her. “Come to chew me out some more?”
“Actually, I’m here to apologize,” said Casey.
Elliot’s eyes widened. “Well, you’re the first.”
“I lost my temper when we spoke on the phone, and I regret how I acted,” she explained. “And I’m sorry.”
“I’m sorry too,” Elliot said quietly. “For a lot of things.”
Casey sat down next to him on the couch. “I don’t regret what I said, though. You hurt her a lot, Elliot, and I’m taking her side in this because you’re in the wrong.”
Elliot stared at her. “True love. Did you only ever sleep with me to protect Olivia’s relationship?”
Casey stared him back, straight in the eye. “No.”
Elliot smiled weakly. “I believe you.”
“Then you’ll believe me when I say we can’t sleep together anymore,” Casey said slowly, “but that we can still be friends. Like last time. I have to be there for Olivia right now, but once her wounds heal, I’ll be there for you.”
“I don’t deserve it,” mumbled Elliot.
Casey gave him a small smile. “I can always be mean to you. We both know I’m good at that.”

She walked towards the stairs. “Goodnight, Elliot.”
Watching her go, Elliot began to think.

“Elliot, you wanted a surrogate, all you had to do was ask.”

Casey rolled off the bed and smiled at him, buttoning up her blouse. “I’m sorry. I liked that shirt.”

Elliot studied her for a moment. “Why’d you kiss me, that night in your office?”
“Because I believe in true love,” Casey replied cryptically.

Elliot closed his eyes and tried not to cry. “Casey, I don’t deserve you.”

- 

It was past nine, and darkness hung over the precinct. Crag walked out of his office, exhausted from wrangling Stabler and Blaine, and nearly passed out. There was a ghost hovering over Olivia’s former desk.

-
“Where is she?” said Alex.
“I… I didn’t know you were back,” stammered Cragen.
Alex nodded. “About four months now.”
“Why didn’t you call?” asked Cragen.
Alex sighed. “I was trying to sort my thoughts out. Looks like I took too long.”

Cragen was silent for a moment. He could see the pain on Alex’s face, her blonde hair glowing in
the low light of the squad room. “She requested a transfer.”
Alex studied Cragen for a moment. “Why?”
Cragen took a deep breath. “Do you really want to know the reason?”

Alex closed her eyes. “Elliot told her that he’s in love with her.”
Cragen’s eyes popped. “Okay, I only figured it out recently. How long has this been going on?”
“Since before I died,” Alex said bitterly.
“If I had known, I swear, Alex, I would have transferred one of them years ago,” insisted Cragen.

Alex smiled at him. “I know. It’s good to see you, Don.”
“Come here, Alex,” Cragen said warmly. “I’ve spent all this time missing you too. I deserve a
hug.”
Smiling, Alex welcomed the embrace.
“Don, do me a favor?”
Cragen pulled back. “You name it.”
“Don’t tell anyone that I was here.”

- 

Olivia found Casey at their usual table, just sitting down.
“Hey, heard you got a guilty verdict on Bixton,” greeted Olivia.
“Did you also hear that he was hospitalized for complications from diabetes?” replied Casey.
Olivia shivered. “Oh god. No, didn’t catch that part.”

“Guilty verdict isn’t exactly a big punishment now,” said Casey. She looked quizzically at Olivia.
“You worked this one hard for them.”
Olivia grinned. “What can I tell you? I may be a big nerd at heart, but Computer Crimes is fun and
fast. Figured I’d try and make up for leaving without a peep.”
“You don’t owe Elliot anything,” Casey said harshly.
“I know, I know,” Olivia said quickly. “I just… Casey, I don’t know how to fix this.”
“Well, don’t ask me,” said Casey. “I’ve been trying for ages now and I haven’t gotten anywhere.”
Olivia stopped and thought for a moment. “What do you mean?”

So it was time to burst the dam of secrets. Sorry, Alex.
“Olivia,” said Casey, taking a deep breath, “it’s time I told you the truth. The whole truth, and
nothing but the truth, so help me God.”
Casey had always had that habit of working legalese into everyday conversations.
“Swearing yourself in?” said Olivia.
“I need to, trust me on this,” Casey replied, her voice low. “And you’d better brace yourself, because this is a lot to handle.”

Straightening up, Casey began to speak. “I told you the truth the other night. I said I figured out that Elliot loved you all on my own, and I figured it out pretty fast. But, I figured he was married, he was a good Catholic, and that it wouldn’t interfere with anything. Then he started talking about how things were rough at home, and the next thing I knew, they were separated.”
Olivia sat still, her eyes focused on Casey.
“So, about a year ago, I confronted him about it. I told him that you were the real reason his marriage broke up, and he admitted it.”

“Wait, hold on,” said Olivia, her stomach sinking. “I broke up Elliot’s marriage? We never did anything! I can’t believe –”
“Olivia,” interjected Casey. “You only broke up the marriage in that you were another woman that Elliot was in love with. Not in that you were a flirt, or suggestive. The blame is all on him. And honestly, that wasn’t the only reason their marriage broke up. He had to leave the house at odd hours, miss school functions, and he never spent any time with Kathy or his kids.”
Olivia nodded, frowning. “You seem to know a lot about this.”

Casey turned away, her mouth open. “Uh, yeah. Well, after I made him tell me the truth about his feelings for you, we, uh…we started sleeping together.”
Olivia’s jaw dropped.
“‘It wasn’t a relationship or anything,’” Casey said quickly, before Olivia could respond. “‘It was a friends with benefits setup. I thought if I provided him with a distraction, he might at least be able to stay away from you while he worked out his issues, and, uh, if I’m being honest…I really enjoyed it.’
‘Oh my god,’” said Olivia, closing her eyes. “‘That actually makes sense.’
‘No it doesn’t,’” scoffed Casey.
“No, I mean you two,” Olivia said softly. “‘You’re so in tune with one another.’

Casey gave her a sour look. “Okay, moving forward. We ended up breaking it off for a while last summer. He felt guilty, understandably so, and I was only contributing to his self-loathing, which everyone in the squad knows about, so I don’t have to explain that.”
“Munch nicknamed him ‘Unstabler,’” Olivia said bitterly.
“Well, it fits,” said Casey. “He’s a wreck. After Kathy served him with the divorce papers, he got stuck. He finally reached a point where he couldn’t keep making excuses anymore, and he knew he’d have to deal with his feelings for you. We started sleeping together again, but it only delayed the inevitable. He saw you studying for the sergeant’s exam, getting ready to move on with your life. He would’ve said something anyway.”

Olivia studied the tablecloth. “At the very least, I wish I hadn’t found out in the way I did.”
“He keeps things bottled up, Olivia,” explained Casey. “He hates himself.”
Olivia looked pained. “I know that, now. And that’s why he stopped talking to me, and that’s why he started arguing with me all the time.”
She glanced up at Casey. “Is it bad that I still want to fix this?”
“No, it’s how you are,” said Casey. “But if you let him back in now, he’ll never stop loving you, and you’ll never be able to give up this mix of grief and revulsion that he makes you feel.”
Casey leaned back in her chair. “If there’s anything you want to ask me, the time is now. I’m bearing my soul to you tonight, Olivia.”

Olivia mulled over what Casey had told her. “You said he couldn’t keep making excuses.”
“You were both single people,” clarified Casey. “He’s no longer legally married, and Alex was in witness protection.”
“Even though Velez is dead,” said Olivia, clenching her fist.

Casey flagged down a waiter. “I need a gin and tonic, and make it quick. Olivia, that’s the other thing I have to tell you. I said I’d give her time, but tonight I’m breaking all my promises.”

Olivia stared at her for a long moment. “Okay, I’ll bite.”

Taking a deep breath, Casey looked Olivia straight in the eye.

“Olivia, Alex is back.”

Olivia sat at her new desk, trying to concentrate on work. However, her mind kept straying back to the conversation she’d had with Casey.

“You should have told me!” roared Olivia, getting to her feet.

Casey stood as well, waving her hands. “Wasn’t my call! She said she was going to tell you, she just needed time to figure herself out!”
Olivia’s face was practically purple. “If this is bullshit, Casey –”

“No, no, I am telling you the truth!” said Casey, pushing Olivia back into her chair. “Alex has just gotten back. She’s exhausted, she’s confused, and she is scared that you don’t love her anymore!”
“How could she ever think that,” said Olivia, shaking her head with rage. “Alex would never think that.”

“You have to admit, Olivia, a lot has changed in two and a half years! Did you ever think you’d have taken the sergeant’s exam, or leave SVU? We are not the same people!” explained Casey.
“I’m not making excuses for her, I’m just explaining her actions.”
Casey gave Olivia a severe look. “And I know you, Olivia. You can’t tell me you would have reacted any differently. Elliot may bottle up his feelings, but you run away from yours. You talk about how you still love her, but I know you’re terrified that she doesn’t love you.”

Olivia deflated, sinking back into her chair. “Casey…you’re right.”
Casey downed the rest of her gin and tonic. “I’ll give you her office number, if you want.”
“I think that’d be good,” murmured Olivia. “And I’d also like to talk about anything else.”
“Well, have you started looking at apartments yet?” offered Casey.

Olivia was so lost in thought that she didn’t even notice Fin and Elliot walk in the door until they were right in front of her desk.
“What’re you doing here?”
“We need your help,” Elliot grumbled.

Olivia looked at her desk. “I wasn’t planning on coming back.”
No, but I can always hope, thought Elliot. “It’s in your blood.”
“That’s the problem,” Olivia said bitterly.

Elliot walked over to his locker to grab his things. Olivia was waiting, sitting on the empty desk.
“Is Teddy alright?” she asked.
“He’s at the hospital,” Elliot muttered. “That’s about all I can give you.”
“Elliot, look at me,” ordered Olivia.

He looked. He walked. They stood, facing one another in front of your desk.
“I know why you keep coming to Computer Crimes for help,” she said calmly. “Elliot, I’m not coming back.”
Elliot looked down at his shoes. “I wish you would.”

Olivia steeled herself. “For seven years, we were partners. You had my back every step of the way, and I had yours. Through tough cases, through broken hearts, we were there for each other. I trusted you. And you broke that trust.”
Elliot looked grim. “I never chose to fall in love with you, Olivia.”
She shook her head. “That’s not what I mean. You should have asked for a new partner a long time ago, Elliot. The second you put your desires first, we stopped having a healthy, working partnership. But you stayed in it for you. You placed what you wanted over the job, over my feelings, over the very nature of this squad. You don’t just answer to me on this. You answer to the captain and everyone you hurt due your feelings for me, and that includes Kathy.”

Elliot flinched. “Drive the knife a little deeper, why don’t you?”
“And you need to apologize to Casey,” Olivia said, her voice rising, “who I feel the most sorry for in this entire mess, for having to carry everyone else’s baggage.”
“She opened the door,” muttered Elliot.
“Then why didn’t you shut it?” countered Olivia.

Elliot looked at her sadly. They were silent for a long, long time.
“And yet, in spite of all this,” Olivia said carefully. “I still want to be friends with you. Friends like we were, or at least like I imagined we were. But right now, we can’t do that.”
“I know,” Elliot said quietly. “I know.”
“So for now, we are cutting all contact,” Olivia said firmly. “For the next three months, you do not call me, you do not email me, you do not attempt to contact me in any way. And then, when you have spent enough time away from me and you have set your feelings aside, whatever that may take, we can try again.”

“I knew this would never work,” whispered Elliot. “I hate myself, Olivia. I hate myself for what I’ve done, every single day.”
“Then I suggest you make it your personal mission to forgive yourself and make amends,” replied Olivia. “Don’t spend the rest of your life in anguish over something you can’t change.”

Elliot looked up at Olivia, beautiful, wonderful, saintly Olivia, and memorized the moment.
Finally, he walked to his desk and grabbed his car keys. It was time to leave.
“Goodbye, Elliot,” Olivia said softly.
He looked back at her and nodded. “Goodbye, Olivia.”

Olivia watched him walk out of her life, wrapped in the silence of the empty squad room.
“It was the right thing to do.”

Olivia glanced over to see the captain standing in the doorway of his office.
“You heard our conversation?” she asked.
Cragen nodded. “Every word.”
Olivia walked over to greet her old captain. “I can’t help but feeling like this was nobody’s fault.”
“It wasn’t,” Cragen said plainly. “Life just bites you in the ass sometimes. All you can do is bite back.”
He took a deep breath. “Olivia, there’s something you should know.”

“About Alex,” finished Olivia. “I’m going to the DA’s office tomorrow.”

Cragen gave her a fatherly look. “Even if you no longer work here, you know you can always come back here, Olivia. Our doors are always open. That’s a promise.”

- 

Alex had been wrapped up in a meeting earlier and had missed her chance for lunch. She sat in her office, door closed, blinds drawn, turkey sandwich close at hand. At least the delis haven’t changed. Then, somebody knocked on her door.

“Come in,” she called.

The door opened and Alex looked up.

Olivia.

Alex stood, spellbound, reflecting Olivia’s own mesmerized look. They stayed there, staring at each other in silence.

“I don’t even know what to say,” Olivia began.

“I do,” replied Alex. “I’m sorry.”

Olivia shook her head. “You’re not at fault for anything. I’ve known for over a week now and I reacted in the exact same way.”

“I tried,” Alex offered. “I went to SVU one night, looking for you. You don’t have to explain what happened, Olivia. Cragen told me everything that occurred between you and Elliot.”

Olivia bit her lip. “Casey said you knew. How long?”

“Olivia, it was why I loathed him for the six months before I was shot,” Alex said plainly.

Olivia breathed out. “Wow. That long. Well, forget it, I didn’t come here to talk about Elliot, I’ve dealt with that. We’ve cut contact.”

“Finally,” scoffed Alex.

Olivia burst out laughing. She doubled over, wheezing, tears beginning to form in the corner of her eyes.

“What?” said a very confused Alex. “What did I say?”

Olivia righted herself, still giggling. “I’m sorry, but that’s the first joke anyone’s made to me in a month. God, it feels good to laugh.”

Alex crossed her arms, smiling. “What can I say? I’ve always had a gift for snark.”

Olivia smiled brightly back at her. “You have. Alex, I’ve really missed you.”

“I’ve really missed you too,” confessed Alex. “You know, after all this change, I was scared of how things would be when I got back. I’m still not entirely sure where I stand, but I know one thing: I still love you, Olivia.”

“Alex, after all this time, I still love you too,” Olivia said tenderly. “I never stopped.”

She glanced at Alex’s neck. “You’re wearing the pendant.”

“You’re wearing yours,” Alex replied.

She walked around her desk and pulled Olivia into a big, warm hug.

“Stop it,” murmured Olivia, “I’m going to start crying.”

“After everything we’ve been through, I think you’re allowed to cry,” teased Alex.

She pulled back to gaze into Olivia’s teary, laughing face.

“So, where do we go from here?” asked Alex.

Olivia thought for a second. “I’d say we start over, but we never really stopped. We pick up where we left off. I have to tell you though, my life is a mess right now. New unit, new cases, still waiting on exam results, I’m moving out of my apartment…”
“Then you’re in luck,” announced Alex, “because I am in need of a roommate.”
Olivia looked at Alex. “You’d really let me just move in?”
“Well, if we’re picking up where we left off, then yes. We were about to move in together before my shooting,” she explained.

Alex grinned. “Besides, I have to show you everything I learned to cook while I was in the program.”
Olivia fought the urge to laugh and failed.
Alex pouted. “Hey, I’m not joking.”
Olivia began laughing harder, not even trying to stop herself now.

Alex pulled Olivia in close and kissed her fiercely on the mouth.

When they finally broke away, Olivia looked at Alex, stunned.
“That shut you up,” Alex said smugly. “I haven’t seen that look since New Year’s 2001.”
“Okay, I’ve also really missed that,” Olivia admitted.

Behind her, Alex saw Desmond’s mouth hanging open in the common area.
“Back to work, Desmond!” she called. Alex smiled at Olivia. “Come on, let’s get out of here.”

Hand in hand, they walked out of the DA’s office and into the streets of New York, ready to face whatever the future might bring.
Six months later, Sergeant John Munch glanced around the squad room, still trying to stabilize himself after the whirlwind of changes that had hit SVU harder than a secret military-guided drone.

Three days after the events of the Teddy Winnock case came to a close, Elliot went into Cragen’s office and closed the door. After a long while, Elliot emerged and asked for the unit’s attention. He offered a public apology for any trouble his actions might have caused anyone and then announced that he was leaving SVU. After that, neither Munch, nor Fin, nor Huang, nor a very disgruntled Cragen heard from him again. The captain now had two slots to fill, and he wasn’t pleased.

Munch looked over at the coffee pot to see Fin joking and laughing with their first new addition, Amanda Rollins. She was young, blonde, and loud, very much one of the guys, and had transferred up from Georgia in July. Amanda already had some experience working with SVU cases, and her cheery attitude was welcome after the thunderstorm Benson and Stabler had brewed in the sixteenth precinct.

However, Cragen wanted her to learn from the old hands, which meant she was partnered up with Fin on a temporary basis. Two months later, the captain finally managed to secure someone else from Warrants to train with Munch.

“Something on your mind?” asked Amaro.

Munch glanced up at Nick, a hard-nosed guy who had all of Stabler’s attitude and none of his baggage. He was still married with a young kid at home, and was a solid detective all around. SVU had been a tough adjustment for him at first, but Munch had reassured him it was a tough adjustment for everyone, and Amaro chose to stay.

“I’m just thinking how bizarre this place looks,” Munch replied.

“Change is hard for an old bag like you,” remarked Fin.

Munch glared up at Fin. “You know you miss them too.”

“I miss what once was, not what it turned into,” Fin said plainly.

“Don’t tell me you’re talking about Benson and Stabler again,” groaned Rollins.

“Hey, don’t knock Benson,” said Amaro. “You know she’s solid. It’s this Stabler that sounds like a nut.”

“Careful, young Jedi,” cautioned Munch. “Another seven years and a broken heart, you’ll end up just like him.”

Olivia still kept in touch. She’d met (and approved of) the new recruits and still went out for drinks with the squad once a month. Alex always tagged along on these nights out, happy to be back with the detectives and see that everyone was doing well. They glowed in one another’s presence, just like old times. Casey too; it was through her that they got all their news of Elliot. Per Casey, they’d learned that he was genuinely enjoying work at the counterfeit task force. They also learned that he’d finally signed the divorce papers.

“Alright, listen up,” said Cragen, surprising the detectives. “I have an announcement to make.”

“Okay, shoot,” said Amaro, placing his hands on his hips.

“I just received a call from One PP. Thanks to our hard work bringing down that statewide pedophile ring in October, I have been promoted to Inspector. As of next year, I will no longer be your captain.”


Cragen gave her a dirty look. “If it weren’t for all the trouble I went through to get you, I’d put you on modified for that. Where are we on the rape of that Julliard student?”
Amaro walked over to the board. “The roommate said she didn’t come home the previous day, but the boyfriend and the guy who had the hots for her both have alibis. Boyfriend was visiting a friend in Jersey, and poor Kenny was stuck showing his mom around the city.”

“Can we recreate her movements the day of the attack? Did we check with her professors?” asked Cragen.

“We talked to most of them, but one guy, Doctor Blessinger, turns out he took a collar for assault in ’91,” said Munch. “Charges were dropped, so it never went to trial.”

“Munch, Amaro, you go back and lean on this guy,” ordered Cragen.

Someone caught Cragen’s eye walking in the door. “Your timing is good, Casey. Where are we on subpoenas for her computer and phone records?”

Casey waved a couple of blue motions at him. “Got ‘em right here. Sorry I’m late. I meant to be here earlier, but I ran into someone on the way.”

“Ah yes, the perks of being bureau chief,” quipped Munch. “There are always people to wine and dine, even during office hours.”

“If he gets started on the mayor again, I’m leaving,” said Fin.

Casey laughed. “Actually, no, just Alex Cabot.”

She pulled a fistful of envelopes out of her briefcase. “She wanted me to give you these.”

-

Olivia Benson leaned against the hallway of the Counterfeit Taskforce, waiting for Elliot Stabler to arrive on scene. He emerged from the locker room, pushing his sleeves up. Catching sight of her, he froze.

“They said I could find you here,” said Olivia.

“You look different,” he stammered.

Olivia rolled her eyes, laughing. “Six months of no contact, and that’s the first thing you say to me? No ‘Hi Olivia, how’ve you been? How’s Computer Crimes?’”

Elliot winced. “Last time I saw you, your hair was a lot longer and blonder, okay?”

Olivia shrugged. “What can I say? Alex likes it better short, and it’s less hassle. Plus, I got tired of dyeing it.”

“How is Alex?” asked Elliot.

“Her usual, no-nonsense self,” replied Olivia. “Half the DA’s office is scared of her, the other half loves her.”

Elliot gave her a strange look. “You said I was supposed to contact you, not the other way around.”

Olivia handed him an envelope. “This couldn’t wait.”

He broke the seam and read it over carefully.

“It’s your wedding invitation,” Elliot said quietly. “You’re getting married in May.”

“I wanted to make sure you got it,” Olivia said softly. “I didn’t want it getting tossed or thrown away by accident. Or on purpose.”

Elliot pursed his lips and said nothing.

Olivia shifted awkwardly from one foot to the other. “Maybe this was a mistake.”

“No,” Elliot said quickly. “No, it wasn’t a mistake. I’m glad you invited me.”

“You really mean that?” Olivia asked carefully.

He looked at her, then nodded. “I do.”

Olivia sighed. “A year ago, I would’ve imagined you’d be a groomsman this.”

“Casey’s the maid of honor, I’m guessing,” muttered Elliot.

“I see that she didn’t say anything to you,” said Olivia.
“Well, we both know Casey can keep a secret,” replied Elliot.

“You don’t have to go,” Olivia said cautiously. “But I did want to invite you. The rest of the squad will be there. Alex even invited Judge Petrovsky.”

Elliot’s jaw dropped. “No way.”

“Okay, I made that up,” Olivia said, giving him a small smile. “But she did invite Judge Donnelly.”

Elliot thought for a moment. “I’ll consider it, Olivia. Thanks.”

She took a deep breath. “Munch asked me to also see if you would consider attending the New Year’s party.”

Elliot shook his head. “No, I’m not ready for that.”

“Warner’s going,” said Olivia. “She’s bringing her husband. And you need to meet the new guys, they’re fantastic.”

“I met Rollins,” remarked Elliot. “She was in Casey’s office once when I stopped by. She said ‘oh, you’re the sourpuss everyone’s always talking about.’”

Olivia grimaced. “Okay, well, you’ll like Amaro better. Trust me on this one.”

Olivia and Elliot sized one another up.

“I’m going to assume you haven’t called because your feelings haven’t changed,” Olivia said in a low voice.

“Look, Olivia,” began Elliot, “there’s a part of me that will always love you. I can’t change that. But…”

Olivia waited for Elliot to find his voice.

“…But I’ve realized, seeing you now, that I don’t feel the same way about you that I did six months ago,” Elliot said honestly. “I think I’m ready to try and be your friend again. And it’s also a great motivator to know this time, if I fail, Alex will probably dump my body in the East River.”

Olivia chuckled. “Without the probably.”

Olivia smiled up at Elliot. “Friends?”

“Friends,” he replied. “And this time, I mean it.”

Elliot shifted his weight. “You know, to tell you the truth, I really did mean to call a couple of months ago, but I was stuck at work, literally. I just got out of an undercover operation two weeks ago.”

Olivia raised an eyebrow. “You out there busting terrorists too?”

He laughed. “No, I don’t touch those cases, I’ve got kids. I was playing hired muscle to a mob boss selling counterfeit Louboutins. Right after I got here, they needed someone with undercover experience and I showed them my sheet.”

“So, you got to beat up thugs and get paid for it. Sounds like your dream job,” joked Olivia.

“Hey, I can see why Fin spent so much time undercover back in the day,” said Elliot. “I’m not gonna lie, it was a lot of fun.”

Olivia flashed a smile. “You didn’t happen to save any of those Louboutins, did you?”

Elliot rolled his eyes. “Sorry, Sergeant. Not even for a superior officer. Come on, I’ll introduce you to the rest of the squad.”

Casey Novak paced her office, rehearsing closing arguments. The Special Victims Bureau was so small that Branch still had her trying cases, even though she now headed the department. Granted, she couldn’t complain too much; Branch was the one who had gotten her the job. After Adams had quit in August, Branch had stalled long enough for Casey to turn thirty, then hired her on as the youngest bureau chief in the history of the Manhattan DA’s office. Casey had made waves ever
since her arrival here, and she didn’t plan on stopping now.

Alex ducked her head into Casey’s office. “Hey, Rubirosa had a question for you about the Weaver case. McCoy’s keeping it, but because the homicide was somewhat sexually motivated, she wanted your advice.”

Casey groaned. “Tell her it can wait. I’ve got a he-said, she-said, she’s dead, and I need my summation to be rock solid.”

Alex grimaced. “Ouch. Well, Rubirosa and McCoy are at odds over this one anyway. If I were you, I’d stay out of it.”

“Dully noted,” said Casey. “You wanna grab a drink after this, or are you heading home?”

Alex shook her head. “Sorry, Casey. We’re eating with my father tonight to work out some wedding arrangements.”

“That reminds me, I don’t know if I told you. I dropped the invitations off at SVU last week. Everyone has agreed to take part, and Cragen’s been promoted.”

Alex beamed. “I didn’t know that, good for him. I guess the family really is scattering to the winds.”

“That’s the nice thing about family,” Casey said wistfully. “No matter how far they go, they always come home.”

Alex looked down the hall and frowned. “Speaking of, here comes the black sheep.”

Elliot approached Casey’s door, treading carefully around Alex.

“Counselor.”

“Detective.”

Elliot sighed. “Can we at least pretend to get along? For Olivia’s sake?”

Alex folded her arms, staring icily at Elliot. “I will never trust you again, you know.”

“And I really don’t blame you for that,” said Elliot. “You don’t have to like me, we just have to live with each other.”

“She said you’ve moved on,” said Alex, her jaw tight. “I don’t believe it.”

“Believe it, Alex,” replied Elliot. “You can ask me in open court if you want to. I’ve done my penitence. I’ve paid for my crime.”

Alex smiled slowly. “And now, like every good sex offender, you’re going to tell me you’ve been rehabilitated.”

“Nah, I wouldn’t lie to you, Counselor,” said Elliot, “but I have learned from my mistakes.”

Alex thought for a minute. “Alright. I don’t trust you, or particularly like you, but you’ve at least made amends with Olivia. It’s a start. Who knows, one day in the far future, we might actually get along.”

“Do you really think that’s actually going to happen?” asked Elliot.

Alex grinned at him. “Not for a second.”

Elliot smiled back. “Alex, I’m sorry.”

“Apolovery accepted,” she replied. “I’ll see you both later.”

“Bye!” waved Casey.

Elliot walked into Casey’s and shut the door, exhaling.

“Something tells me you weren’t looking for her,” said Casey, pushing her long red hair behind her shoulder.

“You got that right,” said Elliot, looking exhausted.

Casey began packing her papers away. “So, what are you here for?”

“Had to testify earlier, just thought I’d say hi,” replied Elliot, shrugging.

“Someone’s in a good mood,” poked Casey.
Elliot looked satisfied. “You know, I really have moved on.”
“You want a gold star?” said Casey.
Elliot made a face. “It’s nice to see you’ll never change.”
Casey grinned. “I’m a class act.”

Elliot watched Casey lock her files in her desk. “I’m glad you dyed it back.”
“You know, I am too,” replied Casey. “Have you decided about the wedding yet?”
“Yeah, I’m gonna go,” said Elliot. “Not only is it the right thing to do, I want to be there for the both of them. Plus, when I consider all the time I spent covering their asses, they owe me a nice dinner and an open bar.”
“There you go,” said Casey. “And the New Year’s party?”
Elliot shuddered. “I’m still thinking about it. Hey, Casey, do you want to get dinner on Friday?”
She gave him a look. “We can get dinner tonight.”
“No, I mean, like a date,” blurted Elliot.

Casey stared at him, her mouth hanging open. “So that’s the real reason you dropped by.”
“You always could read me like a book,” said Elliot, looking slightly guilty.

Casey frowned. “Why now?”
“Casey, you kept in contact with me,” explained Elliot. “Every time I’ve fallen down, you’ve picked me back up. Time after time, you made me pull myself and my life back together. I can talk about anything and everything with you. Hell, you even kept my kids and Kathy in the loop while I was undercover. And despite everything you’ve done for me, out of everyone in SVU, I have this unshakeable feeling that I’ve hurt you the worst.”

Maybe he’d gotten that one right.
“This isn’t just because I’m not Olivia, right?” Casey asked carefully.
“This has nothing to do with Olivia,” Elliot said truthfully. “Casey, I don’t need a surrogate. I don’t think I ever did.”

“Damaged goods,” murmured Casey.
“Kindred spirits,” corrected Elliot. “After Olivia left for good, I figured out why you kept coming back. I just wasn’t ready. Now I am. Casey, this is something I should have done a long time ago.”
Casey looked at Elliot, her gaze soft. “Pick me up at seven?”
“I’ll be there,” Elliot replied warmly.

Casey Novak’s heart filled with light.

- 

Olivia tried to pull away, but Alex’s fingers teasing her slit were a pretty compelling reason to freeze right where she was.
“We’re going to be late,” groaned Olivia. “Come on, let me get dressed.”
“They’ll wait. I won’t,” Alex purred. She extended one finger gently inside and began to stroke Olivia’s g-spot, feeling Olivia’s walls contract around her finger.
Olivia tilted her head back against the wall, eyes closed. “You’re…amazing.”
Alex kissed a line along her neck. “Mmm.”

She added a second finger and began to rub more quickly. Olivia tilted her mound into Alex’s hand.
“Come on, Alex,” moaned Olivia.
Alex’s mouth met Olivia’s. They kissed fiercely as Alex tantalized Olivia with her hand, stroking Olivia until she finished, moaning Alex’s own name into her mouth.
Olivia gazed at Alex lovingly. “Or, maybe we could just stay here.”
Alex removed her hand and pushed her fingers into Olivia’s mouth. “They’ll never forgive us if we don’t show, even if it is our anniversary. Now, put some clothes on before I pin you to that bed.”
“Yes ma’am,” said a grinning Olivia. She fished a gorgeous violet dress with a plunging neckline out of her closet.
“Throw me some panties, will you?” asked Olivia. “You know, we really do have to go. I’m supposed to call Casey when we’re five minutes away.”
“We can’t deny the rest of the squad Elliot’s grand reappearance,” said Alex, rolling her eyes. Olivia sighed. “You aren’t still mad at him, are you?”
“Olivia, I will be mad at him for the rest of my life,” Alex replied in a huff. “But I’m open to the possibility of rekindling a friendship, seeing as he genuinely seems to no longer be interested in you.”

She tossed Olivia the underwear. “I’m going to wash my hands and get our coats.”
“Good, you need to cover up that dress,” called Olivia.
“I still can’t believe you saved this,” said Alex.
“Alex, you know if our apartment burned down and I could only save one thing, it’d be the red dress,” replied Olivia.
Alex returned to the bedroom, coats and purses in her arms. “I know. It’s absurd, and it’s also why I love you.”

Olivia zipped up her dress. “You know, I like living in Chelsea. It’s very different, but at least my commute isn’t any worse.”
“I think we both needed to get out of Uptown eventually,” said Alex thoughtfully. “We really are moving on with our lives.”
“And if we do have kids, this will be a good neighborhood to raise them in,” observed Olivia.
“We’ve got to get to the wedding first,” reminded Alex, “but I’d like that. Someday. But even before that, we have to get to Munch’s, come on!”

They pulled on their coats and turned off the lights. Stopping at the door, Olivia pulled Alex in close, wrapping her arms around the blonde, and kissed her sweetly.
“Yes?” said Alex, kissing Olivia on the nose. “What is it?”
“I was just thinking,” Olivia mused happily. “It seems that, after all this time, I’ve finally found my happy ending.”

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