

~ Leather and Lace ~

by Greek Warrior

Disclaimer #1: This is an Uber story and the characters that appear in this story may seem familiar but aren't the same as the ones we all know and love. All the characters that appear here are made up from my deranged little mind. They're fictitious and aren't meant to resemble anyone. This is all done in fun and yes I know I need to get a life.

Disclaimer #2: Taz belongs to the folks at Warner Brothers Studios. Scooby Doo belongs to Hanna-Barbera. The X-Files belongs to somebody other than me, anything you recognize isn't mine folks, I got tired of looking this stuff up.

Warning: This story contains explicit consensual sex between adult women. If you're under legal age in your neck of the woods, go away. If you live in a place that frowns upon that sort of behavior, tell'em to kiss your derrière then talk to your Congressman, or move, or both.

Warning: This story contains violence. We are talking about a certain warrior's descendant, you know.

Note: The quote at the end of chapter one is from Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet'.

Feedback is most welcome as long as it's constructive. Remember, you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar, although I've always wondered why anyone would want a bunch of flies! I can be contacted at XWPSScribe@aol.com. Thanks for reading.

Part 1

Chapter One:

The woman turned the corner and continued down the long, conspicuously empty, hallway towards the briefing room, the drab grey walls and slate colored floor the same as she remembered them. Even though she walked in silence down the corridor, people peeked out of doorways, just after she passed them. 'Well not completely empty.' She noticed. 'Just avoiding me.' She ignored the eyes watching her and let the whispered comments, barely heard as she walked by, go in one ear and out the other. It was to be expected since this was her first time back after the disastrous mission three months before.

"Captain Chandler." The voice called to her from behind.

She stopped and turned around. "Yes?" She prompted, when a man that she didn't recognize, caught up to her but could only stare at the almost legend standing before him.

Captain Raven Frances Chandler, six feet tall, piercing blue eyes, just past the shoulder black-as-night hair and at the age of 26, already in charge of one of The Divisions elite squads.

A raised eyebrow from the Captain broke the man's enamored trance. He cleared his throat nervously. "I...um...just wanted to say, welcome back and that I'd be honored to work on your team."

"Thank you, Sergeant...Hardly." She glanced at his nametag. The man was a few inches shorter than her and a little on the skinny side. He had mousy brown colored, straight hair that just brushed the top of his collar and large brown eyes that stared at her in wonderment like a puppy dog waiting for some kind of praise from it's owner. He stepped back and snapped a crisp salute, which she returned with slightly less enthusiasm. She smiled and shook her head as she watched the Sergeant practically march back down the hall. 'Definitely new and eager to please.' She thought as she continued to the briefing room.

Officially, the Division is a government anti-terrorist agency that tracks terrorist groups and their activities and is associated with the CIA. Unofficially, it is a private organization constructed to combat terrorism with any means possible. The Division has quietly assassinated terrorist leaders, bombed their bases of operations, rescued hostages, assisted small countries when their governments were in danger of military take over attempts and generally been a thorn in the side of anything that resembled terrorist activity.

While being financially backed by many democratic governments and by large corporations, most of which have interests in the Middle East, Central and South America, they are acknowledged by none. Their actions and their people don't exist. It is a very dangerous occupation, but on the up side, it did pay extremely well.

Raven sat on the far side of the oval conference table, the only position in the small room that placed her back against a solid wall. The other three 'walls', were windows that looked out over the communications center to her right, the hallway to her left and facing her, the computer center. She leaned back, crossed her ankles under the table and closed her eyes. She concentrated on quelling her nerves that had started this morning when she left her apartment. She was anxious to prove to herself and her colleagues that she had recovered completely from her ordeal and was fully capable of leading her team again. Physically she was almost one hundred percent and the doctor had cleared her for active duty. The psychiatrist, on-the-other-hand, was more reluctant. She had to convince him that if her mind were occupied with work, it wouldn't have time to dwell in the past. 'And if the nightmares would stop, I might even convince myself.' She mused. Raven pushed back the dark thoughts and smiled as she recognized the familiar tread of her friend's walk as he made his way down the hall and into the room.

"You're here early." John took a seat to her right. He knew better than to ask how she was feeling. He had asked that question last night even though he knew she was sick of it and she had threatened to throw him out of her apartment, by way of the window, which happened to be five floors up. He knew she was joking, but still vowed not to tempt fate. There were times when he thought even he had pushed her legendary temper to the breaking point.

"Traffic was light." She answered without opening her eyes.

John Logan was her Lieutenant and her best friend. A light-skinned African-American with a neatly trimmed mustache and full beard but a clean-shaven head. He was a couple of inches taller than his Captain and had a slender, but muscular build. Even though he was six years Raven's senior, they had signed on with The Division and finished their training at the same time.

John had met Raven twelve years ago when he was a rookie cop assigned to the White Center area of Seattle. He and his partner had brought a feisty juvenile girl in on a drunk and disorderly charge that had quickly turned into an additional charge of resisting arrest when the hotheaded youth had bitten John's arm. He still had the scar to prove it. It was the first of several meetings for Raven and John over the next couple of years.

Colonel Albright and Major Otis entered the room and handed the other two occupants their assignment dossier. No pleasantries passed between them, no hello how are you or glad you're back. There was no love lost between the Captain and the Major and the Colonel had been in contact with her during her absence.

Colonel Samuel Albright is six and a half feet tall, sporting collar length salt and pepper hair, a bushy mustache that was just starting to show a few white hairs, but still didn't look anywhere near his fifty plus years. The only things that did show his age were his 'John Lennon glasses' and the Colonel's insistence on still using '60's' expressions, some of which were beginning to make a comeback. He had a medium build that was just starting to show the signs of a lack of effort in the exercise department and a little overindulgence in the jar of M & M's that he kept on his desk supposedly to offer visitors to his office.

Major Bernard Otis is a short man at five seven. He tried to compensate by building muscle, but took it to the extreme. The end result was a body that looked as thick and wide as it was tall. Light red hair in a military crew cut and a square jaw didn't help his appearance either. Raven always said that if you put him in clothes with different colored checks, that he would look like the Rubik's Cube puzzle thing, which Albright also kept on his desk.

"This mission is a little out of the norm for us." Albright stated as he took his seat at the opposite end of the table from his Captain. He laced his fingers together and placed his hands, palms down, on top of the folder in front of him. "It's more of a preventive assignment than a quick strike or clean-up." He explained.

Which meant it wasn't an assassination or bombing or rooting out gorilla resistance groups. Raven, still leaning back with her long legs stretched out under the table, was the picture of calm. She had worn black jeans, hiking boots and a black and red checked flannel shirt instead of the fatigues that usually made up The Division's preferred dress. Whereas, John was leaning forward, arms resting on the table, feet flat on the floor with one leg bouncing up and down with nervous energy. He was dressed in olive drab fatigues like the Colonel and the Major. Raven had never been one for bright, cheery colors, but between the paint scheme and the clothing of choice, she thought it depressing enough to drive 'Mary Sunshine' to commit hara-kiri.

The Colonel cleared his throat to continue, which brought Raven out of her contemplation. "This is Ambassador Andrew Whitfield," Albright flipped open his folder and was referring to the first photo in the dossier, "the instigator of the latest round of peace talks in the Middle East and he is also the chief negotiator for the talks. Right now he's the US Ambassador assigned to the consulate in Istanbul."

Otis picked up the briefing. "Our sources have heard rumblings from several known terrorist groups that would rather these talks not take place. Everyone from the almost non-existent 'PLO' to the new and very active 'Mohammed's Quest' and every group in-between, may try to stop the negotiations by trying to take or kill the Ambassador or use his family to gain his cooperation."

Raven knew where this was heading, they would be providing security for this guy and his family, which basically put, meant babysitting. She also knew she would get an ear full from John after the meeting, he hated these kinds of missions. She wasn't going to complain though; at least she'd be doing something other than sitting around her apartment, thinking.

Raven tried to tune out the Major's voice as she read through the file. It wasn't that she didn't appreciate the importance of the briefing, she did. It was just the person doing it that she couldn't stand to listen to. His voice made her think of the old cartoon cat sitting on a fence outside a bedroom window, yowling. Needless to say, it rubbed her the wrong way.

Albright continued when Otis stopped. "As the Major explained, the team will be going in as a military security force, assigned to the embassy as an extra precaution because of the up-coming talks. The Ambassador and his family know nothing of the possible threats, nor does the embassy staff. The Lieutenant in charge of the normal embassy security has been informed of the situation and that additional security is in route. Lieutenant Logan will be in command of all the security personnel." The Colonel paused to allow the question he knew was coming.

"And the reason for this is?" Asked without a threatening tone but one that none-the-less stated that she demanded an answer.

The Colonel stopped the reprimand from Otis. The Major always assumed the Captain showed a lack of regard for a senior officer, but Albright knew she meant no disrespect, she was just being her usual blunt self. "Not what you're thinking, Captain." He leaned back and sighed. "Our friend the Ambassador is, shall we say, an old fashioned kind of guy. Not so much as to say he doesn't think women shouldn't work, but if they do, it should definitely be for a man." Albright knew this wasn't going over well when he saw the tensed jaw muscles, the grinding teeth and the steely gaze of those blue eyes. He sighed and continued. "Whitfield was also one of the biggest and loudest protesters against women in the military. And since we're going in as military, you'll be running the operation from under the table, so-to-speak. You'll go in separate from the rest of the team." The Colonel was wondering what really, really bad thing he had done in a previous life to be the one having to answer her next question.

"So I'll be undercover." Raven expected the worst. "As what?" She was still leaning back in her chair trying to maintain a casual attitude.

"As a companion slash counselor for the eldest daughter." Albright answered with as much authority as he could muster and waited for the explosion. When it didn't come, he braved a glance at his Captain.

"What kind of counselor?" She asked as she now sat up in her chair. 'Come on, Chandler, you can do this. Stay calm. It's not the people here that are doubting your abilities, it's one pig-headed, asinine, political dignitary that probably has to have an aid wipe his ass for him because he can't manage it himself.' Her teeth were grinding together harder with each thought. Her dentist had warned her about this particular habit and she knew next time she saw her, she would be yelled at.

"Well, it seems the daughter..." The Colonel paused, flipping through his folder.

"Kristen." Raven supplied from memory while she was trying to get her mind off an irate dentist, which had all kinds of implements of torture at her disposal. 'Please don't tell me that I've got to deal with a teenager.'

"Yes, that's the one." The Colonel again laced his fingers together on top of his file and continued. "Seems she has been her father's speech writer for a few years now and the Ambassador wishes her to have some instruction in the backroom goings-on of Capitol Hill. So we've set you up as an aid to a recently retired congressman. From reading the file, I think he wants to discourage her from wanting to do any form of political writing for a living. It seems he wants to discourage her, I believe the quote was, 'It's too cut-throat for my daughter.'"

"Problem, I know absolutely nothing about Capitol Hill or politics or congress." Raven informed them.

Major Otis' expression was one of superiority. "We took that into consideration and put together a list of people the Ambassador knows that are currently on the hill, along with enough background information on them to keep him from suspecting that you're not who you say you are." He passed down a separate folder. "Also, there is a kind of 'typical day in the life of an aid' narrative in the file that should be enough to answer any questions the girl might have. You just have to memorize it." His tone meant that his research department had to do all the work for her.

Raven ignored the Major's attitude as she always did and looked at Albright with a lost and forlorn expression. "You're sure there's not someone who needs to be assassinated?" The Colonel just shook his head. "Nothing to blow-up either I suppose?"

"Sorry, Captain, this is it." He cleared his throat to hide the chuckle that wanted to escape. "I'll need your team members names by tomorrow morning. That's all."

Later that night, after they had gone over the mission twice, decided on their team and each members assignment, finished off two medium mushroom, beef with extra cheese pizzas and a bottle of wine from one of the local vineyards, John decided it was time for some major teasing.

"You want me to go shopping with you tomorrow?" He had to bite the inside of his cheek to keep the smile off his face.

Raven raised her eyebrow. "Why would I want to go shopping, you know I hate it." She paused to glare at the man sitting across from her. "What are you up to?"

"I don't think your usual, 'hiking boots, bluejeans, flannel shirt if it's cold, t-shirt if it's hot' wardrobe is going to pass muster in an embassy." He finally let the smile that he had been holding back, spread across his face. The panicked expression his statement caused was priceless. "You know, I hear formal dinners are quite popular with the political crowd. I assume you don't already have evening wear." He laughed and batted away the couch pillow that sailed his way. "Should I take that as a no?"

"John, I think the terrorist might be the least of your worries." Raven announced menacingly when he finally stopped laughing.

"What makes you say that?" He asked, wondering if she was serious.

"Because I just might kill that son of a bitch myself." She ran her fingers through her hair, pulling it back and away from her face. "By the gods, John, I wasn't going to complain, but just how am I supposed to pull this off and what do I know about being a 'companion' to a snobbish politician's teenage daughter?" 'Or anyone else for that matter?' She commented to herself.

"Actually these photos are, where did I read that? Here it is, six years old. So, that would make her twenty-one." He explained.

"Mmmph!" Was the only response.

They were sitting in the Captain's office. The room was about two-dozen square feet. It contained a small brown leather couch, an oak coffee table and two brown leather chairs in front of her oak desk. The desk only contained a computer, a phone and a coffee cup with a Seattle Thunderbirds logo on it, the local minor league hockey team.

Logan leaned back in his chair that was facing the couch and steepled his fingers together under his chin. "Can I ask you something?" He was fully aware of her extreme private nature. "You don't have to answer if you don't want to."

She sat up from her relaxed position on the couch and gave him her full attention. "Go ahead, ask."

John had never considered himself an overly religious person, but he had never deliberately tried to piss the big guy off either. He had always thought of Raven's references to mythological beings as strange. And after her capture during their last mission, which would have been enough to turn even the staunchest atheist into a believer, he wondered if she really believed in 'the gods'. "I was just curious, do you actually think that there's more than one god?"

'Do I?' Raven considered. She hadn't thought about any religion since she quit going to confirmation classes after her younger brother had been killed. Her mother had raised all her children to be what Raven used to call, 'good little Catholics'. "Honestly, John, I don't know if I believe in much of anything, anymore. Mythology has always been something that I was interested in. But the expressions I use are more of a habit now than anything else. I started using them a long time ago basically just to piss my mother off. It was around the same time we met and you know what a bitch I was then." Her expression turned distant.

"What do you mean 'was'?" He asked with his brow furrowed. The faraway look disappeared from Raven's face and he knew he had broken through the tension his question had caused.

Both eyebrows shot up, and then she started chuckling. "There's one thing you need to remember, my friend." Raven started to explain but was interrupted.

"I know, I know. You can beat my butt anytime you want to." He threw his hands up in mock surrender.

"Yes I can, but that's not what I was going to say." She rested her forearms on her thighs and leaned over the coffee table between them. "I know where all your ticklish spots are." She kept the devilish look on her face for a long minute before she erupted into a full-throated laugh at the bug-eyed expression on his face.

It took another minute before John realized she wasn't going to carry out her threat, then he joined in the merriment. "You know." He paused to wipe the tears from his eyes. "That is something I'll never tire of hearing."

"What? That I can beat you up or that I can tickle you senseless?" She asked.

"Neither, smart ass. I'm talking about the sound of your laughter." He winked at her when she didn't readily have a comeback and stood up. "It's not often I can catch you totally unaware. And on that note I think I'll take my leave and head home. What about you?"

"Sounds like a plan. I'll just clean off my desk and drop this off for the Colonel." She stood and stretched.

He stopped at the door and bowed deeply, sweeping his arm out to the side with a flourish. "Good night, good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow, that I shall say good night till it be morrow."

Raven rolled her eyes. "Don't give up your day job." She yelled after he had shut the door to her office. She smiled and thanked whoever was listening, that she had a friend like John.

Chapter Two:

Kris took the stairs two at a time and made it halfway to the top before she stopped and sighed at the voice that called out from the open doorway she tried to sneak past.

"Kristen? Is that you, dear?"

"Yes mother." She reversed her direction and headed towards her mother's study.

Kristen Michelle Whitfield had short, wavy blonde hair; emerald green eyes and stood at an average five-five height. Her frame held muscle tone but was a little softer than she would like since she had to hide the fact that she worked out from her parents, who didn't believe that women should be physically strong.

"Don't forget that Miss Chandler will be arriving today." Regina Whitfield stated when her daughter entered the room. She was an inch or two shorter than her eldest offspring. Her eyes were green and her hair blonde with a slight reddish tint; she was very slim and pale, almost to the point of looking anemic. She took in her daughter's appearance with a critical eye. "I want you to go change into something appropriate. That navy blue skirt and blazer would do nicely and put your hair up, young lady. I don't want the woman to think I'm raising an uncivilized vagabond."

Kris looked at her khaki shorts, forest green button-up cotton shirt and Reeboks, and rolled her eyes. 'I can't believe I've got to dress to greet this 'companion'. She's probably a middle aged frumpy spinster that wears glasses as thick as coke bottle bottoms and has a whiny voice and disposition. It's just my luck that they actually found someone dumb enough to take this job.'

"Oh and don't forget that we're having a small celebration for Parker tonight." Her mother continued, never realizing her daughter's irritation. "Just family and embassy staff and we must remember to tell Miss Chandler, it would be a good way to introduce her to everyone."

A buzz from the intercom interrupted. "Yes?" Kris sat on the arm of the couch, waiting for her mother to finish. "Thank you, Stephanie, we'll be right down." She stood and moved in front of her daughter. "She's here, her flight was early. Oh dear, well this will have to do." She sighed as she buttoned her daughter's collar closed and straightened her shirt.

The embassy building consisted of three floors. The bottom one was used for official business and the top two for private use for the embassy staff and their families. Regina Whitfield's study was on the middle floor, just off the balcony that led to the main staircase and overlooked the reception area of the main lobby.

The balcony on the second floor drew Raven's attention. Her eyes settled on a woman with blonde hair that she recognized as an older and much improved version of the seemingly sly, freckled faced teenager that had stared back at her from the photo in her mission folder. 'Sweet Aphrodite, she's beautiful.'

Kris took in the sight of her 'companion' and she almost stumbled. Her eyes flowed over black hair that looked as much like silk as the red blazer and pants the woman wore. A black silk blouse open at the neck displayed a thin braided leather cord that held an oval bone pendant that had the cartoon character Taz painted on it. Kris wasn't sure how she made it down the staircase without falling flat on her face, but she obviously had, because now she was standing in front of

this tall magnificent creature. Her eyes tracked upwards from the pendant to take in slightly moist lips, high cheekbones and came to rest on the bluest eyes that Kris had ever gazed into. 'She is the most stunning woman I have ever seen.'

"Miss Chandler? I'm Regina Whitfield and this is my daughter Kristen."

Raven blinked to break away from the green eyes holding her captive. "I'm sorry, I must be a little worn out from my flight." She said to cover-up the fact that she was entranced by the lovely vision in front of her. "What were you saying, Mrs. Whitfield?"

"That's all right dear, not all of us travel well." She stated in a condescending manner as she patted Raven's arm.

Her mothers gibe brought Kris out of her trance. "Ms. Chandler, why don't I show you to your room so you can rest? Or if you're hungry, lunch will be ready in about an hour." Kris' feet had started to move towards the stairs without conscious thought. "Or if you can't wait, I know how bad airline food is, I'm sure I could find something to hold you over until then." Kris knew she was rambling but she couldn't help it. 'What's wrong with me? The only time I chatter away like this is when I'm nervous or embarrassed.' She had guided the tall woman to the third floor and pushed open a door. "This is it. You can let me know if you ever need anything, I'm next door." She pointed to the next door down the hall.

"Thanks, Kristen." Raven noticed her luggage had already been brought up. She let her gaze travel around the room. A double bed with the headboard against the wall that she shared with Kris. Double French doors directly opposite the room door, led out to a small balcony that overlooked the inside courtyard and the pool. A chest of drawers sat opposite the end of the bed and shared a wall with a dresser and mirror. The color scheme was pale rose and ivory.

"Actually, I prefer Kris, if you don't mind." She could feel herself blushing and lowered her gaze to the floor. 'This is ridiculous. Why do I feel like an inadequate, bumbling nitwit in front of her?'

Raven smiled. 'Gods, she seems really shy.' "Okay, Kris. Let me unpack and then why don't you show me around before lunch?" 'Might as well get this farce started and see if I pass the test. Otherwise Mister 'women should be barefoot, pregnant and in the kitchen' will just have to get his knickers in a knot.'

Raven threw herself down on her bed and rubbed her eyes. Lunch had been... different. She had been introduced to everyone. She had, of course, already known them. The Division's research department had supplied the team with names, photos and backgrounds. Meeting her 'assignments' face to face was something Raven hadn't had to do in a very long time. And she vowed that it would be even longer before she would do it again.

She had entered the informal dinning room, an elongated room that held a table large enough to seat probably twenty people. 'And this is just for the family. It's nice to know all that tax money

isn't wasted.' She thought sarcastically. She had put a non-threatening expression on her face and waited to be introduced to the other occupants.

Andrew Whitfield was very surprised when Raven was introduced to him and he had to look up in order to meet her eyes. The man was probably five-eight and that was in shoes. Brown eyes and dusty brown hair, that had started receding and he was only forty-six. He looked like he followed a mild workout program, he wasn't overweight but she could tell his body was not accustomed to physically taxing exercise.

Kris' younger siblings, Martin and Vivian, were twins but not identical. Seventeen years old and seniors in high school, which meant they were with the tutor most of the day. Vivian had hazel eyes, short light brown hair and was short like her mother, while Martin was a little taller than his father, with light brown hair and brown eyes and a boyish face. Both had grown up since the photos she was given had been taken.

Raven knew Martin was going to be a problem. A teenage boy with raging hormones that spent the entire lunch undressing her with his eyes. But then, so did Mrs. Whitfield's secretary, Stephanie Knox. As far as Raven was concerned, that was as far as Stephanie would get. The secretary was in her 40's with dark brown hair with a little grey starting to show. Her eyes were light, washed-out grey. Her medium height and her large boned structure made her look a little over-weight. 'I wonder if I could throw them both in the Bosphorus? Um, probably not, with my luck neither of them would know how to swim and I'd have to jump in after 'em.' She sighed and continued her mental assessment of her housemates as she continued her lunch.

Ismail Ahmet the Ambassador's secretary was born and raised in Istanbul but had been educated in England. Dark skin and hair, six feet tall, almond colored eyes and a mustache and goatee. A refined gentleman, with all the correct mannerisms befitting his position. He smiled and laughed at all the appropriate times, made one feel like the most important person in the room with his compliments but could also vanish into the background without moving a muscle. People that possessed that ability made her suspicious. He would bear watching.

Then there was Parker Lewis the newly promoted aid to the Ambassador. A little taller than his employer, with short, above the collar, dark brown hair, dark brown and what she would call, cruel eyes and even at his young age of 26 years, he was just as arrogant and opinionated as his boss. Raven immediately disliked the man when she had been told that he was Kris' fiancé. That had not been in the background checks and it had surprised her and she loathed being surprised. But she managed to smile at her tablemates until she couldn't stand it and excused herself from the table, pleading jetlag.

*'Get a grip, Raven, you're here to protect these people not seduce some poor innocent young woman. Even if she is an attractive, charming, wonderful and incredibly hot one. Ugh, maybe I'd better take a long, cold shower before I dress for dinner and that stupid party. I think **my** hormones have digressed to adolescent lusting.' She sighed. 'And besides, she's obviously not interested in women.' She reminded herself and forced her body to her feet and headed toward the bathroom, suddenly depressed.*

Raven checked herself in the mirror one last time. She was wearing a blood red oriental style silk dress with small black images in the form of Chinese dragons that decorated the material in a sporadic design. The hem of the dress fell to just below the knees with a slit up the front that stopped at mid-thigh. The sleeves were three quarter lengths. She tugged on the short, upright collar and twitched her body; she hated dresses and was horribly uncomfortable. She decided against wearing jewelry, except her ever-present necklace. And since she was running late, she didn't take the time to put on make-up and she decided to leave her hair down, she never wasted time with make-up and her hair anyway. "Why should I start now?" She mumbled as she studied her reflection. "Not bad. It seems to hide the scars as long as I don't cross my legs, that is." She sternly reminded herself, since she had done just that when she sat down to put on her black pumps and noticed the prominent three inch long scar on the inside of her right knee. She took a deep breath and answered the door on the second knock.

"Oh, my." Kris stood in the hallway running her eyes up and down the tall figure.

Raven started to think that something was wrong with her appearance since the young woman's eyes continued to rake over her body. "Do I look okay?" She asked tentatively.

"Oh yes, I'm, uh, sorry for staring. I think you might have a problem though." She couldn't seem to draw her eyes away from the woman in front of her.

Raven's brow furrowed. "What kind of problem?"

"Finding a way to keep my brother from drooling over you all evening." 'And me too for that matter.' Kris blushed at that thought. 'Damn, where did that come from? I've never thought about women that way, much less, been attracted to one before.' She continued talking, afraid of where her thoughts might lead. "In case you didn't notice at lunch, Martin was...well...staring at you with...well...his expression was..."

Raven took pity on her. "Yes, I noticed." She saw the relief on Kris' face when she was saved from explaining. 'Mm, I wonder? Let's see how she reacts to this.' "He wasn't the only one."

"You mean, Mr. Ahmet? I've never known him to be ungentlemanly before. I'll say something to father about it."

"Uh, no, not him. I mean your mother's secretary, Ms. Knox." She watched Kris' expression change from confusion to comprehension to amusement. The confusion and comprehension Raven could understand, but the amusement threw her.

Kris grinned. "Are you sure?" Raven nodded. "It's a good thing she keeps it to herself. Mother would fire her on the spot. Although, mother is kind of clueless when it comes to anything that's the least outside the 'norm', she'd probably have to have someone draw her a picture with explanations before she'd understand." "Why am I relieved that she's not bothered by the thought of another women's attentions?" "We better go before they send out a search party."

The two women started down the hall toward the stairs. "You look very nice, by the way." Raven noticed the shy grin before Kris looked away. She was wearing an unadorned emerald green satin dress, which matched her eyes perfectly, and fell to her knees. A thin gold belt showed off a trim waist, a slightly open collar showed a gold herringbone necklace. Long sleeves completed the simple yet elegant dress. "And you wouldn't want to keep your fiancé waiting." Kris' smile disappeared but before Raven could question it, they arrived in the dining room.

Raven was a little surprised when Kris took the chair next to her instead of Parker. And so was he by the look on his face. 'Huh, maybe there's trouble in paradise.' A grin spread across her face before she could clamp down on it.

"Miss Chandler, you have a very unusual first name. Is it a family name by any chance?" Stephanie eagerly tried to draw Raven's attention away from Kris.

"No, my father was an avid fan of Edgar Allen Poe and the poem 'The Raven' was his favorite, so when I was born and he saw a head full of dark hair, he badgered my mother until she gave in." She explained.

"You're from Seattle originally?" At Raven's nod, Andrew continued. "Do you still have family living there?"

'Shit, I didn't think about them asking personal questions. Should I make something up or tell them the truth?' She swallowed and wiped her mouth with her napkin to gain a little time. "My mother, older brother and younger sister still live in the Seattle area." The truth, just not the sordid details.

"I thought your background information said you have a younger brother? And it didn't mention your father, is he deceased, dear?" Regina knew that the information they had been sent said that the Chandler family was catholic and she would not stand for a divorce in a catholic family, being a 'good catholic' herself.

'Hell if I know, toots'. She wanted to say. The long flight and unpleasant circumstances had begun to take their toll on Raven, not to mention the fact that she couldn't concentrate on anything but the incredible aroma that was coming from the young woman sitting to her right. Raven wasn't sure if it was perfume or shampoo or just the intoxicating scent of Kris' body, but it was very distracting. Raven took a deep breath and collected her thoughts. "Had a younger brother, Mrs. Whitfield. Derek died when he was eight. As for my father, I have no idea if he's living or dead, he left us when I was four."

The silence that followed was deafening; it stretched out for several heartbeats. It seemed that no one wanted to deal with the unpleasantness of the situation until Kris placed her hand on Raven's forearm and gave it a gentle squeeze. "I'm sorry about Derek. It must have been hard to lose someone you cared about."

Raven made it through the rest of the evening without too many questions directed at her. And although Stephanie's eyes stayed glued to Raven most of the night, the secretary left the tall

beauty alone. However, she had not been so lucky with Martin. He had followed her around all evening like it was his rutting season.

All through his teenage years, his parents had basically programmed Martin. Comments like, 'My baby is so cute, he'll have women fighting over him' and 'Son, you're going to be a heartbreaker' and 'You'll be able to have any woman you want', had inflated his ego to the extreme. So, when the object of his desire avoided him all night, he couldn't understand it. He had tried to engage her in conversation several times and received short, clipped responses before she had moved away. He had also felt the tension in her arm when he had escorted her into the lounge after dinner. 'Maybe she's shy or maybe she's not used to the attention. No that's ridiculous; she's stunning, I'm sure she's had men waiting in line. Maybe she had a bad experience with a past boyfriend? I bet that's it. I wonder if some old fashioned courting would bring her out of her shell?' Martin decided to start first thing tomorrow.

Around 11 p.m., Raven had had enough and headed for her room. If everything was on schedule, Logan and the team would have landed at the Izmir Air Station by now. It was a Turkish base, but the US had a squadron assigned to the airbase and would ferry the team to the embassy by chopper, about an hour's flight.

Raven dialed out by way of her cell-phone instead of the embassy's phone. She hadn't been able to check for listening devices within the embassy and if someone were using a microwave device from outside the walls, she wouldn't have any way to detect them either. The call was answered on the second ring. "Hello, John."

"How was your trip?" Logan knew his Captain was just letting him know she was in position and checking to see that the team had arrived at the airbase. The conversation was friendly, as if she was letting family or friends know that she had arrived safely.

After the brief conversation ended, Raven changed from her dress into a t-shirt, shut off the light and crawled into bed. She was exhausted and just starting to doze when her incredible hearing registered a noise, which in turn alerted her sleepy brain, which in turn jumpstarted her body into motion, all before she opened her eyes. By the time she reached her balcony doors, she had located and identified the strange noise. Metal scraping against concrete, outside and a little to the left, which meant it was coming from Kris' balcony.

Raven knew that Kris' room was empty, since she hadn't heard the young woman come up stairs yet; at least she was hoping she hadn't. She eased the door to her balcony open just enough for her to squeeze through and slipped out. The breeze was cool against her lightly clothed body and the cold tiles made her wish she had put on her shoes. The balcony was about ten feet by six feet with a four-foot high concrete railing around the front and sides. Hers contained a small metal table and two metal chairs and she was willing to bet Kris' did too, which would account for the noise she heard. She stood behind a tall potted plant with her back to the building and observed a figure dressed in dark clothes and kneeling down trying to pick the lock on the door leading to the young woman's room.

How to stop him without revealing what she is. Raven's mind processed her choices, one, she could scream to alert security, speaking of which, she wondered how this guy got in here in the first place? Two, she could surprise him and hope they didn't draw anyone's attention until after she could subdue and question him or three, she could toss him over the railing, removing the threat and let the so called security patrols find him. 'I'm damn sure not going to let this guy get anywhere near Kris.' She made her decision, took a few steps running start and jumped the eight feet between balconies. She chose to subdue and question.

The intruder saw movement out of the corner of his eye and tried to flee by jumping to the next balcony. There happened to be several more feet of open space between them than the one Raven had negotiated and before she could grab him, he fell the three stories onto the courtyard below.

Raven heard the shout of alert from the patrol and the sound of running feet. She returned to her room, by way of her balcony and barely got back into bed before someone was pounding on her door. No, she had not heard anything or seen anything, she patiently explained. Then she had to repeatedly assure them that she was all right. She noticed Kris, leaning against the wall watching her from across the hall, with a curious expression, as Raven ushered the security people out of her room.

Kris bid Raven a good night and went to her room. The fact that 'her companion' didn't seem the least bit bothered or scared that someone tried to break in, was very puzzling. Kris walked into the shared bathroom that separated her room from Raven's and leaned against the sink. She started brushing her teeth. "Wait a minute. Thief?" She mumbled with a mouth full of toothpaste. She rinsed her mouth and stared at her reflection. "Nobody in their right mind risks breaking into an embassy that's guarded by Military Police...unless it's for a political reason...which could possibly mean they're a...terrorist. But why...why would a terrorist be interested in us?" She paced the length of the bathroom and back. "The peace talks come to mind." She continued to mutter. She paced back to stand facing the closed door that lead to the room containing the object of her curiosity. "Is it just a coincidence that you show up now? I don't think so; mother sent that request for a companion over three months ago. So, who are you Ms. Raven Chandler? I believe I'll stick to you like stink on shit! As my granddad says." Kris went back to her room, changed into her nightshirt and crawled into bed. She curled up under the covers thinking that a little adventure and excitement might not be a bad thing. She fell asleep with a satisfied grin on her face.

Chapter Three:

Raven felt the comfortable mattress underneath her body and stretched her long frame before she opened her eyes. It only took her a second to remember where she was; there was always that momentary confusion the first morning after traveling. She threw a robe over her shoulders and walked out to the balcony. Her room faced east and the sky was just starting to lighten. She could see the sparse cloud cover and knew that the forecast for cloudy skies with scattered rain showers throughout the day was going to be incorrect. She could always deliver a more accurate weather prediction for cold or rain than the forecasters could, since her knee always gave her at least a days warning about those particular conditions. She leaned over the railing and noticed that not a trace of their late night visitor remained.

She reentered her room and decided that she would go see if the embassy had a gym. That should give John enough time to get the team settled and find out about their 'burglar', which was how the Sergeant from last night referred to their guest. She had almost laughed out-loud at his 'don't scare the womenfolk' attitude or maybe that was how the ambassador had instructed him to handle the situation. She changed into sweat pants, baggy long sleeve t-shirt and running shoes, she would have preferred her normal, shorts and sports bra but that would be making a statement she wasn't sure this crew was ready for. She ran her fingers through her hair before she pulled it back into a ponytail and headed for the kitchen.

Raven was surprised to find Vivian sitting at the table eating breakfast and reading the USA Today paper when she pushed open the swinging door. "Morning."

Vivian put down her paper. "You're up early. Thought you might sleep in after the long day you had yesterday and all the excitement last night. You want some breakfast?" She asked cheerfully. "And please call me Viv."

"I'm usually up about this time. And I'll just have some coffee right now." She noticed the girl looking at her attire as she accepted a mug from one of the kitchen staff. "Viv, I was wondering if there might be a gym or at least somewhere to jog?" She asked as she sipped her caffeine.

"Martin has a treadmill, a stationary bike and some kind of weight machine thingy that he never uses, so I'm sure he wouldn't care, father's the only one that ever uses them and then it's usually only on weekends. And there's a pool in the courtyard but the water would be a little on the chilly side unless your used to it. I'll show you where the stuff is when you're ready." She cheerfully offered.

"Are we the only one's that get up before the sun?" Raven sat down across from the girl at the small kitchen table that was probably meant more for the staff than for the employers.

"Yeah, pretty much. Father, Parker and Mr. Ahmet will be down in about an hour, then Stephanie, then mother, then Martin. If you want Kris out of bed before ten, you'll have to go drag her out." Viv explained.

Raven chuckled. "Not a morning person, I take it."

Viv grinned and nodded her head in agreement. "Nobody talks to her until she's had her coffee either."

After her workout and shower, Raven dressed in grey slacks and matching cotton turtleneck. She headed down the back staircase to the first floor. She gave a slight nod of her head in acknowledgement when she passed members of her team, as she headed for the pre-assigned meeting place she and John had agreed upon. Her mind was focused on the thoughts and concerns she had mulled over during her morning exercise and didn't notice the person intent on following her.

"Hear you had some commotion last night." John greeted his Captain when he opened the door for her. She filled him in on the past night's activities, then he filled her in on what he had learned. "There was a delivery truck parked about half a block down from the side gate that took off when the alarm was raised. Got a description from one of the video cameras but the image wasn't close enough to pick up the registration. But there's no record on the dead guy. No id, nothing on the fingerprints they sent through Interpol's computer. We'll run them through ours, but I wouldn't hold my breath. What?" He asked when he saw her lost in thought.

Raven was leaning back in a folding metal chair with her fingers laced together resting on top of her head and her long legs stretched out in front of her. "I find it interesting that which ever group this is, sent in a lone assassin or kidnapper, the night before we were suppose to get here." She leaned forward, resting her forearms on her thighs. Raven had changed her flight to a commercial airline when she was told that Mrs. Whitfield would send a car for her at the airport. She originally had been set to fly into Izmir with the rest of the team and take a puddle jumper into Istanbul. Raven thought it better if the driver was told to meet a British Airways International flight from London instead of a local flight. And a day earlier was the only reservation she could get on such short notice.

"Who knew of the change in plans?" He sat down in the chair facing his Captain and handed her a cup of coffee.

"You, me, the team, Mrs. Whitfield, her secretary and anybody they told." She took a sip from the steaming cup. "I've been thinking about last night and it seems funny. This guy acted as if he had all the time in the world and made noise like he knew that no one in the embassy was going to be expecting trouble. I surprised him completely and I don't think he knew who I was. I think it was a reaction to being caught off guard that made him run instead of trying to subdue me." She finished her coffee.

"You think someone here is passing along info? That whichever group this is, didn't think we would be here until today?" He went to refill his cup and pointed to hers asking a silent question. "But no one here knows who we are. And only Lieutenant Marks knew that we were coming."

She declined the offer of more coffee with a shake of her head as she answered his other question. "I think someone somewhere is either a traitor or a profiteer, whether it be from here or...elsewhere." Which meant that someone from The Division or from D.C. where the original request for protection came from, could be the culprit.

John jerked his head around at the statement and almost ran his mug over. "Uh...okay. How do you want to proceed?" He knew that if they were being sold out from headquarters, they and their 'assignments' could be in for a very bumpy ride.

Raven stood and walked to the window, staring out at the overcast day. "Anyone leaving the embassy gets a double guard. We've got enough personnel to cover it with the MP's and us. Schedule more patrols around the building and the grounds and randomize the patterns, I don't want to make it easy for them."

"I'll take care of it." He moved to stand beside her. "You'll probably hit me for asking, but how are you doing?" He glanced sideways at his Captain and friend.

She raised an eyebrow and glared. "I'd be a lot better if I didn't have a teenage boy sniffing after me. When I went back to my room to change after working out this morning, I found an arrangement of orchids and hyacinths."

"I'm assuming you mean the Whitfield boy. How do you know he left them?" She pulled a card out of her back pocket and handed it to him. He started chuckling as he read.

'Beautiful flowers for an even more beautiful lady. It would be my honor to be your escort to dinner tomorrow night. Martin'

"Ah, that's sweet."

"You find this amusing?" She drummed her fingers on the windowsill.

He grimaced at the look he was getting then cleared his throat. "Uh, no, of course not."

She decided to let him off the hook. "Damn, if it wasn't happening to me, I'd find it hysterical." They shared a laugh that eased the tension that was radiating from John.

He shook his head. "Any...uh...thing else I should know about?" He was trying hard not to laugh at his Captain's misfortune.

"One thing that I might be able to use to our advantage. Mrs. Whitfield's secretary, Stephanie, gave me an unmistakable invitation to play the 'get to know you better' game."

His expression turned sad. "You're the one that has to face yourself in the mirror each morning." He stuck his hands in his pockets. "Raven, don't do it." He turned sad eyes in her direction.

She looked at the despondent expression on his face. "John, I have no intention of sleeping with the woman. I just thought that I might be able to exchange a little flirting for information if I need to." She furrowed her brow at his peculiar behavior. "What's up with you anyway?"

"Nothing." He answered quickly. "I just hate to see you lower yourself to that level, is all. You happened to be better than that." He walked to the corner of the room and picked up a small backpack that was sitting on top of a small table and handed it to her before she could question him further. "Here's your stuff."

Raven opened the flap. Her 'stuff' consisted of a Beretta 9mm with several extra 15-round clips, a Smith & Wesson .45 caliber automatic with several extra eight round magazines, several throwing knives and two 'hunting knives' as the Captain called them. She grinned from ear to ear. "Felt naked without these." She opened the door a crack and peaked out to see a deserted hallway. "Later."

Kris had gotten out of bed early, at least it was for her, and been looking for Raven ever since. She finally spied her coming down the stairs and heading towards the back of the building, where the military personnel stayed, and followed her. She entered the room next to the one Raven had disappeared into, which fortunately was empty, and pressed her ear to the wall.

"Darn this noisy ventilation system, picks up noise from this entire end of the building." She grumbled and moved her position down the wall away from the vent. She heard two voices, one she thought to be Raven's and the other sounded male, but she could only understand a word here and there. 'Their talking about last night, I think.' She waited for the heat to cut off. 'Lieutenant Marks? Who's he? Oh yeah, he's in charge of the MP's.' Kris moved in the direction of the window when the voices in the other room seemed to move that way also. 'Martin you idiot. Like you've really got a chance with her.' Several conversations mixed together and she couldn't hear anything clearly until she heard the door of the other room open and close. She waited several minutes before she stuck her head out to see if the coast was clear then headed for her own room.

Kris paced the length of her bedroom trying to make heads or tails out of what she overheard. She finally sighed in disgust when all she could come up with were more questions. She had heard Raven leave her room and decided that her original plan of sticking to the tall woman was her best bet. She was about to start down the main staircase to the second floor when she heard voices. Kris looked down from the third floor balcony. It sat back further from the one on the second floor, so if you stood at the railing you could look down on anyone standing on the balcony below you.

"Raven. You don't mind if I call you that do you?" Stephanie didn't wait for an answer. "I have some papers I need you to read over and sign, also there's some personal info that I don't have in your file." She placed her right hand around Raven's upper arm and started to guide her into her office that was located next to Mrs. Whitfield's study.

"Oh sure, I can do that now." Raven smiled at the woman.

Kris clinched her fists, her first instinct was to charge down and punch the obviously flirting secretary. That response and the intensity of it shocked her. She took a deep breath. "Stephanie?" She called out as she descended the stairs. "I thought I heard your voice. I believe mother was looking for you. Something to do with a guest list for tomorrow night." She smiled sweetly at the frowning woman.

"I should go see what the problem is." She said, but didn't let go of Raven's arm.

"I'll come by later to sign those papers." Raven offered.

Stephanie brightened a little at that and detached herself from Raven's arm. "I should be in my office most of the afternoon and if I'm not there..." She paused and moistened her lips. "I'll be in my room." She winked and moved off in search of her employer.

Raven saw the furious look Kris directed at Stephanie, on her behalf. 'What is with everybody today? First John and now Kris, maybe I ought to explain to them that protecting my virtue is about like locking the barn door after the horse has been stolen. Definite waste of time trying to protect something that's not there.' She wiped the grin off her face when her would be defender turned towards her. "So, what do you usually do during the day?"

Kris tried to control herself. After what Raven had said about Stephanie last night and from the way the secretary was acting just now, she knew that Stephanie was after Raven. 'Lusting after my...my what? Raven is not MY anything.' She realized she'd been asked a question. "Oh, swim, read, write, play on the Internet. The usual, nothing cloak and dagger." It slipped out before she realized it, but when she saw the brief astonishment that crossed the tall one's face, she was glad it had. 'Well, that was interesting.'

Raven cleared her throat. "Well, reading and writing are pretty much individual activities. I only use the Internet if I'm looking for something specific. That leaves swimming and the water will be too cold for that."

"Wimp."

"Pardon me?" She crossed her arms over her chest and raised a questioning eyebrow. 'She's turning into a feisty little thing.'

"It's not that cold and besides they blew the forecast again, the suns out." She playfully challenged her companion. When she received no reply, she sighed. "Come on, wimp. You can at least keep me company." Kris knew the water would not have warmed up from last night's lower temperatures but she also knew that Stephanie or anyone else wouldn't bother them if they were in the courtyard. She headed upstairs to change with her companion following.

Raven was more than content to go along with the young woman. 'Kris, bathing suit, Hades, that sure beats playing cozy with 'Madam Butch' this afternoon.' She smiled. 'And besides, I need to find out about this party tomorrow night. It sounds like it could turn into a nightmare, strictly from a security standpoint of course.' She rolled her eyes, wondering why she was trying to fool herself.

Raven had to push her long sleeves up above her elbows after they had been outside awhile, the sun was actually kind of warm. The pool was about the standard size that a family would have installed. Raven noticed the prominently painted, 3 feet at the shallow end with steps leading down into the water and 9 feet at the deepest part. There was no diving board, just two ladders that descended into the chlorinated water. "What's this party for tomorrow night?" The two women were lying back in lounge chairs beside the deep end of the pool. Raven had to shade her eyes from the glare of the sun when she turned towards her companion.

"Huh?" Kris was caught daydreaming about her companion and speculating on the real reason she was here. "Oh, it's one of the 'Everybody Who's Anybody' parties. I think the embassies trade

off monthly gatherings. Last month it was at the Swiss Consulate, this month happens to be mother's turn."

"What's the purpose of having them?" Raven was confused.

"Well, that would be so everyone there could talk about anyone who didn't show up. Or if everybody happens to come, which is usually what happens, they talk about the person that actually had the gall to wear a gown that they had worn before, or whatever the weekly gossip happens to be." She noticed the skeptical expression on Raven's face. "Hey, I'm not making this up. Don't tell me that you've never had to deal with this type of thing? After all, you're a congressional aid for crying out loud." Kris challenged, hoping her companion would slip up.

"Uh, no, I've never been to one of these shindigs. I guess I'm not 'Politically Correct' enough." Raven was wondering what kind of turmoil canceling one of these things would cause. 'I really hate to change the routines, but this seems like an unnecessary risk. John will have to check into the details since I can't.' She spied John heading towards the side gate. "Excuse me a minute." Raven said as she left her companion.

"Ms. Chandler not joining us for lunch?" Viv asked as she sat down in the chair beside her sister that Raven had just vacated.

"Kris has probably bored the poor woman to death by now." Martin stood beside the pool, watching the object of the conversation walk away.

Both his sisters ignored him as they usually did. Kris' eyes were also glued to Raven. 'God, the way she moves. It's like a predator stalking its victim. A panther, that's what she reminds me of, a sleek dark powerful jungle cat, prowling after it's young tender prey.' She blushed. She wasn't sure where the image of herself as the prey had come from.

Viv was watching Kris watch her companion. 'Well I'll be. It looks like something, or should I say someone, has finally snared my sister's attention, if that sudden redness is any indication.'

"Can you imagine the envious looks I'll get tomorrow night when I walk into dinner with her on my arm." Martin's egotistical snicker broke the other's musings.

Kris wondered if she could get away with pushing her brother into the pool. Then had a better thought. "I think I'll cool off before we go in for lunch." And proceeded to jump into the water beside where Martin was standing, causing a very big splash and managing to douse her brother.

"Oh man, Kris! You did that on purpose!" Martin yelled at his sister. He hunched over trying to keep his cold wet shirt away from his skin and grabbed her towel to dry off.

Kris broke the surface of the water with her teeth chattering. She had definitely underestimated the temperature of the water, it was like ice, and it had caused the muscles in her legs to start cramping. She called out for help as her head disappeared beneath the surface.

"Quit joking around, Kris, I'm not jumping in there. You just want me to get completely soaked." Martin complained as he continued to dry off.

"Martin, I don't think she's kidding." Viv explained as she watched her sister go under again and started to stand, but before she could get to her feet a blur flew by.

Raven had been on her way back to the courtyard when she felt her heart start beating double-time. Before she had a chance to question the sudden feeling of panic, she heard the cry for help and reacted. She dove into the pool and surfaced with her arms around Kris' waist. "You ok?"

"I...am...now." She coughed up water between words.

"Put your arms around my neck." Raven instructed as she used her arms and legs to propel her body backwards, pulling the young woman with her.

Kris didn't need to be told twice and held on tighter than she needed to. At the edge of the pool, she broke her gaze with the blue eyes that held her mesmerized and noticed her brother's envious expression and wanted to laugh. She wished she could stick out her tongue and tell him to go find someone else, that Raven was hers. That startling admission, even though it was just to herself, along with the cold, caused Kris to start physically shaking.

Raven, after letting Martin and Vivian pull their sister into the tiles surrounding the pool, lifted herself up and out of the water and knelt down beside Kris as she started trembling. "Go get a blanket." She directed Martin. "Now!" She ordered when he was slow to move. "What happened?" Raven asked, as she sat behind Kris and wrapped the shivering young woman into a cocoon of her body trying to warm her.

"Lllegg cccrammps." Kris stuttered and grimaced when she tried to stretch the aforementioned appendages out.

"Wimp, huh?" Raven reminded Kris of the friendly name calling from earlier. "Can I say I told you so?" She asked as she massaged the young woman's lower legs with one hand while her other arm stayed wrapped around Kris' waist.

"Nnnnoo." She answered through still chattering teeth, but managed to smile at the playful look on her companion's face.

Martin returned with the blanket and an entourage, made up of their parents, Parker, and several security people. "Kristen Michelle Whitfield." Her father intoned with his fists on his hips. "Of all the irresponsible, reckless things to do." His expression was a cross between irritation and concern.

Raven had wrapped the blanket around Kris' shoulders. "It was an accident, Mr. Whitfield." The look that accompanied the statement dared the man to argue. She was beginning to think that the primary consideration in this 'family' was the image that was presented to their colleagues and to the public. Concern seemed to come in a poor second.

Kris tried to stand, but her right leg cramped up again. With a sharp intake of breath and a pained expression, she quickly sat back down. "I guess I'm gonna need some help." She looked up apologetically.

Two MP's started forward at Parker's signal but Raven's glare brought them to sudden stop. She knelt down on one knee and placed one arm behind Kris' back and the other one under her knees and stood up cradling the girl in her arms.

Kris knew she should stop her but couldn't bring herself to protest. Instead she wrapped her arm around Raven's neck and placed her head on an inviting shoulder as her rescuer headed back into the embassy. Raven heard the muttered comments but chose to ignore them.

"Oh my, she's very strong." Said by Regina as she stood between Andrew and Parker.

"I bet she's one of 'those women'." Said with disgust.

"What do you mean, son?" The Ambassador had been calling Parker by that endearment since he and his wife had decided that the young man was going to be their son-in-law.

"Just that she probably works out, lifts weights, that sort of 'manly' thing. Probably also thinks she can compete with men." He explained with a scandalous expression. "It might not be a good idea for Kristen to associate with someone like her."

Andrew Whitfield propped one hand on his hip and rubbed his chin thoughtfully with the other. "I certainly don't want her filling our Kristen's head with those silly notions. She'll bare watching." He decided as the group watched the two women disappear into the embassy.

Raven had slowed her stride when she heard the comment 'those women'. She rolled her eyes and almost laughed at the moron's explanation and at Andrew's response. "Hades take me. These people are living in the dark ages." She mumbled as she entered the building and headed for the back stairs.

"Goodness, Miss Kristen, what's wrong?" The cook asked with a definite southern accent. She had been with the family when they still lived in the Washington D.C. area and had decided to take Mrs. Whitfield up on her offer to stay with them when the Ambassador received his first post, 12 years ago. She was a short, round dark skinned woman with hair that had turned white many year's ago. She had been a friend and confidant to Kris since the girl was old enough to wobble into the kitchen on baby legs and beg for cookies or brownies or whatever Issy had decided to bake that day.

Kris had raised her head and looked at her rescuer with a quizzical expression after the mumbled remark and was about to question it, but turned her attention to the cook instead. "I'm fine Issy. I was just swimming and got a cramp." She stated, trying not to make it sound as embarrassing as it was.

"Good lord, child, you're all wet. Go get into some dry things before you catch your death. Hurry up now." Issy muttered about foolish young 'uns and shooed them out of her kitchen.

Kris was astonished when she realized that the cook was talking to Raven and not her. "You've certainly made an impression with Issy. I've never seen her take to anyone that quickly before."

Raven shrugged her shoulders after she placed her burden on the bed. "She and I had a long talk over breakfast this morning." She shrugged. "She seems to like me okay."

After her early workout, Raven had gone back down to find something to munch on and had been cornered in the kitchen by a very suspicious cook with a very large knife.

"You ain't no political aid. Who are you and what do you want with my Kris?"

Raven had taken a chance and explained everything to the protective cook. It seemed they had a common goal, to look after Kris.

"Uh huh." Kris knew there was something else that had happened between them that morning but didn't push to find out. Instead she asked about Raven's earlier comment.

It was easy enough to explain about her love of anything ancient and Greek, but she had to be careful about the other. As much as she hated the Whitfield's and Parker's feelings about 'a woman's place', these people were still Kris' family and soon to be family. She repeated what she had over heard, to distract herself more than anything, while she helped Kris change out of her suit and into shorts and a plain, long sleeve cotton pullover shirt. "I'm sorry, but I just don't agree with their beliefs. Women can be strong and independent. They don't need a man to provide a home or security for them. And in this day and age, we don't even need them to provide a family, at least not personally anyway." She had started massaging the girl's calf to ease the still slightly contorted muscle and she rambled on to take her mind off the soft skin under her hands. And the fact that the young woman was in bed, laying on her back and that Raven was on her knees straddling Kris' legs and hovering over the prone, inviting body.

Kris had closed her eyes and was very much enjoying the feeling of strong fingers and hands moving over her legs. Her imagination and libido kicked in as she pictured those hands moving up her thighs and over her stomach and coming to rest on her breasts. She let out an almost inaudible sigh, but it was enough to bring both women back to their senses.

Raven jumped off the bed. "I'd, uh, better go change. Sorry I got the bed wet." She hurried back to her room through the connecting bathroom. 'Oh yeah, I'd really like to be the reason she and her bed got wet.' She recalled the glimpse she had gotten of Kris' body when the swimsuit was removed. Now she was wet and not because she had jumped in the pool. She took a cold shower and changed into a pair of white cotton slacks and matching shirt. She had just finished tucking her shirt in when she heard a knock on the bathroom door. "Come."

Kris entered with only a slight limp. "In all the commotion earlier, I forgot to thank you." She leaned against the post at the foot of the bed. "It actually took this long for me to realize that you

saved my life." She leaned down to Raven, who was sitting on the end of the bed putting on shoes, and kissed her on the cheek. She saw the flush on the older woman's face and wondered if it was from embarrassment or if it might have something to do with the heavier breathing and what Kris hoped might be desire shining in those blue eyes.

The move had taken Raven by surprise. She felt her skin tingle from the contact of Kris' lips. She tried to regain control of her feelings before she did something she wouldn't be able to stop, but her body betrayed her. She placed her fingertips lightly against Kris' cheek and slowly closed the small distance between their lips. As she was tilting her head, Raven heard the voice coming from Kris' room through the open doors of the bathroom. She jumped up and moved away. 'Gods, Raven. Of all the stupid, dumb, idiotic, unprofessional things to do. She was just thanking you and you had to go and try to take advantage of her.' She stood in front of the mirror and ran her hands through her almost dry hair. 'Maybe I ought to bed Stephanie, it might get my lust under control.' As soon as the thought came to her, she knew she wouldn't be able to follow it through. She glanced at Kris' reflection in the mirror and felt a warmth flow through her body. 'Gods help me, I think I'm in love with the girl.' She shook her head, wondering what she was going to do about this new revelation when Vivian walked into the room.

"Here you two are. Mother says to come down to lunch, now." She saw the expression she was getting from her sister and knew that if looks could kill, she'd be dead and wondered what she had done wrong.

Kris couldn't believe it; Raven was going to kiss her. Her heart was pounding in her chest and she thought she was going to die before the short space that was between them, dissolved. The next thing she knew was Raven's lips and hand had moved away and Viv was speaking to her. She was about to explode when a hand gently squeezed her shoulder.

"We were just on our way down." Raven said as she opened her door and motioned for them to precede her. 'She's off limits. She's engaged. She's got a cute little butt. Stop it, Raven.' But her eyes still followed the gentle sway of hips all the way to the dining room.

Chapter Four:

Raven was both relieved and perturbed that she didn't see Kris again that day until dinner. Regina had ordered her daughter to spend the afternoon with her in her study, 'So you can recuperate from your ordeal'.

Raven and John did, however, use the time to slip out of the embassy to meet one of The Division's contacts that John had been told might have some useful information. They had waited on the guy for several hours but he never showed, which made Raven late for dinner. Which meant she had to endure snide comments from Mrs. Whitfield about being on time. Needless to say, Raven spent the entire time apologizing through gritted teeth.

Raven had excused herself shortly after the meal. She thought she might strangle the woman if she stayed much longer. She changed and headed for the gym. About halfway through her

routine, she felt eyes watching and turned around to find Kris leaning against the door. 'Damn, must have really been pissed off not to hear her come in.' "Hey."

"My mother seems to have this kind of effect on most people." She pushed off her perch and walked towards Raven. "Sorry about her remarks earlier." She handed the sweating woman a towel.

"Not your fault." She wiped her face and neck. "Mothers can be...how should I put this...hard to train sometimes." They both started laughing.

"How about your mother?" Kris suddenly wanted to know everything about the person she loved. 'Yes, loved. I knew it the moment I first laid eyes on her and tried to tell myself I was crazy. Now if I could just find the courage to admit that to her.'

Raven suddenly seemed to be distant and sad. "I've spoken to my mother once in the last ten years and that was an argument." She stated when she drew her attention back to her companion.

"I'm sorry. You don't have to tell me if you don't want to. I didn't mean to bring up bad memories." 'God, that would mean she's been on her own since she was sixteen. How do kids survive like that?' She shuddered just thinking about the documentaries she had seen about life on the streets.

'I guess I'd better explain the rest now that I've started. It really doesn't matter as far as my cover story goes.' She saw the young woman shiver. "It's not that I don't want to, it's just that I've never felt comfortable telling anyone about myself before. Come on, let's go upstairs before someone catches me in here doing 'manly' things." That broke the stress of unpleasant thoughts and memories. Kris smiled and nodded her head in agreement. 'I'd kill to be able to see that smile everyday for the rest of my life.' Raven thought as they headed for her bedroom. 'Ah, Captain Chandler.' She addressed herself. 'You fooled around and fell in love, just like the song says. Now what in Tartarus do you plan to do about it?' She had no answer and turned her attention back to her companion.

"Why don't you get a shower and I'll go get us something to snack on while we talk?" Kris suggested.

Raven pulled the tie loose that held her hair back. "Do you ever get full?" She grinned. Kris' stomach chose that moment to announce itself. "Guess that would be a no." They both laughed and Kris turned red.

Kris sat the tray down in the middle of the bed and put the wine bottle and glasses on the nightstand. She was lucky no one but Issy had been in the kitchen, otherwise, no wine. Her parents were strict when it came to their children and alcohol. Even though Kris was twenty-one, they didn't consider her an adult until she was married. 'As long as you're living under my roof, you'll do as I say.' Was one of her father's favorite sayings. And her mother was hell bent on

keeping Kris under their roof until that time, 'It's not proper for a young lady of your social class to be living on her own. It gives people the wrong idea.' She had really never argued with her parents, it was just easier to let them have their way.

Raven entered the room to find Kris lost in thought. "Hey, quarter for your thoughts."

"I thought it was a penny?" She sat up and swallowed hard at the vision that greeted her eyes. 'She has got to be the most beautiful creature God ever created.' Raven's black hair was towel dried so it wasn't dripping but was still wet enough to be slicked back away from her face, which was still glowing from the hot water. She wore a silk robe that was barely held together by the sash around her waist, the color was a vivid blue that matched her eyes perfectly.

Raven saw the reaction and made a mental note to thank Sharon, John's fiancée, for making her buy the robe. "Yeah it use to be, but you ought to know about inflation and all that. Didn't you study economics and all those equations the government uses just to get more taxes out of us?"

Kris grinned and answered the initial question. "I was just thinking about growing up and wondering how much your childhood effects what you become. Not just your profession, but your personality, your thoughts, your beliefs and how you treat your friends and family and even strangers." She explained to Raven about her parent's beliefs, how she and her siblings were raised and how she had not questioned her parents or voiced her own opinions. "You know the funny thing is, that they don't come from 'old money' like they lead everyone to believe. My father's family is middle class. My mother's parents owned a family restaurant in Baltimore when my mother was born, so they were basically working stiffs too. My grandpa, mother's father, happened to luck out in the stock market. He decided to do something different for my grandma's birthday one year and bought this relatively new stock that happened to have the same initials as hers and in the next several years, made a fortune."

Raven was intrigued. "You gonna tell me or make me guess?" She handed the grinning young woman the glass of wine she had poured for her and sat down on the bed facing her.

"Umm, this is good." She took another sip, prolonging the suspense. She smiled at her companion that was now impatiently drumming her fingers on the tray of food. "Ok, ok. Her name is Irene Bernice McKenzie."

Two eyebrows shot up. "IBM." She chuckled. "You're pulling my leg."

"Nope." Kris took a cracker and piece of cheese from the tray. "So don't let my mother and her high and mighty ways fool you." She gestured with the hand that held her food. "My grandparents say she's just a spoiled brat that forgets her beginnings." She popped the treat in her mouth. She finished chewing and swallowed. "So, tell me about you. That is if you still want to." She reached for an olive. She didn't want to seem over anxious but she desperately wanted Raven to trust her enough to be able to tell her anything.

Raven swallowed the grapes she was munching on and took a deep breath. "As I told your mother, my father left when I was four. I've got one older brother, Philip; he's three years older.

Derek was two years younger and Lisa was a year younger than he was. My mother managed a restaurant in downtown Seattle, still does as far as I know, and was at work most of the time while we grew up. Philip and I were responsible for Derek and Lisa when mom was at work, but when Philip turned thirteen, he fell in with what I know now was a bad crowd at school. They would come over to the house when mom wasn't home and bring beer. I also found out later that they were gang members and they were also bringing drugs." Raven paused to take a sip of wine.

"Did you tell your mom about it?" Kris asked after the silence grew.

"Yeah, she wouldn't believe me. Philip was her pride and joy. I was...well, I reminded her of dad and she hated him for leaving her. When she was mad, she would tell me I looked and acted just like him. After he left, she always called me by my middle name; she refused to call me Raven because he had insisted on naming me that." She saw the questioning look. "Frances or Fran if she wasn't mad at me." She answered.

"Raven Frances. I like that, it's pretty." She spread some peanut butter over a cracker and offered it to Raven. "She never remarried?"

She shook her head at the offered tidbit. "How can you eat that with wine?" She cringed at the combination.

"I like to eat really hot and spicy foods and I think somewhere along the way, I fried my taste buds. Either that or I just like really strange combinations of foods." She grinned.

"No, to answer your question. Mom's a devout Catholic, so no divorce, no remarriage and no men in her life. I think that's why she threw herself into work. So, between the two of us, she took Philip's word over mine. I tried to keep Derek and Lisa away from Philip and his friends, but Derek looked up to his big brother and wanted Philip to include him in all their fun. At first they were good to him, but then they started giving him beer. I confronted Philip but he said if I told mom he would tell her it was me giving the stuff to Derek, and I knew she would believe him, so I kept my mouth shut. After awhile, I started to notice Derek acting stranger than he did when they got him drunk but I still didn't go to mom." She poured more wine and took a healthy swallow.

"Oh god, they started giving him drugs." Kris guessed.

"Yeah, although I didn't know it at the time. I only found out by accident a few years later. They must have given him too much or had a bad batch one day, because Derek started going into convulsions. Philip's 'friends' took him into the kitchen while Philip held me back in the doorway. I really think Philip thought they were going to help Derek and that's why he kept me from going to him. But they just wanted to cover their own asses." Raven clutched the comforter so tightly in her fists that her knuckles turned white. It was like she was there in the kitchen again; everything was so clear and vivid. She felt herself shaking and felt the tears flow down her cheeks. She couldn't go through this again, she wouldn't. She was about to bolt from the room when she felt a warm hand close over hers and she slowly returned to the present.

The hurt and anger she saw on her friend's face scared Kris. She wasn't sure what she should do, but she had to try and help to ease the pain. "Raven, I'm here, it's over now." She rubbed her hands over the clenched fists and squeezed firmly.

Raven looked into sincere green eyes and took several deep breaths to slow her heart rate. "Sorry, I didn't mean to go away on you like that." She let go of the bedcover and held Kris' hands. "It felt like I was standing in that kitchen again. It's still so vivid."

"It's ok, you don't need to finish, it's too hard on you." Kris' eyes were filled with sorrow.

Part of her was reluctant to go on with the story. She didn't want to have to tell this innocent young woman that she stood by and let her brother die. Her rational adult mind knew that a ten-year-old child was not responsible but her heart still felt like she was. "No, I started and now I feel that I need to finish telling you."

Kris had leaned forward when she covered Raven's hands and had to let go as she straightened her back and sat up. She saw the flash of disappointment cross Raven's face when she removed her hands and quickly moved closer to Raven and brought one of her friend's hands into her lap. "This ok?" Kris held up the joined appendages.

"Yeah, thanks." Raven cleared her throat and looked down to cover her embarrassment at needing the contact. She regained her composure before starting her story again. "Instead of trying to help Derek they wanted to make it look like it was an accident I guess. They grabbed some kind of cleaning solution and poured it down his throat. I just stood there, frozen to the spot. The next thing I notice, is them standing in front of us, threatening us if we said anything. Then they ran out of the house and I called 911. I held his head in my lap, I didn't know what else to do, he died before they got there."

"How could they, he was just a little boy?" Kris now had tears running down her face. "And you were just a little girl, how did you get through something so horrible?"

Raven stared at the pattern in the comforter without really seeing it. "It was my fault. I should've said something to mom when it started but I didn't want her mad at me. Then when they dragged him into the kitchen I just stood there and watched while they killed him, I didn't try to stop them."

"Look at me." Kris gently took Raven's face between her hands and looked into eyes that were haunted by guilt and self-incrimination. "You were TEN-YEARS-OLD." She raised her voice, commanding attention. "How could you stop them? They would have KILLED you, too."

Raven wanted so badly to believe that someone else thought of her as innocent. "Philip ran out of the house before anyone got there. I told the police that Philip knew that his friends were responsible but he lied and said he had been gone to the mall all afternoon and had left me in charge. Mom believed him, of course, and blamed me for Derek's death. Told me if I had watched him better, been more careful, that he would still be alive."

"I'm so sorry." Kris didn't know what else to say so she drew Raven's head down to rest on her shoulder and just held her for awhile. "Did you run away?" She knew that she had helped to lessen Raven's guilt when she had not blamed her and wanted to see if there might be more weight she could ease from the woman's broad shoulders.

"No." She took the tissue Kris offered her and wiped her eyes, but never removed her head from the comfort of her friend's shoulder. "I withdrew into myself. For about two years, I did everything that mom wanted, when she wanted it. I went to mass, I attended confirmation classes and I continued to do well in school. I had always been a straight A student." She sighed deeply.

Kris realized that she was slowly rubbing her hand up and down Raven's back in a soothing motion and wondered if she should stop. 'Oh well, she doesn't seem to mind.' So she continued. "What happened then?"

She took a deep breath trying to control her emotions. "That, my friend, is a story for another time. It's late and you've had a tiring day, with trying to drown yourself and all." That and she wasn't sure she could take much more reminiscing. Raven hugged the young woman tightly. "Thank you for listening and thank you for believing that it wasn't my fault." She drugged up a smile for her companion.

"You're welcome. And I meant it, it wasn't your fault." She stood by the bed, leaned down and placed a kiss on Raven's forehead. She picked up the tray, her glass and the wine bottle. "I'll leave you your glass so you can finish. Good night."

"Night." Raven said. As she watched Kris leave her room she wondered how the young woman would feel about her after she told her the rest of the story. 'If I tell her, she'll probably be so terrified that she runs in the other direction when she sees me coming. But I seem to be compelled to be honest with her.'

Raven's senses feel an intruder near her and her body reacts without thought. She grabs the arm reaching for her, flips the attached body over hers onto the bed, pins the person with her body and with an iron grip, wraps her hand around a slender throat. When the intruder offers no resistance, Raven reaches over and turns on the bedside lamp. The low wattage bulb casts a soft light over the two prone figures on the bed. "Oh gods, I'm sorry." She quickly removed her hand. "I should have told you never to try and wake me up. Did I hurt you?"

Kris was having mixed feeling. Her body was reacting in a very positive way to having Raven's body in contact with hers. But the choking part was making her a little light headed and she really, really wanted to remain conscious just on the off chance that Raven continued the stimulating part of her attack.

Raven raised herself to her knees, straddling her companion's stomach. She placed her hands on Kris' shoulders and gently shook her when she didn't immediately receive an answer. "Kris?"

She sighed when Raven sat up, on one hand, she missed the bodily contact but on the other hand her eyes got to feast on a body clad only in a short black tee shirt and black cotton boxers with Scooby Doo on them. Kris regained her composure, by the hardest, and cleared her throat. "I always heard that politics was cut-throat, but this is ridiculous." She chuckled. "Let me go out on a limb here and guess that you're not really a congressional aid."

"I'm going to go out on a limb also and assume, that since you're joking, you're not hurt." Raven moved off of Kris' stomach and lay down on her side facing the young woman when Kris nodded that she was indeed okay. "No, I'm not." The Captain admitted knowing that she was taking more of a risk, both personally and professionally with this young woman. More than she had every done with any one before, but it felt right to confide in her. "What are you doing sneaking in here anyway?"

Kris turned on her side to face her friend. "I got up to go to the bathroom, I should know better than to drink that much liquid before going to bed, and heard you cry out. I was just going to look in on you, but you looked like you were having a nightmare, and I figured that by making you tell me about your family probably caused it so I felt bad and I didn't want you to suffer all night. So, I was going to wake you and here we are. I guess it's a good thing that I had already used the bathroom or we'd be changing your sheets about now." She returned the grin she was getting from Raven. "So, Ms. Chandler, who are you? Should I be worried that I'm sharing a bed with an imposter? Or should I be grateful that you aren't who you say you are because if you were, you would have more-than-likely lived up to my expectations of you?"

"And just what kind of person were you expecting?" Raven asked after she got past the 'sharing a bed' part. Kris explained what she had envisioned her companion to look like. "Frumpy spinster, huh." Raven raised an eyebrow.

"Not to change the subject or anything, but you going tell me who you are?" Kris asked hopefully.

"Can you keep a secret?" Raven knew it didn't matter too much about her cover story. It was just supposed to make it easier to deal with the Ambassador, it wasn't life and death. After getting Kris' assurance, she started her explanation. "Did you see the new security team that arrived the day after I did?" The girl nodded. "They're my people."

"You're in the Marines?"

"Not exactly." She gave the official version of what The Division was. And to her surprise she also told Kris what they really were. "You can get me in a tremendous amount of trouble by repeating any of this." She held up her hand to stop the obvious question. "I don't know why I told you, except to say that I trust you. And there's only been one other person I've ever trusted this much and that's John Logan."

"I won't betray that trust." She reassured her companion. "How did you get recruited, or should I say hired by this group? And how did you find out about them in the first place?"

"It's a long story." She warned.

"I'm not sleepy." She said as she sat up and crossed her legs, propping her elbows on her knees and her chin in her hands. "Talk to me, Captain. Or should I say, vee have vays of making you talk."

Raven also sat up and leaned back against the headboard. "I need to start the story where we stopped earlier." She crossed her ankles and prayed to whatever god or goddess that might be listening that her young companion wouldn't hate her too badly.

"We lived in an area that was not the greatest place to grow up, it wasn't the roughest but it was far from being considered good. I had stayed late at school one day and had to take a Metro bus home instead of the school bus and as I was walking from the bus stop, I saw one of the bastards that killed Derek and I followed him into an alley. I hid behind a pile of trash and overheard him talking to another guy that must have been from the same gang. Another young kid had died the same way Derek had. The leader of this gang was getting kids hooked young so that he would have them under his thumb. Then he would use their habit to control them so they would sell his drugs in their schools. I decided that I had a new purpose in life and that was to stop them and make them pay for what they did to my brother.

So I went behind mom's back and started taking every defense and martial arts class that I could find. I would work off the lessons by doing odd jobs in the afternoon for the instructors and take their early evening classes. Philip had a job after school by then and Mom was always at work and she kept Lisa with her. I had to lie to our priest though, I told him that mom needed help at work so he wouldn't question why I missed the confirmation classes, and then I was pretty much on my own. Right before my fifteenth birthday, I had a second-degree black belt in several different disciplines, Karate, Tae kwon do, Jujitsu and Kendo. My instructors said that they had never seen anyone advance so fast. Of course I didn't tell them what my incentive was.

Then I started hanging around the places the gang did, trying to find their leader and the others that were at the house that day. I thought that if I could get enough evidence the police would put them in jail. Well I finally did and they were. But little did I know that justice and the law sometimes are two separate things. It never even went to court; the judge threw it out. He said that the evidence was obtained illegally or something along those lines."

"So they let them go? Did they know it was you that went to the police?" Kris saw that same haunted look enter Raven's eyes that she had seen earlier. She couldn't imagine being fifteen and infiltrating a gang.

"Yes and no not at first." Raven really didn't want to tell Kris the rest of the story, but if the girl wanted Raven to be her friend, she owed her the complete truth. "I was so enraged when I found out that they were free, I went off the deep end. I started staying out on the streets at night drinking, but I never would do drugs. I'm not sure why, because looking back on it, I was really set on self-destruction." She got up and poured herself a glass of water then resumed her place on the bed. "I was arrested a few times for drunk and disorderly, resisting arrest, shoplifting, minor stuff really. That's how I met John."

"He'd been arrested too?"

Raven laughed. "Oh, I've got to tell him that. No, he's the cop that kept hauling my butt in." She offered Kris the water glass, then turned serious again. "A couple of days before my sixteenth birthday, I heard that another kid had died the same way that Derek had and the that the gang members had been questioned, but not held. By that time my family had pretty much disowned me and I didn't care what happened to me, so I went after the gang members that were responsible for Derek's death and just hoped that they were the same ones that had killed the other kids too." She cleared her throat and looked at the innocent girl that she could have been if things had turned out differently. 'That's water under the bridge though.'

Kris sensed Raven's reluctance and held one of her companion's hands in both of hers. "I know that this isn't going to be pleasant to relive, but I think it will do you some good to talk about it." She sincerely hoped it would.

Raven looked into unwavering green eyes and took a deep breath. "I've never even told John this." She admitted. "Although I think he probably guessed what happened."

"Take you're time, I'm not going anywhere." Kris promised.

Raven took another swallow of water and placed the glass back on the nightstand as she started to remember the past. "I lured the five that I knew were responsible for killing my brother to an old abandoned store by telling them that I would bring them the person that had turned them in to the police the year before. They thought I had tricked them when I showed up alone and started telling me what they were going to do to me and how much I was going to act like I enjoyed it, for making them look like fools."

Kris gasped. "They didn't...you weren't..." She couldn't finish the thought.

Raven understood what she was trying to ask. "No, Kris, they didn't get near me much less hurt me. Don't forget the kind of training I had. They were nothing but bullies with guns and knives." She noticed the relief on her companion's face. "I was able to disarm them quickly. I don't think they were used to having someone fight back." Raven glanced down; she knew she couldn't look Kris in the eye.

Raven had relived those moments in that abandoned store so many times in her nightmares that she remembered every last detail of that fateful night down to the smell of fear that saturate the building.

She stood across from the gang members and reminded them of what happened almost six years before. It took them awhile to remember and that drove Raven to the breaking point. Not a day passed for her without thoughts of Derek and they couldn't even remember him. A vicious maniacal expression settled on her face and they started pleading for their worthless lives. She remembered grinning at their useless pleas; it must have been fairly sadistic because she saw the fear in their eyes. The more she stared, the more afraid they became. The more afraid they became the stronger and more empowered she felt. She fed off the incredible rush of holding that

kind of power over someone. One guy made a run for the door but she hit him so hard in the nose with the heel of my hand she pushed the bones into his brain, he died a few seconds after he hit the floor. Another one, pleading for his life, tried to convince her that he was just doing what their leader told him to do. He walked slowly towards her, thinking she would let him go. She grabbed him and turned him to face his friends while she stood behind him, putting her arms around him quickly and snapping his neck. One of the others pulled a knife that he had hidden in his boot and charged her. Stepping to the side at the last minute and grabbing his wrist, she spun him around and used his own knife to slit his throat. As he fell she threw the knife into the chest of another one that tried to run past her to the exit. That left the leader. He was terrified, she could see him shaking and could smell the odor of urine since he at some point wet himself. She didn't realize until later, but all of her senses were heightened. She remembered the sound of their breathing and could tell the exact point when each man's heart stopped beating. Raven laughed when he started begging again. When she moved towards him, he tried to turn and run but she caught him from behind by his collar and belt. She never knew how she did it, but she lifted him up above her head and held his struggling body there long enough to tell him that they would meet again in hell. She let his body fall as she dropped to her knee, he fell across her bent leg and let his own weight break his back. The sound of his spine snapping was what always woke her up from her nightmare.

"That night I murdered five people." Tears were running down her cheeks and she tried to remove her hand from Kris' but the young woman wouldn't let go. "How can you still want to touch me?" Her voice was a combination of pain, anguish, fear and guilt.

'Oh my god, what do I say to her. She hates herself and expects me to hate her too.' "Quit, I'm not letting go." When the struggling stopped she did let go with one hand, placed her fingers under Raven's chin and lifted until green met blue. "I don't blame you for what you did. You tried to do it the right way the first time and it got you nowhere. It's not up to me to judge you or what you did. But ask yourself how you would have felt if another innocent kid had died." Kris watched hope flicker in the eyes that were locked onto hers.

"You don't...hate me?" She couldn't believe that this sweet, untainted soul could not be sickened by what she had just admitted to.

"No. How could I hate someone that stopped those monsters from hurting children? The way I see it, you didn't murder five people, you stopped five bastards from killing again." She rested her forehead against Raven's. "You went through so much at such a young age. I wish I could have been there for you."

Raven noticed the tears that had run down Kris' face and realized that they had been tears of sympathy for Raven's innocence that had died that night, not for the men that she had killed. "Thank you. But I'm glad you weren't. I wasn't the kind of person then that you should have been around or that you would have wanted to know." They held on to each other for several silent minutes.

"So, we've known each other for two days and you think you can pick and choose my friends for me, huh?" The twinkle in her green eyes and the warmth in her voice let Raven know she was

joking. "I'll tell you one thing, Captain Chandler, as long as you're one of them it's alright with me." She knew she caught her off guard because Raven sat there with her mouth hanging open. "You better shut that or you're gonna catch flies. Now, finish your story because you still haven't told me how you came to work for The Division." Kris knew that this was probably just the first of many steps Raven's soul would need to take for the healing process to be complete and she hoped that she would be there to help her new friend take the rest.

Raven closed her mouth with an audible snap. "You know, you're something else...Sagira."

"Sagira? Where did that come from? What does it mean?" She noticed the sly smile on her companion's face. "You're not making fun of me are you? You know, if you are, I just might have to hurt you." Kris feigned anger and waggled her finger in Raven's face.

"No, no, definitely not." Raven was quick to reassure her. "I meant it as a complement, honest." She captured Kris' hand that was waving under her nose and held it in both of hers. "It's an Egyptian name, meaning little one." She watched Kris take a deep breath and knew she'd better explain in a hurry. "I'm not commenting on your stature." She assured her companion. "You just remind me of one of those cute little sprites." 'Besides, you must have a magic wand hidden somewhere, because you've made me feel something other than anger and pain.'

'Yes, she thinks I'm cute.' The thought brought a dazzling smile to Kris' face. "You know of course this means I'll have to come up with a nickname for you." They settled back onto the bed with both leaning against the headboard and still holding hands.

'I wonder if I should worry about that?' Raven thought before she picked up her story from where she had stopped. "Well, to make an already long story a little longer." She explained that she had ended up in Juvenile Hall, but not for the killings. She and several others had been tested and recruited by The Division. She had gone through two years of training and graduated at the top of her class in both the physical testing and in the classroom. "After I finished the training I went back to see mom, to explain everything to her, but she wouldn't listen. She told me she never wanted to see me again. So, I haven't talked to anyone in my family for the past eight years." She felt Kris squeeze her hand and she smiled. "Anyway, I owed The Division four years of work in return for the training and for getting me out of trouble, so I started out at a low rank, worked my way up and now I have a team that I command."

"I have a feeling you're making that sound a lot more simple than it really is." Kris yawned, looked at the clock and groaned. "Tell me it's not 3 o'clock in the morning, please."

"Ok, I won't." She chuckled at the indignant expression she was receiving. "Come on, Sagira, its time for bed."

"Can I just stay here?" She realized how that might sound and held her breath. Not that she was opposed to a loving, physical relationship, in fact she was almost sure she wanted that with Raven, she just didn't mean at this particular moment.

Raven smiled and let her companion panic for a few minutes. "What would happen if I over slept in the morning and someone came in to wake me, I don't think we would be able to explain the situation to anyone's satisfaction."

"Uh yeah, I see what you mean." Kris imagined having to explain that to her parents. 'Ugh, don't want to go there.'

'And besides, I'm sleepy not dead. I don't think I could lay here without being able to hold you or touch you.' A grin slowly formed on Raven's face at the thought of holding Kris all night.

Kris had gotten up and started back to her own room when she remember that neither of them had made any move to complete the kiss that had almost happened before dinner. She quickly moved to stand beside Raven and when she looked up questioningly at her, Kris leaned down and covered Raven's lips with her own before she lost her nerve. The kiss was not meant to be passionate or erotic, it was a confirmation of trust and friendship and maybe a promise of things to come. "Goodnight, Raven."

Raven felt her lips tingle from the contact. "Goodnight, Sagira." She whispered as she watched the young woman who had captured her heart in such a short time, return to her own room. 'I think I'm in big trouble here, very big trouble. But you know what? I really don't give a damn. I've discovered that I can feel again and she's made me want to live again, not just exist.' Raven laid her head down on her pillow and smiled at the door that led to the woman that changed her life in less than two days time.

Continued in Part 2.

The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

~ Leather and Lace ~

by Greek Warrior

Disclaimer #1: This is an Uber story and the characters that appear in this story may seem familiar but aren't the same as the ones we all know and love. All the characters that appear here are made up from my deranged little mind. They're fictitious and aren't meant to resemble anyone. This is all done in fun and yes I know I need to get a life.

Disclaimer #2: Taz belongs to the folks at Warner Brothers Studios. Scooby Doo belongs to Hanna-Barberra. The X-Files belongs to somebody other than me, anything you recognize isn't mine folks, I got tired of looking this stuff up.

Warning: This story contains explicit consensual sex between adult women. If you're under legal age in your neck of the woods, go away. If you live in a place that frowns upon that sort of behavior, tell'em to kiss your derrière then talk to your Congressman, or move, or both.

Warning: This story contains violence. We are talking about a certain warrior's descendant, you know.

Note: The quote at the end of chapter one is from Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet'.

Feedback is most welcome as long as it's constructive. Remember, you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar, although I've always wondered why anyone would want a bunch of flies! I can be contacted at XWPSScribe@aol.com. Thanks for reading.

Part 2

Chapter Five:

Raven did oversleep but only by an hour. She skipped her workout remembering the Ambassador was probably in the gym since it was Saturday. She resisted the strong urge to sneak into Kris' room just to watch the sleeping young woman and headed for breakfast and a meeting with John.

John informed his Captain that two of the local grounds keepers had failed to show up for work this morning and an attempt was made to find them at their home addresses. But the only thing they found was that the addresses given had been false. The only information he had gathered on the party was the guest list, which consisted of Ambassadors and other dignitaries, their spouses and their aids. In total about 50 to 60 people that would begin arriving about six tonight with dinner starting about eight. He handed her a list of the people that had been invited. "There isn't anyone that should present a threat, but of course drivers can be changed without anyone asking questions. I think that old theory of servants being invisible is true."

"What about extra catering help, servers, that kind of thing?" Raven questioned.

"Lieutenant Marks didn't mention any."

"Check with Stephanie." She saw surprise flash across his face. "I know I said I was going to use my feminine wiles to grill her." She chuckled. "But I kind of avoided her yesterday and she's probably put out with me, so she might question why I want the info."

"Ok." John looked relieved. He had seen the way Kris and his boss had looked at one another yesterday at the pool and even though it was not a good idea to become involved with one's 'assignment', John first and foremost wanted his friend to be happy.

"Let me know as soon as you find out anything. I don't want YOU to have to cancel this shindig at the last minute." She grinned devilishly when he realized that being in charge meant he would have to do the dirty deed. "I want to stay in the background as long as possible, at least to almost everybody." She explained to him that Kris and the cook, Issy, knew her true purpose in being here.

Raven figured that Kris would be sleeping for a while longer, so she headed for the kitchen to see if she could scrounge a late breakfast. Issy met her at the coffeepot.

"You slept in this mornin." Issy announced loudly so the eavesdropping ears could hear. She continued in a lower voice. "I wanted to let you know that Leila, one of the maids, found an empty wine glass in your room this mornin and brought it to Mrs. Whitfield's attention."

Raven raised an eyebrow. "She's not my mother, Issy, and it's no concern of hers if or when I decide to have a glass of wine." She whispered.

"Yes'um, I'll cook you some eggs and bacon for breakfast." She said for the benefit of the still listening ears. She lowered her voice again. "I myself indulge in a sip now an again, but you hasta' not let the Mrs.'s know. It saves ya the trouble of listenin' to her complain and preach. Not that I got anythin' against the good book, my daddy, God rest his soul, was a Baptist preacher hisself."

"Thank you, Issy." Raven stated loudly. Meaning for breakfast and the warning.

"We's all been told to watch ya, they must be suspicious of ya." Issy warned her.

Raven explained why they were watching her by telling her about Parker's observations the day before. She started to ask Issy about Kris' relationship with the man, but was interrupted by Mrs. Whitfield.

"Miss Chandler, I would like to speak with you. You may bring your breakfast into the dining room." 'No doubt she overslept this morning because of her drinking last night.' She thought as she made her way out of the kitchen.

Raven accepted the plate from Issy, rolled her eyes at the retreating woman's back, which brought a chuckle from the cook and followed the ridged back through the doorway and into the adjoining room. "What did you want to discuss?" She asked even though she knew. Raven sat across the table from the older woman and picked up her fork.

Regina pursed her lips and folded her hands on the table in front of her. "Miss Chandler, I don't know what your normal habits are concerning...indulgences, but they won't be tolerated here."

Raven was trying hard not to laugh. "What, ah, indulgences would you be referring to, Mrs. Whitfield?" She wiped her mouth with her napkin to hide the smile that was creeping onto her face.

"I'm talking about alcohol, Miss Chandler. A social drink is one thing, but when you drink alone at night in your room, I have to wonder what other inappropriate things you might par-take in."

I could tell her I wasn't alone, bet that would get her off on a tangent. Or I could tell her that it takes at least half a bottle of tequila before I even get a good buzz going, so I really don't

consider one glass of wine drinking. Or I could go for broke and tell her that ravishing her daughter until she walked funny would be the most pleasurable of my many indulgences.'

Regina furrowed her brow at the wistful smile that appeared on Raven's face. "Miss Chandler?"

Raven unwillingly yanked her mind back to reality. "What? Oh, yes." She cleared her throat and bristled at having to be good. "Sorry, I didn't know you would consider that to be inappropriate behavior. Won't happen again." She said sweetly to pacify the woman.

Raven was left alone and thought she might be able to finish her breakfast in peace until Martin entered the room. 'It's just not my lucky day, is it?'

"Oh good, I found you." He sat down beside her. "I took the opportunity to plan a day of sightseeing for us. Kris will, I'm sure, have to stay in bed most of the day to recover from her ordeal yesterday. She's so fragile." He was consulting his list and missed the look that Raven gave him, which was for the best, considering he probably would have keeled over dead. "If we leave within the hour, we can see the Blue Mosque before prayers. Then a visit to Topkapi Palace, it's been restored and it's actually a museum now. You can even tour part of what was the Harem, where the women stayed." He clarified, thinking she might not be familiar with the term. "It's amazing to think that one man could actually have so many wives." He sighed. "Of course it also houses and display's the Spoonseller's Diamond, it's 86-carts." He just knew that all women loved diamonds. "Then we could see the Grand Bazaar or we could see the Basilica Cistern and the Spice Bazaar. We won't have time to do all three, since we'll need time to dress for the party." When he received no reply as to which Raven would rather see, he finally looked up from his list. He found himself very alone in the room. "Um, must have overwhelmed her. I guess I should turn down the charm just a bit." He got up and went in search of his reluctant prey.

Raven slipped out while the condescending, conceited little twit was running his mouth and raced for the stairs. Good luck was on her side this time; she made it all the way to her room without encountering anyone else. She heard the water from the shower cut off and knew Kris was up. Without her knowledge a smile formed and turned into a grin when a knock sounded and her bathroom door opened to admit a blonde head. "Morning."

"What's left of it." Kris stated, knowing she had slept later than usual. "I suppose you've had breakfast?"

"Yeah, I just finished actually." She told Kris about her talk with her mother.

Kris groaned and shook her head in reply. "Sorry about that. So, what are you up to today?" She didn't what to talk about her mother.

"You don't need to apologize for your mother and mostly hiding from your brother." She patted the bed beside her for Kris to sit and filled her in on his plans.

"Those are interesting places to see, but I could think of better company than Martin. Have you been to Istanbul before?"

"Yes, but not sightseeing. I have been on the tour of the Cistern, but only because a group was going in while I happen to be passing by and happen to need a place to hide for a little while." She saw the curiosity gleaming in green eyes. "Don't ask. Please?" She wasn't quite ready to tell Kris of all her exploits.

Raven remembered that it had been one disaster after another. There had been several teams of two operatives working together, tracking an arms dealer that had information of a large shipment of weapons that also contained several stolen crates of ground to air missiles. Her partner was just out of training and restless for action. They had been the team to spot the dealer. They were instructed to follow him until other teams could rendezvous with them. But Jimmy had drawn the dealer's attention and been shot and killed. Raven had killed the man and all but one of his 'associates' and recovered the computer disk, but had been shot in the shoulder for her trouble. She had needed a place to disappear and blended in with a tour group that had been headed into the underground chamber that had been built in the 6th century to supply water to a nearby palace complex.

Kris nodded. "Okay. So...do you want to do the tourist thing?"

"Probably wouldn't be a good idea. I told John that anyone leaving the embassy gets a double guard. And I doubt armed Marines would go over real well at the tourist attractions."

"Why don't we hide out up here and you can explain to me the need for double guards." She gave her companion a 'cat that ate the canary' smirk. Kris had realized this morning while taking her shower, that in all the explaining Raven had done, she still hadn't let on the reason that she and her team had taken up residence at the embassy. And Kris thought she had done a rather good job of trapping Raven into spending the afternoon alone with her where they could talk.

"Was wondering when you'd get around to asking that." Raven returned the smirk and added a wink, letting her young companion know that she would have to get up a lot earlier to trap the Captain.

"Wow, are we really in danger?" Kris asked after she had been told the story. She had eaten lunch and returned to Raven's room after telling her mother she was going to rest before the party tonight.

"After the visitor you almost had the other night, I'd say it was a distinct possibility." Raven misinterpreted the expression on Kris' face. "I won't...we won't let anything happen to you or your family." She knelt down in front of her companion.

"No, it's not that. Did you stop him from breaking in?" At Raven's nod, she continued. "You seem to be making a habit of saving me. I would have walked into my room and he would have been waiting there for me. I guess I thought he was after documents or something like that, I never thought that he might be after one of us." She placed her palm against Raven's cheek and gently caressed.

Raven felt a tingling sensation spreading through her body. She leaned into the warm, smooth skin of the person that seemed to tame the wild, dark energy that flowed through her veins. She tilted her head and kissed Kris' wrist. At the slight moan, voiced from her companion, she used her tongue to lightly stroke the rapidly beating pulse point.

Kris moaned when lips captured her wrist. She moved her free hand to the bowed head and ran her fingers through the midnight tresses. "I, uh, never knew that, oh my, that my wrist could, um, be so sensual." She was breathing hard.

Knock, knock, knock.

"Oh for the love of Zeus, I'm gonna kill who ever that is." Raven mumbled as she headed for the unsuspecting person. She waited until Kris had entered the bathroom before she opened her door. "What?" She barked out.

"Well, I love you, too." John said as he walked into the room. "I finally got the info about the party. And next time you, my friend can talk to that woman. She hates me or maybe it's just that she hates all men, I'm not sure." He stopped when he saw a blonde head poking from around the bathroom doorframe. "Hello, Kris, isn't it?"

"Yes and you must be John, nice to meet you." She said as the rest of her body entered the room. "Ah, should I leave?" She directed the question to Raven.

"Nah, you'd wheedle it out of me later anyway." She grinned at her companion then turned a more serious expression towards her Lieutenant. "So, do we rain on their parade or what?"

"Oh yeah, I think I see storm clouds gathering." He shrugged his shoulders. "What can I say, I'm a metaphoric kinda guy." He grinned sheepishly at Kris before regaining his composure and turning back towards his Captain. "Taking into account the caterers, waitpersons and drivers, there would be about fifty or so people that we haven't cleared, in and out of here this afternoon and tonight if we don't." He crossed his arms across his chest and leaned back against the wall, waiting for his Captain to make the final decision. His eyes watched Kris watching Raven. 'Oh boy, I wonder if Raven has realized the young lady has a crush the size of Texas, on her?'

Raven ran her hands through her hair and sighed. "Damn, we can't chance it." She looked up to find two sets of eyes, Kris' staring at her and John's staring at Kris. "Cancel the party, John."

John returned his gaze to his boss. "Aw shucks, I was looking forward to seeing you in that black number I was told about." He chuckled.

"Wait a minute. You're canceling the party?" Kris looked stunned.

"Have to, it's too big of a risk." Raven explained.

"Oh God! You'd better call an ambulance before you tell mother, she's gonna have a coronary." Her eyes betrayed her mirth. "Nobody's ever had the guts to try this before. Mother will have you for breakfast after she recovers." She looked at her companion.

Raven's mouth twisted into a devilish grin. "Not me, John. I'm still undercover." She laughed at the groan that came from her longtime friend. "John, call everyone together in the dining room. And remember you have the authority from the State Department and Foreign Affairs to do this if they question you."

"Lot of good that's going to do me if Mrs. Whitfield's beating me to death." He looked dramatically skyward. "Why me?"

"I'll protect you." Kris promised and patted him on the arm. Raven rolled her eyes.

Raven sobered the room by asking John if he had heard from the contact they had tried to meet with. "Uh, yeah, he turned up dead." He looked apologetically at Kris.

"Godsbedamned." Raven mumbled. "I take it that it wasn't from natural causes?" John confirmed her assessment. "I don't like this one bit. It's like somebody's always one step ahead of us. Contact the base, I want helicopters standing by to evacuate the embassy on a moments notice."

"Good as done. How much do I tell them when I cancel the party?" John knew that with the death of the informant that more-than-likely the traitor was someone in The Division.

"Anything you have to. Let's just keep me a bystander for right now." She rubbed her neck tiredly. "If there's a leak here, and they haven't discovered me, I might be able to catch them off guard."

John protested. "If it's at our end, they already know about you." This assignment was going from bad to worse. He paced while he rubbed his hand across his bald head. Raven had always teased him about that. She said it looked like he was trying to wake up his brain cells. "You want them to come after you." He voiced his guess out loud, forgetting they weren't alone and cringed when he heard Kris' stunned voice.

"What?" Kris jumped up from the chair she had been observing from. "No, you could get...hurt." She looked at Raven. "Please." She pleaded.

Raven pulled her into a hug and rested her cheek against the top of Kris' head. "I'll be okay." She moved her hands up and down the young woman's back in a soothing motion, which made Kris cling to her tighter. "Hey, you alright?" No answer. "Sagira?"

John's face showed his confused surprise at the contact from his normally stoic Captain. Then his eyes nearly bugged out at the term of endearment. Kris blushed despite her fear. "Sorry, I just...I'm a little scared that something...might happen to you." She looked up to meet a startled expression. 'I'm glad I toned that down. I really would have floored her if I had admitted that the thought of losing her terrifies me.'

Raven gazed into sincere green eyes. "John, go call everyone together. We'll be down in a minute." She heard the door softly close. "I, uh, don't know what to say." She pulled Kris back into a fierce hug. "Thank you, for caring. Other than John, Sharon and Granny, nobody's really worried about me in a long time."

'Sharon?' Kris felt a pang of jealousy. "Who are they?" She tried to casually ask.

Raven heard an odd tone in the voice and grinned. "Granny kind of adopted me when I moved into the apartment above her several years ago. She's in her, I don't know, mid-fifties. She took pity on me I guess, when she saw I ate nothing but take-out, she started cooking for me sometimes and we became friends. And Sharon is John's fiancée." She felt Kris let go of the breath she had been holding. "Come on, let's go watch your mother explode."

Kris stopped breathing, waiting for the answer. 'I know she's bound to have past lovers and probably has a current one or two. So why do I feel this way? Because I want her all to myself and I don't know if I can compete with her lovers.' She exhaled. 'At least Sharon's not competition.' "Can't cook huh?" She would save her insecurities for another time.

"I didn't say I couldn't, I just don't."

"Touchy. I'd say that means you're one step above boiling water." Kris taunted as they made their way out the door and towards the stairs.

"Hey, I can open a can with the best of 'em." She replied in mock seriousness. She lost her composure when Kris playfully bumped her with her hip on the way down the stairs. "Okay, okay, so it's not a skill I possess." Raven still couldn't believe she felt so comfortable with this young woman in such a short time. It went completely against her normal stoic attitude.

"I'm sure you have many other skills to make up for the lack of that one." Kris couldn't believe she had said that. She tried to get her blush under control as they put a little distance between their bodies before entering the dining room where most of the others were waiting.

"Ms. Whitfield, Ms. Chandler." John acknowledged the two. "We're just waiting on Mr. Lewis and we'll begin."

"I don't know what your problem is Lieutenant, but I have a party to prepare for." Regina huffed. "I don't have time to waste with your games." She stood beside the table with her hands resting on the top, leaning threateningly towards John. She was dressed in a robe and it was obvious that she was in the middle of having her hair done since half of her head held curlers.

"Sorry." Parker strolled into the room. "I had a phone call to make." Clearly by his tone, he wasn't at all concerned that everybody was waiting on him.

John's anger at the insolent aid made him forget that he was nervous. His blunt statement that there wasn't going to be a party caused a titanic uproar. 'Hell, you'd think I'd cancelled 'The X-Files'. He let it continue until all but one voice had quieted.

"I don't know who you think you are, but no soldier boy can tell me what I can and can't do." Regina's face had turned a bright scarlet color and she stamped her foot.

"Mrs. Whitfield, calm down. You're going to hyperventilate." Stephanie begged and pulled on the woman's arm, trying to get her back in her chair.

"Ambassador, you and your family are in danger." John went on to inform them of the threats and incidents that had transpired over the last few days. And was very happy to make it known to Mrs. Whitfield, that yes he did have the authority to tell her and anyone else in this building what they can and can't do. He also went on to explain exactly who they were, leaving out his Captain of course, and exactly who it was in Washington that gave them total control of the situation.

"Andrew, this is ridiculous. Everyone wants the Peace Talks to go forward." She waved her hand in John's direction. "Straighten out the 'Lieutenant' so I can get on with my preparations for tonight."

Regina Whitfield's definition of current affairs might be what the latest style in Paris is, but her husband knew his profession well and he also knew of The Division. He had done work in countries that helped support the anti-terrorist group, which meant he knew what they really were. He had continuously turned paler and paler as John had explained and now he was a ghostly white. "General Mitchell thinks we're in that much danger, Lieutenant Logan?" He used the name that John had said was one of the principles in contacting The Division. Mitchell was a close friend of the Ambassadors and was not one to panic.

"I assure you, Ambassador, that if he didn't feel that way, we would not be here." John answered the clearly upset man.

"Andrew?" Regina wasn't use to being told no.

"I'm sorry, my dear, but this is serious. We all will need to follow the orders of the Lieutenant." He stood up. "I have phone calls to make." He announced as he left with Mr. Ahmet following.

"It seems as if I also have phone calls and apologies to make. You three." She pointed to her offspring. "Have a bag to pack, according to our jailer, in case we are whisked away in the middle of the night." She walked briskly to the door. "Come Stephanie." She intoned without glancing back.

Vivian looked worried and Martin looked perturbed.

"Yes Stephanie, heel, fetch, roll over, play dead." Kris whispered as she watched the pair leave. Raven overheard and smothered the laugh before it made it's way past her lips.

"Kristen, that's not very lady like, as your mother would say." Parker reprimanded. "Come, I'll escort you to your room to pack, so that disrespectful 'person' won't have any reason to complain."

Raven saw the annoyance spread across her companion's face and she had no desire whatsoever to stop the impending rebuke. She placed her elbow on the table and rested her chin in her hand with a slight grin on her face and waited.

"You don't listen to a word I say. I just referred to Stephanie as a trained hound that heels whenever mother snaps her fingers and you, not ten seconds later, treat me the same way." She stood and glared at him with fire in her eyes. "Stuff it, Parker." She stormed off with Raven scrambling to keep up.

"I'll chalk that up to nervousness and not hold it against you, Kristen. I realize you must be scared by all this talk." He called after them, raising his voice so he would be heard, as the two women raced up the stairs.

They made it to Kris' room before they clasped in laughter. "I guess it's better to laugh than cry." Kris said as she wiped her eyes. "It's really sad, though. Mother worries more about that stupid party than the fact that we might be in danger. Parker thinks he has a right to tell me what to say and how to act. And I think Martin's more concerned that nobody will see him escorting you tonight."

Raven became subdued as she traced the pattern on the comforter across Kris' bed. "But you're engaged, aren't you? I mean that still doesn't give him the right to boss you around, but maybe he thinks it does." Raven had conveniently forgotten Parker when she and Kris had been together. She had known that the only way to stop her escalating feeling toward the young woman was to stop her heart from beating. So she had pushed any thought of Kris and Parker being a couple, to the furthest recesses of her mind until seeing him downstairs.

'God, she thinks there's something really between Parker and me.' "Everyone assumes we're engaged because mother and father want us to be. Father likes him because Parker wants to follow in father's footsteps and be an Ambassador and mother just thinks he's a good catch. Parker wants to marry me because father wants it. Martin thinks I'm lucky to have someone interested in me at all, he thinks I'm boring. Viv thinks I need to sample all the delicacies that life has to offer'." Seeing the uncertain expression, she explained. "Viv finally hit puberty at seventeen, she's boy crazy and wonders why I'm not chasing anything in pants."

"Ah, I think you should take her advice." She looked Kris in the eye and grinned. "I wear pants, most of the time." She explained to a suddenly worried young woman.

Kris understood and relaxed. "Why, Ms. Chandler, are you asking me to go steady?" She asked in her best southern drawl.

"I, uh, don't know. I've never gone steady with anyone before." It was Raven's turn to be the nervous one.

They were sitting on the bed with their legs folded under them, facing each other and Kris scooted closer, so that their knees were touching. "I'll tell you what." She laced her fingers

together behind Raven's neck. "Why don't we forget the chasing and go directly to the catching." It was a statement, not a question. She leaned her forehead forward until it met her companion's.

"I think I would like that very much. If you're sure that's, or I'm, what you want." Raven sat back and placed her fingers over Kris' mouth to stop her from interrupting. "Let me finish." Raven took a minute to compose her thoughts. "Even if you disregard my past and what I do for a living, your parents are not going to be happy, to say the least, about this. I want you to be sure that you're prepared to deal with the consequences if they don't accept your decision."

Kris thought about what her parent's reaction would be. "Happy? No, they wouldn't be happy." 'But would they accept it? She wasn't sure.' She removed her hands from around Raven's neck and grasped both her companion's hands. "I didn't realize how long we've been talking, it's starting to get dark. We better get packed before they call us to dinner." She stood up and pulled the older woman with her. She needed time to get her emotions and her thoughts under control before she threw herself and her problems into the Captain's very capable hands.

"You're a special person, Sagira, you mean a lot to me even though we've just met. I feel very at ease with you, like we've been friends forever." She pulled Kris into a hug. They stood in each other's arms, swaying to an unheard melody for several long minutes. Raven knew Kris needed to think seriously about how her life would change if they went forward. She also knew she would give the young woman all the time she needed and abide by whatever choice Kris made, her heart would let her do no less.

Kris sighed. "I still have to find a nickname for you." She pulled back and looked up. Her eyes began to shine and a devilish grin graced her features.

"Should I start worrying?" Raven asked with a raised eyebrow.

Kris had spotted the necklace that hung around her companion's neck. "No, nothing to be concerned about... Taz."

Both eyebrows disappeared beneath dark bangs. "Taz?"

"Well, I could call you devil but people might get the wrong idea. Besides I figure you like the character or you wouldn't wear this necklace. And I think you could probably explode into a tornado at the drop of a hat." She explained very reasonably.

"Mmph." Raven decided she like the nickname, she had certainly been called a lot worse. "Our personalities do kinda match." She gave in. "But his appetite reminds me of you." She jumped back before a backhand caught her in the stomach.

Kris waved a finger menacingly at the tall woman and was about to protest, when her appetite told her brain to contact her stomach. A loud complaint grumbled just as she opened her mouth. She blushed and started laughing. "Don't say a word, woman, not one word."

Chapter Six:

Most of dinner had been spent listening to either long periods of silences or complaints. Which had been voiced mostly by Regina, who was making sure everybody knew what a hardship it had been to personally call all of the invited guests to apologize. Of course Stephanie could have done it, that's what she was there for, but then Regina couldn't have griped about it.

The dishes had been cleared and everyone was sipping coffee or tea, when a loud crash from outside was heard, followed by yelling and a round or two of gunfire. Raven's first reaction was to head toward the commotion but caught herself before she darted for the door. A few minutes later, Sergeant Hardly entered the room. He gave the occupants of the room a goofy grin before addressing the Ambassador explaining what had happened and that Lieutenants Logan and Marks would be here shortly to discuss the issue further.

Seems that a delivery truck, probably the same one that had been parked by the embassy the night of the attempted break-in, had tried to drive through the main gate, without benefit of it being open. When that failed the occupants exchanged a few shots with the guards before fleeing.

The inhabitants of the dining room were exchanging nervous glances and comments when Logan and Marks arrived. John addressed the group. "None of the guards at the gate were hurt." That said for his Captain's peace of mind. "One perpetrator killed, the others, unfortunately escaped. They must have expected the gate to be open for the arriving party guests. And now that their chance of a simple 'operation' has gone down the drain, I think that they will be attacking in full force." He paused to let the meaning of his words sink in. "I'm not willing to take the chance of them succeeding, so I'm ordering an evacuation of all non-local personnel." Stunned silence, then the eruption he was expecting. He held his hands up and yelled for quiet. "The helicopters will be here in an hour. You will be taken to Izmir Air Station. That's all I can tell you right now. One of the MP's will remain with each of you until you leave the embassy." He locked eyes with his Captain and got her slight nod of approval.

Raven hung back so she could have a minute of private conversation with him. "Did you track down our other contact?"

"Yes, finally." He handed her a small piece of paper. "These two addresses are the most likely places to find him. You know what he looks like?" At her confirmation he continued. "I don't think it'll be hard to keep your disappearance unnoticed, except by a certain blonde."

"I'll talk to her before I go." Raven assured him. "Everything else in place?"

"Yes, a boat by the name of 'Ali's Ark' will be waiting to take you across to Yalova. The motorcycle will be waiting at the dock. It's about 200 miles to Izmir, so I'll give you about, say five hours, to get there before I start worrying." Although he was already doing that and he knew that she knew it, too.

She was about to reply when they heard the Ambassador calling for John. "Go see to him. I'll use the commotion of the helicopters to slip out of the embassy." He nodded and headed in the direction of the Ambassador's voice.

Kris was pacing in her room. She was not at all happy that Raven was not leaving with them. *'You're going out in this city, at night, alone, by yourself, with nobody to watch your back?'* She had known she was babbling but she couldn't help it. Then when Raven simply answered, 'Yes', Kris had pleaded with her not to go. Raven had assured her that she would be fine, and left to change into her nighttime 'prowling' attire.

As Kris continued to pace, she noticed the shy and adoring look that was directed at her by her bodyguard. He had not been privileged to the conversation between his boss and his charge. "Sergeant Hardly," She threw a charming smile at him when he turned his big brown puppy dog eyes toward her. "I would really appreciate it if you would be kind enough to get me something to eat from the kitchen."

"Uh, I'm not supposed to leave you alone." He looked down at his shoes trying to avoid getting lost in her green eyes. Kris noticed that he was a rather ordinary looking guy, not bad looking really, except for his weak chin. She felt bad about manipulating him but she was worried about Raven.

"Oh please." She did everything but bat her eyes at him. "When I get nervous, my stomach gets upset and if I don't get something to eat...well, you get the idea."

His eyes flew open. "I, ah, yeah, get the idea. I'll be right back." There was no way he was going to be responsible for the Ambassador's daughter getting sick, especially not in the helicopter. He stopped in the open door. "What should I get?" When she said it didn't matter, he hurried down the stairs.

"Yes." Kris pumped her fist in celebration. 'Now I just need to follow Raven without her knowing it.' She heard the noisy blades beating a rhythm in the air above the building and knew the Captain would be leaving soon. She hurried downstairs and slipped out the back door. She was careful to avoid the spotlights that were flooding the courtyard.

Raven advanced along the side of the building, melding into the shadows. With all the commotion, she failed to notice the figure following behind. She exited the side gate and moved down the wall that protected the embassy from the outside world as the last helicopter lifted off the roof. She watched as it passed overhead and turned southward heading for the base. As she continued her jog eastward she felt more than saw the movement behind her. She turned the corner and waited. She had recognized her 'tail' immediately. 'Damn, Kris.' She used the few minutes waiting for the girl, to calm herself. She wasn't mad at her for following, but at herself for not realizing that Kris was just stubborn enough to follow her and for it taking this long for her to notice.

Kris saw Raven disappear around the corner of the wall and lengthened her stride. She would have screamed except for the hand that clamped over her mouth. She started to struggle until a familiar voice calmed her.

"Kris, it's me." Raven held her companion off the ground until a heel connected with her shin. "Shit." She hissed as she dropped the girl back to stand on her own feet. She bent down and rubbed her tender leg.

"Raven, you scared me half to death." She took deep breaths, trying to slow her rapidly beating heart. "Oh god, sorry." She said when she saw the tall woman hunched over rubbing her leg. Then it dawned on her that she had been caught. "I can explain." She offered as Raven straightened up and glared menacingly at her. "I was worried about you. I thought you might get hurt. I know you can take care of yourself but I wanted to help." She thought about how nice a helicopter ride sounded about right now. She was almost in tears.

"Shh." Raven pulled her in against her body and gently held her. "I'm not mad at you. I just want you to be safe, that's all." She had to decide what to do, take the young woman with her while she tried to track down their contact or head for the boat immediately. She decided that Kris was more important than what she might find out even if she could track the guy down. "Come on, we've got a boat to catch." She brushed a kiss across the bent head.

"We're leaving? What about the information you wanted?" She tilted her head up but kept her arms firmly circled around Raven's waist.

"Change of plans. You matter more to me than the info I might possibly get from him. So, we're outta here." She headed them south toward the Karakoy Pier.

"We're not headed towards the docks, are we?" Kris hesitantly asked.

"Yeah, a boat ride is quicker than going around. Why? Please tell me you don't get seasick."

"No, not on a big boat or the ferries." Kris explained. "If it's a small one, Taz, you better hope the waters calm."

Raven sent a silent request to Poseidon for a nice smooth crossing. Raven scanned their path when the hairs on the back of her neck stood up and her eyes darted to the darkened doorways and alleys they passed. She knew they were being followed but with all the civilians around she couldn't react until she had pinpointed their adversaries. She pulled her companion closer and picked up her pace. She turned her head and noticed a shadowy figure that accelerated his walk also.

Kris felt the tension practically radiating from the body next to her. "What is it? What's wrong?" She tightened the grip of her right hand in Raven's left and leaned closer into her companion's body, seeking the comfort and security the tall solid frame provided.

"We're being followed." She tilted her head slightly, listening. "No matter what happens, I want you to do as I say, when I say it. If I tell you to run, you run." She looked down into suddenly fearful green eyes. "No arguments this time, okay?" She gave Kris directions to the pier and what to tell the Captain of the boat in case they became separated.

"What about you? I don't want to leave you. Please, don't make me." She pleaded.

"I'll be alright." She tried to reassure her companion. "I've got on a bullet proof vest." She hoped that might comfort Kris' panic. It didn't, Kris tightened her grip.

"Please, don't leave me." She whispered and clutched Raven's hand so tightly that she almost cut off the blood supply.

"Okay, Sagira." She wished she could take the girl in her arms and hold her, but now was not the time. "What do you say we make a break for it?" 'Now I wish I'd taken the time to have her put on my vest. I'll never forgive myself if anything happens to her.'

They continued to swiftly walk southward. Kris moved slightly away from Raven's side, but kept her death grip on the woman's hand. "I thought we were running?" She questioned as they continued their walk.

"We're about to." Raven answered. They had left the area that contained the embassies and were now passing storefronts. The road to her right had become more congested with automotive traffic, just as the sidewalk had become crowded with pedestrians. She had been hoping to lose the tail in the more populated area, but they were proving to be adequate followers. She was now just hoping they wouldn't try anything with this many people around while she was waiting for an opportunity to make a run for the boat. They had been walking towards the flow of traffic on a one-way street when Raven saw the chance she had been waiting for. "You see the bunch of cars heading for us?" Kris nodded. "We're going to wait until the last second and cross in front of them, so our pursuers can't follow us. Don't worry, I'm not going to let you get run over." She squeezed her companion's hand once to reassure her.

"I trust you." Kris said matter-of-factly, like it was an everyday occurrence that she put her life in the Captain's hands.

Raven almost stopped walking at the simple admission. She would have to wonder about where that came from later. "Ready." She waited until the last possible second. "Go." She put her arm around Kris' waist to help pull her quickly across the road. They made it to the other side just before the stream of traffic made it impossible for their pursuers to follow. She turned them down an alley that would take them to a workers entrance to the pier to avoid customs, the man on the gate had been bribed earlier. They were halfway to the end of the alley when she felt a presence behind her. She knew there had to have been at least one following on this side of the road, but she had not been able to pick him out of the crowd. She pushed Kris behind a stack of crates before she turned and drew her gun. She felt the impact of the slugs hit her vest just as she fired her own weapon. She saw the man hit the pavement of the alley as her body impacted with the wall behind her.

John prayed all the way to the base. His gut told him that the girl had followed Raven even before he and Hardly had searched the embassy. He was thankful that he was on the last

helicopter, at least it would delay telling Whitfield and his wife. He would have to send out teams to try and locate her if it happened that she wasn't with Raven, but he would find that out when his Captain radioed in from the boat. And if lady luck were with him, that call wouldn't be long after they landed. After they touched down he made his way to the large recreation building where his charges were being guarded.

"Lieutenant Logan, where's my daughter?" Andrew Whitfield's voice bellowed over the mumbling of the other inhabitants that very quickly became quiet. The Ambassador marched toward the reluctant leader and stretched his short stature trying to look him in the eye.

John inwardly cringed. "Ambassador, I'm sure she's fine. She eluded the guard assigned to her and left the embassy."

"Well, what kind of idiot let's an innocent girl get away from him?" The irate father yelled.

"He shouldn't have had to worry about her trying to get away. He wasn't supposed to tie her down, just protect her." John raised his voice also.

"Oh God!" Kris felt like she was moving in slow motion. "Wake up, please." She captured Raven's face in her hands and caressed tan cheeks with her thumbs until blue eyes opened. "Where are you hurt?" Kris panicked looking for traces of blood. Raven was hurt and it was up to her to take care of her companion. "Raven?" She called again and waited for the unfocused eyes to zero in on hers.

Raven looked up at the soft lips that were inches from hers. She started closing the distance before the realization of where they were stopped her. "If I tell you later will you kiss it and make it better?" She chuckled at the startled expression. "Ow!" She rubbed her head where it had connected with brick wall behind her. "Come on, help me up and let's get outta here before we end up with an audience."

"You're okay?" Kris wasn't convinced even though she helped her friend up.

Raven rapped her knuckles against her chest. "Vest." She explained the clunking sound and found her arms full of a relieved blonde.

"Lieutenant?" Sergeant Hardly ran up and held out a headset to him. "It's the Captain."

John grabbed the thing and jammed it over his head and against his ears. "Logan." He informed the mike.

Raven had been debating on how much to make him sweat before she admitted to Kris being with her. "How are things on that end?"

He knew it would go easier if he just came clean and told her that they had lost the girl. "Uh, we, or that is to say I, seem to be missing someone." He was wondering if Sharon would mind if he retired, as he waited to see what would be left of his butt after it was chewed.

"Really? That someone wouldn't happen to be a short, feisty blonde, would it?"

John relaxed when he heard the voice in the background. "Short? I told you before I'd have to hurt ya if you ever called me short." John grinned and turned to the Ambassador and his wife. "Your daughter is with the Captain and she's okay."

"John, we're on the boat now and we'll be there in about four or five hours. Make sure everything's ready to go, I want to leave when we get there."

"We'll be ready." Raven signed off before he could ask her anything else. He handed the headset back to the Sergeant and faced the group of people. He advised them to eat the meal that was being provided to them and try to get some rest. He was heading towards the door when Andrew and Regina Whitfield stopped him.

"I've been informed by my wife that Miss Chandler, Kristen's companion, is also missing."

"She's with your daughter, Ambassador." He wasn't about to enlighten them to the fact that his Captain was their daughter's companion. 'If they can't put two and two together I'll let Raven deal with it when she gets here. Serves her right for making me admit I'd lost her before telling me the girl was with her.' "Anything else I can do for you?" He tried to keep his voice neutral.

"Yes." Andrew replied, not bothering to keep the arrogance from his voice. "Tell your Captain that I want to see him, as soon as he gets here." He tried to look down his nose at the man facing him. Not an easy task when the other person is almost a foot taller. "That will be all." He dismissed the man.

John rolled his eyes as he walked away. 'I've got to be sure that I'm here when he finds out who the Captain is.' He chuckled all the way to the command center. 'He obviously doesn't have a clue.'

"You really think I'm feisty?" Kris asked rather shyly.

Raven wondered what happened to the playful young woman from a minute ago. "Yes I do." She placed her fingers under her companion's chin and raised the lowered head. "I think that you've got a good heart, you're kind, you're trusting, that you look for the good in almost everyone and that you're very beautiful. I also don't think that you're short, just vertically challenged." Raven grinned.

Kris didn't know what to say to all the incredible compliments she was receiving. She looked into sincere blue eyes as the flattery continued. She blushed and looked down when she was

called beautiful and it took a minute for what Raven said next to register. She jerked her head up to see a playful grin spread across her companion's face. She tried to look stern as she responded. "Yep, I'm definitely gonna hav'ta hurt ya for that." But couldn't keep the matching grin from her face as she pulled Raven close. Well, as close as one could when both were wearing unyielding bulletproof vests.

As soon as they had boarded the boat, Raven had launched into a conversation with the boat's Captain in Turkish, no less. Kris stood by, only understanding a word or two that she had picked up from the embassy staff, before Raven pulled her below deck. "What was that all about? It sounded like an argument and you never told me you could speak Turkish." She stood by while her companion opened compartment after compartment. "What other languages can you speak?"

"He was upset that there was two of us, he was only expecting one. They tend to get nervous if things don't go as planned." She moved to another crate. "And I speak enough of the language to get by." She seemed to find what she was looking for. "Here, let's see if this will fit you." She held it up to judge. "Take off your jacket." While Kris complied, Raven answered her last question. "A little Italian, some Spanish and German, a little more Arabic and Greek, and a smidgen of Russian. It comes in handy in this line of work if you can speak a little of the language of the place you're being sent." She placed the vest over the young woman's shoulders and had to catch her before she collapsed.

"These things are heavy." She said as she bounced up and down trying to get use to the extra weight.

"They're not that heavy, you just weren't expecting it." She adjusted a strap. "This one is not as large as mine, but it's still a little big for you. See if you can move around in it."

Kris did as asked. "You know, out of all those languages, the one other than English that I speak you don't." Raven raised her eyebrow in question. "French." Kris answered. "I wanted to learn Spanish, but the tutor we had at the time only knew French. And mother thought it more appropriate that I learn a romantic language. They had made their back on deck and were sitting in the bow of the boat, talking.

"Hugging isn't easy with these on." Raven griped and kissed the forehead that was level with her lips. "Come on, Sagira, we're about to dock."

"Okay, Taz, but you owe me a hug when we get out of these." She reluctantly released her.

Raven waited until the boat moved away from the empty dock. Still in a crouch she moved them towards a chain-link fence that bordered the piers. About twenty yards down from where they started, she stopped them and pulled aside a section of fence that had been cut and motioned Kris through. After several minutes of moving from shadow to shadow, Raven stopped them again, this time in front of a sleek blue motorcycle. "Ever ridden one before?"

"That?" Kris pointed to the bike. "No. Mother said they were too dangerous. And this one looks like it'd be really, really fast." She couldn't keep an excited grin off her face.

"She was right, they can be. And this one is fast." Raven zipped up the black leather jacket that she had confiscated from the boat for Kris to wear. She placed the helmet she had also swiped from the boat, much to the Captain's irritation until she promised that he would be compensated for the items, on the girl's head and secured the strap. She raised the visor. "We'll be going pretty fast, so I want you to keep your head down behind my back if it bothers you. And I want you to put your arms around my waist and hold on tight, okay?" Kris nodded. "Oh, one more thing. On the turns I need you to lean with me and the bike, don't fight it."

"Lean into them, got it." She looked thoughtful. "Holding you might be a hardship though."

"Smartass." Raven closed the visor with an audible snap. Then proceeded to attire herself in the same fashion as her companion. She showed Kris where the footrests were and settled in front of the girl. She turned the key and grinned from ear to ear as the 1200cc engine roared to life. This bike had been customized for her after she complained that with the throttle on the right, she would have to shoot left-handed. Not that she couldn't, but she had better aim with her right hand. So, out of the complaint came this, 1999 model Triumph Trophy pacific blue in color, as she requested.

The 99's hadn't even been delivered to the dealers when she had taken her first ride, which had been on a closed test track. She had pushed the bike to near 200 mph on a smooth straight away and had been hard-pressed not to jump for joy. She instead returned to the waiting onlookers and simply said, "It'll do."

About an hour and a half into the ride, Kris patted Raven on her side and the Captain pulled over. "You alright?"

"I uh, gotta go." She said apologetically and shrugged her shoulders.

Raven turned her attention to the area beside the road. "Pick a bush." She said when she turned her head back to Kris. "It's not like they're in short supply."

She raised her visor and the similar one on her companion's helmet to see if Raven was pulling her leg. "You've got to be kidding." She stated hopefully. When a raised eyebrow was her only answer she swallowed audibly. "No way, there's scorpions and snakes and lizards out there." She shivered.

Raven threw her leg over the front of the bike and held her hand out for Kris to take. "Come on, Sagira, I'll chase all the creepy crawly's away."

They were about thirty minutes away from the base when Raven stopped the bike in the middle of the road and looked behind them. "Oh shit!" The Captain complained. "I should have known better than to think this would be simple."

"What? What is it?" All Kris saw were lights headed in their direction. After all it was a road, even if it had been deserted for the past three hours. Then she noticed them spread out. It wasn't normal cars coming down the road, they were coming cross-country and heading at an angle to get in front and cut them off. "Oh." She shuttered when she comprehended the situation.

"Kris, I want you sitting in front of me." She said in a 'don't argue with me' voice.

"Why? I can't hold on up there." But she was already in motion.

"Yes you can." Raven showed her where to put her hands so they wouldn't get burned or interfere with her controlling the bike. She pulled Kris' hips back against her tightly "If they start shooting at us, I don't want your back exposed." She explained. "Lean forward and stay as low as you can." She had the bike speeding down the road as fast as she could and still control it on the curves. She kept one eye on the road and one on their pursuers. 'Hades take me, we're not gonna make it unless this gods be damned road straightens out.' She used her right hand to partially unzip her jacket so she could reach her guns. She also released the strap that was holding the Vz.58 assault rifle securely in place beside her leg.

Chapter Seven:

"Lieutenant Logan." One of the airmen assigned to the base yelled. "They're on their way in, but they're being followed."

"How far out are they?" John started for the door; he didn't want the other's to hear anymore.

"About ten miles. You can get a good view from the roof of this building, there's not time to get to the tower."

He reversed his direction and took the stairs two at a time. He knew the embassy personnel who had been startled out of their sleep when the airman had yelled were following him, but didn't take time to stop them. He heard the gunfire before he spotted the bike. He also noticed two choppers with air to ground missiles starting their engines and knew that they wouldn't get off the ground in time to prevent the chasers from catching the chaseses, it was up to Raven to beat them to the base. The main gate was open and waiting.

"I don't see them." Regina complained. "All I see is a cloud of dust."

"There." Parker pointed.

"Oh my God." Andrew groaned when he also noticed the speeding motorcycle.

Raven saw the straight road that they needed if they were going to have a chance at out running their pursuers. She grasped the handlebars with both hands to hold the bike steady and opened the throttle all the way. As they picked up speed she wondered if the Ancient Greeks had a god

she could pray to for a good smooth road, because if she hit a bump or a hole at this speed there wouldn't be anything left of them for the terrorists to capture.

Kris opened her eyes when she felt the speed increase and wished she hadn't when she saw what used to be landscape become a complete blur. She quickly shut them again. Then she heard the shooting and was suddenly very grateful than Raven had made her get in front. 'She probably has this kind of thing happen to her all the time.' Her respect for the woman went up by leaps and bounds as each minute passed.

Raven was extremely tired of being shot at by the one vehicle that had managed to take a better angle than the others and almost catch them. It was positioned off the road to the left and a little behind the bike. She knew that it would be a lucky shot if one managed to hit her because of the rough surface the vehicle had to deal with, but it was still possible and if it happened she wouldn't be the only one that paid the consequences. She grabbed the rifle and steadied it by resting it across the left arm. She then slowed the bike down long enough for their pursuers to come up beside them. She held the trigger down and hoped she hit the driver or something vital that would stop them before the magazine ran out.

"Come on, you can make it." John mumbled over and over again. He felt as helpless as he did on the last mission when Raven had been captured. Everybody on the roof held their breath when the bike slowed down. All eyes moved as one as the car they thought would overtake the motorcycle started flipping end over end before it exploded in a ball of fire. John let go of the air he had trapped in his lungs as the bike regained its speed. He knew that they would now make it to the base as the helicopters lifted off to turn back the others that still followed.

Raven had slowed down before entering the base. She headed in the direction of a hanger that she was being waved toward. She shut off the bike and had to help Kris pry her fingers loose and sit up. "Are you okay?" She asked as she removed the helmet from her companion's head.

"Yeah, I think so." She responded shakily. She was about to thank Raven for saving her again, but turned instead to the commotion of a multitude of people trying to get through the door into the hanger all at the same time. It reminded her of the old Keystone Cops silent movies and their slapstick kind of comedy.

They all managed to gain entrance without killing each other and gathered around the bike. "Kris, you scared us to death when you weren't on the helicopter. Thank God you're safe." Vivian broke the silence.

"What do you mean by running off like that." It wasn't a question. "You're grounded for the rest of your life, young lady." Regina Whitfield scolded her eldest daughter.

The Ambassador stood next to the still helmeted figure. "Well, Captain, I can't say much for the men under your command, they could use a little more training I believe. But I'd like to thank you for saving my headstrong daughter." He dug himself in deeper as Raven loosened her chinstrap. "She just needs a husband to keep her in line, if you know what I mean?" He chuckled until he saw the long black hair fall from under the helmet as it was lifted off and the cold as ice blue eyes greet him.

"No, Ambassador, I'm afraid that I don't know what you mean." She pinned him with her stare.

"Miss Chandler." He backed up a step or two, slightly embarrassed. "Lieutenant." He shouted. "You told me that my daughter was with your Captain."

"Yes I did." John didn't offer anymore and turned his attention to a person walking towards them.

The commander of the US Squadron that made the base it's home, stood in silence for several minutes glaring at the assembled mass. His eyes came to rest on Raven who raised an eyebrow at him. The others were beginning to get nervous with this bear of a man staring at them. "Damn, girl, you sure know how to make an entrance." He smiled and pulled her into a hug that would have collapsed her lungs if she hadn't had the vest on.

He had been one of Raven and John's instructors when they had gone through their two years of training. It had also been her team that pulled a group of civilians out of a dangerous situation in South America that his son happened to be one of. "Come on, Cuddles, put me down." She had hung that nickname on him because of his fondness for hugging people that he cared about.

He placed her back on her feet. "You are the only one that I let get away with calling me that, Captain." He turned serious. "You had us worried for a minute back there."

"I had myself worried, too." She admitted. "But I promised my friend over there, that I wouldn't let anything happen to her." She inclined her head towards Kris. They talked while The Division's C-17 was pulled from the hanger.

Kris had managed to tell John about the incident in the alley and that she wasn't sure if Raven had been hurt or not. So when she finished her conversation with the commander, they cornered her. "Where were you hit?" John knew from first hand experience that even though you were wearing a bulletproof vest, the impact could still break bones.

"I'm fine." Raven protested to deaf ears. "Oh, alright." She removed her jacket and pointed to her right ribcage.

John leaned down and extracted the two slugs that were still embedded in the vest. "He got off two shots?" He questioned, then glanced at the probable reason, Kris. 'She would have made sure the girl was out of the way first.' "Let's get this thing off and see if you're just bruised or if a rib is broken."

Kris took the two flattened slugs from John as he started taking the vest off his Captain. The result of what would have happened to Raven if she hadn't been wearing the vest hit her hard. 'Thank you, thank you, thank you.' She said a prayer to who ever was responsible for making sure the Captain was protected.

Raven held up the hem of her tank top in order for John to examine her side. A large bruise had started to darken her skin as he prodded and poke her ribs. "Ow! Not so hard." She noticed that they were being watched but no one ventured very close. "Did headquarters know that Kris and I were on our own?" She lowered her voice so that only John and Kris heard.

"Yes, Simmons radioed in right after we landed." He followed her possible line of thought. "You don't think that's why you had company, do you? You could have just been followed."

"No." Raven shook her head. "I would have picked it up and besides, there were better places to catch us than right before the base." She explained. "There's nothing we can do about it from here, so let's keep it to ourselves. But tell Simmons no more messages."

"It's just a bad bruise." He announced as he stood up. "But your ribs probably should be wrapped."

"I can do it, if you've got an ace bandage." Kris offered as she looked from Raven to John and back.

"We have a good stock of first aid supplies on hand and as soon as the planes secured you can get on board." John responded.

All three stiffened when Andrew and Regina advanced in their direction. "Captain Chandler." He said with contempt dripping from his voice. "I must protest." He made it obvious that he was looking her over from top to bottom. "I will NOT take orders from a woman who thinks she can do a MAN's job." He stood in front of her with his fists on his hips. His wife was standing beside him with a smug grin on her face.

Raven straightened her back, taking full advantage of the difference in their height. "Your protest will be noted, Ambassador." She kept her voice even and calm. "But you, your family and staff are my responsibility and until we reach Washington, I'm afraid we're stuck with each other. So I suggest you make the best of it, sit back and enjoy the ride." She turned with the intention of walking away, but his voice stop her.

"No, MISS Chandler, I won't." Andrew Whitfield had never had to deal with very many strong women in his life and most of those just turned a deaf ear because it was easier than dealing with the man and his out dated attitudes.

Raven slowly turned around to face him. She had dealt with people trying to bully her most of her life and this guy was an amateur. She ignored his title as he had hers. Not that she really cared less about them, but she returned the insult. "Mr. Whitfield." She had moved to stand about a foot in front of him and looked down. She resembled a predator looking at its next meal. "You

will get on that plane or I'll pick you up and put you on it." She had her hands clasped behind her back and remained outwardly calm, but her voice rumbled dangerously low in her chest. "Do I make myself clear?"

Kris stared in awe as Raven transformed from the friend that she had comforted two nights ago into a hardened, battle trained warrior that she had a tiny glimpse of on the boat and a little longer glimpse of on the bike. The warrior, as Kris was beginning to think of her, stood proud and confident. Kris wished that she had a fraction of that self-assurance. 'Maybe if I did I could have taken control of my life sooner.' Her attention was drawn back to the minor conflict when she heard her mother's voice.

"You can't threaten the Ambassador that way." Regina said with a fair amount of hostility.

The Captain smiled but there was nothing friendly about it. She noticed out of the corner of her eye, one of her men signaling that the plane was ready. "I strongly suggest that you get on the plane, Ambassador, before I carry out my 'threat' in front of your staff and your family." This time when she turned, she did walk away. She motioned for Kris to follow her on board.

Kris was enjoying the bewildered looks that followed the Captain as she headed up the ramp and into the plane and had to jog to catch up. "That was a first." She said when she was even with Raven. "I've never seen anyone order him around before."

Raven grabbed a first aid kit and walked several more steps before coming to a sudden halt. She turned to her companion. "I wasn't ordering you to follow me in here." She was worried that Kris might have been frightened by the way she intimidated her father. "I mean I would never just order you around like that unless your safety depended on it."

Kris was again amazed at the way Raven could go from a fearless warrior to a very insecure woman. She saw an almost frightened look on her friend's face. 'She thinks I'm scared of her. That I'll run away from her.' She reached out and laced her fingers through her companions. "I know that." She blushed. "That intimidation thing you did was actually kind of sexy. In fact," Kris figured she might as well finish totally embarrassing herself. "I bet you look very hot in a uniform."

It was Raven's turn to blush. "Uh, we don't have a uniform, unless you count dull grey or drab green fatigues." 'If just thinking about a uniform does that to her maybe I should push for dress blues or something.' Raven opened the door to the small compartment that she used as an office and sleeping quarters. She smiled, bowed and motioned for the young woman to precede her.

The plane was one of two C-17's The Division had. It was a four-engine monster that was designed as a cargo plane for the military. Part of the large cargo area had been sectioned off and used as sleeping compartments for the crew and any passengers that might be on board. It also had a fairly comfortable seating area for two-dozen people, a small galley, two toilets, communications and navigational areas behind the cockpit and as John had mentioned earlier, a small first aid center.

Kris placed the kit on the desk. "Take off your shirt." She instructed her patient as she removed the bandage from its protective cellophane wrapping and didn't hear Raven come up behind her.

"Is that a proposition, Ms Whitfield?" She wrapped her arms loosely around Kris' waist. Raven didn't want her companion thinking she was pressuring her into anything.

Kris turned around and placed her arms around Raven's neck. "It is if you want it to be." She answered shyly but sincerely.

That caught Raven off guard. She had only been playing with Kris, not trying to inflame the desire that was speeding through her body and that she now saw smoldering in the green eyes. She lowered her head slowly as Kris rose up to meet her. They both hesitated a second, expecting the usual interruption. When it didn't come, they both continued their motion, closing the distance between them. They both watched hypnotized as tongues darted out to moisten suddenly dry lips. Eyes closed as mouths met in a brief delicate kiss. Heads tilted in opposite directions as lips met again. A moan from her companion was all that was needed to drive the last rational thought from Raven's mind. She drove her tongue into the slight opening left by the escaping erotic sound. She knew she had lost all control when she blindly backed Kris against the wall.

Kris heard the moan and was mortified that something that sounded so lustful came from her. But when Raven's tongue entered her mouth, she didn't care. She moved her arms to circle Raven's waist and slipped them under her shirt to caress bare skin. When she felt the wall behind her back, she opened her stance slightly to accommodate Raven's body between her legs. She grabbed two handfuls of Raven's backside and pulled the woman roughly into her. "Please." She begged as their mouths parted for much needed air.

Raven's hands rested on Kris' thighs as she thrust her hips against the young woman pinned to the wall, before rational thought returned. She took deep breaths, trying to calm the passion that raced through her body. "Kris, I want you, desperately, but not like this. I want our first time to be special, not with you pushed up against the wall." She straightened up and pulled her companion to her. She ran her hands soothingly up and down Kris' back and kissed the top of her head. "Is that okay?" Kris nodded her head. "Are you okay?"

"I, uh, yeah, I'm good." She looked up into blue eyes. "I'm sorry, that's never happened to me. I've never felt like that before. I was completely out of control."

"I'm the one that needs to apologize, I know better. I just sorta lost it when we kissed. I've never felt like that after one kiss, either." Raven replied honestly. No one had ever gotten to her like this young woman had and she wasn't so sure it was a good thing, but she knew she couldn't stop it and if the truth were known, she didn't want to.

They held each other a few minutes longer before Kris pulled back. "Come on, my warrior, I need to take care of your ribs."

Raven raised both eyebrows in surprise. "Warrior? Where did that come from?"

"That's what you reminded me of when you faced down my parents. And besides, a soldier is a kind of warrior." She reasoned as she began wrapping the bandage around her companion.

With their extra-curricular activities they didn't have time to change clothes before having to join the others in the seating area before take-off. They heard the raised voices before they entered the cabin. Kris just shook her head when she heard her mother's voice and then Parker's, complaining. Raven pinched the bridge of her nose. With the desire she felt for Kris still coursing through her veins and the irritation of dealing with these people combined with a possible traitor somewhere in The Division and lack of sleep, she was developing one Hades of a headache.

"What seems to be the problem now?" She didn't raise her voice but nonetheless captured everyone's attention as she stood just inside the entranceway to the seating area.

Kris had entered first and moved into the room resembled a lounge that you might find at an expensive hotel. And the seats looked more like leather executive chairs that you would find in a boardroom than in a plane. They were arranged into groups of two with a small table in-between. She saw her sister sitting with Issy and headed towards them.

Raven saw that Simmons was the one under attack, not John. 'He must have escaped to the cockpit. Wish I'd thought of it first.' She saw the haggard look on the poor man's face and addressed the two troublemakers. "Well?" She noticed the Ambassador sitting by himself, quietly staring out the window and wondered if she should be worried about it. But now she didn't have time to wonder if he'd given in or was he plotting something.

"We aren't even being told where it is that you're TAKING us." Parker made it clear that he was against the entire evacuation.

"This whole thing is absurd." Regina continued. "You come to us under false pretenses, take advantage of our hospitality and put God only knows what kind of...ideas into my daughter's head. Parker was right, you're one of 'those' women." She stared at the muscular arms that were folded across the Captain's chest and particularly at the tattoo that surrounded her right biceps. She had had a Greek Key design done after she had finished her training; it was done in a deep rich purple color and was about a half inch in height.

Kris had taken a deep breath to give her mother a piece of her mind, but hesitated when she felt her sister's hand on her arm. "Let Ms...Captain Chandler handle it. It'll only make mother more irrational if you jump to the Captain's defense." Vivian reasoned.

"You know she's right, child." Issy added and Kris held her tongue.

Raven raised an eyebrow and chuckled at the older woman's righteous attitude before she turned to Parker. "Mr. Lewis, you've not been told because we've just received clearance for our destination." She addressed the entire room. "We will land at the NATO Base which is also a US

Naval Air Station in Keflavik, Iceland to refuel and re-supply. From there our final destination is Bolling Air Force Base just south of Washington, DC. We should be landing in Washington by tomorrow morning barring any unforeseen delays."

When there weren't any questions or comments directed at her, Raven turned her attention back to Regina. "First of all, Mrs. Whitfield, the false pretense was necessary because of you and your husband's attitude towards women in any authoritative position. Although I'm not sure why that doesn't apply to you, because you sure as hell like to boss people around. Secondly, hospitality doesn't enter into it. I wasn't a guest and you definitely weren't friendly." Raven was surprised that the woman had kept her mouth shut. "And if you mean that I work out and that I'm in a position to give orders and have men follow them, then yes, I'm one of 'those' women. And as far as Kris is concerned, I'm not aware of putting any ideas into her head. She has a mind of her own and can make decisions for herself with out any help from me." She paused and debated, then added. "You don't have to like me Mrs. Whitfield, this isn't a popularity contest. Which is a good thing, because I'm damn sure neither of us would win."

Regina Whitfield closed her mouth with a snap. She was completely taken aback; she had never been talked to in that manner before and was at a complete loss. Her entire repartee of scolding remarks seemed to have left her.

John walked in and was immediately aware of the fact that the tension in the room was thick enough to cut with a knife. He looked from his Captain to the woman she was staring down and cleared his throat. "We've, uh, received clearance and are ready to taxi and take-off if everyone will take a seat and buckle-up."

Raven acknowledged her lieutenant, took a seat and closed her eyes. She would let Kris decide if she wanted to associate with her after Raven's verbal thrashing of the young woman's mother. 'Idiot, you couldn't hold your tongue, oh no, you had to put her in her place. Well Raven, I hope you're happy. You've pretty much made Kris have to go against her mother in order to have anything to do with you.' She berated herself. Her headache was getting worse, she was exhausted and she was quickly becoming rather pissed off at the world.

"Hey." Kris sat in the chair next to Raven. "That was quite an accomplishment." She elaborated when she received a confused expression. "I've never seen her speechless before." Kris was aware of the fact that showing her allegiance to Raven would cause all kinds of problems later but she also knew that this was the first step for her to take control of her life. "You okay? You look tired." She saw the drawn features on her companion's face.

Raven opened her eyes and saw the look of genuine concern floating in the normally bright green eyes that now were somewhat dull. "I am." A simple statement from most people, but from the stoic Captain it was a breakthrough of her tough exterior. The image that she presented to her colleagues and to the world in general, was a self-sufficient, don't need anybody, individual. Not that she wasn't self-sufficient, she definitely was. But she did admit at least to herself, that after meeting the young woman sitting beside her, she most assuredly needed Kris in her life. "You don't look that bright eyed and bushy tailed either, my friend." She squeezed Kris' hand that was rubbing her forearm. "It's just been a very long and extremely grueling night."

'She called me her friend.' Kris smiled and a little of the twinkle reappeared in her eyes. She was very aware of the fact, even in the short time she had known Raven, that friend was more than just a word to the complicated woman. "I can understand the 'bright eyes' part of that saying, but the 'bushy tail'? I'm personally very glad that I don't have one. I'm sure you will be too." She tried to stay completely serious but the corner of her mouth turned up at the raised eyebrows and grin from her companion.

'Well, well. She can be playful at a time like this.' Raven didn't try to keep the grin from forming on her face. She felt the plane gain speed and lift off as she leaned in close to Kris' ear and whispered huskily. "I'm sure I will be, too. But tell me, are there any...bushy...places that I should be made aware of?" A blinking red light attached to the phone on the forward bulkhead interrupted her before she could continue which was a good thing considering they had an audience.

'Oh my God.' Kris was trying to control her breathing and her desire. She could feel the heat rising from point's south, upward across her neck and face. She could also feel the moisture collecting on her underpants and crossed her legs. 'I'm certainly glad I didn't have time to change into clean clothes.'

The Captain hung the phone up and turned. "The pilot says we should have a smooth flight until we start our decent into Keflavik, then it might get a little bumpy. If you're hungry, there are sandwiches, fruit, cereal and a couple of different hot meals the base provided. If you want to rest there are small rooms with cots where you can lay down or you can stay here. The flight deck and the cargo area are the only places that are off limits on the plane." She announced. "Our ETA is about six hours."

Several people started moving around and a few headed towards the food. Vivian squatted down beside her sister. "You ok?" She asked puzzled. "You look a little flushed."

Kris cleared her throat. "Uh, yeah. I'm fine."

"You hungry? I was going to grab a sandwich or something. You want to join me?" Viv looked a little spooked still.

Kris and her sister had grown apart over the last few years. Ever since Kris had finished her schooling, they had spent less time together since Vivian was still with the tutor a good portion of the day. But when they had been younger, especially when they stayed with their grandparents, they had been inseparable. Strange since Vivian and Martin were twins and twins in most instances seemed to be connected to one another. But this wasn't the case, Vivian and Martin barely tolerated each other. Kris had often wondered if she and Viv might have been found on the doorstep, since neither one of them seemed to share their parent's personalities. "Yeah, I could eat. Let me tell Raven."

They looked over their choices and Kris grabbed a turkey on sourdough, an apple and a can of Pepsi while Viv took pastrami on rye, two chocolate chip cookies, a bottle of iced tea and one of

water as well. They sat down at a small table in a room just off the galley. "This has, um, been different." Vivian took a swallow of her drink.

Kris chewed a bite of sandwich and swallowed. "Yes, it has." She wasn't sure if Vivian was upset or just trying to fill the silence.

"That cute Sergeant Hardly is headed this way. I think he has a crush on you." Viv grinned at her sister's 'why me' expression.

"You think he's cute?" Kris asked as she wrinkled her nose.

Viv wagged her hand back and forth. "In a hound dog sort of way, yeah." She responded in a whisper. "And he seems like he's a decent kinda guy."

"Sergeant Hardly, I guess I should apologize for tricking you. I hope you didn't get into too much trouble." Kris said sincerely.

"Don't you worry about that, ma'am. I'll forget all about it if you call me Herman." He looked at her with an expression that was a cross between goofy and endearing.

'Oh boy!' Kris wondered if this day could get any worse. 'Scratch that, I don't want to know.' She didn't want to be mean to the poor man, but on the other hand she didn't want to encourage him either. "Ah, Herman, thanks for not holding it against me."

Vivian was aware of the fact that Kris was squirming and decided to have some fun. She figured they'd had a really horrible day and she was entitled. "Herman, why don't you sit down and join us. I'm sure you have a few stories you could tell us. After all a big brave soldier like yourself must have some heroic tales to tell." She didn't dare look at her sister; she knew she would lose it if she did. It took all of her control not to break down at the puffed-up look of importance the Sergeant was emanating.

"Hardly." A voice rang out behind him.

He jumped to attention, knocking his chair over in the process. "Yes, Captain."

"Lieutenant Logan is looking for you." She waited until he had scurried off before she unceremoniously collapsed into the righted chair. "Hey." She addressed the other two table occupants.

"Hey." Kris responded. "You should eat something, in fact I'll go get it. What'cha want?" She was going to make sure Raven got something to eat and then got some sleep.

"Ham and cheese if we've got it and a bottle of water, please ma'am." She leaned forward, placing her forearms on the table.

Vivian watched her sister disappear through the door. "Captain Chandler, is it?" She turned to the older woman. "Kris seems to like you. Our parents seem to dislike you. That could cause problems for my sister and I don't want to see her hurt." She looked into blue eyes that held many different emotions. From worry to sadness, pain to what might have been a little bit of fear. But Viv noticed the expression soften into tenderness and turned to see what caused the change. She watched Kris walk back to the table and place the food in front of the Captain.

"I brought you an orange." She put it in Raven's hand. "Eat it." She commanded. "It's good for you, full of vitamin C." She looked at the uneasy body language of her tablemates. "What?"

Raven took a bite of sandwich and swallowed before answering. "Vivian is concerned about you siding with me over your parents." She rushed on before the ire she saw building in the young woman's body, exploded. "Sagira, she doesn't want to see you get hurt and neither do I." Raven had to stop herself from reaching out to comfort her upset companion.

The endearment and sentiment soothed the savage beast, somewhat. Kris took a calming breath. "Viv, I know you mean well, but I'm an adult and I'm not going to let them dictate the way I live my life. Not anymore." She looked down at the table and drew patterns in the condensation left by her can of Pepsi. "I couldn't be happy being Parker's showpiece, you know that. I don't love him, I love...my writing." Her mouth stumbled over what her heart wanted to say but she wasn't sure if her sister could handle her being in love with the Captain. 'Or is it that I'm scared that I can't handle her not being able to handle it?' She questioned her own insecurities.

Vivian watched the non-interaction between the two women, which was just as telling as if they had comforted one another. Raven tensing her muscles to stop her arm from reaching out to hold Kris' hand that rested on the table not far from hers. And the looking down by Kris to hide the look of total adoration in her eyes every time she glanced at the Captain. Viv wasn't going to broach the subject of love for them. Viv also wasn't going to tell her sister that she had figured out that Kris was probably gay. She had often wondered about that ever since the lack of interest shown by Kris, not just in Parker but in all boys in general. She leaned over the table to capture her sister's full attention. "I know. And I think you should follow your...heart. Hopefully father and mother will understand that Parker's not the one for you, but if they don't, it's their loss. Don't give in, Kris." She patted her sister's hand and turned to the Captain. "What did you call her?"

Lighter conversation followed while Raven finished her sandwich and ate her orange under the watchful eye of her companion. They stayed together at the table passing some of the boring hours that usually made a long flight seem longer.

They returned to the lounge area to strap themselves in when the telltale sign of ears closing up meant the plane's decent into Iceland had started. They had been spared the withering looks of Regina Whitfield and the seething comments of Parker since neither had been seen after takeoff. And were still pleasantly missing. The Ambassador seemed to be in a world of his own. He had reclaimed his seat after taking advantage of the services offered by swallowing a quick meal.

"How long are we going to be here?" Kris asked while the plane taxied from the runway towards one of the hangers.

"An hour tops." Raven answered. "Just long enough to file a flight plan, restock supplies and refuel. Why don't you go try to get some sleep? It's going to be a long night, at least what's left of it and a very long day tomorrow if you don't." She had to stop her traitorous hands from reaching out to caress Kris' cheek.

"I think I will, I'm beat." She cleared her throat and looked down. "Can we...ah...I mean...will you join me?" She blushed. "Why am I so shy after what we almost did several hours ago?" She questioned herself. "Just to hold each other, I mean." She clarified. "You said you wanted...it...to be special and all." She turned redder when she realized what she'd said. 'Oh God, I can't even call it making love or sleeping together, I had to say 'it'.' She fought down her embarrassment and turned her attention to her companion when she realized Raven was speaking.

Raven wondered why Kris was so embarrassed. She knew that there were some people that couldn't talk about sex. Oh they could do the kinkiest things in bed, but ask them to talk about it later and they'd faint dead away. Or could it be that she was just inexperienced? And if she was, was it because of being with another woman or was it being with anyone? 'I'll have to find out later, now is not the time or place.' "Yes." She answered and smiled. "I have to talk to the base commander first, but I'll join you after."

Kris leaned over the small window and watched the tall woman walk along the tarmac towards the car that was headed her way. The wind whipped the heavy arctic jacket the Captain was wearing, around her body. "What am I going to do with you, Taz?" Kris mumbled. "It must be freezing out there and you don't even zip your coat up." She sighed and made her way to Raven's cabin.

Captain Chandler and Lieutenant Logan spent most of the time they were on the ground in the base's communications center receiving instructions and relating the details of what had happened, to Colonel Albright. Raven did tell him about the possible infiltration at the embassy by the two supposed groundskeepers, but didn't mention that she thought that they might have a leak at headquarters.

She entered her cabin to find Kris asleep in her bunk and a smile quickly spread across her face. She briefly wondered how long it had been since she had smiled this readily and this much. She gently sat down on the edge of the bed and brushed the blonde hair away from the peaceful face and discovered sleepy green eyes trying to open. "Shh, go back to sleep, Sagira. I didn't mean to wake you."

Kris propped up on one elbow. "Not until you join me." She brushed her lips across the palm of Raven's hand that she had placed on Kris' cheek.

"I should get cleaned up." Raven really didn't want to do anything but crawl into bed, hold and be held by Kris.

"Come on, Taz, we can take a long hot shower tomorrow." Kris said sleepily. She blushed when she realized what she had suggested.

Raven chuckled. "But I'm too tired so move over." She climbed in bed after she changed into a clean t-shirt and pair of boxers.

Kris held up the cover so Raven could get underneath. They snuggled up together, wrapping arms around each other and legs adjusting to find comfortable positions. They held one another in silence, listening to and feeling the slow and steady inhale and exhale of each other's breath. Both women had been nervously considering the direction their lives were headed. Both knew that they wanted the other one to be a major part of their life, but were afraid that the other may not be quite as serious. Kris tilted her head back and looked up at her companion who was also still awake. "Can I ask you something?"

"You have to ask me that after all I've told you? What else could I possibly keep from you?" Raven grinned.

Kris saw her companion's blue eyes sparkle with playfulness from the small lamp that Raven had left on for Kris so she wouldn't have to get up in a strange place in the dark. "What's going to happen, with us, when we get home?" She hated to turn serious but not knowing was driving her crazy. "I know Seattle is a long way from Washington DC, but I don't want to lose you."

Raven wiped a lone tear away that had run down from the pleading green eyes that were begging her to make everything okay. She decided to be honest with the young woman that had gotten so far into her battered and dark soul, that Raven feared what she would do if she ever lost her. "Kris, I don't want to lose you either." She kissed the forehead that her cheek was resting against. "Colonel Albright told us tonight, that we would be continuing to head up the security for you and your family, until the government relieves us. That'll take a couple of days at least." She took a deep breath. "I don't know how you want to handle your family or how much you want to tell them, but be assured that I need you in my life, Kris. I don't know how to make any relationship last, much less a long distance one, but I want to try."

"What do you mean by long distance?" She was afraid that Raven didn't want her to come to Seattle.

"Well, with me working in Seattle and you working in DC, I call that long distance." She explained to her very confused looking companion.

It suddenly dawned on Kris that Raven must assume Kris had wanted to be involved in the political world and wanted to work in DC. "No, I never wanted to work in politics. Just because I wrote my father's speeches they assumed that was what I would do until I was married. No, definitely don't want to do that, I hate politics."

"Really?" Raven felt better. "So tell me, what does a speech writer that hates politics want to do?" She felt arms tighten around her waist.

'Spend the rest of my life loving you.' Kris grinned. 'Maybe I'd better not dump that on her just yet.' "I want to write science fiction or maybe fantasy fiction or possibly mysteries. My parents don't know this but I've sold some short stories to magazines. My grandparents keep and invest the money I've made for me."

"Have you, ah, ever had the desire to see Seattle." Raven was a little nervous about asking Kris to move that far away from home to live with someone she hardly knew. "Maybe come for a visit and see if you might like living there?"

"Not until I met you. Now I would live anywhere as long as you were there too." She swallowed hard. She was unsure of what Raven was really asking her and she didn't want to make a fool of herself, but she had to know. "Raven, are you asking me to live with you?"

"Please think about it before you answer." Raven rushed ahead. "I know this is sudden and if you want to get separate apartments or what ever, it's okay. I just want you close to me."

"I don't need to think and I don't want separate anything." She saw relief and happiness settle on her companion's features. She tightened her arms around the strong body and laid her head on the Captain's shoulder. She sighed in contentment. 'Haven't you figured it out by now, Taz? I love you and I'm not letting you get away.' Kris wished she had the courage to voice that out-loud.

Raven let go of the breath she was holding and sucked another one in deeply. "Thank the gods for that. Because the only way you could get rid of me now, is to drop me from the plane." The joy she felt in her heart flowed throughout her entire being. "Oh, in case you haven't figured it out either, Sagira, I don't want separate anything's either." They kissed, but didn't let it get out of hand like earlier. It was a kiss to confirm the love they felt, but couldn't yet admit to each other. Not one to ignite passion, and although they found it hard to break apart, they did. "Goodnight, Kris."

Kris brushed the backs of her fingers down Raven's cheek, then snuggled back down into Raven's arms. "Goodnight, my warrior." Sleep came surprisingly easy for both women, considering the gauntlet of emotions that they had run in the last twenty-four hours and the uncertainty of what would happen in their future.

Continued in Part 3.

The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

~ Leather and Lace ~

by Greek Warrior

Disclaimer #1: This is an Uber story and the characters that appear in this story may seem familiar but aren't the same as the ones we all know and love. All the characters that appear here

are made up from my deranged little mind. They're fictitious and aren't meant to resemble anyone. This is all done in fun and yes I know I need to get a life.

Disclaimer #2: Taz belongs to the folks at Warner Brothers Studios. Scooby Doo belongs to Hanna-Barberra. The X-Files belongs to somebody other than me, anything you recognize isn't mine folks, I got tired of looking this stuff up.

Warning: This story contains explicit consensual sex between adult women. If you're under legal age in your neck of the woods, go away. If you live in a place that frowns upon that sort of behavior, tell'em to kiss your derrière then talk to your Congressman, or move, or both.

Warning: This story contains violence. We are talking about a certain warrior's descendant, you know.

Note: The quote at the end of chapter one is from Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet'.

Feedback is most welcome as long as it's constructive. Remember, you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar, although I've always wondered why anyone would want a bunch of flies! I can be contacted at XWPSScribe@aol.com. Thanks for reading.

Note: Astolpho's at the Marcello Hotel is a completely fictitious restaurant and hotel.

Part 3

Chapter Eight:

The plane landed at Bolling Air Force Base, just south of the DC area, to a grey overcast drizzling October day. They stood under the plane's wing to stay dry while waiting for the representative from the State Department that was meeting them. "I don't remember it being quiet this cold this time of year." Kris moved to stand beside Raven. "Thanks for the parka." She had her hands stuffed inside the pockets and her head squished down inside the collar of the drab olive green coat resembling a turtle inside his shell.

Raven had to stop herself from putting her arm around Kris' shoulders and pulling her close. Instead she smiled at her companion. "You're welcome." The sound of footsteps approaching drew her attention. She watched the Ambassador close the distance between them.

"Captain." He stood nervously beside the taller woman.

'Well that's an improvement.' She inclined her head in acknowledgment. "Ambassador. What can I do for you?" She indiscreetly winked at Kris letting her know that it would be okay if she left them alone.

"I had a conversation with General Mitchell after we landed this morning. He's on his way here along with the State Department's representative." He paused a minute to organize his thoughts.

'Oh boy.' Raven rolled her eyes. 'I wonder if the General told him that he's still going to be stuck with me for awhile.'

"I was informed that your team would be...with us a little longer." He cleared his throat and stared off into the distance. "I was also told about some of your...accomplishments and the general also told me in no uncertain terms, that I ought to consider myself lucky that you took this assignment in the first place." He rocked back and forth from heel to toe with his hands clasped behind his back. "Doug, General Mitchell, basically told me that I was being a fool and if I wanted to live to be an old fool that I had better listen to you and if you say jump, the only thing I should question is how high." He looked at her for the first time since he had started talking and saw what he thought might be a sparkle of amusement in her eyes.

"General Mitchell seems to have a way with words." She turned serious. "Ambassador, I just want to do my job and keep you and your family safe. If what I ask of you seems unreasonable, I assure you it's not. I'm not in the habit of explaining myself or my actions, but I will try to answer legitimate questions." She looked sideways at the shorter man.

"Fair enough, Captain. But I'm still not comfortable with a woman in charge." He turned his head to meet her gaze.

"I can't change your...opinion of what you see as 'a woman's place', but I am very good at what I choose to do, Ambassador."

He grunted an acknowledgment and watched her back as she moved away from him towards her team members. He had sarcastically asked Lieutenant Logan just before they took off from the air base in Turkey, how it felt to 'betray his gender and tag along through life clinging to a woman's skirt'. And was surprised by the brown eyes that looked at the Ambassador, filled with pity. "Pretty damn good." The Lieutenant had said. "Considering that I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for 'that woman' pulling me out of hellhole after hellhole. Be careful of what you say about her, Ambassador, you might find yourself up shit creek without a shovel. This team respects her and would follow her anywhere, hell, she's saved most of us at least once." That answer had at least quieted the Ambassador during the flight and at most gave him pause to rethink one of two of his opinions.

Kris filled the vacated spot beside her father. "Is everything okay?" She questioned wearily. She had overheard part of the conversation, surprised by her father's almost apology, which had surprised her and exonerated her father somewhat for his earlier behavior.

Andrew looked at his daughter's profile and sighed. "That is one very dangerous individual, Kristen."

"Yes, she can be." She forced her gaze away from the woman in question and looked at her father. "But I suppose anyone can be dangerous if given the right circumstances." She countered. She sighed deeply; she knew where this was leading. "Father, I won't stay away from her, she's my friend. And that's something that I haven't had too many of in my life, so I won't give that or her up." A test of wills, the first one between father and daughter, was interrupted before a clear

winner could be determined, by the arrival of the General, the person from the State Department and the cars to take them home. Kris knew it was just the beginning, but she also felt like she had accomplished a Major victory by just standing up to her father in the first place.

Andrew Whitfield watched in silence as the cars slowly moved closer. He turned to his daughter to correct her assumption that this discussion was concluded but she had moved away from him to join her sister. On the surface he was annoyed that she had challenged him. But deep down he was proud that she had stood up to him for someone she believed in. He also grinned a little at the fact that she had gotten the last word in, something that no one had done in a long time, except his wife that is.

For Raven and her team the rest of the day was spent installing security cameras at the Whitfield's house that was located in the Bethesda area off MacArthur Blvd in Montgomery Country just outside the central DC area. The Captain quickly discovered it was more of a mansion than a house. It had been an early wedding present from Regina's parents. They had sold their restaurant, retired and moved to Marsh Harbour in West Ocean City on the coast of Maryland leaving their daughter in D.C. attending classes at Georgetown. They hadn't realized their mistake of their overindulgence and how it contributed to Regina's supercilious attitude until it was too late.

The house was centered on two and a half acres of landscaped grounds, surrounded by a ten-foot high brick wall. The house was a huge two-story colonial that looked to be perfectly square. Six bedrooms and three full baths occupied the second floor, while the first floor contained a formal dining room to the right of the front foyer and a living room to the left. A modern kitchen with a walk-in pantry, a den/office for the Ambassador and a study for his wife and a library, plus a few small workrooms for the Ambassador's staff, completed the ground floor. There was a half basement that had been converted into a family room. The area behind the main house was taken up with six small connecting cottages for the staff. Which consisted of Issy, the maid Leila that had been with them in Istanbul, Eleanor the maid that had remained behind at the house, the butler Robert that had also remained behind, and the two secretaries Stephanie and Ismail. Raven learned that Parker would be occupying one of the empty bedrooms in the main house.

The Captain commandeered the remaining unclaimed room for the members of her team to use while on duty. They would run round the clock shifts until the State Department could spare personnel that could take over for them. Which wouldn't be until four days from now since the White House was having a costume ball on Halloween. 'Bet that put the Secret Service's undies in a wad.' John had stated once the representative had joined the Ambassador in his office. The off-duty people would share rooms at the Grand Hyatt at Washington Center.

Raven had just finished the conversation with Colonel Albright about the additional checks on the butler and maid that they hadn't had a reason to check before now and she talked at length about her concerns of a possible leak on their end, when Kris found her. "How about some dinner since I know you skipped lunch?" She stood behind the dark head with her hands resting on broad shoulders.

They were, for the moment, alone in the spare bedroom, which now looked like a security control room with all the small TV monitors that were showing different parts of the house and grounds. Raven tilted her head back to look up at her companion and let a tired smile cross her face. "I'd love some."

They entered the dining room to find most everybody else gathered there. Issy had set up a buffet style dinner for them and the two women joined the end of the line just in time to hear Regina complaining about the arrangement. "I don't like eating food that other people have come in contact with." But that didn't stop the fork in her hand from completing its journey into her mouth, which was almost always in the open position.

Kris shook her head and rolled her eyes. "I happen to like a good buffet myself." She said loud enough for Issy, who was filling the soup tureen, to hear. Which earned her a wink and a huge grin from the cook.

"They've got the best buffets that I've ever eaten in Las Vegas. Some of the hotels have a Champaign brunch on Sundays." Raven responded.

"That sounds decadent." She wiggled her eyebrows up and down. "I've never been there, is it a fun place?" She piled her plate high with spaghetti noodles then poured sauce over them then added several meatballs and on top of them dumped Parmesan cheese."

Raven watched in wonderment at the mountain that was taking shape on top of the plate Kris held. 'She probably had lunch too.' She was getting full just looking at the plate. "You forgot the garlic bread." She announced when Kris bypassed the basket.

"Oops, thanks for reminding me." She leaned back and snatched a couple of pieces.

"Yes." Raven remembered the question she had been asked. "It's a lot of fun even if you don't gamble. They sat down at the table next to each other. She caught herself before she added 'We'll have to go sometime'. That was something the rest of the people in the room didn't need to hear, yet.

"Do you?" Kris asked after she wiped the sauce off her chin.

"Do I what?" Raven speared a fresh mushroom out of her salad bowl and popped it into her mouth.

"Gamble." Kris clarified.

"Oh. Not really, but I do like to play the slot machines. I've been known to try blackjack, but I'm not very good at it, I usually lose more than I win." She explained.

"Are you talking about the computer games?" Viv asked when she overheard their discussion.

"No, Las Vegas." Her sister corrected.

"Now there's an immoral place." Martin jumped into the conversation.

"Correct me if I'm wrong, brother dear, but you've never been there so how would you know?" Viv challenged.

"Because of all the gambling and drinking. And I bet you didn't know that prostitution is legal there." Parker jumped to Martin's defense. "The good thing about that is at least they have to pay taxes like the rest of us and they don't have to hide any 'medical' problems at free clinics that we pay for." He added smugly.

"Considering you don't live in Nevada, Parker, you wouldn't be paying for them." Kris pointed out. "Besides, they're just supplying a demand."

"Ooh, good one." Viv complemented her sister, which aggravated Parker.

"Well, if wives would give husbands what they need, there wouldn't be a market for it." He replied with indignation.

The two sisters were looking at him like he had finally gone off the deep end. "Were you born this stupid or do you have to take pills everyday?" Viv asked.

"Parker." Raven had been sitting quietly through the 'discussion'. "You seem to have several opinions on prostitution. So tell me, where did you learn all the, ah, ins and outs about it?" She kept the smile off her face by the hardest considering Kris and Viv were snickering. She couldn't just sit by and let them have all the fun. 'This guy is just too easy.' She thought as she calmly watched the meaning of her jest sink-in.

Parker's face was turning a dangerous shade of red. He sat as still as a statue for a minute before he threw his napkin onto his half finished plate of food and stood. "You." He pointed at Raven. "Are an unnatural bitch. And I'll advise you to stay away from my fiancée. She's mine!"

Kris jumped to her feet at the comment. "I don't belong to you, Parker. And I'm not your fiancée. You never asked me to marry you. You, mother and father just assumed it because that's what all of you wanted." She never raised her voice. "And I'll pick my own friends and thank you to keep your nose out of my life." She refused to let him see how upset she was and calmly sat back down to finish her meal.

Parker opened and closed his mouth a few times without any sound emerging before storming out of the room. "Good for you." Viv praised her sister. "Bout time you told him off."

"You okay?" Raven moved her hand under the table, placed it on Kris' thigh and squeezed encouragingly. 'So much for a quiet night.'

Kris pushed a meatball around with her fork. She heard her sister's words of praise and shrugged her shoulders as if to say, 'I should have done that long ago'. A smile immediately came to her face at Raven's concern and a burning feeling traveled through her body to settle between her

legs when she felt the woman's hand on her thigh. She shuttered and almost moaned. "Yeah, I'm, ah, fine." She managed to say and rein in her desire. She cleared her throat. "I'm just glad mother and father had left the room before that happened." 'I know he'll go tell them but maybe I'll get a reprieve until tomorrow.'

The next four days passed uneventfully. Parker had either not said anything about the argument or Andrew and Regina had chosen to let it go. Viv stated that she thought Parker was so embarrassed about being told off, that he decided to pretend it didn't happen. Either that or the fact that the morning after the confrontation in the dining room, an invitation for the Ambassador and Regina to the costume ball at the White House had arrived and distracted them.

Halloween morning came too quickly for Kris, she knew she was running out of time to tell her parents that she was leaving with Raven when she went back to Seattle. The Division's team would be packing up the next day to make way for the Secret Service. Although she and Raven hadn't been able to talk about their plans, she did know that the Captain and John would be staying a few extra days to brief the team that would take over security.

"Kris?" Viv knocked on her sister's bedroom door and entered. "Gwendolyn is downstairs."

"Gwendolyn?" She sat up in bed surprised.

"Yeah, you know, the person you were like this with growing up." Viv had crossed her index and middle fingers.

"I remember who she is." Kris stuck out her tongue at her little sister. "I'm just surprised she's here." Kris' correspondence with her childhood friend had dwindled over the years. When her father became an Ambassador and the family moved away, the two girls wrote each other religiously. After several years, the contact became cards at holidays and birthdays and only an occasional letter. "Tell her I'll be down in a minute." She asked Viv as she grabbed her jeans and started getting dressed. In fact a card last Christmas was the last time they had been in touch.

Kris found her old friend sitting in the living room, sipping tea. Gwen had dark red hair that fell to her shoulders with eyebrow length bangs. A light dusting of freckles dotted her nose and cheeks and even though Gwen's pallor was rather pale they had started to fade somewhat, with the onset of winter and the lack of sunshine. Her friend was a couple of inches taller than Kris but probably weighed about twenty pounds more. Kris didn't remember Gwen being quite so heavy looking, she had always been skinny, so much so the other kids in the neighborhood called her toothpick. But she looked healthy and happy and that's all that mattered. The woman was dressed in a wool tweed skirt that came to her knees, brown, orange and white in color with a white cashmere turtleneck sweater. "Gwen." Kris called to her friend. "It's so good to see you again." A smile on her face as pale green eyes met darker green ones.

Gwen returned the smile as she stood to hug her childhood friend. She placed a peck on each of Kris' cheeks as she stepped back. "Let me look at you." Gwen grasped Kris' hands and held her

arms away from the young woman's body. "You look...like you just woke up actually. You did, didn't you?"

"Yes." Kris admitted laughing. "I still don't do mornings. But this morning I went back to bed after we got home from early mass. So I have an excuse." They sat together on the couch. "Tell me what you've been doing."

"I have a feeling my life has been boring compared to yours. We heard why you came back so suddenly, with the terrorists and all."

"Really?" Raven pushed off from the doorframe she had been leaning against and stood menacingly in front of the redhead. No one had informed her of the stranger's appearance at the door and she was pissed to say the least. "And just who did you hear this from?" It came out more as a menacing growl than a question. She looked down on a pale face that suddenly turned whiter.

"My...my father." She explained to the dangerous looking woman towering over her. "He...he works at the Pentagon."

"Raven." Kris stood up with her hands on her hips looking quite miffed at the way her new friend was trying to intimidate her old friend. "Captain Raven Chandler, meet Gwendolyn Mitchell. General Mitchell's daughter, we grew up together." She turned back to Gwen. "You'll have to excuse tall, dark and deadly. She takes her job rather seriously."

"I, ah, didn't mean to frighten you." Raven felt like a fool. Her protective instincts started working overtime when she saw the stranger sitting with Kris. She was also a little jealous at the affection the two women seemed to share.

"Actually it's not Mitchell anymore, I got married last January." She turned her attention back to Kris. Her father hadn't really told her about the reason for the Whitfield's return, she had overheard him talking to the Ambassador on the phone. She had also overheard the part about the person standing in front of her now, and that person was even scarier in the flesh she decided.

"Really? Who'd you marry? Anybody I know?" Kris interrogated her old friend, totally ignoring her new one.

Raven tuned out the conversation. 'Damn, I really think she's pissed at me. Well, why wouldn't she be you idiot? You practically threatened her friend.' She stopped kicking herself and turned her attention back to the two women.

"No you don't know him, but that's the reason I stopped by, to ask you to go to the opera tomorrow night with Harold and I. We could go to dinner before hand and it would give you and Harold a chance to meet. We have two extra tickets so you can ask your fiancé Parker to go. I just met him before you came downstairs; your mother introduced us. What do you say?" Gwen asked.

Kris was a little apprehensive with telling Gwen about Parker. That would mean she would have to explain why she wasn't marrying him, she never could keep a secret from her childhood friend and she wasn't sure how Gwen would react to the news of her falling in love with Raven. Especially after a few minutes ago when it looked like Gwen would faint from the look the Captain had given her. 'So what do I tell her?' She refused to look in Raven's direction thinking she would see a look of pity on her friend's face at what Kris was sure was cowardliness on her part. "I, ah, don't know. I mean we'd have to clear something like that through security. So maybe we should plan on doing this another time." 'Please drop it so I don't have to deal with this.' Kris silently begged.

To Raven, the sound of Kris' voice conveyed distress and reluctance. 'Why doesn't she just tell her about Parker? I don't understand.' But then one of the few insecurities she had reared its ugly head. 'Because that would mean questions that Kris is...is what? Is too ashamed or afraid to answer?' Raven's expression turned hard when Kris wouldn't look at her. 'That gives me my answer, she's ashamed.' She stood and left the room now wondering if the shame stemmed from her being a woman or from the type of person she was.

Kris had not noticed the array of emotions crossing Raven's face in her reluctance to face her companion but did give her a curious expression when Raven stood suddenly, which went unnoticed since the Captain didn't look in Kris' direction as she left. Kris vowed to find her friend later and focused her attention back on Gwen.

"Kris?" Gwen shivered and picked up her friend's hand. "She's scary."

Raven paced the length of the command room several times before stopping to stare out the window, which overlooked the staff cottages. The two members of the team that were monitoring the views from the security cameras glanced in the direction of their Captain with puzzled expressions. They were use to their Captain being stoic or indifferent or angry, they were even use to bored. But they didn't know what to make of the expression of defeat that inhabited her face. The two men exchanged worried looks.

"Corporal Franks."

"Yes, Captain?" The older of the two men acknowledge her.

"I'm taking your next patrol." She informed him and left the room. Leaving the two men scratching their heads in confusion.

During the next hour Kris and Gwen talked, slowly catching up with each other. The entire time, Kris tried to think of a way to politely get out of going to the opera in case security allowed it. The only thing she could come up with was to tell Gwen the truth but she still wasn't sure she

could handle that. She was contemplating how she would react to her friend's negative response if that were the case, when her mother entered.

"Gwen, good you're still here. I told Parker about tomorrow night and he said that he would take care of the Secret Service." She turned to her daughter. "Kristen, you will have to have something new to wear. I'm sure that you didn't pack any of your dresses before we left the embassy considering that horrible woman and her orders for packing only one suitcase."

"Mother, you know perfectly well that there was a valid reason for that." Kris said with a tinge of anger in her voice. She didn't notice the questioning expression she received from Gwen since she was glaring at her mother. 'My reason for not going just flew out the window, thanks mother.' She thought as she rubbed her suddenly aching temples. 'Oh well, how bad could one night be? Besides, I'm going to see Gwen and meet Harold, not to be with Parker.'

"Whatever, dear." Regina dismissed the possible confrontation. "Now go find one of 'those people' to take you shopping. I'm sure Gwen would be happy to help you since I can't go. Invitation to the White House you know." She stated with self-importance as she glanced in Gwen's direction. "Go on, Kristen." She added when her daughter hadn't moved.

Kris left the room in search of Raven. 'God, if I can just get through today and tomorrow night, maybe everything will be alright.'

The Captain had returned from her circuit of the grounds to her vigil at the command room window. She had hoped having to concentrate on the patrol and the solitude would clear her head and her heart from the feelings of pain and betrayal, but it hadn't. 'Shit, Raven, get over it.' It wasn't working. She felt like crawling under a rock and hiding. 'You're a big girl, deal with it.' A sigh escaped her throat as she rubbed her eyes.

The door opened and Kris' head appeared. "Ah, there you are." She turned to close the door and didn't see Raven's posture stiffen. "I seem to be stuck with having to go to the opera tomorrow night and I need something to wear." She stood beside her friend at the window and reached her hand out with the intention of placing it on top of Raven's that was resting on the windowsill.

Raven saw Kris' hand moving towards hers. Before contact was made, she stuck her hands in her pants pockets and turned towards the two men at the monitors. "Who's available to escort Ms. Whitfield shopping?" To Raven, the gesture meant a double standard. 'It's okay if my friends and associates know about us; she probably thinks she's an improvement for me. But I guess I'm a step down to a lower class, an embarrassment to her if her friends found out.'

Kris looked at Raven quizzically. She had no idea what her reluctance over not telling Gwen, had done to her friend. "I thought maybe you could take us." She addressed the Captain's back.

"I have other things to do." She answered. 'I just have to last until six tonight, then John takes over. Then a couple of hours tomorrow morning when we turn everything over and then I can get out of here for good.'

Franks answered his Captain's inquiry. "Hardly and myself."

"You're it." The Captain ordered. This time she left a very confused young lady behind as she hurriedly left the room.

"Uh, ma'am?" Franks addressed Kris. "Anytime you're ready."

'She's got some explaining to do when I get back.' Kris pulled her eyes away from the door Raven had disappeared through. "Let's go." She told the man waiting by her side.

It was after six when the shoppers returned and Kris was told that the Captain had already left. Not deterred in the least, she went in search of John and found him in the kitchen talking with Issy. Kris, still unaware of her roll in Raven's withdrawal, questioned the Lieutenant on his Captain's behavior. Yes, he had noticed that something was wrong. No, she hadn't said what it was and no, he didn't ask.

"I have found, over the years, when she's in that kind of mood it's definitely better not to ask." He explained. "The only thing she did say that I found puzzling was, and I quote, 'Don't call me unless the house is being invaded or someone disappears, if anything else happens, I don't care and I don't want to know', then she left. Did you two have a fight or something?" He asked as he stuffed the rest of Issy's apple pie in his mouth.

"No." She replayed the day in her head. "We barely spent any time at all together."

"Nothing you can do tonight. I suggest you talk to her tomorrow. She'll be here to turn things over to the 'SS'." He rinsed his plate and put it in the sink. "Don't worry about it, I'm sure whatever is bothering her has nothing to do with you." He reassured Kris. "Damn, I hope she's not still having problems from the last mission." John mumbled, but it was loud enough for Kris to hear.

"What problems?"

John wanted to kick himself. He hadn't meant to say that out loud. "She was captured and...hurt during her last mission. It was my fault really but she'd tell you it wasn't." He held up his hands to stop the questions he knew were coming. "It's not my place to say anymore. You'll need to ask her about it, but I'm not sure she'll be willing to talk about it."

John left a worried young woman and headed up to the control room to start his watch, while Kris headed for the dining room and dinner.

Raven was walking along the river, parallel to the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. She wondered at her own sanity when she looked up and noticed the building directly across from

her. The Kennedy Center, which is where the Washington Opera performed, which is where Kris will be tomorrow night. "Kris." She mumbled under her breath. She had tried to stay angry with the young woman, but couldn't. The feeling of desolation settled on her shoulders like a wet wool blanket on a hot summer's day, heavy and suffocating. She turned and faced the water, sitting down on a wooden bench and propping her bluejean-covered leg on a concrete bearer. 'She said she didn't want to be separated from me.' She thought back to their conversation on the plane. 'I guess it was just a spur of the moment thing, an experiment. Maybe she just changed her mind before we went too far.' She rested her head along the back of the bench and stared up at the few visible stars that twinkled above her on this overcast night. 'But I've never trusted someone so quickly or completely before.' She wondered if all her instincts had left her to migrate south for the winter. 'Wouldn't blame them too much, it's cold out here.' Raven rubbed her hands together briskly and blew on them. She had left her coat and gloves in the car, when she had parked and started her walk. She hadn't been thinking about anything except that she shouldn't be behind the wheel of a car since she hadn't even remembered driving back towards the city so she had stopped in the first parking lot she found. She turned and started back towards the warmth of the car not paying any attention to her surrounding and didn't notice the two men sticking to the shadows and following her.

Chapter Nine:

Kris dragged her body from bed and dressed. She hadn't slept well last night, tossing and turning thinking of Raven and what could possibly be bothering her friend. She descended the stairs to the kitchen, poured herself a cup of coffee and sat down at the table with her sister.

"Good morning." Viv cheerfully intoned until she saw the bedraggled appearance of her sibling. "You look like death warmed over. What's the matter?"

"I'm not sure. Have you seen Raven?" With her sister's negative response, she looked to Issy with a questioning tilt of her head.

"No child I hasn't seen her since yesterday." Issy dried her hands on the dishtowel she had thrown across her shoulder. "Is you two havin' problems?"

"You're the second person that's asked me that." She replied as the cook joined the two sisters at the table. "I don't think so but I'm beginning to wonder." She started filling them in on the day before but was interrupted by Viv.

"Wait, why are you going anywhere with Parker? I thought you didn't want anything else to do with him?"

"I don't, but I didn't want to explain the situation to Gwen." She stared down at the table. 'Let it go, Viv, please.' She silently pleaded with her sister.

"What situation?" Vivian asked innocently. She was going to make Kris come clean and admit her feelings for the Captain however strong they may be.

"It's okay, child, tell us." Issy softly encouraged as she patted the young woman's hand.

Kris looked up at the old woman that been her friend since she could remember and saw understanding in her eyes. She took strength from those eyes and decided to confess her feelings for the Captain. "I didn't want to answer questions about why I wasn't marrying Parker. You both know Gwen; she wouldn't let it rest until she had me admitting my deepest, darkest desires." Kris chuckled to herself at her use of adverbs. "I'm, ah...I'm in love with Raven." There, she'd admitted it, out loud, now if she could just admit it to Raven. She cringed and waited for their laughter or their reluctance to be around her, but they hadn't laughed at her or run away. "It...it doesn't bother you?" She looked from Issy to Viv.

"Good heavens no. Why would you think that?" Issy looked genuinely perplexed.

"Because most people don't think that, I mean, well, most people believe it's wrong." She stumbled around her words, trying to explain what had made her apprehensive.

Viv took her sister's hand in hers. "I am a little surprised that it's this serious, but I don't think it's wrong for two people to love each other. And besides, I was wondering what it would take before you blew off Mr. Numb Nuts."

"Miss Vivian, I'm gonna wash yo' mouth out with soap." She gentled her expression and turned to Kris. "Child." Issy explained. "We's not most people, we are your friends and family and we care about you. So, what makes you happy, makes us happy." Issy winked at her. "Now, go find your Captain and clear up whatever's wrong."

Kris jumped up and ran out only to run back into the room and hug both women. "Thank you." She smiled and charged out the door again. She found John in the command center packing some of their gear.

"Morning, Kris." He continued to coil the cable from a disconnected monitor. "How you doing?"

"Okay. Where's Raven?" She leaned against the wall close to the case he was packing the cable into. "I thought she was supposed to be here this morning."

"Oh, there's been a slight change of plans." He looked around on the floor. "Where did that, ah, there it is." He bent down and picked up the clamp he had dropped. "The agent in charge won't be here until this afternoon, so she called in to let me know that she was meeting with him at his office downtown."

"Damn." Kris mumbled an almost never used curse. "I need to see her, John, I have to find out what's wrong." She was almost panicking. "Was she just going to leave without seeing me? What's going on with her? Maybe she changed her mind about us. No, she said I wouldn't be able to get rid of her and I know she couldn't just change her mind."

John interrupted her thoughts. "Come back to the hotel with me and wait for her there."

"I have a previous engagement tonight."

"Can't get out of it?" He was beginning to think that he had been wrong last night and maybe he should have questioned his friend and not just let her storm off.

"I could, but I'd like to spend some time with Gwen, an old friend." She explained. 'I don't know when I'll get the chance to see her again if I leave with Raven. If, where did that uncertainty come from? I was sure of our life together when I woke up this morning.'

"Come by tonight then, afterwards." John interrupted her doubts. "Here, I'll write down the hotel and her room number for you." He pulled a piece of paper and pen from his jacket.

"Thanks, John. I should be done around 11:00 or so." She folded the paper and put it in her pocket and left him to his packing.

Raven exited the tall grey office building and slipped her sunglasses down from their resting place on top of her head, to cover her eyes. The sun had decided to make an appearance in direct contrast to her sullen, gloomy and dejected mood. She had dragged the briefing out as long as possible not because she liked being cooped-up in a room full of stuff-shirt, over-paid chair warmers, the Captain hated upper management. But she knew she would have to make an appearance back at the house and the chance of running into Kris was high. 'Maybe she'll have started getting ready for tonight.' Raven sighed deeply and headed for her rental car.

The Captain convinced herself, last night after much floor pacing, that her instincts hadn't left her after all and she hadn't miss-judged the girl. Kris had simply changed her mind and wasn't sure how to tell her. About the time the sun was rising, Raven decided that she would make it as easy on Kris as she could and just avoid her until time to leave. That way neither of them would have to be embarrassed by the awkwardness of a possibly unpleasant meeting. With that decided, she tried to get some sleep but spent the next hour tossing and turning. Funny the things one can talk themselves into when trying to avoid being hurt.

Kris took her time soaking in a hot bubble bath since she wouldn't have a chance to see Raven until later tonight. She had driven herself crazy the past day and a half with worrying about what was bothering her friend and if she didn't put it out of her mind before tonight, she'd be a raving lunatic by the time she confronted the woman. She peeled one eye open and looked at her white and wrinkled hand. 'Yuck, I'll be a prune permanently if I don't get out of here.' Water sloshed over the edge of the tub, as she was standing up and an unrestrained smile spread across her face. She remembered the hours she and Gwen would spend in the tub making up stories of fairy tale princess and the knights that would brave horrible dangers to rescue them. And the one time they had gotten a little too enthusiastic and just about flooded the bathroom. Her mother had been furious even though the maid would be the one cleaning it up. Kris shook her head and returned to her bedroom to find her sister sitting on the bed waiting.

"Don't you think this dress is kinda, oh what's the word I'm looking for...drab, conservative, boring!" Viv was staring at the cream colored, long sleeved, calf length, high necked and unadorned dress that was hanging on the closet door.

"That's three words." Kris sat down in the chair at her dressing table and held up her hand to forestall her sister's rebuttal. "Those are the exact reasons I bought it. I'm not real sure why Parker agreed to go, but I'm not going to be some kind of ornament he can hang on his arm and show off. In fact I plan on spending the entire night pretending he's not there." She turned around to face the mirror and removed the towel from her head.

Viv leaned back on her elbows laughing. "That sounds like it's going to be a fun night. I'd give anything to be a fly on the wall." She let her amusement die down. "Have you had a chance to talk to Raven?"

Kris turned to face her sister. "No." She played nervously with the brush in her hands. "I'm going by her hotel after the opera."

"With Parker, Gwen and her husband tagging along?" Viv asked wide-eyed, thinking Raven wouldn't be too pleased with that entourage showing up on her doorstep, so-to-speak.

"Oh no." Kris reassured her. "John's going to talk to one of the Secret Service guys he knows and for one of them to drive me to the hotel in a separate car."

"Ah, I see." Viv saw her chance at some good-natured teasing. "So, you going to pack an overnight bag?" She glanced up at her sister and the blush that was covering her face and burst out laughing.

"VIV!" Kris threw her damp towel at her sister. "I can't believe you." But soon found her siblings laughter contagious and joined in.

Unfortunately Raven picked that moment to sneak past a certain bedroom door and heard the unreserved mirth. She blinked her eyes at the sudden moisture she found blurring her vision and hurried down the stairs and out the front door. She sat in the car with her head resting on the steering wheel. 'Just be happy for her Raven, she deserves better than you and you know it.' She sat back and started the engine. 'But does she have to be so damn cheerful about it? Couldn't she at least act like it was a hard choice? Like we might have had a chance together?' She looked over her right shoulder as she backed down the drive and into the street. She put the car in drive and sped away, refusing to look back.

Gwen and Harold met Kris and Parker at the house and drove to the restaurant with them. The two men seemed to have found a common interest, investing in the stock market, which left the ladies free to entertain each other.

"So, where are we going to eat?" Kris asked.

"We are going to Astolpho's at the Marcello Hotel." Gwen had a euphoric expression on her face as she placed her hands together, one on top of the other, and brought them to rest against her chest. "And, Kris, one doesn't eat at Astolpho's."

Kris glared at Gwen, confusion written across her face. "I thought we were going to dinner? I'm hungry." She crossed her arms in front of her. "I didn't eat lunch. Don't you dare tell me this is one of those places where you pay through the nose for a sprig of parsley and a glob of raw fish."

"Oh, Kris." Gwen laughed. "We will have dinner. But you go to eat at McDonald's. You go to Astolpho's to have a dining experience." She patted her friend's leg. "And I promise, no sushi."

"They better have normal food on that menu, Gwen." Kris threatened.

"They have great food." Harold leaned forward and joined the conversation. "Loin of venison, that comes with chestnuts and mushrooms in a wine sauce."

Kris interrupted him. "I don't eat venison and before you go down the entire menu, I also don't eat veal or lamb."

"I would have thought that with living in Turkey you would have developed a taste for lamb. Isn't that one of the main food staples over there?" Harold asked.

Parker laughed and jumped in. "Yes it is." He answered the question. "Ask her why she won't eat it." He added laughing harder when he remembered Kris' silly explanation.

Kris sent an irritated glare in his direction that abruptly quieted him down. "I've never actually tried any." They looked at her funny. "It's just that deer and calves and lambs are so cute. I could never bring myself to try any." She shrugged her shoulders, not about to apologize for her soft heart.

Gwen shook her head and smiled, she had forgotten what a soft heart her friend had when it came to cute fuzzy little animals. "Okay, how about other than raw fish? They've got a really great salmon steak." She paused until Kris confirmed her fondness for seafood, then Gwen told her about desert and the restaurant's specialty, The Crunchy Napoleon. Layers of caramelized dough between creamy vanilla custard drizzled with butterscotch and dark chocolate.

Kris closed her eyes and knew she was in trouble.

Raven sat in her suite staring out into the night and finished her second rum and coke. She had been berating herself most of the afternoon, for letting Kris get inside her normally impenetrable walls that she had painstakingly built around her heart. She still couldn't blame her for wanting out of the relationship. 'Kris deserves better than an emotional cripple like me.' Raven kept telling herself. Other than John and his fiancée Sharon and Granny, she hadn't let anybody close since she lost her younger brother and walked away from her family. She stood and walked to

the floor to ceiling window that looked out over the city and rested her forehead against the cool glass. "If I could just stop thinking about her." She stated angrily at herself for not being able to get the blond woman out of her head.

John jogged over to Sharon and hugged her. "Sorry, it took me forever to find a parking space." He placed a kiss on her cheek. "How was the flight?" He had asked Sharon to meet him in DC. He had wanted a few days for them to spend together away from the wedding preparations and their families. Both families got along great, but their mothers were driving them crazy. What had started out as a simple wedding, planned for Valentines Day, was turning into a three-ring circus.

"It was good. Bad weather over the mid-west, but we were above it." She placed her arm around his waist as they started down the concourse, towards baggage claim. Sharon was a foot and a half shorter than her husband-to-be and had a darker skin tone than John did. Her light brown hair was shoulder length and straight. She was a small boned woman that looked almost like a kid next to her tall fiancé. But John learned early in their courtship that this petite woman packed quite a temper.

"You ready for dinner?" He asked with a smile. John had been amazed the first time they had gone out to dinner, Sharon had easily eaten at least twice as much as he had and still demolished her piece of cheesecake and most of his cherry pie. It reminded him of Kris. 'I guess it must be a special gene short people only get.'

She elbowed him in the gut. "What do you think?" She grinned.

John grabbed the two bags as Sharon pointed them out. "Two? You're only going to be here a couple of days." John had learned early on in their relationship that Sharon packed for any conceivable emergency.

Sharon knew something was bothering John even though he was trying to hide it, but waited until they were in the car to ask. "Is whatever's troubling you something you can talk about or is it the last mission?" Being a naturally curious person, she was downright nosy and she knew it, it had bothered her in the beginning of their relationship that John couldn't talk too much about his work, at least the part involving the assignments and their clients, all the juicy parts she had kidded him once.

He paid the parking attendant and pulled into the lane of traffic leaving the airport. "Both." He told her of Raven and Kris' relationship and his growing concern over his Captain's despondent mood. And that she had avoided him and Kris the entire day. "I left a message at the hotel that Kris was coming by tonight, but I don't know if she's gotten it or not." He turned into the hotel drive and stopped the car. "Do you think I did the right thing, telling Kris to come by tonight?"

She patted his leg reassuringly. "Something's definitely wrong, at least as far as Raven's concerned and it sounds like they need to work it out. So yeah, I think you did the right thing."

They headed towards the elevators after planting a kiss on his cheek. "You want to see if Raven wants to go to dinner with us?" She asked after they had gotten off on the ninth floor.

"Yeah." John smiled at his fiancée as he held the room door open for her to enter. "Maybe you can get her to open up."

Kris was able to ignore Parker, for the most part, during dinner. She divided her focus between Gwen, sitting to her left and Harold to her right. She never looked in Parker's direction, across the table from her, even when he tried to gain her attention with a question, which she replied to with one word monotone answers.

Gwen had been observing the interaction, or lack thereof, between the couple and assumed that they had probably just had a fight. It wasn't until halfway through dessert that her brain kicked in and she realized that Kris wasn't wearing an engagement ring. "Have you two set a date for the wedding yet? I assume it's going to be here, in town." She asked.

Parker, who had looked at this evening as a way to get Kris away from 'that unnatural woman' and back under his protective influence, answered. "We haven't set a date yet." He turned from Gwen to Kris. "We probably should do that soon. Shouldn't we, dear?"

Kris looked surprised, which quickly turned to anger. "Excuse me." She through her napkin into her plate stood abruptly and headed toward the restroom.

Gwen had followed her friend and as she entered the lounge area, the restroom attendant was staring nervously at the pacing, mumbling young woman. Gwen patted the older woman's hand. "Give us a minute, please." The attendant nodded and left.

"No, I don't want to talk about it." Kris firmly stated as Gwen stood in front of her to stop her pacing.

"Okay, okay." Gwen put her hands up in a placating manner. "Everybody has arguments. Harold and I fought up until the day before our wedding." She was still curious about the missing engagement ring but didn't want to push her fuming friend. 'I have the rest of the night to wheedle it out of her.'

A change of subject was definitely in order. "Shouldn't we be leaving? We don't want to be late." Kris felt guilty for not confessing the truth about Parker to her friend but also felt relieved that she still had her secret about her feelings for Raven. No matter how nonjudgmental Viv and Issy had been, it didn't mean everyone else would be.

"Yes. I hope they've paid the check so we don't have to wait." Gwen stated as the two friends walked out the door with arms linked together.

Kris was a little surprised at Gwen giving up so easily but wasn't going to debate her good fortune.

After putting the luggage in their room, Sharon and John headed up to the top floor to see if they could talk his depressed Captain into joining them for dinner. "Maybe she's already gone to eat? It is getting kind of late." Sharon commented when they received no answer to their knocking.

"Maybe." John responded. "Let's head down to the desk and see if they know if she left the hotel." Their inquiry at the concierge desk pointed them towards the health club. "I should have headed here first." John sighed. "When she's upset she works out." He explained to Sharon, who was still learning about the sometimes complicated Captain and her moods. He easily spotted the tall figure that was in the small free weight area doing arm curls and headed that way.

Raven put the weights in the rack when she saw their reflection in the mirror and turned around. "Sharon." She opened her arms and had a devilish grin on her face. "Come on, give me a hug."

"Ugh, get away." Sharon hid behind John. "You're all sweaty."

"I thought you said you liked me that way?" Raven mustered a hurt expression.

"You know I only like it when we're both hot and sweaty, girl." Sharon answered in a sensual voice.

"Something you two need to tell me?" John tapped his foot, trying to look menacing. Which didn't work since both women were laughing at him. "I don't know why I put up with the two of you." He said as he joined in, glad of the playful banter between the two most important people in his life.

Raven grabbed her towel and water bottle and headed out of the club with them. "No, you two wanted time alone. And three's a crowd, especially on Sharon's first night here." Her answer to the dinner invitation from John. They had finally taken no for an answer with the understanding that Raven was to join them for breakfast in the morning.

"Yes, I got your message about Kris coming by tonight." Which is why she had been working out in the first place. Then they were politely told to drop the subject.

She made her way back to her room, stripping when she reached the bedroom and headed for a long hot shower. She was curious as to why Kris wanted to see her. 'Why wasn't she taking the easy way out? Am I wrong thinking she wants out? That's right, Raven, get your hopes up so it'll hurt again when they come crashing down around you.' She sighed deeply.

Chapter Ten:

After the opera, that Kris didn't see or here more than five minutes of because she was constantly checking her watch and thinking of a certain Captain, she pulled Gwen to the side and asked her to cover her absence with Parker. "Why? Where are you going?"

"I can't tell you, Gwen. Please just tell him I left with the Secret Service instead of riding back in the limo." She pleaded. "For old times?"

"Alright." She gave in. "But you owe me an explanation tomorrow morning, early." She told her as Kris hurried off in the opposite direction with the agent.

"Where's Kris?" Parker asked when Gwen entered the car.

"She had somewhere to go, said she would be home later." She explained to the suddenly fuming man sitting across from her. "She left with one of the agents, she's not alone." Gwen tried to reassure him, thinking that he was afraid for Kris' safety.

The drive back to the Whitfield's house was silent after Harold had tried to start a conversation with Parker but had been ignored. Parker was too busy trying to plot a strategy that would remove the 'bad influence' from Kris' life, once and for all, without any embarrassment to him. Kris had done enough of that lately. He barely managed a polite 'thank you for the evening' before leaving the limo.

"I think I'll have you drop me off here in the morning, dear." Gwen said in a curious and somewhat worried voice.

The agent that had accompanied Kris waited by the elevators as she continued down the hall to the Captain's room. She discovered that her hand was shaking as she raised it to knock. She looked down at her feet and clasped her nervous appendages under her armpits as she waited for the door to be opened.

Raven took a large swallow of hot cocoa when she heard the knock. She had promised herself, after learning that Kris intended to see her tonight that she wouldn't have another drink. Subjecting Kris to myself mixed with large quantities of liquor was not something she wanted the young woman to have to endure. She took a deep calming breath and opened the door.

"Hi, can I come in?" Kris asked shyly. 'God, I'm acting like a schoolgirl with their first crush. I mean, gee wiz, we've slept together, well not, I mean we didn't do anything but sleep, but we shared a bed. And we've kissed, so why am I so nervous? And why am I carrying on a conversation with myself?'

"Sure." Raven replied and opened the door wider. "You want some cocoa? I've got a carafe full."

"Yeah, thanks." Kris sat in silence until Raven handed her a mug. She took a sip before she turned to face the Captain, who was sitting in an armchair angled towards the sofa, which Kris

occupied. She could tell by the slightly distant expression on her friend's face that there was definitely something wrong, she hadn't been imagining things. "Tell me what's wrong. Please don't shut me out." Her voice cracked with anxiousness.

Raven put her mug down and pushed the long sleeves of the heavy cotton t-shirt up past her elbows. "Kris, I..." She leaned forward and rested her forearms on her sweatpants covered thighs. "I need to know why you went with Parker tonight." Her eyes leaving her fingers that were laced together in order to stop her hands from trembling to look at the confused young woman.

"Is that what's bothering you? Me going with them tonight? I just wanted to spend time with Gwen." Kris was perplexed; she couldn't believe Raven could be jealous of Gwen. "Is Gwen the problem? Raven, she's just a friend."

"No, I would never begrudge you spending time with a friend." Raven looked back down at her hands. "You let her think that you and Parker are a couple. Why? Did you change your mind about us?"

The unguarded scared expression on Raven's face took Kris' breath away. "No...god, no. I want to be with you. I do...I just..."

Raven waited for Kris to continue, but had to prompt her when the silence continued to stretch. "But?" She thought her original assessment had been correct after all when she saw the tears filling the young woman's eyes. She ran her hand through her thick hair and tried to school her emotions. "But you're ashamed." She sighed deeply and looked down.

"Ashamed?" Kris frowned until it dawned on her what Raven had been thinking. "I'd never be ashamed of you." She said with conviction. "I'm confused and a little afraid." She admitted and then remained silent.

Raven poured more cocoa for both of them and then settled herself cross-legged on the floor in front of her friend. "Here." She handed Kris her mug and put hers on the table. "Sagira?" She placed her hands over Kris'. "I don't want to lose you." It was a simple statement that was said with a tremendous amount of love and conviction and a little fear. "I convinced myself that you had changed your mind and the easiest thing for both of us was for me to leave. Then when John left a note saying you were coming by tonight, it confused the Hades out of me. If we're not the problem, please tell me what is."

Kris took a couple of deep shaky breaths, trying to settle her nerves. "You remember the other morning when mother dragged us off to mass?"

"Yeah, that's the morning that Gwen came to see you, when all this started." Raven acknowledged a little warily.

"Yep." Kris chuckled humorlessly. "Mother has a sixth sense when it comes to giving me a guilt complex, I think. The priest talked about, what he called, 'The Anti-Family in Today's Society'.

Care to guess what topped his list?" She continued before Raven could answer. "Being gay." She sighed. "I'm not a practicing Catholic, mother isn't either until it suits her, but it just brought all that earlier conditioning back to the surface. Is God going to condemn me because I...I'm with you? And are my friends and family going to disown me because I want to make a life with you? Issy and Viv gave us their blessing, but I'm worried about my grandparents and I don't see eye to eye with mother and father, but I don't want to never see them again. I don't know what to do, because I don't think that I can lose you either."

'Oh boy, religion. This is certainly not my forte and I'm certainly not the one to try and relieve her concerns.' But she had to try. "Kris, I'm not a religious person and I don't even know if there is such a thing as a 'higher power', so I'm not sure I'm the one that should be trying to advise you." She paused to try and organize her scattered thoughts. "I don't think that any God that you choose to believe in, could hate anybody, much less hate the good and caring person that you are especially for loving another person, no matter who that person is. About the only thing that I remember thinking, after my admittedly short studies on religion, is, that the 'powers that be' only seemed to be tolerant and compassionate of a person as long as that person believes in what they believe, if you didn't you were a sinner and were on the fast track to hell. I think religion and faith are two separate things. Religion is believing in what you're told to believe in. Faith is believing in something that makes you a better person, that makes you treat others with respect and kindness." She paused until Kris looked her in the eye. "I don't know how Gwen or family will react to us being together. The only thing I'm certain of is that I want to spend my life with you, I care about you more than anyone or anything, and I don't want to have to try and survive without you. But I don't want you to lose any part of your life just to be with me." Raven shut her eyes and took a deep breath. She was exhausted after her unusually long and emotional speech.

Raven opened her eyes at the strangled gasp. "Whoa." She caught the flying form of her friend as Kris launched herself off the couch. Raven ended up flat on her back with the smaller woman sprawled on top.

"I'm sorry I hurt you." Kris sobbed as she wrapped her arms around Raven's neck.

"And I'm sorry I jumped to conclusions." Raven replied sincerely as she rubbed her hands up and down on Kris' back in a soothing motion. "I guess we're going to have to work on the communication thing."

"Can I stay here with you tonight?" Green eyes looked shyly into blue ones. "It only took one morning of waking up in your arms for me to become addicted to it and I've missed you." Kris explained and hoped she'd been forgiven for causing the pain she had glimpsed earlier in those oh so very penetrating eyes.

"We should clear that with your escort, but I'd like it if you stayed. I've missed you too." She hugged her captive tightly. "Come on. Let's send 'big brother' on his way." After a short conversation and even shorter phone call, the agent left his charge in the Captain's care.

"You got something I can sleep in, Taz?" Kris followed Raven into the bedroom and circled her arms around a slim muscled waist. She smiled as her fingertips massaged suddenly quivering

muscles. She pressed closer to the solid warmth she was holding, which enticed a low moan from the tall body leaning back into hers.

"Much more of that and I guarantee you won't be needing anything to sleep in, since you won't be sleeping." Raven forced her body to stand up straight and move away from Kris.

"Sorry about that." Kris wiggled her eyebrows up and down. She was both sorry and not sorry, she wanted Raven as a lover and a friend. But in the days since returning home, she had the opportunity to wonder if her meager sexual knowledge could please the Captain, who must have had her share of lovers. She had decided not to ask about those. It would only make her feel...inadequate.

Raven tossed a t-shirt at her tormentor and saw the expression of regret tinged with a little relief cross the young woman's face. She suddenly wondered if her companion was really as innocent as she looked. 'I assumed she'd had some experience. Huh, maybe not. Maybe I should just ask her.' Raven pulled off her sweat pants and long sleeve shirt and replaced them with her boxers and sleeveless sleep shirt. "I've only got one toothbrush. We'll have to share." She raised her voice to reach into the bathroom, where Kris had gone to change. "You want it first?"

"No, you go ahead." She answered as she reentered the bedroom folding her dress. "I washed out my underclothes since I don't have a change. Hope you don't mind unmentionables hanging in the bathroom."

Raven felt a jolt that coursed through her body and landed at her center when she realized that the only thing covering Kris was a thin cotton shirt. 'Oh boy! This is going to be a very long night.' She quickly brushed her teeth and exited the bathroom. "All yours." She informed Kris as Raven sat on the bed with her legs folded under her. "Can I ask you a question? A personal question?" The Captain amended.

Kris had to shake herself out of her fantasies that the innocent statement of 'all yours' had implanted in her brain and proceeded to brush her teeth. She paused as the question registered, then stuck her head out the door and nodded her head since her mouth was full of toothpaste and brush.

"Have you...I mean, are you...a..." Raven ran her hand nervously through her hair, she had never had to be concerned with any of her previous partners having this particular condition and she was certain she was embarrassing herself, since she could feel the blush rising up her cheeks. "Oh Hades, what I'm trying to ask...is if you've had any...experience?" She looked at the young woman leaning against the doorframe with her arms loosely crossed over her chest. "Sexual, I mean." Raven looked down at the comforter she was sitting on and traced the pattern with her finger. Anything to keep her from looking at her friend's face. "I know we...almost...on the plane. But that was spur-of-the-moment and we did manage to control ourselves." She was uncharacteristically babbling but couldn't stop. "I know we're just going to sleep and hold each other, now. But if you are...a virgin, I want to know...so I'm extra careful not to hurt you when we do...ah...decide to take our relationship...further." She finally glanced up as she felt Kris settle on the bed in front of her.

Kris sat down facing Raven. Her right leg was folded under her while her left one remained on the floor. She caressed Raven's calf muscle that lay under her fingertips. "I'm...um...no, I'm not a virgin."

Raven clinched her jaw. It wasn't that she thought that her companion should be pure and innocent, but Kris was hesitating like she was remembering a bad experience. And the sudden thought of Parker possibly being the one that Kris had been with that was making her blood boil. 'That worthless piece of arrogant trash. If he hurt her...I'll kill him.' She calmed down when Kris' words penetrated her infuriated mind.

Kris had not noticed her companion's rage and continued. "We were in Brazil. I had just turned 16 and thought I was in love. Father had told us one night at dinner that he had been assigned a new embassy and that we would be moving in the next month. I told Lazaro, that was his name, the next day when I saw him. We had to keep it quiet that we were seeing each other, I knew mother would not approve of him. Anyway, to make a long story short, I asked him to make love to me before we moved away and we did. But he didn't have hardly any experience and I had none, so there weren't any fireworks going off, to say the least. He was very gentle but I was disillusioned since I had read all these books and poems about love and how the earth would move and how you would glow after you became a woman. Well, the earth didn't even tremble and I was certainly not glowing, I was just sore. The only thing we did right that night is take precautions so at least I didn't have to worry about being pregnant." She took a deep breath. "Sordid little tale, huh? I bet you've felt the earth move and seen those fireworks though."

"No, to all questions." Raven stretched out her long frame, pulling Kris with her. She waited for the young woman to cuddle up and lay her head on the Captain's left shoulder. Arms and legs wound around bodies until both were comfortable. "It's not shameful to want to show another person how much you love them. I'm sorry it wasn't as wonderful as you thought it would be." She pulled the blanket over them and reached over to switch the light off.

When she paused and didn't continue, Kris' curiosity overrode her resolve not to ask. "What do you mean, 'all questions'? I know you've bound to have had...lovers." She had begun to wonder if she was pushing for too much information when she felt the chest underneath her arm, take in a deep breath.

"I mean, yes, I've had sex, both very good and...bad, but I've never had a lover or been in love...until now."

The last part was whispered but Kris heard. She knew she held the older woman's heart in her hands and needed to be very careful. She propped up on her elbow and looked down into eyes that refused to meet hers. "Even after we left Brazil, I continued to think that I loved Lazaro, until I met you that is. You made me realize that what I felt for him was sorely lacking." Blue eyes tracked to hers and Kris saw the hope they held. "Those books and poems also say that when you fall in love with someone you get goosebumps and a tingly feeling all over when they touch you. Well, all you have to do, my friend, is walk into the same room and I get those and a lot more. Do you know the first time you kissed me I thought I was going to pass-out and you

still make me weak in the knees." She smiled and caressed Raven's cheek. "I love you, too." She barely finished her declaration of love before she was pulled into a bone-crushing hug.

Parker quietly entered the house in case anyone other than the agents were up and about. Fortunately for him, the Whitfield's had retired for the night. He closed the door to his small office located on the ground floor beside the Ambassador's and pick up the phonebook and phone. He was going to call every hotel in the DC area in order to find his fiancée and drag her back if he had to. Parker had thought that everything would be back to normal when that deviant, perverted woman left and his Kristen would return to the shy and quiet girl he remembered. He sat down and started dialing.

"Hey, Taz...I can't breathe." But Kris was holding Raven just as tightly.

"Oh...sorry." She eased the strangle hold she had on the young woman sprawled across her. "I, ah...sorry, didn't mean to crush you."

"You didn't crush." Kris assured her as she raised her head to look at the face below hers. "I just don't want to pass out from lack of air, because I don't want to waste a single minute more. I want us to be together, tonight. Please make love to me and teach me how to please you." Kris wasn't totally in the dark about how to love another woman. She had read stories that had females as lovers and she knew how to please herself. But she was still nervous because she wanted very badly to bring this woman that she loved, to an earth moving release.

Raven didn't need to ask if Kris was sure, she could see the love and desire smoldering in the green eyes gazing deeply into hers. 'I had something like a candlelit dinner and soft music in mind, but being with her anywhere would be special.' She raised her head slowly and captured the soft lips waiting above hers. She ran one hand under the back of Kris' shirt and placed her other hand on the back of the young woman's neck and pulled her close. Raven tilted her head, as the kiss became more heated and tongues explored and tasted each other's mouth. "Gods, Sagira, I want you so bad." Raven forced out on a ragged breath when they broke for air. She could feel the moisture growing between her legs, which intensified when she ran her hand down Kris' back and across a bare bottom and was reminded that her companion's only attire was the shirt she had loaned her. Raven growled, sounding every bit like the predator that she reminded her companion of.

Kris moaned as she felt Raven's hand move down her body and onto her butt. She ground her hips into the body below hers as she propped herself up on her arms and looked down at her lover. "Oh...yes." Kris groaned as they continued to grind their hips against each other and felt a rumbling from deep within Raven's chest.

Raven took advantage of the access to Kris' chest as she brought her hands around to fondle the young woman's breasts. Kris wasn't 'top heavy' by any means, but her ample chest size filled the

Captain's hands and left plenty of soft yielding flesh for her long tapered fingers to tease. She alternated between massaging already erect nipples with her thumb and forefinger and lightly pinching and pulling them until her lovers breathing became erratic. "Sit up, I want to take this off." Raven tugged on the shirt that was blocking her view and pulled it over Kris' head when she brought her knees up and straddled Raven's hips. "By the gods, Sagira, you're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen." She announced as her eyes took in every inch of the young woman's body.

"To my eyes, you hold that title." Kris replied as she was pulled back down and rolled over onto her back so that she was the one now looking up at her dark-haired lover. "Your turn, take these off." She demanded as desire was quickly overwhelming her. She was trying to pull Raven's shirt over her head and push her shorts down at the same time, until the Captain stilled her hands.

"I have...a few scars. There not too bad, but you might not want to look at them while we're making love." Raven tentatively admitted as glanced down at the soft unblemished smooth skin below her. She knew that later, questions of how they came to be would probably be asked by her curious mate, but she wouldn't think about that now.

Kris sat up, grasped Raven's head in both hands and caressed her cheeks with her thumbs until their eyes met. "I don't care. They're part of you and I love you, all of you." Raven quickly disrobed and returned to her kneeling position between Kris' legs. "Um, you are sexy." Kris leaned back on her right elbow and admired the strong bronze body and ran her left hand slowly over quivering stomach muscles. She heard the sharp intake of air when her hand firmly squeezed and manipulated the older woman's breast. She sighed in contentment. "I'm glad your breasts are so sensitive because I think playing with them is going to be one of my favorite things to do."

"Um...yes...that feels...so good." She managed to force out between ragged breaths as Kris' mouth now suckled her breast. One hand held the young woman's head purposefully to her chest while the other caressed and fondled Kris' breast. The scent of both women's arousal filled the air making it hard to control their building passion.

Kris released Raven's breast after making sure both received equal attention. Her heart was pounding heavily as she struggled to draw air into her heaving lungs. "I can't wait...I need you now."

Raven pulled Kris up so that the women were both on their knees, facing each other. She claimed the smaller mouth with her own and they spent several minutes mapping out with their hands, the newly discovered territory of each other's body. "Baby, spread your legs a little for me." Raven requested when they broke for air.

Kris complied quickly with the request when Raven's fingers made their way down her stomach and tangled themselves in the moist blonde hairs at the gateway to her womanhood. Her hips jerked forward and she had to grab Raven's shoulders in order to remain upright. "Please." She threw her head back and moaned.

Raven steadied the young woman with an arm around her back, and then her fingers continued their path downward and into smooth silkiness. Raven moaned out her pleasure as she moved her fingers slowly back and forth through drenched folds, carefully avoiding her clit, as Kris' hips continued to buck. "Together." Raven whispered in her ear. "I want us to release together, to experience each other's pleasure throbbing in rhythm with each other."

It took a minute for Kris' overloaded senses to kick her motor skills into gear. She moved her hand between Raven's legs and into wet heat. "God...incredible." She mimicked the fingers driving her so thoroughly to distraction.

Raven claimed Kris' lips and pushed her tongue into her companion's mouth at the same time she impaled the young woman on two fingers. Raven swallowed the aroused moan torn from Kris' throat and continued to slowly and rhythmically thrust in and out of the smooth wet warmth that was her lover, moving deeper with each thrust.

Kris' fingers followed a heartbeat behind and entered Raven. She moaned at the feeling of liquid fire surrounding her fingers.

They broke apart, both gasping for air. Raven plunged her body down onto the digits filling her. "Ugh...gods...more." Raven begged as she rode the two fingers penetrating her.

Kris added a third finger and moved her thumb over the pulsing nub. She could feel Raven's muscles starting to clinch as if trying to imprison her fingers inside. She had little time to marvel over the intimate feelings as Raven's thumb found Kris' sensitive bud and sent sensations through her body that took her breath away.

"Gods you...feel...incredible." Raven moved her thumb in a circular motion, making the young woman whimper.

Both women felt the building of their climax and pushed in deeply one last time as both erupted with a powerful orgasm. They leaned against each other in order to remain upright and stayed inside one another until the tremors dissipated.

"I definitely think the earth moved." Kris stated as she laid her head on Raven's shoulder for several minutes waiting for her heart to stop racing.

Raven chuckled. "I'll take that as a compliment." The husky voice whispered close enough to Kris' ear that she shivered in response to the rush of air that moved seductively past her sensitive body part.

Kris removed her fingers and moaned as Raven did the same. She lifted her head from its resting place and was mesmerized by the sight of her lover slowly bring her hand to her mouth and erotically cleaning her fingers of Kris' juices. She didn't think the flames of passion could ignite again so quickly, but found that she was starting to burn with desire once more. "I can't believe what you do to me, how much I want you again." Her eyes never leaving the vision in front of her.

Raven chuckled. "You taste...as good as you look." She licked her fingers one last time as she ran her eyes over the body in front of her. "I want you again." She brought Kris' digits that were covered in her own juices to her mouth and lick them clean, also. "And I'll have you again and again until we pass out from lack of bodily fluids." She promised as she hungrily claimed Kris' mouth.

Kris whimpered, as she tasted both her and Raven's essence mixed into one, on the tongue that explored her mouth. "Take me." Kris growled as lips disengaged. She lay back on the bed and placed her arms above her head. She gazed up seductively as she placed her feet flat on the bed and opened her legs in an invitation for Raven to mount her body.

Raven felt a tug at her center at the erotic sound that escaped from the young woman's throat. And came close to climaxing at the brazen request. She licked her lips as she watched Kris present her body in such a lustful way. Raven spread her legs, forcing Kris' further apart as she kneeled between them. She lowered herself onto Kris and started a grinding and thrusting motion with her hips that pressed their mounds together in a primitive sexual dance. Grunts and groans from both women filled the bedroom and Raven was sure that if the next room were occupied they would be getting an ear full, but she didn't care. She curled her arms under Kris' shoulders and grasped them with her hands, pulling their bodies into each other, as their thrusting became almost frantic.

Sex had never really interested Kris after her not so great first time, which is one of the reasons she had kept putting her mother off about the wedding. She was a romantic at heart and the thought of being with Parker was not a pleasant one. But now, with Raven, she wasn't sure she could ever get enough. She briefly wondered if she had overnight turned into a nymphomaniac or if she was just trying to make up for lost time. Then decided that as long as it was Raven who loved and wanted her, they could spend the rest of their lives in bed and it would be okay with her. She wrapped her legs around her lover's hips, trying to pull her closer and meld them into one. She raked her, fortunately, blunt nails down her lover's back, hard enough to raise welts. The animalistic sounds coming from them both drove her passion higher as their sweat soaked bodies bucked against each other.

They screamed each other's name into the night as once again their orgasms thundered through their bodies within a heartbeat of each other. Raven moved down Kris' body. She didn't want to miss the liquid ambrosia that was flowing freely from her lover. She inhaled deeply and a hedonistic smile spread across her face. She sighed in pleasure and dove in, lapping like a starving kitten. Long thorough licks of Raven's tongue, starting at Kris' ass and running all the way up and through her folds made sure she didn't miss a drop of her reward.

"Oh god." Kris groaned as she felt the tongue cleaning her sex that started the passion coursing through her body again. Her eyes flew open when she felt the muscle lightly pressing against her anus and felt her body's reaction to it. Desire danced through her veins double-time. She tangled her fingers in midnight hair and pushed herself into the mouth that was devouring her. She stared into blue eyes until the overwhelming burn of release started to spread throughout her body, forcing her eyes shut. "Ugh." Grunted over and over again as she continued to press her sex into

the face between her legs. Kris cried out as she went over the edge again and, totally spent, fell into the pillows behind her.

Raven watched as Kris shuttered with another climax and continued to consume her prize until the young woman weakly stated that she couldn't take anymore and begged her to stop. She moved to lie beside her contented lover and pulled her close. "So, did the earth move again?" Raven asked. She was extremely pleased that she was able to satisfy her lover so completely.

"No, this time I had the most amazing fireworks display on the inside of my eyelids." Kris chuckled and snuggled up on Raven's left side. "I love you so much." She placed a kiss on her cheek. "You're my cute little Tasmanian Devil and my great big wonderful warrior all rolled into one." She sighed in contentment as she laid her head down on Raven's shoulder and felt the woman's arms cradle her in a gentle strength.

"I love you too, Sagira." She placed a kiss on top of the blonde head. "Go to sleep my little one." She reached down and pulled the sheet and light blanket over them. The comforter had long ago landed in a heap on the floor. Raven pushed the nagging thoughts of her not deserving this incredible woman to the back of her mind. 'Deserving or not, Kris wants me and I'm not going to question my good fortune.' She cleared her mind and joined her lover in sleep in the wee hours of the morning.

Chapter Eleven:

Parker had spent several hours on the phone trying to find the two women, without any luck. He had spent the last hour pacing. He was angry, tired and all around infuriated. The only thing that the idiot hotel clerks had been happy to tell him, was their management's policy on not giving out any information over the phone, on whether someone was a registered guest or not. He was about to resign himself to having to wait for Kris to come home when he decided he might as well finish calling the hotels on the list he had made. He sat down and picked up the phone again and dialed another number.

He grinned when he recognized the name on the other end of the line. "Dan? This is Parker. Long time no see." They chatted about old times for a few minutes and Parker learned that his old fraternity buddy was now the assistant manager at the hotel. He also learned that 'Yes, there was a Raven Chandler registered there in room 1229'. He hit the off button and tossed the phone on his desk. 'Not long now, Kristen. Then you'll be back where you belong.' Parker decided to take a shower and change before retrieving his wife-to-be. He also went to inform the head of security that he would need an agent at his disposal this morning.

Gwen and Harold pulled into the drive of the Whitfield's house and saw Parker and one of the Secret Service agents getting into a car. She ran to the passenger side before the car could pull away. Gwen had told her husband on the drive over that she had a bad feeling about the whole Parker and Kris situation. "What's going on?"

Parker glared at Gwen. "If you must know, I'm going after my fiancée that YOU let get away last night." He turned back to the driver. "What are you waiting for? GO."

'This guy's elevator doesn't stop on all floors, hell I'm not even sure it gets out of the basement.' She thought as she high-tailed it back to Harold. "Follow them." She instructed her husband. "I'm not sure if he's crazy or just possessive, but I'm worried." Gwen filled Harold in on what Parker told her.

Bam...bam...bam.

"What the heck is that?" Kris groaned at being disturbed. She woke up just after sunrise and was quietly admiring her lover's face in peaceful slumber when the racket started.

"What's what?" Raven stretched and rolled over, kissing the now trapped young woman.

Bam...bam...bam.

"That." Kris looked towards the suite's living room, deciding that's where the noise was coming from.

"Damn. I'm supposed to meet John and Sharon for breakfast." Raven jumped up and threw her shirt over her head. "Just a minute." She yelled before the noise could start again. She hopped on one foot, struggling into her boxers, as she headed towards the door. "What's with all the rack...et?" She flung open the door expecting to see John standing there and was actually quite surprised when she found Parker, Gwen and some man standing there instead.

Parker barreled past her into the room. Gwen followed him, slowly edging around the imposing woman, even though she was wearing purple silk boxers with little Dalmatians on them. The unknown man walked in and stuck his hand out. "Hi, I'm Harold, Gwen's husband. Nice shorts." He grinned.

She recovered her composure and shook the man's offered hand. "Thanks." She returned the grin even though she wasn't happy with the situation.

"Where's my..." Parker started and suddenly stopped as the object of his search entered the room.

"What is going on here?" Kris stood just inside the room in front of the doorway leading to the bedroom with her hands on her hips; clad only in the shirt she had borrowed the night before. She moved slowly to stand beside Raven. "What are all of you doing here?" She knew now that the cat was out of the bag. No way to avoid it now, even if she was still a little reluctant, she was not about to be the cause of anymore of Raven's insecurities.

Harold stayed quite; he was going to let Gwen explain. Gwen clamped her jaw shut; she was going to let Parker explain. Realization suddenly dawned on Parker as he stared at the vacated doorway at the now visible bed. A bed that was entirely too crumpled and mussed up to have just been used for sleeping. "You pervert!" He jerked his head around to look in disgust at the two

women standing close. "I should have known you were a dyke and kept you away from Kristen." He walked toward them and Raven put her body in front of her lover's.

"Parker, stop it." Kris maneuvered out from behind Raven to stand beside her. She placed Raven's arm across her shoulder and wrapped her arms around the older woman's waist. "I love her and she loves me. And that's not going to change." She felt a reassuring squeeze from the arm holding her. "I'm sorry, Parker, but I don't love you, I never did and you don't know what the word love means. You just love the idea of having someone under your thumb. Someone to order around."

"I'll tell your parents that you gave yourself to this queer." He looked like he had swallowed something offensive. "That the two of you...rolled around in bed together." He threatened, with a smug expression on his face, sure that a threat of her mother's disapproval would make her crawl back. "You know what that will do to your mother." He coaxed.

Kris was usually a basically non-violent person, wanted to deck this worthless piece of shit and wipe the self-satisfied look off his face. "Oh, Parker, rolling around wasn't what we were doing last night. I'd try to explain it to you, but I doubt you would understand the first thing about making love and believe me, Parker, we both gave and gave and gave and still begged for more. Make sure they know that."

Raven was so surprised by Kris' 'stick that in your pipe and smoke it' attitude, she almost missed Parker raising his arm to strike the young woman. "Don't even think about it." She caught his wrist in the iron grip of her left hand and held on. "If you ever," she curled the fingers from her right hand around his throat and lifted until his toes were barely touching the floor. "Ever, try to touch her again, I'll rip your spine out through your throat and beat you to death with it." She shook him like a rag doll. "Do we understand each other?"

Parker squeaked out a yes, which was all he could manage with his air supply being cut off. He had never been so frightened of anything or anyone in his life as he was of this incredibly strong and very scary and extremely angry woman. He stopped being concerned about his dignity, which was a good thing considering he had wet his pants when she had grabbed him and looked at him like he was the lowest species on the food chain. He was concerned, however, with getting away with his life, so he was damn sure going to agree to any and every thing she wanted.

"Good, now get out of here." She dropped him like a sack of potatoes and used his coat to wipe away any trace of him that might be soiling her hands.

He stood just long enough to make sure his legs would hold him before bolting for the door and safety.

Raven turned to Kris. "You okay, Sagira?" She asked as she wrapped long arms around the young woman and held her tightly. She felt Kris nod her head and heard the deep sigh that escaped her mouth. Raven placed her fingers under Kris' chin and tilted her head up. "Has he hit you before?"

She saw the storm clouds gathering in blue eyes and answered quickly. "No. That's why I just stood there. It caught me by surprise." She laid her head down on Raven's chest. "Thanks for coming to my rescue again, Taz."

They both were reminded that they still had company by the chuckling and slightly higher pitched giggling coming from the couch. "Sorry." Two voices said in unison after receiving a dauntingly raised eyebrow from the Captain.

"It...this doesn't bother you?" Kris asked.

"It probably would have a few years ago, but no, not now." Harold answered.

"What happened to change your mind?" Raven questioned.

"My brother introduced me to his boyfriend and I had to either change my bias opinion or lose my bother. It wasn't much of a choice, I love my brother very much." A sheepish grin spread across his boyish face as he explained.

"What about you, Gwen? I was scared of losing your friendship if you found out." Kris held tightly to Raven, still fearing the answer.

"Kris, my college roommate was gay, a lot of our friends are gay and I volunteer at the Aids Clinic at the hospital. So, no, it doesn't bother me. Besides, it shouldn't matter to a true friend." She winked at her longtime friend before looking at the Captain. "You are still scary." She paused and pointed a finger at the menacing figure. "But what you did to that imbecile was priceless."

"Yes?"

"It's me." The low gravelly voice said. He paused waiting until the kid and woman got into the car that was parked beside the pay phone he was using. "I think I've finally got what you'll consider good news."

"I don't pay you to think." Informed the voice on the other end of the phone. "What do you have?"

"The Ambassador's daughter stayed the night at the hotel with Captain Chandler." He opened his notebook, flipping through several pages.

"Go on." The voice eagerly encouraged.

"Early this morning, the girl's boyfriend headed up to the Captain's room like a man on a mission. He was up there about 15 or 20 minutes, no more, before he came charging back down

and through the lobby like the hounds of hell were nipping at his ass." The voice laughed at the memory. "He looked both terrified and infuriated at the same time."

There were several moments of silence on the other end of the phone. "Yes, interesting." The drumming of fingers against what sounded like a wooden surface. "Keep up the surveillance and keep me informed. And it better not be another five days before I hear from you. I want a phone call at least every other day, so I'll know you're doing your job."

"What about my...money." He started to ask when he heard the click and a dial tone greeted his ear. "Damn sorry son of a bitch." He slammed the receiver back onto the hook.

Going down in the elevator, Parker had taken his coat off and folded it across his arm. He held it in front of him in order to hide the dark stain that spread across his crotch and down his pants leg. He hurried through the lobby and out the front door, trying to avoid running into his old friend. She had humiliated him yet again but he saw no reason to announce that fact. And now that he had escaped with his life and was safely on his way home, he was already trying to devise a plan of revenge. He was also trying to decide what, if anything, to tell the Whitfield's about their daughter's whereabouts, wondering if it might work to his advantage.

Sharon and John made their appearance after all the excitement had died down and joined Raven, Kris and Gwen in a leisurely breakfast ordered from room service, Harold had to leave for work. Sharon made Gwen repeat the story twice. "I always miss all the fun." She complained good-naturedly and received a raised eyebrow from Raven.

John had been hard pressed during breakfast, to keep the grin off his face after seeing Kris' attire, or lack of it. Only twin glares from his Captain and his fiancée had kept him silent. And the occasional kick to his shin from Sharon when she had seen the gleam of mischievousness in his eyes.

"I don't even know this guy and I dislike him. Honey, I don't know how you put up with him for so long." Sharon said to Kris as she frowned and wrinkled her nose in disgust. "Describe his face again." Sharon requested of Gwen.

"Well." Gwen started, then stopped. Turning to Kris she asked. "How did you describe Raven the other day at the house?"

Kris looked confused. "Oh." She started laughing. "Tall, dark and dangerous." She supplied.

John lost it. He had just taken a large gulp of orange juice and ended up spraying it over the table before he could swallow any of it. Raven gave him one of her most intimidating stares, but it had no effect on the howling man considering her face was also generously covered with the juice.

Raven took the napkin from Kris' shaking hand. The young woman was trying hard not to laugh out loud, but her body was vibrating from the effort. "Oh, shut up, all of you." She tried to look annoyed but a grin made its way across her face. "Yuck, this stuff is sticky after it dries." She announced as she wiped her face.

"Give me that." Kris snatched the napkin and dunked it in her water glass before proceeding to clean her partner's face. "Hold still, Taz." More chuckling and giggling.

"John, if any, and I mean any of this gets back to headquarters." She leaned over the table and poked him in the chest with her finger. "I'll tell'em you've been hit in the head once too often and to put you on a desk job."

"Okay...Deadly." He jumped up and hid behind Sharon and Gwen.

"I give up." Which solicited more laughter from the group. Raven groaned and slid down in her chair. "My reputation is irrevocably in shambles." She glared at Kris who was slowly sliding out of her chair and onto the floor in her continued effort not to laugh.

A short time later, Raven and Kris declined an invitation for a day of sightseeing with the engaged couple and Gwen also left, stating a meeting at the clinic.

"Well...I guess I have no more excuses not to go and face the music." Kris absently twirled a piece of parsley between her thumb and forefinger.

"We," Raven interjected, "will go face your parents." She intertwined her fingers with Kris' unoccupied ones.

A deep sigh. "There's no telling what Parker has told them." She stopped playing with the greenery that had adorned her stack of pancakes. "And you certainly aren't one of mother's favorite people to begin with. Although I think maybe father might have at least a reluctant respect for you now."

"Come on, my dear, I need a real shower after my unexpected one earlier." She pulled the young woman to her feet by their joined hands. "They might surprise you, ya know? Your parents, I mean."

Kris looked at her like she had lost her mind. "Yeah, right. I might develop a total lack of interest in food too. But I kinda doubt it." They walked through the bedroom and into the bathroom hand-in-hand.

"We'll go to the back-up plan then." Raven said when she stopped laughing. She explained after starting the water for her shower. "I'll just walk in, wrap my arms around your mother." She demonstrated on her partner. "And say 'Hi, mom, I'm so happy to be the newest member of the family. I know we'll get along just peachy, don't you?' She'll faint and you won't have to worry about it. We'll be packed and gone before she comes to." She grinned and wiggled her eyebrows up and down.

Kris stood in Raven's arms with her mouth hanging open and an unreadable expression on her face. She opened and closed her mouth a few times but no sound emerged.

"What?" Raven wondered if she had taken her joke a little too far.

"I, uh...was just trying to picture my 'proper and ladylike' mother, down for the count, spread eagle on the floor. Makes for an amusing and really peculiar picture." She shook her head and looked up. "Would you really do that for me?"

"Oh yeah." Relieved that Kris could laugh at the tense situation. "Just let her start mouthing off and saying bad things about you and I'll change into 'Ms Warm and Fuzzy' so fast her head will spin."

"Ms Warm and Fuzzy, huh?" She kissed the skin that was exposed by the v-neck of the shirt Raven wore. "I'll buy warm, but there's not a fuzzy place on you, Taz."

Raven felt the fire coursing through her body when the lips connected with her skin. "I...ah...what did you say?" She lost the thread of the conversation when Kris' hands migrated underneath her shirt and moved over her skin and a trail of molten lava was left behind.

"I said that you weren't fuzzy." She answered as she cupped two breasts in her hands. "Although." Kris was starting to breathe heavily, also. "Your mind seems to be a little out of focus at this particular moment."

Raven couldn't take it anymore. She wrapped her arms around Kris' waist, picked her up and carried her into the shower, clothes and all. It wasn't that her mind was out of focus, it's just that it was only focused on one specific little blonde that had stolen her heart and who was proceeding to drive her to distraction.

Continued in Part 4.

The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

~ Leather and Lace ~

by Greek Warrior

Disclaimer #1: This is an Uber story and the characters that appear in this story may seem familiar but aren't the same as the ones we all know and love. All the characters that appear here are made up from my deranged little mind. They're fictitious and aren't meant to resemble anyone. This is all done in fun and yes I know I need to get a life.

Disclaimer #2: Taz belongs to the folks at Warner Brothers Studios. Scooby Doo belongs to Hanna-Barbera. The X-Files belongs to somebody other than me, anything you recognize isn't mine folks, I got tired of looking this stuff up.

Warning: This story contains explicit consensual sex between adult women. If you're under legal age in your neck of the woods, go away. If you live in a place that frowns upon that sort of behavior, tell'em to kiss your derrière then talk to your Congressman, or move, or both.

Warning: This story contains violence. We are talking about a certain warrior's descendant, you know.

Note: The quote at the end of chapter one is from Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet'.

Feedback is most welcome as long as it's constructive. Remember, you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar, although I've always wondered why anyone would want a bunch of flies! I can be contacted at XWPScribe@aol.com. Thanks for reading.

Note: Astolpho's at the Marcello Hotel is a completely fictitious restaurant and hotel.

Part 4

Chapter Twelve:

The drive to the house, Kris didn't think of it as home anymore, was taking less time than she would have liked. She sat lost in thought and staring out of the passenger window oblivious to the passing scenery. Without her knowledge an occasional sigh escaped past her frowning lips.

"You doing alright?" Raven had glanced at her passenger each time the almost inaudible groan had left the young woman's mouth.

Kris managed a smile as the deep voice of her companion rumbled through her. "Yeah. I just wish I knew what to expect, you know?" She reached across the space between the bucket seats and circled her fingers around Raven's.

"Yeah, I do." She squeezed the smaller hand entwined with hers. "I'm sorry Parker found out about us." Raven rubbed her thumb up and down Kris'. "Hopefully I scared him enough to make him think twice about causing trouble." She was trying to be optimistic and relieve some of the tension radiating through her lover. She turned the blinker on and made a right turn.

Kris chuckled. "Don't hold your breath. He'll have had time to think about his humiliation and his damaged ego."

They drove on in silence until Raven pulled the car over to the curb a few houses away from their destination. "You ready?" She asked, pulling the smaller hand that she still held up to brush her lips across the knuckles.

"No." Kris answered honestly. "But I need to get this over with." She took a deep breath. "You know, there's really no reason you have to go in there and subject yourself to the rude and insulting remarks mother and father will probably throw my way." Kris had been arguing with herself during the drive. The part of her that felt safe and protected in Raven's arms wanted her lover by her side, knowing it would be easier to face her parents with her security blanket wrapped around her, so-to-speak. But the adult part, an annoying little voice, was telling her to stand on her own two feet and take care of her own problems.

"There is a very good reason." Raven placed her fingers under Kris' chin and lifted until their eyes met. "I love you and I won't let you go through this alone." As the silence grew, Raven became a little insecure. "I mean if you want me to...go with you, I mean. Unless you think it'll make it harder on you...with me there." She forced herself to not look away.

"I do." Kris saw the shattered expression on Raven's face and hurried to clarify. "Want you with me, that is." The transformation was amazing; Raven went from devastated to elated in the blink of an eye. Kris couldn't help but grin at the joy radiating from her friend.

They snuck around the side of the house and headed for the kitchen, deciding a little reconnaissance was more prudent than an all out frontal assault. Kris opened the back door just enough to stick her head in and look around. "Psst...Issy."

Issy jumped. "Good lord, child, you tryin to give ol' Issy a heart attack?" The cook leaned against the sink with her hand covering her chest like she was checking to make sure her heart was still beating.

"Sorry, didn't mean to scare you." Kris tiptoed into the kitchen with Raven right behind her.

"Where've you been? I just sent Miss Vivian to wake you up." She eyed the pair wondering what was going on as Kris turned a colorful shade of red and Raven looked down at her shoes instead of meeting the cook's eyes.

"She's not...in her room." Viv smirked and finished her sentence even though it was obvious where her sister was. "I take it the two of you...made up?" Kris' face darkened by several shades. "Nice color." Viv couldn't pass up an opportunity to tease her sister.

Issy was trying to keep a straight face, which was hampered by the lecherous grin that was plastered across Viv's face. "Anyone want coffee?" The cook turned to retrieve mugs before anybody had a chance to respond.

They sat down and explained the morning happenings to a stunned pair. "That no good, sorry south end of a north bound mule." Issy's hand hit the table so hard that the coffee mugs jumped. "Pardon my foul mouth." She stated as she retrieved the coffeepot and refilled their mugs. The two sisters knew for Issy that was as close as the cook had ever come to cursing.

Viv was both angry and amused. "Did he really wet himself?" At her sister's nod, she chuckled. "God, I wish I had seen that." She sobered at her increasingly nervous sister. "Maybe he hasn't

said anything, he never did mention the argument in the dining room the other night." Viv reminded them.

"Issy!" Regina called out as she entered the kitchen. "Oh good, here you are." She hadn't noticed the other occupants of the room as she stood facing the cook who was making another pot of coffee.

"And where else would I be?" Issy mumbled.

"What was that?"

"Nothin', Mrs. Whitfield. What can I do for you?" The cook replied.

"I finally convinced Felicia LeClaire that the annual Ambassador's Christmas Party should be here instead of at that over-decorated pompous French Embassy. That woman is so snobbish, I don't know why anyone bothers going to her little get-to-togethers in the first place." She missed Issy's eye roll of exasperation as she let out an exaggerated sigh. "I don't want anything ordinary so come up with some spectacular ideas by the end of the week and let me see the menu."

The three people sitting at the table had frozen when Regina entered the kitchen; each hoping inactivity meant invisibility. No such luck.

"Vivian, shouldn't you be with the tutor?" Regina asked as she turned to face the three statues. "Run along, dear." Viv stood, but only moved to stand beside Issy, out of her mother's line of sight. She wasn't about to leave until the confrontation had been resolved. "Kristen, it's about time you finally got out of bed. I volunteered your services to Stephanie to word the invitations for the party. I don't know why I pay that woman as much as I do." She mumbled to herself. "But before you do that, I want you to tell me about the opera last night." Her eyes fell on the last occupant. "And lastly, Miss Chandler, your job here is over and you're not welcome in this house. I'll thank you to leave."

"Mother, that's enough. I won't have you treating my...friend like that." Kris stood and glared across the table at her momentarily stunned parent.

"And I won't be spoken to with such disrespect from my own daughter in my own home." Her voice gained volume with each word. "I can't believe you would turn against your own mother and take her side." She said with disgust as she pointed toward the Captain.

"What is going on in here? I can hear you in my office." Andrew stood by the kitchen door with his hands on his hips, glancing at each person in turn. Issy, still standing by the coffeepot, remained mute. Viv was quietly standing by the cook and staring at the floor. His wife stared at their eldest daughter who defiantly stared back at her mother. The Captain was the only one to look his way. "Well?" He glanced back at Regina.

"She's the problem." Regina again pointed at Raven. "I don't want her here and I don't want Kristen associating with her kind."

Raven flinched, thinking Regina knew she was gay. Kris jumped to her defense. "If by 'her kind' you mean a woman who's strong and independent and doesn't need to be taken care of, I not only want to associate with 'her kind', I want to be 'her kind'." Kris stated as she leaned her weight on her arms that were propped on the tabletop.

"We'll just see what Parker has to say about this. I'm sure he won't take too kindly to his wife associating with 'her kind'." Regina stated triumphantly, thinking that was a threat.

Kris took a few deep breaths, trying to calm down before she said something that she would regret. It wasn't working until she felt Raven's hand lightly rubbing her back. 'How can such a small gesture mean so much?' She smiled inwardly. "Mother, you need to listen very carefully. I'm not marrying Parker. I don't love him. Heck, I don't even like the dweeb." She raised her hands from the table, palms up and shrugged her shoulders. "He's self-centered and egotistical. The only reason he wanted to marry me was because he thought it would benefit his career."

Regina looked panic-stricken. "This is all your fault." She accused Raven.

This time Raven beat Kris to the punch. "No ma'am, as much as I'd like to take the credit, Kris had a mind of her own long before I came along." That comment got her a warm and loving smile from her companion, which she returned.

"Are you going to stand there and let your wife be insulted?" Regina huffed.

Andrew had to admit a growing pride in his daughter and an increasing respect for this woman that Kris had chosen to care for. He wasn't blind either, he could see more than friendship in the way they looked at each other. "Dear." He addressed his wife. "I haven't heard any insults, except towards Parker that is. Let's all sit down and discuss this like adults." His diplomatic side always came through when his personal side didn't quite know how to cope.

"No, I refuse to be around her." Regina stamped her foot. "I want her out of this house." Andrew sighed and rubbed his temples.

Viv was shaking her head in embarrassment and whispered to Issy. "This is the first time I've seen someone my mother's age throw a temper tantrum and I hope it's the last." Issy patted the girl's shoulder in sympathy. "It certainly isn't a pretty site." Vivian groaned.

"Fine, Mother." Kris grabbed her companion's hand and left the kitchen heading towards the stairs. "There's only a few things I want to grab from my room then we can get out of here."

"Kristen, I forbid you to leave this house!" They heard Regina yell from the kitchen.

"Are you..." Raven started to ask but was stopped by Kris' fingers placed lightly on her lips. Kris turned on the stairs to face her companion. The young woman was standing one step higher than Raven, which made it easier to look the Captain in the eye. "Sure? Yes, very sure."

She asked and answered. "It's not just a case of choosing you over them, I'm also choosing to take control of my life. It's mine to do with as I see fit, whether they approve or not." She smiled and tweaked Raven's nose.

Kris' stuff consisted of her laptop, back-up disks of her writings and the suitcase that she had brought with her from the embassy and a few knickknacks and stuffed animals she had acquired while growing up. Raven shouldered the duffel bag as Kris did the same with her laptop case. Viv was standing in the doorway as they turned to go.

"Believe it or not, I'm going to miss you, sis." Vivian held out her arms as Kris stepped into them.

"I'll miss you too, Viv. I'll call in a couple of days." She stepped back and wiped a tear off her sibling's cheek. "Tell Issy I love her and I'll keep in touch. I'd go hug her neck but I don't want to get her in trouble with mother."

"I'll let her know." She assured her sister and surprised Raven by wrapping her arms around the Captain. "Make her happy, she deserves it." She let go and stepped back to allow them to exit the room.

As they reached the bottom of the stairs, Andrew met them. "Kris still needs to be protected until the talks are completed." He addressed Raven but never took his eyes from his daughter. "I'm counting on you to do that, Captain."

"I assure you, Ambassador, the only way they would get to Kris is if they come through me first." She heard the sharp intake of breath next to her and felt Kris' hand, tighten around hers.

"I'll hold you to that." His eyes had tracked to Raven's and held for several seconds before looking back at Kris. "You...care for each other, don't you?" He couldn't quite bring himself to use the word love.

"Yes, Father, we do." She looked directly into his eyes and saw something that surprised her. It wasn't quite the happiness or understanding she wished for, but a grudging acceptance of her as an adult and able to make her own decisions.

"I don't know if I'll ever be able to come to terms with...this, but I do want you to be happy. Give me some time, okay?" He asked nervously. "I'll even see if I can work on your mother."

"Of course I'll give you time. I love you." Kris placed a kiss on her father's cheek. "But if you can change mother's mind, you'll go down in history as the greatest diplomat ever." They smiled at the truth of the statement before Kris hurriedly pulled Raven out the front door when she heard her mother's voice headed in their direction.

The ride back to the hotel was spent in silence until Raven broke it. "How do you think it went? Better or worse than you expected?" She stole a sideways glance at her companion. Worried that she was more upset than she looked.

"Actually better, with father anyway. I'm confused about why mother is so set against you. She doesn't even know that we're lovers." She blushed shyly at the still new concept. "And to tell the truth, I'm a little worried that Parker might try to get back at us in some way."

Raven grinned at the blush, which gave her body a warm feeling and her mind a few ideas of how to spend the afternoon. "You really think Parker would be that stupid?" She put a lid on her lurid thoughts and concentrated on Kris' concern.

'Enough of these depressing thoughts.' Kris was determined to get her mind off the past few hours. "Well, as Issy would say, 'sometimes he's a couple of sandwiches short of a picnic'."

Raven almost missed the turn into the hotel garage since she was laughing at Kris' response. "Sorry." She said when she had to brake quickly in order not to have to go around the block again. "I can imagine Issy standing there and very nonchalantly telling someone off and them not figuring out until hours later that they've been insulted."

They got out of the car and headed for the elevator. "She did that to a caterer once and the poor man stood there and thanked her then hours later came stomping into the kitchen, demanding an apology." They exited the garage elevator when they reached the lobby and headed for the elevators to take them to their room.

As soon as the doors slid closed and Kris hit the button for the 12th floor, she found herself enveloped from behind. "What would you like to do this afternoon?" Raven whispered in Kris' ear. "If that blush is any indication, I think I'll approve." She turned Kris around and kissed her passionately. They continued their tongue duel, with Kris practically climbing Raven's body, until the car started slowing down.

When the door opened, they wedged past two older couples, with a mumbled 'excuse us' and ran down the corridor to their door. "Young people today." One of the ladies stated. "They're always in a hurry. Seems like they could slow down and enjoy life."

The two men chuckled. "Oh, I think those two probably will enjoy a lot this afternoon." One whispered to the other. They had both noticed the heavy breathing and disheveled clothing of the young women.

Raven finally got the door to their room open after fumbling with the key card for what seemed like forever. Once inside, she dropped her coat and was immediately pinned with her back against the door and a very amorous smaller body attaching itself to her front.

Kris attached her lips to Raven's neck as her hands pulled at the shirt tucked into faded jeans. "Gods, Kris." Raven managed to grab her shirt and pull it over her head as Kris' lips moved to the newly exposed skin of her Captain's stomach. Her bra joined her shirt somewhere on the floor as Kris not so lightly claimed an erect nipple with her teeth. "Ugh." The older woman groaned as she tangled her fingers in blonde hair and pulled Kris tightly into her. Her hips bucked forward trying to force more contact with the smaller body of her lover.

Kris chuckled as she released a very red and stimulated nipple, she couldn't believe she was having this kind of effect on her more experienced lover. "Is there something you want, Taz?" She ran her hands up Raven's thighs and around to grasp the firm ass then pressed her body into the Captain's. "Is there?" She prompted when no answer was forthcoming.

Raven's head slammed back against the door. "Yes...you." She finally answered through her heavy breathing as Kris stepped between her spread legs and their hips ground together.

"I think that can be arranged." Kris dipped her head and suckled both nipples before she crouched at Raven's feet and removed her shoes. She watched blue eyes darken with desire as she ran her hands slowly up the front of Raven's legs, stopping when she reached the waistband of her jeans. Kris straightened her back, bringing her mouth level with her lover's crotch. "Mmm, you smell good." She maintained eye contact as she opened her mouth and raked her teeth along Raven's denim covered mound. "I bet you're dripping by now and your panties are soaking wet."

"Please." The Captain begged as she watched Kris lean towards her. "Oh fuck...Kris." She almost collapsed when she felt teeth rake across her.

Kris smiled. "Oh, I definitely think that can be arranged." She stood and pulled her Captain into the bedroom by her belt loop.

Raven was turned around which placed her back towards the side of the bed. She stood as still as her shaking legs would allow while Kris unbuttoned and unzipped her jeans. They were slowly pushed, along with her underwear, down around her knees, and then fell to the floor. She was pushed backwards until she was laying on her back across the bed. She propped up on her elbows to watch her lover as she leaned down and finished removing the clothing that was still bunched around her ankles.

Kris straightened and locked green eyes with blue as she slowly and enticingly started stripping for her lover. She almost lost her focus as a moan escaped Raven's mouth and her tongue hungrily moistened her lips. She regained her equilibrium as the last of her clothing was removed.

Raven sat up and reached for the young woman that was teasing her so wonderfully. She arched an eyebrow in surprise as her target nimbly stepped back.

"Uh uh." Kris wiggled her finger. "You, my love, are going to let me have my way with you."

"But..." Raven started to protest.

"No buts. You gave me so much pleasure last night and this morning, I just want to show you how much I love you." Kris moved within touching distance and leaned down to place gentle kisses on Raven's eyelids, nose and mouth. "Now, Captain." Her voice became authoritative. "You are going to follow orders."

"Yes Ma'am." Raven responded to the wicked gleam in Kris' eyes. She knew at this moment she would do anything and everything that her seductress wanted, including sit up and beg. 'And I thought she was innocent and shy.'

"Lay down." A devilish smile spread across her face. "And roll over." Kris swallowed hard and wondered if she could control her own desire as her eyes roamed up the tall, tanned, beautiful body when Raven leaned back. 'No tan lines.' She filed that thought away for later consideration. Raven turned to her stomach. 'Nice ass.' She felt the moisture cascading down the inside of her thighs. 'Of course I could allow myself one quick little climax. Just to make sure I stay in control.'

Raven rolled over and clutched the edge of the mattress in her hands as she waited. She was about ready to plead when she felt the bed shift as Kris straddled her thighs. She tried to spread her legs when she felt Kris' nipples lightly graze her butt and move upwards to leave a trail of goose-bumps, but her young companion refused the action by clamping her legs tighter against her lover. "Please."

Kris chuckled. "Not yet, Taz." She whispered in Raven's ear before she moved along the strong back, placing kisses down her spine. She paused and licked her lips as she hovered over the firm, smooth mounds of flesh that had captured her attention minutes ago. One long wet swipe of her tongue sent hips pressing into the bed then raising up begging for more.

Raven wanted desperately to open herself to her lover, but was denied. She clutched the mattress tighter, not caring if it ripped apart. Her hips bucked as she felt the warm wet muscle glide over her left cheek. She groaned her frustration into the blanket below her when there was no other immediate contact. "Take me...please, Kris."

"God, it turns me on when you beg." She placed a delicate kiss on her captive's rear end just before sinking her teeth into the inviting flesh, hard enough to leave an indentation. The sound that passed from her companion's throat was a cross between a growl and a groan. Kris eased up her lover's body until her knees were beside Raven's hips. She spread her own folds and lowered herself until her center was pressing against her lover's ass. She threw her head back, moaning at the delicious contact touching her clit as she rhythmically undulated against the body beneath her.

Raven felt teeth sink into her skin and was about to pass out from unfulfilled need, then when she felt hot moist softness grind into her, she briefly wondered if lust had ever been a cause of death. She felt Kris' release throb through her own body and settle between her legs adding to her already agonizing need. "Ugh...Kris...please...need you." She whimpered.

Kris didn't wait for her body to calm before she spread Raven's legs and knelt between them. "You've been very patient, Taz. Time for a small reward, I think." She entered her lover with one finger, twisting it as she slowly pumped in and out of Raven's over heated body.

"M..More." Raven pleaded as she raised her hips in invitation.

Kris removed her well-lubricated finger and placed it at the smaller puckered opening and hesitated. "Is it okay?" She asked her lover, realizing that they were still discovering what did and didn't please each other.

Raven pulled her knees under her, leaned forward on her forearms and presented herself to her lover. "Take me...now." She growled and felt the small finger enter her. "Gods...yes." Her entire being focused on that one finger easing in and out of her until she felt two other fingers fill her neglected opening. "Uh, Kris...fuck me...hard." She had never before wanted to give herself so completely to another.

Kris felt the tight opening give way as she gently pushed in with her index finger. With her free hand she entered Raven's soft warmth. She could feel her finger's slowly pumping past each another, one entering while the others pulled out, never leaving her lover completely empty. She felt Raven's muscles quiver and convulse and worked her fingers harder and faster.

Raven bucked forward as a soul shattering orgasm erupted throughout her body. Tremors continued to throb within her even after she collapsed onto the bed. She groaned and turned over to find Kris propped on her elbow, lying beside her. "You look mighty pleased with yourself." Raven was still waiting for her heartbeat to slow down.

"And why shouldn't I be?" Kris caressed a smooth cheek before tracing Raven's lips with her finger. "I wanted to give you as much pleasure as you've given me. And I think it's safe to say, I did." Kris suddenly needed confirmation. "Didn't I?" Her brow furrowed.

"Oh, I think that's a fairly safe bet." Raven captured Kris' finger in her mouth, tasting her own essence. 'Gods, I can't get enough of her. Is this what it's like to be in love?' Raven wondered as the desire to possess and be possessed over and over again by this wonderful beautiful young woman raged through her body and soul. "I love you, Sagira." She declared and eased her companion back on the bed as she covered the smaller body with her own.

Chapter Thirteen:

"Andrew, I can't believe that you just let Kristen leave with that...that woman." Regina sat staring into the fireplace where the gas logs flickered with small blue flames. "What were you thinking?" She turned her head to glare severely at her husband while her hands fidgeted nervously with her monogrammed linen handkerchief she held.

Andrew rubbed his suddenly tired eyes. "Dear, I couldn't keep her here against her will, she's an adult." He tried to reason with his irrational wife as he sat down in the recliner facing the stubborn woman.

"She may be an adult but her judgment has obviously been affected, she's not thinking clearly, Andrew. That Captain Chandler has coerced her into leaving her family and her husband-to-be. We have to bring her back, Andrew. I have been planning this wedding since she and Parker met and I won't be denied." She stated firmly while slapping the palm of her hand on the arm of the couch.

"Sweetheart." He leaned forward resting his forearms on his thighs and tried again. "I don't think she would marry Parker even if we brought her back."

"Well of course she would. We just have to get Kristen away from 'her' influence."

"No, Regina, they care for each other." He waited a few minutes for any acknowledgement of understanding from his wife. 'Talk about having to have a brick wall fall on you, so much for the delicate approach.' He took a deep breath and braced himself. "Kristen and the Captain seem to be quite taken with each other." He watched as a somewhat puzzled expression cross his wife's features. "They're in love." He expected denial, anger, and or resentment. He was at a loss on what to do as his wife keeled over in a dead faint. "Oh my."

Parker had been standing in the hall listening the entire time. He fully expected the Ambassador to denounce the two women and demand that Kristen return and go through with the wedding. And he would, of course, play the grieving hurt boyfriend and gladly take Kris back which he knew would get him points with the Ambassador. When that didn't happen, he had to rethink his position. 'Is it worth going against my benefactor just to get even with them for embarrassing me? If I do, I could jeopardize my career if the Ambassador takes exception to it.' He quietly eased back from the door, deciding that his career was far more important than any woman was. 'Besides, there's bound to be others that would be grateful to be the wife of an up and coming political star, such as myself. Someone that would be a lot less trouble.'

"Is there anything you need to do before we go home?" Raven asked the contented young woman that was spooned in front of her. She raised her head and kissed a bare shoulder.

"Home, I like the sound of that." She hadn't really thought of any place being home in a long, long time. "I'd like to go visit my grandparents and introduce you to them, if it's okay to let them know that we're back, that is." She absentmindedly rubbed her fingers across the arm around her waist.

"I believe they were notified of your return and asked not to contact any of you. For their safety." She answered before Kris could ask why.

"I won't put them in any danger by seeing them, will I?" She turned in Raven's arms to face her. "I was also going to pick up the money that I've made from the short stories I've sold, they've been investing it for me, but I could just get them to send it."

"No." The Captain assured her. "They're being watched. Just not as closely as your family." She explained.

"I thought at first this would be a big adventure but now I must admit this terrorist stuff scares me." 'Especially after seeing the scars you have, some look almost faded, others look fairly new.' She absentmindedly traced a small one that was one of the fading ones. 'I wonder if you would

tell me about them? And how do I watch you go off on a mission knowing that you might not come back? Or that you might be hurt and I can't go to you?"

"Do they have the published copies of your writings? I'd like to read them if you wouldn't mind." Raven wasn't aware of the misgivings of her companion she was just trying to get Kris' mind on more pleasant things.

"Yeah, they've kept an extra copy for me." She felt the blush creep up her face. "I'll get those too." They cuddled together, enjoying the closeness. "Can I ask you a question, love?" Kris linked her fingers with the ones caressing her middle.

"Sure." Raven propped her head in her unoccupied hand.

"John mentioned something, more to himself than to me, the other night when I didn't know what was upsetting you. Something about your last mission, the one before this one, I mean. He was afraid that was what was bothering you. Can you talk about what happened?"

"John worries too much and still blames himself." Raven wondered if telling her would mean the start of Kris' own nightmares when she went back into the field. 'I could just say it was top secret. That would be the truth, but I'd be keeping things from her and I promised I wouldn't do that.'

Raven kissed Kris' bare shoulder and took a deep breath, hoping she wouldn't regret this. "Workers from a US company and their families were being held captive and we were sent in to rescue them. The plan was for one of us to pose as a representative from the company and to be taken to the complex with the others so the rest of the team could follow, courtesy of a tracking device. Two things went wrong; one, somehow they knew I wasn't from the company and two, the captives were held in underground cells with thick stone walls and the tracking device wasn't strong enough to transmit through all that. It took the team several hours to get into the complex undetected and to find the captives and me and to get us out. I had been, ... questioned and John blames himself for not using the right equipment. But the intel we had been given never mentioned the underground area." Raven pulled Kris tightly into her body when she tensed up. "It's okay now...I'm here, baby...I'm okay." She whispered soothing words.

Kris almost panicked when she realized that Raven could have died before they had a chance to meet. "How ba...badly were you...hurt?"

Raven's hand that was wrapped around her lover, started a gentle caress across Kris' stomach. "I was in pretty bad shape, it took me a few months to recover and a few more months to get back to work."

Kris turned around, pushing her partner on her back and covered her Captain's body with hers. Looking into the concerned blue eyes calmed her racing heart. She realized that Raven probably hadn't wanted to tell her because of the worry that it would cause. "I'm beginning to realize that what you do scares the hell outta me." Kris admitted. "But I'll never ask you to quit and I'll

always be waiting for you at home." She paused. "I just want you to promise me that you'll always come back to me, no matter what."

"Always." Raven looked deeply into pleading green eyes. "I promise." She wrapped her arms around the smaller body and pulled them into a comforting embrace. She knew that nothing could keep her from returning to the love the two of them shared.

After a shower, packing, calling Gwen, talking to John and Sharon, checking out, eating lunch, and extending the return date of the rental car, the two women headed east towards Ocean City, Maryland. Kris happily snacked away on one of the many goodies she had stocked up on before leaving the hotel. Raven had to admit that when driving for more than a few hours at a time she tended to get the munchies too. Though she knew that it was more from boredom than from hunger.

About 30 minutes into the drive found both women deep into their own thoughts and concerns. The studio apartment she had now was definitely not big enough for both of them and not good enough for Kris. 'I want her to have the best I can give her.' Raven had always meant to look into buying a house, she just had never gotten around to it.

'They're probably going to tell me I need my head examined. Leaving every thing and every body I know to move across the country with someone I hardly know.' Kris glanced sideways at her companion and smiled. 'But she's worth that and more. I know I'd never be happy without her.' "Looks like rain." She pointed to the south.

"Yeah, but we're about to head southeast, so maybe it won't effect us." Raven said as they started across the toll bridge that took them across Chesapeake Bay. She noticed the far away look and the anxious tone in Kris' voice. 'Could she be having second thoughts about this? And why in Hades not, you idiot, you're dragging her across the damn country. Could I live here if she changes her mind? I'd have to, because I know I can't lose her.'

'She looks a little lost. I wonder if she's nervous about meeting my grandparents?' "Are we there yet?" She grinned at the surprise in her friend's face.

"Don't start." Raven tried to scowl. "And don't pout." She said as Kris did just that. "I'm warning you."

"Or what?" She crossed her arms over her chest and poked her bottom lip out further in defiance.

"Or I'll turn you over my knee." The Captain warned.

"Huh." Kris got a gleam in her eyes. "I might like that too much, Taz. Better think of something else." They both started laughing. Kris' mission to get Raven out of her funk had been accomplished. She reached over and closed her hand around her friends. "I think we might have the makings of a new kind of fairytale here."

"What do you mean?" Raven glanced at her companion out of the corner of her eye, before turning her attention back to the road.

"Most fairytales end with the rescue of the fair maiden by the knight in shining armor, ours begins there." She brought their entwined hands to her lips and kissed Raven's. Kris almost laughed at the bewildered expression that she was getting. "Watch the road, love, I'd like to get there in one piece."

Raven finally found her voice. "Kris, I'm not..."

"You are to me." She interrupted. "I know you're human and you make mistakes and that we're going to argue about things, but you're also my hero, so learn to live with it, Taz." She winked at her companion when Raven stole a glance in her direction. "You'll learn in time that it's easier just to agree with me when I have my mind made up."

Raven shook her head and chuckled. "I always say a good soldier knows when to fight, when to retreat and when to surrender."

"Which is this?"

"Let's call it a strategic retreat, pending a complete surrender." She winked at the grinning woman.

Raven had been floored by Kris' willingness to tell her grandparents that they were in love. Then the unexpected and complete acceptance of her and their partnership had left her a wee-bit stunned. She was left wondering how Kris' mother was a product of those two understanding and supportive people.

Raven glanced over at her sleeping companion then leaned her head back to rest against her first class seat. They had left in the very early morning hours to drive to Baltimore, after spending a couple of days with Kris' grandparents, to catch their flight home. They were due to land at 4:10 p.m. but had been 45 minutes late taking off due to thunderstorms that plagued the Baltimore area all day. She hoped the pilot could make-up the time in the air, she really didn't want to be in the middle of rush hour traffic all the way to the apartment.

Kris yawned and stretched. "How much longer?" She asked as she raised the covering and looked out the small window.

"About an hour and a half. I doubt you'll be able to see anything. It's overcast with scattered showers. That's the standard October to April forecast by the way. In case I forgot to tell you, it rains here most of the time in the fall and winter." Raven replied.

"But it stays green here during the winter, doesn't it?" Kris grabbed her water bottle from the pouch in the back of the seat in front of her.

"Most everything does, yeah. That was the hardest thing to get used to, being in other places where everything would be grey and bleak, like it was dead." She handed her empty glass to the flight attendant as he passed by collecting them.

After they landed and collected their luggage, Kris asked, "So, where's home and how do we get there?" Kris asked as she shouldered her laptop case and stuck her hands in her pockets since Raven insisted on carrying their two large bags.

"We get there by taxi." She quickly maneuvered around the people still huddled close to the moving carousel and directed Kris towards the exit. They had made up a little time in the air and she still held out hope of missing most of the commuter traffic. "And home is a studio apartment on Bell Street a little north of the downtown area." She headed for the taxi that pulled over at her signal. "We'll have to talk about getting a larger one or maybe a house. I was thinking about looking for something out of the congested areas." She climbed in the backseat after Kris and gave the driver the address.

"I don't want you to change the way you live, just for me." She stopped Raven from interrupting her by placing her fingers over her companion's mouth. "I'll be happy wherever you are."

Raven turned Kris' fingers around and kissed her knuckles. "I know you would be. But I've thought about doing this for a while. I just never had the motivation to deal with the agents and the banks and stuff." Their hands stayed clasped together and rested on the seat between them. "It won't hurt to look and we won't rush into anything." She promised.

Kris agreed for now. She promised herself that they would talk about finances later. The money she had from the investments by her grandparents was quite a bit more than she had originally made, but she didn't think it would go too far on paying for half a house and expenses. She spent the rest of the time looking at the passing scenery and asking tourist type questions until the taxi pulled up in front of an older five-story red brick building. Raven paid the driver while Kris waited at the top of the four concrete steps that lead up to the single wooden door. The Captain fished in the outer pocket of her duffel bag and retrieved her keys. She unlocked the door and pushed it open for her companion to enter first.

"Don't you want to check your mail?" Kris asked as Raven bypassed the mailboxes hanging just inside the door and headed for the elevator.

"Uh uh. Granny always picks it up for me when I'm gone." She pushed the button for the fifth floor and waited for the slower than molasses in the winter, antique lift to start upwards. "The stairs are faster if you don't mind the climb." She informed Kris who had moved over and leaned against her side.

Kris wrapped her arm around Raven's waist. "I don't know, I think this time can be used for a good cuddle or two." She stated and was rewarded with a kiss to the top of her head. "So when do I get to meet Granny and see if I pass inspection?" She tried to make the question sound casual but she was a little nervous about meeting her since she knew Raven valued the older woman's friendship and opinion and it showed in her voice.

"Hey." Raven dropped one of the bags she was carrying and tilted Kris' head back until their eyes met. "There is nothing to be nervous about. She's going to love you almost as much as I do, Sagira." Their lips met briefly. "I promise." She stated as the door slid open and she led the way down the hall.

'I hope your right.' Kris followed her taller companion to a doorway with the number 20 fixed to the wall beside it. Raven had told her earlier that there were 20 apartments in the building, ten one bedroom units and ten studios and that Granny lived in number 16, directly below them.

"She'll probably come up a little while after she hears us moving around." Raven explained more to fill the silence than anything else. "She always has to see for herself that I'm still in one piece. But she'll never admit she's worried about me."

Kris had been looking around the apartment and turned towards her companion. "Does she know what you do?"

"No, she doesn't know anything about The Division. I think she's talked herself into believing that I'm an undercover cop or something." Raven was standing beside the couch that she had dropped their bags on. "You want the nickel tour?"

Kris nodded her head. Raven opened a door that led to a fairly large walk-in closet, which she thought was an odd thing to have in a small apartment. The next door led to a small bathroom that contained a cabinet and sink combination, a toilet, a small corner shower stall and a normal sized bathtub. The room was wallpapered in an off-white color with yellow and orange pinstripes to give it a little color.

The kitchen was tiny; it contained a stainless-steel sink, a few feet of counter space with cabinets above and below it, a small microwave, a white stove and a white refrigerator that looked skinnier than a normal sized one. An open counter area with bar stools was used as a dining table but also served to separate the kitchen from the living area.

The bedroom contained a double bed pushed against the northwest corner of the apartment and separated from the rest of the apartment by a wooden screen that reached almost to the ceiling. A small table sat beside the bed and held an alarm clock. The main room contained a cloth-covered couch, cream in color with a beautiful forest green colored afghan folded across the back. One overstuffed chair, the same color as the couch, sat at a 90-degree angle from the sofa with an end table between the two. A small entertainment center occupied the corner across from the couch and contained a TV, VCR and small stereo. The entire floor, except for the kitchen, was covered in a dark brown carpet.

"I told you it was small." Raven reminded her as she stood behind the young woman and rested her forearms on Kris' shoulders. "We'll need to get you a table or desk, you need someplace to put your laptop to write."

Kris was about to start the dreaded financial discussion when a knock interrupted her.

"What'd I tell you." Raven winked at her and moved to open the door.

"I figured you'd be hungry when you got back so I made you some lasagna the other day and put it in your freezer with heating instructions. Here's your mail." She stated before noticing they weren't alone. "Oh, sorry. I didn't realize you had company." She looked from the one to the other. "You gonna introduce me or what?" It was unusual for her tall friend to have anyone other than John and once-in-awhile Sharon, stop by. In fact, now that she thought back, those were the only two people she had ever remembered seeing much less been introduced to in all the years she had known her.

Kris watched the, younger than she was expecting, woman as she talked to Raven. She had short grey hair, not quite reaching her collar. Expressive bright hazel eyes, covered by wire framed glasses that moved over every inch of the tall frame in front of her. 'Probably checking to see if she's in one piece like Raven said.' Kris smiled to herself. She was only an inch or two taller than Kris but had a larger bone frame and a heavier build. She walked up and stuck out her hand. "Hi, I'm Kris and you must be Granny, nice to meet you. Raven's told me a little about you, in her own talkative way. Is it okay if I call you Granny?"

The older woman shook the hand held out to her. 'She's nervous.' Granny realized as she grasped the firm but slightly sweating hand. She stole a glance at the completely open expression that was plastered across Raven's face as she stared lovingly at the young woman. 'It must be important to Kris for me to like her. And anybody that can get the 'queen of solitude and isolation' here to open up and take a chance, is worth getting to know.' She gave Kris a genuine 100-watt smile. "It's a pleasure to meet you too and yes, everybody calls me Granny." She reassured the young woman.

"I like her." Kris played with a strand of dark hair as they lay in bed. "I think she likes me, too." She rolled over and attached herself to the naked body that was stretched out beside her.

"I told you that she would." Raven yawned and wrapped her arms around the smaller, also naked body, and pulled her close.

"That lasagna was delicious, I think I'll see if she'll give me cooking lessons." She moved her head until she found the perfect spot on Raven's shoulder.

"And here I thought you could cook. What do you think I dragged you across the country for?" Raven said feigning exasperation.

"Well heck, Taz, I thought it was for the sex. That's what I came for." She ran her hand down bare skin causing Raven to draw in a breath and grabbed the wandering appendage before it ducked down between her legs.

"Don't you ever get enough?" Raven laughed at the pout she could see in the moonlight shining through the window behind Kris' body.

"Never. I could make love to you all night and still want you again." Kris stated emphatically but a large yawn gave her away.

"Get some sleep, love. We'll work on our stamina tomorrow."

"Love you." Mumbled sleepily.

"Love you too, Sagira." Raven turned and kissed her forehead. "Goodnight." Slight snores were the only reply.

The next morning Raven got up and showered while Kris was still sleeping. She moved quietly to the kitchen, setting up the coffee maker and opened the fridge to grab the can of coffee. 'Guess shopping is in order.' She thought as she searched the equally bare cupboards.

The smell of fresh coffee made Kris stir from her state of hibernation. She stretched and threw on her sleep shirt before joining Raven in the kitchen. She grabbed the clean mug beside the pot and filled it. "Morning." She sleepily stated before kissing her companion's cheek and sitting on the other stool at the counter.

Raven grinned. "Good morning, sunshine."

Kris ignored the jab at her less than cheery morning personality. "What are you looking at?" She inclined her head in the direction of the newspaper that was open to the classified section.

"Houses right at the moment. But I've also looked at the sales ads for cars. And there was one in here from a computer store I wanted you to look at. You mentioned that yours was kinda old and out dated." She had dressed and walked down the block to get a paper while the coffee was making.

"Hey, slow down a minute." Kris reached for her companion's hands that were busily searching through the sections of paper for the ad. "I know we could probably use a bigger place and I did say I'd eventually like to update my computer but I don't think we should go rampant spending money. I haven't got that much." She had turned her body to face her companion.

"But I do." Raven countered.

"Do what?" Kris was confused. "Spend money we don't have?" She asked for clarification.

"No." Raven chuckled. "Have money. More than enough for both of us." She continued on in a hurry when Kris opened her mouth to comment. "Listen, my job pays pretty good and I've never been one to spend it just because I had it, so I'll take care of us while you're the struggling writer and you can take care of us after you become rich and famous." She tilted her head until their foreheads met. "Deal?"

Kris was silent for a few minutes while she basked in the warmth of the love she felt surrounding her. "Are you trying to tell me that I'm going to be a kept woman, Taz?" She leaned her head back and grinned at her companion.

Raven let go of the breath she had been holding and felt relief flood through her. "I guess so since you're definitely a keeper."

Kris swatted Raven on the shoulder and laughed. "Look for that ad, woman. And give me the real-estate section. I'm curious as to your taste in houses."

"Here." Raven passed over the requested items and got up to refill their coffee mugs. "We need to go food shopping today. There's a grocery store not far from the computer store." She resumed her seat before she noticed the stunned expression on Kris' face.

She had been reading the listings of the houses Raven had circled. The areas of course meant nothing to her, but the square footage and the descriptions listed made her wonder if her friend had any idea just how much money the sellers would probably be asking. She continued reading until she came across one that actually had the price listed. "Oh...my...God!"

"Kris, what's wrong?"

"Did you see how much they want for this?" She turned to face her visibly relieved companion. "You did." She looked suspiciously at Raven. "Just how much money do you have, Taz?"

"Not real sure. You'd have to ask the firm that invests it for me. They also take care of all my bills and stuff since I'm gone a lot, they make sure everything gets paid on time." She shrugged her shoulders.

"You don't keep track of it?" She looked unbelievably at Raven. "They could be stealing you blind and you wouldn't know it."

"Yes and no. I mean I look at the statements they send every month and the graphs and percentages keep going up but I don't know how much the stocks and bonds are worth." She explained.

Kris hung her head and shook it. "I guess I better hurry up and get my writing career off the ground if I'm going to support us in the manner that we're about to become accustomed to." She looked up and smiled at her companion. "Let's get dressed and you can buy me breakfast since you're loaded."

They stopped by Granny's apartment to see if she wanted to go with them, she informed Kris that she never turned down a free meal, and the three women headed for the diner a few blocks over. Breakfast turned into a becoming acquainted with each other affair for Kris and Granny. With both of them learning that they had at least one thing in common, that they cared a great deal for their most of the time serious and usually sedate friend. Which was most definitely enough of a reason for them to start a friendship of their own.

Kris had also talked Granny into agreeing to some cooking lessons, as long as she didn't expect anything too fancy. 'Good ol' home cookin' was the only thing she professed to know. Kris actually learned more about Granny in the two hours that they spent over breakfast than Raven had learned in the many years of their friendship.

Chapter Fourteen:

Kris found out later that afternoon, why Raven had mentioned getting her a car, the only transportation that the Captain owned was a Harley-Davidson. They did manage to get all the groceries into the saddlebag compartments on the bike, but they had gotten a few strange looks in the process. Kris guessed that most people didn't go grocery shopping on motorcycles, even really big ones.

They had decided to leave computer shopping until the next day, so Raven headed in for her debriefing and to discuss the situation of Kris' whereabouts and the problem of The Division's probable leak with the Colonel. Kris spent the afternoon on the phone with real-estate agents setting up appointments to look at houses the next week.

When Kris had asked Raven if she really wanted to move and leave Granny behind, Raven had confessed that she would love for Granny to move in with them or at least somewhere close by, but she didn't think the older woman would. Kris' first cooking lesson was this afternoon; beef stroganoff was on the menu since she found that it was a favorite of her companion's. She told Raven that she would ask Granny to stay for dinner and maybe they could talk to her about their plans for buying a house and see if she might think about staying with them.

She had just finished with the last phone call when the knock came. She opened the door to let the older woman in. "Hey, I got all the ingredients on your list so we should be set. I really appreciate you taking the time to teach me."

"No problem, Kris. It actually gives me something to do, my bridge and bingo partner's in the hospital so if I weren't doing this, I'd probably be playing couch potato." She followed the younger woman into the kitchen.

"You want some coffee or tea before we start?"

"Yeah, coffee sounds good." She sat down on one of the barstools and leaned her arms on the counter.

"Your playing partner's not too sick, I hope?" Kris asked.

"She's gotten really sick over the last week and they don't expect her to last much longer. She's a lot older than I am." She took the mug Kris handed her and took a sip. "I use to volunteer at the nursing home she's in, reading and whatnot, and we got to be friends so when they needed a new person for bridge she conned me into it."

"I'm sorry." Kris wasn't sure what else to say.

"Thanks. She always tells me not to be sad. She says she's had a good long life and that when it's her time she'll be ready." She patted Kris' hand. "Enough about depressing things. Let's get started on dinner and you can tell me how you and Raven met."

'Oh boy, I should have asked Raven what I can and can't tell her.' Fortunately she was able to keep Granny talking about cooking until Raven came in a short time later.

Raven walked into the kitchen and wrapped her arms around Kris' waist from behind. "Hey. What smells so good?" She leaned over and down and gave the younger woman a light, quick kiss on the lips.

They had told Granny about them being together at breakfast, but Kris was a little spooked at the unrestrained show of physical closeness around someone she'd just met and started blushing.

"Relax, Kris." Granny smiled. "It doesn't bother me that the two of you openly show affection for one another." She reassured her.

The anxiety Kris felt left at the sincerity of their friend's voice and words. "Beef stroganoff." She answered and leaned back into the solidness of the body firmly holding her.

"Just make sure you keep it at a PG-13 rating. Getting overly excited at my age is detrimental to my well being." She shook her finger at the two lovebirds.

"Guess that means you'll be canceling the Playboy Channel then." Raven kidded her.

Granny turned several shades of red. "How'd you know about that?"

Raven chuckled. "Remember I watered your plants and borrowed your washer and dryer while you were gone a couple of months ago?" Granny nodded. "I watched television while I waited on the clothes. I can't believe how many channels that satellite dish gets."

"I guess trying to deny watching it wouldn't work?" The grey-haired woman tried for a sound of innocence in her voice. Kris had leaned against the counter with her arms crossed in front of her chest, getting a kick out of someone else being embarrassed for a change and Raven raised an eyebrow. "Guess that would be a no." Granny said.

Last night over dinner, the two women found out that Granny wouldn't be at all opposed to moving. She was very flattered that the new couple would want her under foot, but she made it very clear that she would not accept a free ride. She had even agreed to go on some of the house hunting trips next week.

Kris finished her shower deep in thought. She and Raven were meeting Colonel Albright for lunch, Kris had insisted on the meeting after learning that the Captain had gotten her ass chewed for removing her from the protection of the Secret Service. She was going to make it perfectly

clear that it was her idea to leave with Raven and that she would have followed on her own if she had been left behind.

"We need to get going if we're going by the computer store before lunch." Raven opened the door and stuck her head in the bathroom to see her naked mate stepping out of the shower.

Kris tossed the towel she was drying her hair with in the hamper. "Bout ready. Give me five more minutes." She turned back towards the mirror only to find herself trapped by strong arms. "If you don't stop that, we won't make it to the store before lunch." She nevertheless abandoned herself to the feelings Raven's lips created in her neck, which sent sparks to points south.

Raven relented and released her prey after a few more nips. "You got five minutes, Sagira." She left the bathroom, but not before delivering a swift pat to the rear end of her lover.

"Ow!" Kris rubbed her butt. "Retribution's a bitch." She yelled out to her laughing companion.

"Oh, I'm counting on it." She replied in a low throaty growl that sent shivers down and back up the young woman's spine.

The computer store offered a variety of machines and printers in a variety of prices. They not only bought Kris a brand new laptop; Raven also sprung for a new more powerful desktop model for herself. Of course that meant that she could also run the new games that had been too much for her old system to handle. Kris spent the next 30 minutes talking to the young salesman while Raven pondered and finally selected two games. They left the store, instructing them to deliver their purchases later that afternoon and headed for their lunch date with the Colonel.

Walking into the restaurant, Raven spotted her boss sitting at a back booth and guided her companion in that direction. "Kris, this is Colonel Albright."

"Pleasure to meet you." He stood and lightly shook her hand. "Please have a seat."

"Thank you, Colonel." Kris said politely but stiffly as she slid into the vinyl-covered bench, moving against the wall to allow Raven room to sit next to her.

"Call me Sam." He insisted as the waitress handed menus to the new comers.

They quickly glanced over the selections and placed their order. Kris barely gave the waitress time to get out of earshot before she opened fire on the unfortunate man sitting across the table from her. "I'd like to make a few things clear, Colonel." She hurried on before he could correct her. "One, I was not removed, I'm here because I choose to be. Two, I feel safer with the Captain than I would with anybody else. Three, I'm an adult and I'm not going to be sent back like some runaway child. So don't you dare blame any of this on Raven." She stared defiantly at the Colonel.

Sam looked at his Captain, noticing the stunned expression on her face that confirmed his belief that she had no prior knowledge of this little outburst. He slowly and deliberately wiped his mouth with his napkin before neatly folding it and placing it on the table. "Are you quite through?" He questioned in a subdued tone.

Kris swallowed audibly and held Raven's hand that was resting on the bench between them, intertwining their fingers. "Yes." She answered, hoping her voice was steady and not revealing the fact that she was scared she might have gone too far.

"Give me a little credit, I can see that you wish to be here. And if I needed protection, my first choice would also be the Captain here, I can't think of anyone better. And I have no intention of trying to force you to return, as you said, you're an adult. As for any disciplinary action against her." He paused, cleared his throat and turned his attention towards Raven. "I've assigned you as her," he pointed towards Kris and grinned, "personal bodyguard. I think that's punishment enough." He sat back with a playful smirk on his face.

Raven started laughing and Kris looked from her companion to the Colonel and back. "I think I've been had." She chuckled.

"Not by me." Raven assured her. "I can safely say that I'm totally ignorant in regards to this entire conversation."

"I didn't decide on this until last night." Sam explained. "And as far as The Division's concerned, you're on vacation." He told Raven. "The fewer people that know of Kris' whereabouts, the better."

After they ate they stood outside the restaurant and talked a few more minutes while the Colonel waited on his car and driver, which appeared at the curb along with honking horns and squealing tires. The driver had darted across several lanes of traffic and into the restricted lane, cutting off a Metro bus in the process.

"I think I'd get a new driver if I were you." Kris commented.

"He is new." The Colonel looked skyward and shook his head.

Raven leaned over and looked into the passenger window to gaze at the driver. "Sergeant Hardly." She mumbled and straightened as he hurried around to open the door for the Colonel.

The Sergeant quickly removed the silly grin that had appeared on his face at seeing Kris and stood at attention as he opened the car door. He slammed the door and tipped his hat at the two women before he rushed back around the car and resumed his position behind the wheel. He pulled back into traffic with more horns and a few shouts from irate drivers at the blue sedan that cut them off.

"You think they'll make it back in one piece?" Kris asked as she watched the red taillights disappear down the street.

"They'll be okay but I'm not so sure about everybody else. I'm glad we're headed in the opposite direction." They turned as one and started walking. "You up for a little exercise since its stopped raining?" Raven tilted her head down to look at her companion.

"Sure." Kris nodded her head and they continued past the bus stop heading north along Fifth Avenue.

Kris buzzed in the delivery people from the computer store and instructed them to take the elevator to the fifth floor. She had waited for them while Raven had gone down to help Granny re-hang a fallen curtain. She opened the door to the apartment when she heard the elevator and was surprised to see the salesman accompanying them.

"Hello, Kris. I thought you might need some help setting up the system." He explained while she signed the invoice. The brown coverall clad men finished stacking the boxes, retrieved their clipboard and headed down the hall towards the stairs.

"Thanks...Mark." Kris hesitated a second before she came up with the young man's name. "But I'm sure we'll be able to handle it."

"Oh...okay. But you can call if you or your sister have any questions or anything." He looked down at his feet nervously. "Would you, ah, be interested in going out to dinner or maybe a movie with me?" He glanced back up hopefully.

"Uh, Mark that's nice of you, but she's not my sister, she's my..." Raven entering interrupted Kris.

"Oh good." She leaned over and lightly kissed Kris on the lips before continuing towards the stacked cartons. "The goodies are here." She ignored the blushing young man as she started opening boxes.

As soon as she closed the door behind Mark, Kris walked over to where Raven sat cross-legged on the floor surrounded by cables, packaging and computer parts. She knelt down behind her companion and put her arms around her neck. "It was nice of you to let him bow out gracefully." She kissed her on the cheek. "You, ah, do know what you're doing, don't you?" Kris asked as she regarded the mess that was scattered out on the floor. "I could probably catch Mark before he got too far."

"Ha, ha, very funny." Raven tried to look hurt. "I'll have you know that I can read the instruction manual just as well as anybody." She stuck her tongue out at her companion and was surprised when Kris caught it lightly between her teeth. "Don't damage that." Raven said when Kris let go of her prisoner. "I've got plans for it later tonight." She wiggled her eyebrows.

Fingers kept a steady rhythm, lightly drumming on the desktop. 'So, she's back and she brought the girl with her. How considerate of her.' A vengeful smile spread across a surly face. 'I'll have to completely rework my plan, but I think I can use this to my advantage. Bring down The Division and get rid of a certain Captain along the way.'

The following Wednesday found Granny visiting her friend in the hospital and Raven and Kris meeting the real-estate agent at her office. She called just after breakfast telling them of a brand new listing that she thought might fit their requirements. The property located just north of Woodinville on a private drive accessed off a dead end street was seventy acres of mostly woodland with a small lake. The house was located on a small rise of land and was a rambling two-story grey stone structure with a three-car single-story garage built of the same grey stone connected to the eastside of the house. Several hundred yards behind and to the east of the garage was what sold them before they even saw the inside of the house, a small one level two bedroom cottage that would be perfect for Granny.

The main house was bigger than they needed. Four bedrooms and two baths upstairs, the downstairs contained a dining room, a huge kitchen, a study, a small room with built-in floor to ceiling bookcases, a half bath and a living room with a stone fireplace that took up practically an entire wall. A finished basement the size of half the ground floor of the house was located at the bottom of a staircase accessed by a door in the kitchen. At the back of the house was a wooden deck, accessed from the breakfast nook in the kitchen. It was large enough to hold a table, a gas grill and several deck chairs. A set of wooden stairs led up to a smaller deck area that was also accessed from a set of French doors located in the master bedroom.

"We'll take it." Raven announced after the tour was complete.

Kris stared at her companion but spoke to the agent. "Excuse us a minute." She pulled Raven into the corner of the deck. "Are you crazy?"

"What? You don't like it?" The Captain drew her eyebrows together. She thought Kris had been just as taken with the house as she had been.

"I love it. But did you even look at the price? It's too much."

"I thought you did, yes I did and no it's not." She turned and walked over to the agent. "How long before we can move in?"

"Well, you'll need to make an offer and I'll need to take it back to the seller, then get back to you."

Raven interrupted. "I'll pay what they're asking."

"Oh, okay. Well then, a month or two should do it. That will depend on the credit check and whether or not you finance through a bank or Mortgage Company." The agent was about to continue her explanation when she was interrupted again.

"What if I give you a cashiers check?" She wrapped her arm around Kris' shoulders as she joined them.

"Excuse me?" The agency that Sue worked for always made it a point to run a check on prospective buyers before sending their agents out to meet them, just to make sure that they weren't meeting weirdoes in lonely empty places. Sue wondered if they might have missed something on these two. "For the entire amount?" She knew her eyes were about to pop out of their sockets but there was no way she could hide her shock.

"Yes." Raven glanced at Kris who was trying hard not to laugh at the startled, confused and wary expression that was on the agent's face.

"I, ah, don't know. I've never heard of anyone paying cash for a house. I'll need to talk to my boss." She explained as she unconsciously backed away from them and dug in her briefcase for her cell phone.

After a short conversation with her boss, in which she was assured that Ms Chandler was not some kind of wacko, she hung up and smiled sheepishly at the two women. "The boss said as soon as the papers are signed and the seller has the check, it's yours."

They had taken Granny out and given her a tour of the house a few days after they signed the papers. She had been speechless upon seeing the house that was to be hers. Several days later they were still arguing over how much she was going to pay for rent. Raven didn't want her to pay anything; Granny wanted to pay more than she was paying now. They were both being incredibly stubborn and Kris didn't know whether to give them boxing gloves or try to mediate a settlement.

The three women ended up spending a pleasant Thanksgiving at the apartment even after the phone call Kris placed to her family. An upbeat cheerful conversation with her father and sister, with a promise from Viv to visit soon, but the refusal by her mother and brother to even talk to her, upset her more than she cared to admit.

The following week they would start moving into their new place, which meant Kris was dragging Raven to every furniture store in town. Raven had told her that she could decorate the house anyway she wanted, but Kris knew her companion just didn't want to go.

"So if I put orange shag carpet with red beanbag chairs in the living room, you won't complain?" Kris had innocently asked one afternoon when Raven tried to back out of going. "You wouldn't?" Raven had countered, but had ended up going even though they were heading across the lake to Bellevue. The traffic on 520 always put Raven in a bad mood but she gritted her teeth and

refused to take her foul temper out on Kris. She actually surprised herself and her companion by contributing to the selections bought that day. Several days and furniture stores later, they had just one room left to fill, the library. Raven told Kris that she could fill it with anything from first editions to romance or comic books to erotica. The young woman accepted the challenge on one condition; they would sit in the living room in front of a roaring fire every night and take turns reading to one another until they finished every book on every shelf. Raven promised and told her to buy enough books to last the next 60 or 70 years.

Kris still wondered if she would have had the courage to buy such hideous looking furnishing.

Two weeks before Christmas, the minor inside re-modeling was finished, the new furniture had been delivered and the three women had settled into their new homes.

Raven surprised Kris with an eight-foot Christmas tree and box after box of decorations for the house and tree. It took an entire afternoon but by the time the sun dipped below the tree line, Kris leaned back into the tall warm body behind her as Raven's arms circled her stomach and shoulders. Both stood in silence as they admired the multi-colored lights twinkling and reflecting off the many different sized and colored balls that hung from the branches of their first Christmas tree.

"Why don't I go warm up the leftovers, you go get Granny and we can have dinner. Then we can sit in front of the tree with some eggnog and tell each other our most embarrassing Christmas stories." She peered up and over her shoulder.

Raven leaned down and kissed the grinning lips. "I talked to her earlier, she said she was going to make it an early night. I think she's still pooped after all the unpacking." She wiggled her eyebrows. "Or she's being polite and trying to give us some time alone." She turned Kris in her arms and rested them across the shorter woman's shoulders. "You fix the food and I'll bring the presents in and put them under the tree."

Kris put her hands on her hips as she backed away and gave Raven a severe scowl. "You promised me you wouldn't get me anything. Not with all this." She held out her arms and turned in a circle meant to include the house, car, computer, furniture and everything else.

"All of this." Raven moved closer to her upset companion. "Is ours." She placed her palms against Kris' cheeks and tilted her face up. "I promise I didn't go overboard. I just wanted you to have a few things under the tree." She kissed Kris' forehead and pulled her into a hug. "Besides, I never had much of a Christmas when I was growing up, mother always had to work and we didn't have much money for presents and things. And lately, except for Granny and John, I haven't been close enough to anybody to buy presents for or spend time with, so indulge me. Please?" Raven thought about the one gift she had for Kris that she hadn't bought, a ring that her father's mother had given her before she died. Being the oldest girl she had meant that it should automatically pass to her by way of her mother. But her grandmother hadn't trusted Raven's mother to give her the ring, so she had called an eight-year-old into the hospital when the old woman had known she was dying and presented it to her. She had explained to the wide-eyed

child that it had been passed down from mother to daughter or daughter-in-law for so long that no one remembered where it had come from or how old it was.

"Oh all right." 'Makes me feel better about the few things I got her.' Kris looked up and rested her chin above her companion's breast and lost herself in the sparkling blue eyes for a long minute. "I can't deny you anything when you plead with me like that."

"Glad to know that. It might come in handy some time." Like the next time Kris was teasing her with a promise of a climax then backing off and denying her the release she so desperately needed. Which brought thoughts of the night before to mind. Which in-turn reminded her of one of the gifts she had picked up today from a little store on 2nd Avenue, which she still had to wrap. 'Mm, maybe I'll make that an early present.'

"What are you thinking about? You've got the strangest smile on your face." Kris asked with a wary tone.

Raven ignored the question. "I thought you where going to get dinner? I happen to be starving." She squeezed Kris' butt and crushed her companion's hips to her thigh while leaning down and capturing an earlobe with her mouth. After several minutes of very stimulating attention she abruptly let go and turned the smaller body around. With a pat to her butt she gently pushed the young woman towards the kitchen and whispered to a very aroused Kris. "Dinner."

Raven chuckled and headed upstairs to retrieve the wrapped presents. After a couple of trips she had them arranged under the tree then headed back upstairs and into their bedroom to prepare the gift she had bought today that was as much for her as it was for Kris. She had just finished arranging it when her partner called her down to eat. Raven decided that Kris would 'unwrap' the gift after dinner while they relaxed on the floor in the living room in front of a roaring fire.

Every once-in-awhile Kris would catch Raven with a self-satisfied grin on her face and by the time the relatively quick dinner was over she had to find out what was going on. "Okay spill-it, Taz. You've been grinning like the Cheshire Cat through the entire meal and twitching in your chair like you've got ants or something in your pants." She stated as she sat down behind Raven who was kneeling in front of the fire she had just started and handed her friend the cup of eggnog that she had promised earlier.

Raven took the cup and drained half of it before she looked over her shoulder at her lover and raised an eyebrow. "Or something." She replied then turned back to face the fire.

"What do you mean, 'or something'?" Her brow furrowed with confusion as Raven finished the remainder of the eggnog, put her cup down, stood up and slowly turned around.

The blinking lights on the tree and the fire that was consuming the logs provided the only illumination in the room so that when Raven turned from the fire and closed the small distance between them she was shrouded in shadows. She stopped less than a foot in front of where Kris sat cross-legged on the floor. "You said ants or something, it's or something." She said in a quiet, controlled voice.

Kris' face still showed confusion as she looked up at the tall figure that stood so close to her she could smell her partner's unique scent. Comprehension quickly dawned on her as she also recognized the smell of desire that radiated from Raven. Her eyes tracked down the body of her lover and stopped at her crotch that was just about at eye level and saw the bulge that pushed against the buttons of her jeans. Kris unconsciously licked her lips and grinned. "What do we have here?" She ran her hands slowly up Raven's thighs. "Is this for me?" She asked as she got to her knees and leaned her butt back on her heels.

Raven's hips moved forward several inches at the seductive tone and the feel of Kris' hands on her legs. "Guess you'll just have to unwrap it and see." Her voice was thick with desire. The harness was equipped with a smaller dildo that fit into the wearer as well as the larger cylindrical dildo that was intended for one's partner, so Raven had to contend with the teasing movement all through dinner.

Kris roughly grabbed Raven's pants and unbuttoned them, then pulled them down the length of her legs until they pooled around her ankles. She licked her suddenly dry lips and she looked at the medium sized purple dildo that was made from a very pliable rubbery substance. She noticed that this particular one hadn't been made to resemble a man's appendage like the others that she had seen. She had been making use of their recently acquired satellite dish and the adult film channels. Kris ran her fingers up and down the slick shaft before she wrapped her hand around it and continued her stroking. She knew the friction was having an effect on Raven when she heard the moan from her companion. "You like that, uh?" She curiously asked.

"Gods yes." She placed her hands on Kris' shoulders for balance and explained while she still could talk coherently; about the smaller end and that it pleased both of them at the same time.

"So when I pull and push on it, like this." She exaggerated her stroking. "You feel it inside you?" She grinned at the guttural moan that escaped from Raven. "That answered my question."

"Ugh." Raven's eyes shot open. "Are you trying to kill me?"

Kris ignored the question; correctly assuming it was a rhetorical one. "Take your shirt off, love, I want to see all of you." She commanded as she unbuttoned and removed hers along with her bra. Her eyes never left Raven's chest as the sweatshirt her companion was wearing was pulled off. She wasn't wearing a bra much to Kris' delight. She helped Raven step out of her pants that were still pooled around her ankles, then moved her eyes up until she was staring into blue ones that seemed to turn violet. She took the accessory into her mouth and sucked down the length of it before drawing it in again, while her hands traveled up her lover's stomach and occupied themselves with her breasts.

Raven tossed her shirt to the couch then watched in fascination as her lover's mouth stroked the toy. She let out a sensual moan as she felt the corresponding movement within her from Kris' actions. She rested her hands on Kris' shoulders as she gently rocked her hips in time with Kris' activity. "Gods, Sagira, if you don't stop," she paused and licked dry lips, "I'm gonna come." Her head was thrown back and her hips were starting to move faster and faster.

Kris removed her mouth but continued playing with Raven's nipples. "And that would be a bad thing?" She asked, clearly puzzled by the statement.

Raven's eyes tracked to her companion's. "No, but I want to be inside you when I do, love."

"Ah." Kris slowly raised her body to a standing position. "I can live with that." She kept up her manipulation of Raven's breasts, kneading them, then pinching nipples between her thumb and forefinger.

Raven decided she needed to regain control of this encounter. She pulled the smaller body into hers and captured Kris' lips. Her tongue demanded entry into her companion's mouth and wasted no time in claiming the area as hers. She released Kris' mouth and quickly lowered her head to seize the young woman's breast. She alternated between the two, first suckling then biting and stretching the nipple out then letting go.

"Oh god." Kris moaned at the treatment of her breasts. She shook her head no when Raven asked if she was being too rough. Kris held on to her companion's shoulders when she thought her legs might give out.

Raven lowered herself to her knees as she quickly removed Kris' shoes and pants. She took her time moving back up her lover's body, pausing to lick, kiss or nip each and every inch of exposed skin. She paid particular attention to the places on Kris' thighs, stomach and neck that she knew were the most erotically sensitive.

Kris was breathing hard and heavy by the time Raven had moved from her neck to her ear. "And you thought I... was trying to kill you." She heard the low rumble of a chuckle in the ear that was receiving her companion's undivided attention. "Ah god... the things you can do to me." She pulled Raven's mouth to hers and tongues dueled for dominance.

As lips met, Raven reached down and grasped Kris' right leg behind her knee, raising it and holding it against her hip. She thrust her hips forward; making sure the dildo came in contact with Kris' folds. She pulled back and pushed forward again and again, running the appendage lightly across Kris' sensitive clit until she was driving her companion wild. "Is there something I can do for you, love?" She asked with a slight teasing in her voice after listening to the grunts and moans of her companion.

After their mouths parted, Kris groaned in frustration at not being able to force more contact where she needed it the most. Her hips bucked wildly but she still couldn't get satisfaction. "I need you now." Kris shouted, her distress evident in her voice and actions. "Please." She whimpered.

"You want me to take you?" Raven continued the stimulation.

"Yes." Kris pleaded.

"You want me inside you? To fill you completely?" She prolonged the sweet torment.

"God...yes inside...please." Kris hung on to Raven like her life depended on it, her sanity certainly did.

Raven claimed a quick and intense kiss from her suffering companion. "Put your legs around me, Sagira." She instructed as she let go of the leg she had been holding and took a firm hold around Kris' waist. She gently lowered them both to the blanket that had been spread out in front of the fire, stretching her body out and fully covering the smaller woman.

Kris devoured Raven's lips, tugging on the bottom one before letting go. "I can't wait...any longer." Intense green eyes smoldered with pent-up passion.

Raven knew she had pushed her lover and herself for that matter to the edge of tolerance. She wanted and needed Kris just as badly as Kris needed her. She rose up until she was kneeling between her lover's legs and ran her fingers through the young woman's folds. 'We definitely won't need the lubricant.' She licked the glistening juices off her fingers, growling her pleasure at the succulent taste.

Kris' eyes closed when she felt Raven's fingers touch her. "Please...please." She moaned over and over again.

Raven spread her knees apart, further opening Kris to her and sat back until her butt rested on her ankles. She grabbed Kris by her hips and pulled her lover's body close to her own.

Kris wrapped her legs around Raven's waist when she felt the dildo at her entrance and tried to pull the device into her by forcing her lover closer. She whimpered her disappointment when the strong body refused to accommodate her.

Raven moved the appendage until it barely entered her companion, holding it there for what seemed like a lifetime, then abruptly thrust her hips forward, swiftly filling Kris. She pulled almost completely out then plunged in again and again. "Ugh...gods, baby, that feels so good."

Kris' eyes rolled back as she felt the accessory penetrate her. "Harder." She commanded as she propped herself up on her elbows watching her lover thrust into her over and over again. "Yes, love...fuck me harder." She forced out between labored breaths. "Oh god...that's it...just like that." She felt the familiar tingling start deep within her being then spread throughout her body.

Raven forced her eyes to stay open and watched the phallus disappear into Kris' depths. She felt herself on the edge of euphoria and drove in once more as they both tumbled over the edge together. She collapsed on top of Kris and sweat covered bodies molded together as one. "Gods...I love you, Kris." She stated when she could catch her breath.

"I love you too, Taz." Kris groaned when Raven pulled out of her still throbbing tunnel. "That was truly inspired."

Raven chuckled, a rumbling sound deep within her throat. "Is that what you had in mind?" She turned on her side facing her companion and propped on her elbow, resting her head on her hand.

"Did it meet all your expectations?" She wiggled her eyebrows as her free hand played with Kris' sweat soaked hair. Her young companion continued to amuse and amaze her, Kris had been so embarrassed when she had come to her lover stumbling over her words and turning bright red while trying to tell Raven about the 'toy' she wanted to try. But nothing seemed to be too awkward or too uncomfortable for her while she was at the height of passion.

Kris turned on her side to face her love and ran her finger slowly down Raven's chest, leaving a trail of goosebumps between her breasts, before continuing downwards. "Oh yes, one fantasy fulfilled." She assured her companion as her finger stopped at the leather that still circled Raven's hips. "Now, let's see if we can," she paused as she reached around to unbuckle the harness, "fulfill a few more."

Raven rolled onto her back and groaned as the smaller dildo was slowly removed from its resting-place inside her.

Kris was on her knees between Raven's legs. "Open wider for me, love." It only took her a second to decide that she wanted to taste the savory mouth-watering fragrance that assaulted her sense of smell instead of using the appendage that she held in her hand. She tossed the apparatus over her shoulder and licked her lips before lowering her mouth to devour the liquid delicacy that flowed freely from her companion.

Raven bent her knees and spread her legs as wide as she could. "Oh gods." She mumbled and lifted her hips to meet the attack that was consuming her body and short-circuiting her brain.

Kris paused in her feasting of Raven's juices to run her tongue through her lover's folds and to tease the swollen nub that was pulsating in time with her companion's rapid heartbeat.

Raven looked down between her legs at sassy green eyes. 'She's having way too much fun.' She decided she didn't want to be left out of the banquet. "Turn around, love. I need to taste you too."

Kris stopped long enough to reverse her position. She was on her knees and elbows and was about to continue where she left off when she was rolled over and found herself laying on her back. She was about to protest but found something better to do with her mouth as Raven's center hovered over Kris' face. She wrapped her arms around strong thighs and continued her interrupted feast.

Raven turned them over so her longer body was on top. She placed a cushion underneath Kris' hips and inhaled the heady aroma that was distinctly her lover. She wondered if she could become intoxicated from the liquid desire that poured from the young woman. She ran her fingers through her lover's folds as she felt Kris' mouth making love to her. She rocked her hips and encouraged Kris. "Suck harder. Just like that, baby." Raven's fingers continue their path past Kris' tunnel and paused for a second before one of the lubricated digits pushed into the young woman's tight anal entrance.

Kris moaned as she felt the finger slide into her. "Oh yes...that feels good." She knew she was close to coming when Raven attached her lips and tongue to her clit. She continued in her own effort to bring her companion to climax.

Raven felt the euphoria start deep inside her body and quickly spread outward. She pressed her tongue hard against Kris' sensitive nub as the spasms of their release jerked their bodies in time with each other. Raven managed to roll off the smaller woman and collapse beside her.

After a few minutes, Kris turned her body around and pulled the blanket up to cover their bodies. She laid her head on Raven's shoulder and sighed contentedly. "Your wonderful, love." She lightly patted the stomach that her hand rested on. "And I think we'll be sleeping here tonight unless you carry me up the stairs." She yawned loudly and snuggled in closer to prove her point.

Raven chuckled softly and wrapped her arm tightly around her companion. "Your wonderful too, Sagira." She placed a kiss on the blonde head that was using her shoulder as a pillow. "Sleep tight." She whispered to Kris who was already doing just that.

'Just the patsy I wanted to see.' He had reworked his plan and was convinced that he could get his revenge against The Division and a certain Captain. "Please step into my office, Soldier." He addressed the one person that he was sure he could manipulate into doing his bidding.

"Yes, Sir." The patsy stood at attention in front of his superior's desk.

"Sit down, Sergeant." He leaned forward over his desk and whispered. "I have a 'top secret mission' that I need your help on." He stroked the Sergeant's ego.

"Me, Sir?" He couldn't believe his good luck. He'd finally be able to prove to his uncle that he did deserve this chance in The Division. "I'll do anything you need, Sir. I won't let you down."

It was all he could do not to laugh. 'Look up goofy in the dictionary and I'd bet this guy's picture is there.' He controlled his emotions and leaned his forearms against his desktop. "I'm sure you will, Sergeant."

"Yes, Sir, most definitely, Sir. Anything at all, Sir, you can count on me, Sir." He assured him.

"This is the problem, Sergeant. The Ambassador's daughter is in grave danger." He had the Sergeant's undivided attention. "I have discovered that our traitor is none other than the illustrious Captain Chandler."

"I can't believe it. Are you sure, Sir?"

"Are you questioning a superior office, Sergeant?" His voice was full of indignation.

"Oh, no, Sir, of course not. It's just that it's hard to believe that she would turn traitor with her service record and all. A lot of people look up to her around here."

The Sergeant should have known things weren't quite right. The man sitting across the desk from him had almost turned purple with rage at the praise directed towards the Captain. "Since you seem to be more loyal to the traitor than to this organization, maybe I should find someone else to rescue the Ambassador's daughter."

Since the Sergeant had an enormous crush on Kris, that suggestion was all it took to secure his complete co-operation. "No, Sir. I'm your man, Sir."

"Very well, Sergeant. This is our plan of attack." He proceeded to outline his 'rescue' of Kristen Whitfield.

Continued in Part 5.

The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

~ Leather and Lace ~

by Greek Warrior

Disclaimer #1: This is an Uber story and the characters that appear in this story may seem familiar but aren't the same as the ones we all know and love. All the characters that appear here are made up from my deranged little mind. They're fictitious and aren't meant to resemble anyone. This is all done in fun and yes I know I need to get a life.

Disclaimer #2: Taz belongs to the folks at Warner Brothers Studios. Scooby Doo belongs to Hanna-Barbera. The X-Files belongs to somebody other than me, anything you recognize isn't mine folks, I got tired of looking this stuff up.

Warning: This story contains explicit consensual sex between adult women. If you're under legal age in your neck of the woods, go away. If you live in a place that frowns upon that sort of behavior, tell'em to kiss your derrière then talk to your Congressman, or move, or both.

Warning: This story contains violence. We are talking about a certain warrior's descendant, you know.

Note: The quote at the end of chapter one is from Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet'.

Feedback is most welcome as long as it's constructive. Remember, you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar, although I've always wondered why anyone would want a bunch of flies! I can be contacted at XWPScribe@aol.com. Thanks for reading.

Note: Astolpho's at the Marcello Hotel is a completely fictitious restaurant and hotel.

Part 5

Chapter Fifteen:

Christmas day was spent in leisure. The two women had opened their presents to each other that morning after Raven had to practically drag her companion out of bed. Kris had been sound asleep, snoring lightly when six feet of manic energy had landed on the bed. Raven was on her hands and knees, straddling the young woman and bouncing up and down. Kris had later been thankful they didn't have a waterbed. She was sure she would have been seasick.

Later that day Granny shooed Kris out of the kitchen and took over, cooking not a traditional dinner since they had done that for Thanksgiving. They had decided on steaks, French fries, garlic bread and a green salad. After the meal that was spent laughing at Granny's childhood Christmas stories, most of which consisted of her father's less than successful attempts to portray Santa Claus, they gathered around the tree in the living room to exchange gifts.

"We never did figure out how my dad got the impressions of the sleigh marks and the deer tracks on the roof since it was covered in snow. And of course he swore it wasn't him." Granny finished her story as she sat down on the couch.

"Maybe he didn't." Raven stated seriously.

"Don't tell me you still believe in Ol' Saint Nick?" Granny asked somewhat hesitantly. She was looking from one to the other, trying to figure out if her leg was being pulled.

"Sure we do. We also believe in the Easter Bunny, Leprechauns and little fairies with magic dust." Kris explained and Raven wiggled her eyebrows at her old friend.

"You almost had me going there." She chuckled as she leaned over and handed a gift to Kris. "That's for both of you." She added.

Granny remembered the almost argument the three of them had just after moving into their new houses. She had wanted to put a monetary limit on the amount spent for presents between them and the two younger women had protested. She had put her foot down and finally won by telling them if they didn't, she wouldn't be accepting any gifts from them. That had set off another 'discussion' deciding on what the amount would be.

Kris unwrapped the thin box and removed its lid. It was a picture of the two women standing side by side with Raven's arm around Kris' shoulder and Kris' arm circling Raven's waist. Granny had snapped the picture late one afternoon when the three of them had gone down to the waterfront to explore the shops and to walk along the docks. They had taken a short ferry ride and on the way back, Granny had captured them with their backs leaning against the aft railing and the setting sun behind the mountains as a backdrop. She had the shot enlarged to an 8 x 10 and had it framed in a very plain silver frame.

"This is great. Thank you." Kris jumped up to kiss the smiling woman on the cheek.

"It's perfect, we don't have very many pictures of us together." Raven added her gratitude. "It's your turn, open yours."

Granny picked up the roughly foot and a half, square box that was a couple of inches thick, wrapped in brightly colored paper with a green bow. She knew what the box contained since she had shook the package earlier and heard the puzzle pieces shift within. Raven and Kris knew of her crazy obsession with jigsaw puzzles, she was just curious to see what kind of picture she would be putting together. She ripped off the paper and saw a garden of flowers staring back at her. All different kinds and colors in no discernible order.

She grinned brightly. "Ooh, this is going to be fun. A thousand pieces, too." Then she noticed the certificate taped to the back of the box. "What's this?" She asked as she started reading. "I've heard of 'Book of the Month', 'Coffee of the Month' and even 'Beer of the Month'. But I've never heard of a 'Puzzle of the Month Club'."

"You get a different puzzle each month for a year, each being at least 1000 pieces." Kris explained.

"We signed you up for the hard category, but we can change it if you don't think you can handle it." Raven added with a smirk.

"Oh no, I recall telling you that there hasn't been a puzzle made that I can't assemble. You just wait and see." Granny stated with confidence. "I may be completely crazy by the time I'm done, but I will finish them. And no smart alec comments from the peanut gallery." She pointed towards Raven. "Thank you both, very much." She added sincerely.

"You're welcome." Raven responded. "Do you want more?" She pointed to Granny's empty cup. At the older woman's positive nod, she headed towards the kitchen.

"Kris, have you talked to your sister yet?" Granny's delicate way of asking if maybe the young woman's mother might have come around since the holidays sometimes make people put aside their problems. She knew it hadn't made a difference at Thanksgiving but that had been less than a month after everything had happened and she was hoping that with a little more time, Kris' mother might be regretting her decision to ostracize her oldest daughter.

"Viv and my father called day before yesterday to say Merry Christmas and to warn me that mother was still basically denying my existence." Kris looked down at her empty eggnog cup.

"I'm sorry, sweetheart." The older woman leaned over and patted Kris' knee. "It's her loss."

"Thanks, but it's okay." Kris had been trying since the phone call to shrug it off and not let it get her down. She didn't want this to put a damper on their first Christmas together.

"No it's not." Raven came back into the room carrying the pitcher of eggnog. "But there's not much we can do about it until she decides to come around."

"My father did ask us to join him in New York after the peace talks were over. He thought that Viv could come up too and maybe the four of us could have a mini vacation." She had been so happy that he was making such an effort to adjust, she almost cried when he suggested it.

"Well that sounds like fun." Granny had hoped at least someone in that family, other than Kris, had some sense. "When are the talks going to be over?" Granny asked.

"They're scheduled to start after the first of the year and I figure about four to six weeks at least. They'll have to blow hot air at each other then argue back and forth and make sure the world doesn't think that one side is giving in to the other." She explained.

The three women spent the rest of the afternoon talking and taking comfort in each other's presence. John and Sharon had stopped by in-between family gatherings.

Later that night found Raven and Kris sitting on the floor in front of the fire, watching it burn down to embers. Kris was sitting between the older woman's legs leaning back against her chest. Raven had her arms wrapped around her lover's waist. "You tired?" Raven asked when Kris yawned loudly.

"Yeah, how'd you guess?" Kris laughed.

"I keep getting a nice view of your tonsils." Raven chuckled and kissed the blonde head that was leaning back against her shoulder.

"Impossible." Kris said as she snuggled closer to the solid warmth holding her. "Had'em out when I was five." She explained sleepily.

"Come on, love." Raven stood up, bringing the limp body with her. "It's beddy-bye time."

The next afternoon Kris answered the front doorbell to find Sergeant Hardly.

"Hello, ma'am. Is the Captain here?" He took his cap off and grinned at the young woman.

"Merry Christmas, Sergeant, I mean Herman." Kris corrected herself before he could remind her. "Yes Raven's here. Come in and have a seat, I'll get her for you." She led him into the living room.

Kris found Raven at the computer in the den they used as an office. "Was that someone at the door?" Raven asked.

"Yeah. Herman said he needs to talk to you." Kris stood next to Raven and leaned her butt against the desk.

"Herman?" Two eyebrows shot up. "Are you sure he didn't come to see you?" Raven leaned back in her chair and folded her arms across her chest. "Should I be jealous?" She managed to keep the scowl on her face even though the corners of her mouth had tried to curl into a grin.

"What?" Kris stood up straight with her hands on her hips and her foot tapping out a quick steady rhythm. "Do you think..." She paused in her tirade when she saw Raven's mouth betray her. "What am I going to do with you." She sighed dramatically.

Raven stood up and tweaked her companion's nose. "Anything you want. But not right now, cause once we start I don't want to be interrupted." She smiled lewdly, kissed Kris passionately and headed for the door.

Kris licked her lips at the thoughts that were running through her head, then spent a minute shoving her libido back into it's cage. "If she keeps throwing those images at me, I'm gonna need a bigger cage." She informed the empty room then followed her lover out.

"Sergeant, you needed to see me?" Raven noticed the difference in the man's attitude towards her immediately. His body language indicated to her that something was most definitely different. Gone was the hero-worshipping soldier and in his place was a suspicious individual.

"Captain." He came to attention and saluted. "The Colonel sent me." Herman wiped his sweaty palms on his trouser legs when Raven motioned for him to be seated. He hoped that he could remember exactly what he had been told to recite to the woman seated across from him. He knew that if he made a mistake she would pick up on it and would be forewarned that they were on to her.

"And why would he do that, Sergeant?" Raven glanced at Kris who entered the room and quietly sat down on the far end of the couch.

Herman also glanced that way and watched the young woman sit sideways and tuck a leg under her in order to face them. "I...ah." He turned his eyes back to the Captain and cleared his throat. 'I have to concentrate, Kris' life is in my hands.' He took a deep breath. "We received a message from one of the informants. Some of the members of the terrorist group have managed to enter the country. They're targeting Kris, I mean Ms Whitfield." He grinned sheepishly at his slip up. He had been told to keep things professional, by the book. "We were told that they think she would be an easier target since she's not under the protection of the Secret Service with the rest of her family."

"Does Colonel Albright want me to bring her in?" Raven's sixth sense was jumping up and down, warning her that things were definitely not as they seemed. "Maybe I should call him." She started to stand.

"No." Sergeant Hardly yelled. "I mean...he told me to stay here and help you protect her. He didn't want you to have any contact with The Division. He still doesn't know who the traitor is and he doesn't want to take any chances of them intercepting the phone call."

'Bingo!' Raven forced her body to return to her chair and stay seated when all she wanted to do was beat the shit out of this guy. Other than John, Albright and herself the only other person at HQ to know that there's a traitor, would be the traitor him or herself. She was willing to bet that Hardly was just a pawn in the plan to take Kris. She didn't think anybody was a good enough actor to play dumb as well as the Sergeant did. And she knew that whatever lies he had been told were ones that preyed on his obvious feeling for Kris, so he wouldn't be so easily convinced to turn over the person behind the scheme. She decided playing along would be the safest option for Kris.

Raven saw the puzzled look on her companion's face and discreetly shook her head, signaling Kris not to question anything. "Okay, Sergeant, let me show you the security measures that I've installed."

Herman couldn't believe his luck, since before this most of it had all been bad. 'It's about time I caught a break. I'll get to show my uncle that it wasn't a mistake to get me a job with The Division and I'll get to save the beautiful damsel in distress at the same time.' He almost jumped for joy when he stood up to follow the Captain. 'I wonder if Kris will fall in love with me after I save her?'

He had a grin on his face the entire time Raven led him through the house showing him the main security system. She did not show him the back-up system that was programmed to sound an alarm directly to John and Colonel Albright.

It took several hours before Kris finally cornered Raven alone in the bathroom; it was the only place Herman didn't follow her. "Explain to me just exactly what is going on. I know something's bothering you."

"I don't know, exactly." Raven saw Kris take a deep breath that meant she was about to explode and hurried on. "But I do know that the informants that supposedly gave them the information were killed before we left the embassy. And that Albright would be the only one to contact me. And that John and the Colonel were the only other people at The Division that knew of the leak." She watched as her companion took in the explanation.

"Oh God." Kris was scared but tried not to show it. "You mean he's in on it?" She studied her serious partner and realized that Raven was scared.

Raven pulled Kris to her and held her tightly. "I don't think he's aware that he's in on it." She explained her theory of the Sergeant being used.

"That doesn't make me feel a whole lot better, Taz." She lifted her head from where it rested against Raven's shoulder. "What are we going to do?"

Raven had to smile despite the circumstances. It had always been her and the team, even where John was concerned. She had never been part of a 'we' before. "We are going to catch this S.O.B. before he or she has a chance to get within striking distance of you." She tilted her head down and lightly touched her forehead against her companion's.

"And how pray-tell, are we going to do that?" Kris pulled her head slightly back from Raven's when she felt her eyes going cross-eyed.

"First of all we need to get you to Granny's without our friend out there knowing."

"He acts like we are joined at the hip. He'll know if I disappear." Kris paced the best she could in the confined space. "And most importantly, I'm not going to leave you here by yourself to face God only knows what." She stopped in front of her friend and lover. "Don't ask me to do that." Kris placed her hand over Raven's heart. "Please." She realized that the fear she saw in the blue eyes gazing into hers was for her safety and that her partner would do whatever it took to keep her safe, including sacrifice herself.

Raven cradled the pleading face, lovingly in her hands. "Sagira, I can't concentrate on catching this bastard if my attention is on keeping you safe." She rubbed her thumbs across Kris' cheeks to wipe away the single tear that fell from each eye. "Besides, you have to warn Granny and make sure she's safe. You can call John from her house, he'll get both of you out of here and send someone to help me."

Kris sighed deeply. "I don't want to leave you but you're right about Granny. She could walk in on the middle of this and get hurt." She wrapped her arms around Raven's waist. "But you better keep yourself safe, Captain, otherwise I'll kick your butt."

"Yes, ma'am." Raven chuckled.

"Captain Chandler?" Herman called out. "I think there's someone outside the house. I heard a noise out back." He looked at his watch. He had to get her out the backdoor so he could let the Major in the front. Otis had already been waiting and he knew that the Major wouldn't be happy if he blew the plan now. "Captain?" He called out again.

Raven shook her head. "Supposedly we're trying to catch these people off guard and he is yelling loud enough to warn them." She whispered to Kris. "Here, Sergeant." She opened the door just wide enough to squeeze her body through, then closed it behind her. She didn't want him to know Kris was in there.

Kris had her instructions. She was to wait five minutes before heading for the kitchen and the side door. Raven had surmised that if Hardly wanted her in the back of the house that whomever was out there would most likely be coming in the front. Kris would then be able to sneak across the area between houses without being seen. Kris hoped Raven was right. She checked her watch and seeing that it was time, slowly opened the bathroom door and stuck her head out. Complete silence greeted her. She cautiously made her way into the kitchen and to the door. She opened the door and peered out into the fading twilight. She thought she heard a faint noise coming from

in front of the house and had to stop herself from heading that way to make sure Raven was safe. Instead she sent a silent prayer up to the heavens for her lover and ran towards the small house and the phone that meant help for her and the most important person in her life.

Raven let the Sergeant lead her towards the back of the house. "What did you hear?" She whispered as they both stood by the back door.

"It sounded like glass breaking." He hesitated, unsure of what to tell her.

"Hmm...I wonder why the alarm didn't sound?" She walked back towards the front of the house and the hallway where the panels for the alarm system were located. She was now sure in the knowledge that he didn't want her in the front part of the house, she was also sure that he would follow her and leave Kris a clear path to escape.

"Maybe he cut the wires." Herman thought that sounded logical. "Where are you going? The noise came from back there." He had turned and pointed towards the backdoor. When he turned back towards the Captain, she had made her way to the front door and was in the process of passing through it.

Raven kept one eye on the Sergeant and one eye scanning the area ahead. She was less concerned with Hardly and when she noticed movement behind the Sergeant's car, it drew all her attention. She was trying to determine how many people she was dealing with, when her body felt a threat coming from behind her. Her instincts reacted quickly enough to keep the club from making full contact, but not quickly enough to have it miss her completely. She collapsed to the ground unconscious.

"What the hell happened?" The Major asked. "You were supposed to keep her busy."

"She wouldn't cooperate." Herman explained. "I didn't know what else to do." He looked down at the unmoving figure with blood streaming out of the cut on her forehead. He turned rather pale at the thought that he might've actually killed someone.

Otis glared at the Sergeant as he knelt down to check for a pulse. "There better be one. I get to kill the bitch, not some buffoon that can't follow orders.' His fingers pressed into Raven's neck. He grinned sadistically as he felt the strong and steady drumming against them. "Go find the Captain's wh...Ms Whitfield and bring her here, hurry." He yelled at Herman to bring him back from his haze. The Major grabbed Raven's ankles and pulled her beside the car to shield them from prying eyes.

Chapter Sixteen:

Kris knocked frantically on the door. "Granny, open up." She was trying to convey urgency without raising her voice.

"Hold your britches." The older woman yelled. "I'm coming." She looked out the small window on the door then opened it quickly when she saw it was Kris and the state she was in. "What's wrong."

Kris shut the door and locked it behind her. "I need the phone, now." She said as she rushed by the older woman and into the kitchen. She yanked the receiver off the base, nearly pulling the whole thing off the wall in the process. She reached John at home and explained the situation.

Granny stood by and listened to one side of the conversation. When the young woman hung the phone up the older woman put her arm around Kris' waist and just held her, giving her a chance to calm down.

After a short time Kris was able to catch her breath and settle down. "John said that we should lock ourselves in the basement and wait for him to get here." She wiped her eyes that had tried to tear up when talking to him, with the napkin Granny handed her.

"Sounds like sage advice to me." The older woman said. But instead of opening the door that lead to the small root cellar, she opened a broom closet and pulled out a double barrel shotgun.

Kris stared at the gun that was probably longer than the woman wielding it. She picked her jaw up off the table, where it had landed at the sight of this little woman and this really big gun. "What..." It came out as a squeak so she cleared her throat and tried again. "What are you going to do with that?"

Any reply was silenced by the sound of a gunshot coming from the direction of the main house. Both women froze and stared in that direction. Kris moved first but was brought to a stop by a surprisingly strong hand gripping her arm.

"We can't just go running out there." Granny pulled the young woman around to face her.

"Let me go." Kris tried to pull free from the two strong hands that now held her. "I have to go, she could need me."

Cautiously Raven opened her eyes. She wanted to see what the situation was, hopefully without alerting the Major and Sergeant to the fact that she was conscious. She discovered that she was in a bad position, flat on her back with the Major kneeling in front of her by the side of the car. He would surely notice any movement on her part. She couldn't see or hear Hardly and assumed that he was searching the house for Kris since that's where Otis' attention was riveted. Raven knew that she would need to make a move before her companion was discovered. There was no way she would wait until Kris was found and placed in danger.

She moved as quickly as she could, but there was too much distance between her and Otis to cover before he noticed. He raised the gun in his hand and fired once. Raven's right leg crumbled under her and she hit the ground again. This time at least she was conscious.

"That was pretty stupid, Captain." He stood and closed some of the distance between them, taking care to stay out of her reach.

"Why are you doing this, Otis?" She pressed her hand over the hole in her leg, trying to slow the bleeding. "I always had you pegged as a company man. The real gung-ho type."

Before he could answer her, Hardly ran out of the house in a panic. "She's not in there, she's disappeared."

"Calm down, Sergeant. She couldn't leave without us knowing. Are you sure you looked everywhere?" He kept his eyes and gun on Raven while questioning the agitated man.

"Yes, sir. I checked everywhere, twice." He paced ringing his hands. "What if she hurt Kris? They disappeared for a few minutes right before I tried to get her out the backdoor like you said to do."

"If that was the case, then you would have found the body." He was beginning to panic a little himself, then he remembered. "She's probably being held in the other house by the old woman. Go find her and kill the old woman while your at it, she's got to be in on it too."

"But Major, I've never...I mean she couldn't be any trouble, can't I just tie her up?" Herman begged.

"Hardly, she's innocent." Raven yelled before Otis could stop her. "Major Otis is the traitor. If you listen to him, Kris is as good as dead." She finished just as Otis delivered a kick to her injured leg.

"Shut up." He pointed the gun at her. "Or I'll kill you now instead of later." The Major threatened in a voice that was hushed so Hardly couldn't hear. "Go, Sergeant, you have your orders."

"Please, Sergeant." Raven ignored the threat and called out, but Hardly continued around the side of the main house towards the smaller one.

Major Otis was laughing. "This is even better than I could've imagined."

"Why?" She asked again. 'Maybe if I get him talking, he'll screw up and give me a chance at overpowering him. Don't all psychos like to sing their own praises?' She tried to remember what she had learned from the psychology classes she had to take when she was in training.

"Why?" He leaned casually against the side of the car. "I'll tell you why. You, Captain are the why. You get promoted instead of me. You get fieldwork instead of me. You get commendations instead of me. You get everyone praising your work instead of me. That's why." His voice was steadily being raised with each point he made and his face became redder and redder. But he never gave her a chance to jump him.

'He's gone off the deep end. The gods only know what he's going to do to Kris.' She continued to watch, hoping for an opening.

"This way I can set you up to be the traitor and get back at The Division by making them all look like the fools they are." He had settled down and again leaned back against the car. "I'll kill Hardly with your gun, kill you and come out looking like a hero for figuring it out. It'll be too bad that I couldn't get here before you turned the girl over to the terrorist. Can't leave her around to blow the whistle, though." He grinned. "Is your whore any good? Maybe I can spare some time to have some fun with her before they take her." He grabbed his crotch. "She's got a nice ass, I'll bet it's real tight. I'd love to hump that."

Raven was blinded to the precarious position she was in by her rage. She got to her feet in a flash and charged the grinning bastard before she could think things through. She might have had him too, but she hesitated a split second when she heard a gunshot come from Granny's house.

Herman headed for the house, all the time mumbling to himself. He really didn't want to kill anyone much less an old woman, but an order was an order.

Granny let go of Kris' arms. "I know and we'll go see if she needs us, but we have to be careful. It won't help if we go charging in and get caught."

"I know." She admitted. "But I'm scared something bad has happened to her. I feel it in my gut." Kris closed her mouth and tilted her head towards the door, listening. "Someone's coming."

Granny quickly hid in the hallway just outside the arched entranceway to the kitchen holding the shotgun in a death grip. Kris grabbed the first thing she could find to use as a weapon and ducked behind the door. Both were taking deep breaths trying to calm their racing hearts.

The Sergeant slowly pushed the door open and stepped inside. He crouched down to peer under the table that was in the breakfast nook to his left and saw nothing but stars before he collapsed.

Granny entered the kitchen in a crouch; gun ready, after she heard the deafening shot. "Are you alright?" She shook her head wishing the ringing in her ears would go away. She had forgotten how loud a gunshot could sound in an enclosed area.

Kris sat the frying pan on the stove. "Yeah, his gun went off when I hit him." She was sticking her fingers in her own ears trying with little effect, to lessen the ring. "Is he dead?" She peered over the older woman's shoulder as she knelt down and checked for a pulse. Kris audibly exhaled when Granny assured her that he was still breathing.

"He'll have one helluva headache but he'll live." She reached over and opened a drawer, pulling out a pair of scissors. "Get me that duct tape off the pantry shelf, would you. We wouldn't want our friend here to get away before the cavalry arrives." She proceeded to roll him onto his stomach and tape his wrists together behind his back. She taped his ankles together, then bent his

legs at the knees and taped his ankles to his wrists. "That should hold him." She reached for the Sergeant's pistol and stood up. She held the gun out, offering it to Kris. "Do you know how to use it?"

Kris took the gun. For some reason it was lighter than she thought it would be. "No, I've never used one before." She continued to stare down at the weapon in her hand.

"If I show you how, do you think you could shoot someone if you had to?" She knew that if she let Kris carry the gun, the young woman would have to be willing to use it. If Kris faltered at all, it could mean all their deaths.

Kris raised her head and looked her friend in the eye. "If that someone was hurting Raven, I wouldn't hesitate to use it."

Granny nodded her head once, satisfied that Kris meant what she said, then quickly showed her what to do. They paused as they started out the door and looked at each other as another shot was heard. "Let's go." They said at the same time and resumed what they now considered their mission at a brisker pace.

The split second hesitation is what cost her the upper hand, although she managed to knock the gun out of the Major's hand. Otis recovered from his surprise and drove his fist into the side of her face with enough force to knock her to the ground. Raven tripped him with her good leg as he went for the gun he dropped, instead of her. He landed hard on his stomach but turned over and kicked Raven in her ribs when she tried to crawl past him towards the elusive gun. By the time Raven had managed to recover enough to make it to her knees, Otis had gotten to his feet and picked up the gun.

"As much pleasure as it would have given me to torment you, I think you're way too dangerous to keep alive any longer." He aimed the gun and smiled. "I will enjoy sending you to hell, though."

"I'll be sure to save you a seat." Raven replied just before she felt the impact of the bullet.

Granny was sure that the shot they heard had come from in front of the main house. By using the trees and shrubbery as cover, they were able to make their way to the edge of the garage without being seen. She peeked around the edge and saw the man on the other side of a car, but couldn't see Raven. "Stay here in case I need you as backup. Kris nodded her head as Granny moved slowly and as silently as she could. She had moved closer and could now see the dark-haired woman lying motionless on the ground. She raised the shotgun to her shoulder. "Drop the gun." She called out. "And move away from her."

Otis jerked his head around and laughed at the sight that greeted him. "Or what?" He spread his hands out to his sides. "You think you're going to shoot me?" He laughed harder. "Damn, woman, that gun is bigger than you are." He started moving the hand that was holding his gun in her direction.

There were two blasts in quick succession. "No, asshole, I know that's what I'm going to do." Granny replied as she lowered the now empty shotgun. There was no need to see if he was dead, one of the cartridges of the buckshot had caught the Major in the face.

Kris was at Raven's side almost before Otis hit the ground. "Oh God! Raven...love?"

Granny hurried to the other side of their very still friend. "Easy, Kris, she's still with us but she's losing a lot of blood and we need to try to stop it." She checked Raven's pulse and then her breathing as best she could without a stethoscope. "Kris." She used one hand to shake the young woman; the other was busy trying to stem the flow of blood. "Don't fall apart on me now, she needs our help."

Kris swallowed her fear and anxiety. "Okay, what do I do?" She concentrated on taking deep, even breaths and on what Granny was telling her.

"Good girl." Now that she had Kris' attention, she could focus on Raven. "Go get towels or sheets. Anything that's clean that I can pack the wounds with." She yelled since Kris was off and running into the house before she could finish.

Raven rolled over from her side to her back and groaned. She opened her eyes and started to panic when she saw the older woman hovering over her.

"Be still. You shouldn't be moving around. You'll make the bleeding worse." Granny scolded her.

"You need to get out of here. Where's Otis? Where's Kris? Is she okay?" Raven's eyes darted around looking for answers.

"Calm down, Raven, Kris is fine." She reassured the distressed woman. "Otis is dead, if that was the guy with the gun's name. The other one, the dark-haired man, he's tied up in my kitchen." She glanced up, willing Kris to hurry. "Help is on the way, but I need for you to stay still so you aren't bleeding as much."

Kris ran out of the house and skidded to a stop beside the now conscious woman. She handed Granny the makeshift bandages and gazed into blue eyes. "Please don't leave me." She pleaded as tears streamed down her face. She gently grasped Raven's hand and held it to her cheek.

"Hey." Raven brushed her fingers against Kris' wet cheek. "I'm not planning on going anywhere, love."

Granny was growing concerned. Raven's breathing was becoming more labored by the minute. She had checked for an exit wound and found none, so she knew the bullet was somewhere inside. She had seen the results of bullets ricocheting around in the human body like a pinball and was very concerned about this one's path of destruction. The only thing she was fairly sure of was that one of Raven's lungs had been punctured, probably collapsed and the chest cavity was more than likely filling with blood.

"I love you." Kris said as she gently kissed Raven's forehead.

"Love you, too." Raven managed. She knew she was growing weaker but she was determined to hang on. 'I'll be damned if I'll give up now that I've got something and someone to live for.'

Granny heard the sound of the helicopter and swallowed hard at the memories the sound invoked. If she closed her eyes, she was thirty years in the past. A sea of red flowing past in an endless stream of body after body. She shivered and opened her eyes. That was why she had quit nursing a long time ago, all the nameless faces that paraded through her mind.

The helicopter landed in the front yard just as several cars pulled to a stop not far from the three women. John was the first to run to them with Dr. Kudirka, who was on staff at The Division right behind him. The paramedics trailed behind with their equipment, waiting for the Doc's orders.

Colonel Albright stood beside Otis' body; his hands clenched in fists so tight that his knuckles were turning white. He took a few minutes to collect himself before joining the concerned party around his Captain. "How is she?"

Kudirka responded without stopping his treatment. "We repacked the wounds and put in a chest tube." He lifted his head to look at one of the paramedics. "Bring the stretcher now." He stood up to move out of their way. "But we need to get her to the hospital now to see what other damage was done." They all watched as he moved towards the helicopter with his patient.

John drove the two worried women to the hospital. Kris had put up a struggle when told there wasn't enough room in the helicopter for her, but gave in when Granny made her realize that she would be more of a hindrance than a help to those keeping Raven alive.

Kris paced from window to doorway, each time stopping to stare towards the large double doors that led to the operating rooms, before she slowly headed back to the windows where rain angrily pelted against the glass panes.

Sharon sat beside John. He called her on the way and she made it to the hospital just after they had taken Raven into surgery. Her eyes followed the young blonde's silent, methodical trek. Sharon had been through the waiting game twice before. Once when John had been slightly injured in a minor explosion. And once she had held vigil with him the last time his Captain had been hurt. She remembered that her first reaction had been relief that it hadn't been John hurt

again. Her second reaction had been guilt at her first one. She had only known Raven for a few months when that had happened and she liked the sometimes sad, most of the time quite woman, even though she told herself she wouldn't. Sharon remembered convincing herself that the Captain was a rival for John's affections and that deep down he loved Raven. She soon found out that was true, but the feelings that they had for each other were like two close siblings. After that, Sharon was able to relax and try, 'try' being the operative word, to get to know the sedate woman. 'God knows she didn't make it easy.' Sharon thought as she continued to watch Kris who seemed to have had no problem in jumping in and removing layer after layer of protection Raven had encased her heart in. She squeezed John's hand when she looked over and saw the malicious look on his face. She would have to ask him later, what he had been thinking about.

John had slouched his tall frame down in his chair and rested his head against the back. He stared unseeingly at the white ceiling tiles. 'Why her again? Just because that wanna-be soldier couldn't compete, he takes it out on her.' They had learned a few things from Hardly after he had been retrieved from Granny's kitchen floor and had put two and two together. He knew that Raven would be the one to fill in the few blanks that remained. 'I hope he ends up in the lowest level of hell.' He was imagining all the horrible things he would like to have done to the worthless bastard when Sharon's touch brought him back to reality.

Albright sat motionless. He hated this part of his job. It was the waiting and the not knowing that drove him crazy. He turned his thoughts toward Major Otis. 'How did he get that far-gone without someone noticing something? How did he pass his psychology exam? I know one thing; everyone's going to have them more often now, that's for sure. I also need to talk to the team that interviewed Hardly.' He pushed his glasses up on his head and rubbed his eyes. 'Make sure that gullible fool is just that and not in on this.' He sighed and pulled his glasses back down. 'The General's probably busted a gut by now, demanding to know how this happened.'

After an hour or two of watching Kris pace, Granny tried to get her to sit. She was unsuccessful. She wondered how long before the young woman wore a trench down to the floor below them. She closed her eyes for a few minutes, but was inexplicably drawn back to the rhythmic pacing. She could see the tension and strain in Kris' body and face. She sent up a silent prayer that Raven would be all right. She didn't care to think about what might happen if Kris lost her.

Kris looked at her watch; again, ten minutes had actually passed since the last time. She looked down the hall for what seemed like the millionth time. 'Still empty. Why won't they tell us something?' She nearly cried out loud. 'It's been five hours since they took her in.' She pivoted and retraced her steps. She stared at the wind driven rain lashing against the panes of glass. It seemed to her that the wind was punishing the rain for some reason, as it angrily drove the drops of moisture this way and then that way. She at first could identify with the rain since she ran the gambit of her emotions being pulled first in one direction and then in another. She started with fear, fear of losing her friend, companion, and lover. Then she moved to denial. Denial that Raven could one minute be with her and the next minute gone. Disbelieve came next. Kris almost talked herself into believing that this was a nightmare and that she would wake up any minute now next to the warm body of her lover. Now she was angry, just like the wind. The problem with that was the person she was angry with was dead and she didn't have anyone to take it out on.

Kris turned from the window just as Dr. Kudirka entered the waiting room. As many times as she had wished for the man to appear, she wasn't sure what she would do now if it turned out to be bad news. She suddenly wondered why she just remembered the old saying, 'No news is good news', she now wished he would disappear.

John sat up on the edge of his chair and Albright stood. All eyes in the room zeroed in on the man in blood covered blue scrubs, silently pleading for a positive report. He motioned for Kris and the Colonel to sit and pulled a chair closer for himself.

"They're closing now and in a few minutes we'll take Captain Chandler to the recovery room." He wiped the sweat trickling down his forehead with the cloth head cover he had removed and was still clutching in his hand. "The bullet in her leg passed through muscle and tissue and missed the bone completely. Her leg will be fine." He paused and took a breath. "It's the other one that caused all the trouble. It shattered a rib on entry and deflected downward. The bone fragments tore a rather large hole in the lung but we were able to repair without having to remove any of it. The bullet nicked the liver, kidney, and the small intestines. We had to remove the damaged tissue from the liver and removed a small portion of the intestines. The right kidney had to be completely removed." He expected the slight panic. "She can live a perfectly normal life with one kidney." He would not tell them that the bullet deflected once again, this time off her pelvic bone and that it then passed into her uterus and that it also had to be removed. He would discuss that privately with his patient. He only hoped that she didn't want to have children or that adoption would be an option if she did.

"So she's going to be okay?" Kris' question came out as more of a hopeful statement.

"She's lost a great deal of blood and therefore is very weak, but barring infection, I'd say she's got a good chance of a full recovery."

"When can I see her?"

Kudirka smiled slightly. The young woman was not being very subtle in letting him know that she had no intentions of being kept away from the Captain's bedside. He deferred to his boss.

Albright looked at Kris then turned to the doctor. "I'm sure not going to try and keep her away."

"When she's settled in ICU." The doctor answered. "Now, if there's no more questions, I'm going to get cleaned up."

"Thank you." Kris said sincerely to the retreating form.

Kudirka smiled at the young woman. "You're very welcome. But the lady there," he pointed to Granny, "is the one that should get a lot of credit. She kept the Captain alive until help arrived." He answered just as sincerely.

The older woman blushed at the praise and attention as all eyes turned towards her. And when Kris gave her a look of undying gratitude, she stared down at her shoes, unable to meet the

young woman's eyes. She was grateful when the Colonel drew the attention away from her and to himself.

"I need to go check on our people. Make sure they've been cleared through security and tell them to meet us in ICU." Albright announced as he stood and stretched. "John, would you check to see if the hospital personnel have been cleared?"

"Sure thing, boss." He also stood; glad to have something to occupy himself with.

Chapter Seventeen:

Kris entered the ICU room and looked at the motionless form lying on the bed. Slowly her eyes scanned the tubing that ran into and out of Raven. Her ears picked up the bleeping of the heart monitor and the hissing of the oxygen that flowed through the small tubes and into her nose. Raven's eye was black and swollen shut and she had a pale and hollow look about her. "Oh God." Kris covered her mouth with her hand to stifle a sob.

Sharon came in behind the young woman and placed her arm around Kris' waist. "She'll be okay. She's been through a lot worse."

For some reason Kris didn't find that comforting. She of course had seen the scars on Raven's body and heard the origins of a few of them, but it had been fairly easy to dismiss the fear she felt when the woman that had suffered the injuries had been whole and healthy at the time.

Granny entered and stood on Kris' other side. "Why don't you let me take you home so you can get some rest? I'm sure she won't wake up until tomorrow at the earliest." She tried to coax.

"No, I want to be here." She drew her eyes away from the unmoving figure lying in the hospital bed. "I don't want her to wake up alone."

"I'll stay with you tonight so you don't have to be alone." Sharon said to Kris.

"And I'll come back in the morning to relieve you." Granny told Sharon. "I'll bring coffee and something for breakfast. You, young lady, try to get a little sleep." She hugged Kris and kissed her cheek.

"I'll try." She promised. "And thanks, guys. I probably would have fallen apart if you hadn't been here."

"What are all these people doing in here?" The young nurse whispered to her superior who had just finished a conversation with two of the men loitering around one of the rooms.

"They're with the CIA." She informed her young colleague. "The patient in bed 8 belongs to them. She came in last night with gunshot wounds." Emma shrugged her shoulders like it was an

everyday occurrence to have armed people in their unit. It had happened a few times in her long career but it tended to make her nervous. "You'll have to work around them. They'll be here until she's moved. Here, take a look at her chart." She handed it over. "I'd like you to be her nurse, you haven't had a gunshot wound yet. It'll give you some valuable experience."

'Great.' Lisa had misunderstood the 'belongs to them' statement. She thought Emma meant that the patient she had just been stuck with was a felon. 'It's not nerve wracking enough in ICU, we get to have public enemy number one as a guest.' And this was just her second day in the Intensive Care Unit. She was beginning to regret changing rotations. She sighed as she looked over the new patient's chart. "There isn't a name listed."

"There never is in a case like this." Emma explained.

Lisa rolled her eyes as she continued to familiarize herself with the patient's condition and the doctor's orders. She had only been an LPN for six months. "I knew I should've become a dental assistant." She mumbled under her breath.

"What was that, dear?"

"Nothing." Lisa smiled. "Just talking to myself."

"Oh, Janet called. She's going to be a little late. It seems the 520 bridge decided to stick in the up position again." Emma was referring to one of the two floating bridges that crossed Lake Washington. The central part could be raised to allow boats to pass and sometimes decided it wanted to stay that way.

Lisa wondered if today could get any worse.

Kris had laid her head down on the bed beside Raven's hand and had dozed off sometime in the wee hours of the morning. Sharon woke up as the sun was making its way into the room. It had peeked through the clouds and through the cracks in the blinds covering the windows. She left the room to stretch her legs, leaving Kris to get some much-needed rest.

Lisa looked nervously at the man sitting beside the doorway for bed 8. "I'm just gonna..." she pointed into the room, "check on the patient." The man nodded his head at her, but made no move to accompany her. "Shouldn't you come with me?" She stopped with one foot inside the doorway.

He looked up at her surprised. "Why? Do you need help doing your job?"

"No, of course not." She put her fists on her hips. 'Who does this guy think he is? Asking me a stupid question like that.' "I thought you were here to watch the patient." Truth was, she admitted to herself; she was a little scared. She had never treated a convict before and she wasn't sure if she wanted to be alone in the same room with one.

"I am." He decided to give the nurse a break, even though she was kinda cute when she was flustered. "But the staff has been cleared so you're okay to treat her." The guard explained.

'I've been cleared? That's a funny thing to say. I guess they were concerned about one of us helping her.' Lisa gathered her courage and walked into the room, after all, the patient was still unconscious. 'I hope she'll stay that way. At least while I'm in here.' The first thing she looked for was the blonde woman. Emma had told her that two women would most likely be in the room most of the time. Lisa had seen the other one leave the unit a few minutes ago. She had assumed that they were there to watch the woman but now had to wonder after she found the young woman asleep with her head down on the bed beside the patient who wasn't even restrained.

'Get on with your job, Lisa girl. The sooner you finish, the sooner you can leave.' She checked the setting on the monitors, then the IV's. She made a mental note that the IV would need to be changed within the hour. Lisa moved closer to the patient to check the dressings covering the wounds. In order to check the bruising and swelling around the eye, she slowly reached out to rotate the woman's face towards her. "Oh my God." She whispered when she found her voice. "Raven."

Lisa quietly, but quickly left the room and told Emma she need to take a break. She needed time to get over her shock and collect her thoughts. This was the first time in over ten years that she had seen her sister.

She made her way down the corridor towards a small staff break room that she knew would probably be empty this early after shift change. As a little girl growing up she had always been curious about what had happened to her, but her mother forbid her from talking about her older sister. And as she grew older, Philip had happily informed her all about their sister. She had never been very fond of her brother, there was too much of a gap in their ages, six and a half years. And he always treated her like a tag along that he had to put up with. And she discovered that in dealing with him now that they were adults, she really didn't like him. She thought of him as a whiny spoiled brat that threw a temper tantrum if he didn't get his way. She took a swallow of her coffee and tried to look at her feelings toward her sister with an open mind. But she just couldn't seem to forgive the woman for the loss of her brother that she barely remembered.

Kris groggily woke up from her nap to the feel of fingers running through her unruly hair. She thought it was Sharon or Granny until a tingle ran down the back of her neck, spreading familiar warmth across her body. She jerked her head up and opened her eyes to stare into somewhat dull, but still the most beautiful blue eyes she had ever seen.

"Hey." It came out as a dry croak.

"Hey yourself." Kris took Raven's hand that had been stroking her head and brought it to her lips. She lovingly kissed the palm trying to collect her emotions, she promised herself that she wouldn't break down and cry. "They said you could have a little ice for your dry throat. Do you want some?" Raven nodded and Kris spooned a few small crushed pieces in her mouth. "Let it

melt before you try to swallow so you don't choke." She tried to stop it but a few tears trickled down her cheeks and before she could turn her head and brush them away, Raven saw.

"Come here." Raven said, her voice not as rough as it had been.

"I don't want to hurt you." Kris wiped at her eyes. "I'll be okay, just give me a minute."

"You won't hurt me. Please, I need you close." Raven moved her left arm open in invitation and waited.

It only took a second for Kris to decide. She carefully stretched out against Raven's side and laid her head on the familiar shoulder. "If they come in and yell at me, I'm telling them this was your idea, Taz." But she couldn't hide the sigh of contentment that the warm body and the comfortably familiar act drew out of her.

It, of course, did hurt. But the joy it brought Raven's soul made the physical pain pale in comparison. She closed her eyes and drifted off with a smile spread across her lips.

She wasn't sure how long it had been since she nodded off, but she woke up to the feeling of being stared at. Raven opened her eyes to see two smirking faces. "Kris, love, we're being laughed at." She rubbed the young woman's back until green eyes opened.

"Oops." Kris sat up. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to fall asleep on you." She blushed as she carefully got off the bed and faced the two women.

"I'm going out on a limb here." Sharon teased. "But I take it you're doing a lot better?" She moved to the side of the bed as Granny put down the sack that contained breakfast and joined her.

"Yes I am." Raven opened her mouth to accept the spoon full of ice Kris was offering her. "Now, when can I get out of here?" She asked after the ice melted and she swallowed the welcome moisture.

"Isn't that just typical?" John joined the growing crowd. "Scare us half to death again, and then want to get up and walk away like nothing happened." He stood beside Sharon and put his arm around her waist. "Good morning, ladies and other." He smiled at the 'other' since he knew she couldn't come after him. It was a friendly game John and Raven played, who ever was hurt had to suffer the torments of the other. It was a way of getting back at the injured party for making the other wait through the hours or days of grief at not knowing if their friend would live.

"Well isn't this quite the little party." Kudirka wasn't as irritated as he portrayed. He had worked with The Division long enough to know that this kind of thing was due to a release of tension and not a total disregard of the rules. But he felt like he had to show some authority or he would quickly lose the little control that he did have.

John cringed at the evil eye Kudirka gave him. "Sorry, Doc." John turned his own evil eye towards the bed when he heard the snicker coming from that direction. Raven tried to look innocent but had never been able to pull off that look. "Just you wait, missy." He shook his finger at her.

"Okay, folks, that's enough. Everybody out so I can check on my patient." He stood aside as John, Sharon and Granny walked out the door. He looked back to see a defiant look on the young blonde. "Of course I didn't mean that to include you." He was smart enough to know that he would never have any control what so ever over the young woman glaring at him with her arms crossed over her chest and a determined look on her face.

Raven snickered again. "And she doesn't need any help from you, Captain. She can intimidate me just fine on her own."

"She's good at that isn't she?" Raven glanced lovingly at her protector.

"Yes she is." He agreed. "I think I'd rather try to cross a mother lion with a cub than her." He pulled a chair over and sat beside the bed. "I think she's a keeper." He grinned at the thoroughly red faced blonde.

Kris sat on the edge of the bed and held Raven's hand while the doctor took a few minutes to glance at the chart in his hands. "Your vital signs were good last night and this morning, although your blood pressure is still a little low." He made a few notes and put the chart on the bedside table. "How do you feel? Don't tell me fine." He warned.

'He's starting to know me all to well.' Raven mused. "Truth? I feel like I've been run over by a steamroller."

"So you watched 'A Fish Called Wanda' the other night too." He was actually surprised by the fact that she admitted to feeling like she should feel, lousy. He had always had to drag it out of her before.

"Okay, Doc, so what's the damage and when can this lovely lady take me home?"

He took a deep breath and started to run down the list of injuries and the results of the surgery. When he revealed the part he had kept from the others, he heard the in-drawn breath that came from Kris instead of his patient. "I'm sorry, Captain...if I could have done something different, I assure you I would have."

"I know, Doc, I'm okay." Raven felt the searching gaze of her companion studying her.

"I've got some thing's to go over with the nurse and a few other patients to see. I'll be back later on." He headed towards the door. "Oh, you can have liquids now," he pointed towards the sack that contained breakfast, "but not anything solid, okay?"

Raven nodded. "Sure, Doc."

"Are you really all right? Did you want kids?" Kris asked after Kudirka left the room. They had never discussed the prospect of having children and Kris was completely in the dark as to whether her lover even liked kids or not. "And please tell me the truth, not something that you think will make me feel better."

Raven squeezed Kris' hand. "Yeah, I'm okay. I never thought about it, really. I just took it for granted I'd never have them. I guess maybe my own childhood and the way my mother treated me kinda influenced my unconscious decision. But I also never thought I'd have a partner either." She smiled at Kris, knowing she was being vague and noncommittal. "What about you, Sagira?"

Kris took a deep breath and blew it out, ruffling her bangs. "I knew I'd be expected to have a family after I married and in a way I think I resented that. Now that I...we have a choice, I really don't know." She played with the plastic hospital bracelet around Raven's wrist. "I'm being just as evasive as you are, huh?" She grinned at Raven.

"Yes you are. But I think it just means that we're not ready to commit one way or the other right now. It's not something that needs to be decided right now anyway."

Granny stuck her head in the doorway. "Hey, you ready for something to eat?" She entered the room completely when Raven motioned her in. "Oh, John took Sharon home, said he'd be back later."

After going through the now cold contents of the sack Granny tried to persuade Kris into trying the snack bar in the basement of the hospital. It took five minutes of assurances from Raven that she was tired and would probably sleep the entire time they were gone.

Granny decided on a bagel with cream cheese while Kris took one look at the huge cinnamon roll with cream cheese icing and drooled. Granny chuckled and added it to the tray while Kris filled to cups with coffee. They paid for their purchases and made their way to a corner table a little ways away from the other diners.

"Tell me about your medical training. According to the Doc it took more than just first-aid knowledge to do what you did." Kris asked after they had had several bites of their respective breakfasts.

Granny shook her head. "You don't waste much time do you?" She blew on her steaming coffee, not expecting an answer. She knew that curiosity would get the best of her young friend. "I used to be a nurse when I was younger, gave it up for Lent." She sighed at the expectant expression on her friend's face. "I was a surgical nurse in Vietnam from '67 to '69. Volunteered to go nobly thinking that I could make a difference and not so nobly knowing that it would give me unlimited and valuable experience it would take ten or fifteen years for me to get at a stateside hospital." She admitted.

Kris bit her tongue to stop the flow of questions that she wanted to ask and instead concentrated on her cinnamon roll.

Granny's eyes had focused on a point on the far wall as she looked into her past. "When I came back, I worked in a VA hospital for almost a year then went to a civilian hospital and worked in the emergency room for awhile." She refocused her eyes and mind on her tablemate. "But I had what the experts like to call a nervous breakdown. Not the straight jacket and padded room type, but I started to freeze if a patient came in really messed up. Anything from a bad car wreck to a shooting would send me back to the carnage over there."

"So you had to quit?" Kris tentatively asked after a long stretch of silence.

Granny sat her now empty coffee cup down. "They moved me up to one of the floors thinking that it was the sight of all the blood that was causing the flashbacks. That worked for about a year and a half, but gradually other things like people crying out or screaming in pain brought the memories back, so yeah, I finally just had to quit."

"But you seemed to be okay helping Raven. I mean you didn't freeze or panic then." Kris pushed her empty plate and cup away from in front of her and propped her elbows on the table.

"I guess enough time had passed. Or maybe seeing someone hurt that I care about was enough to override the memories." She shrugged her shoulders. "But don't let the Doc fool you, anybody could've done the same things I did."

"I know I couldn't and I don't think you're giving yourself enough credit." Kris covered Granny's hand that was resting on the table with hers and squeezed. "I know that I'm very grateful that you were there." She released the slightly embarrassed woman's hand and leaned back.

"Thanks but...Kris what's wrong?" Granny changed gears in mid-sentence when the young woman's face paled considerably.

"I'm...not sure, but I think I should get back upstairs." Kris pushed her chair back and stood. "I'm getting a strange feeling in the pit of my stomach."

"You think something's happened to Raven?" The older woman asked as they headed for the elevator.

"No, at least not physically. It's hard to explain but more like she's upset." She leaned over to press the up button.

A while after the duo had left, Raven felt like she was being watched and opened her eyes to see a nurse standing at the foot of her bed. "Is there something you want?" She asked after several seconds of silence from the nurse. Raven felt her senses prickle, not in danger but in familiarity. It was dark in the room since Kris had turned the overhead light out when she left and the sun was once again blocked out by a cloudy sky, so she couldn't make out the features of the woman's face.

Lisa knew she should have gone to her supervisor right away and reported her relationship to the patient but she wanted to confront her sister before she lost her nerve. "Actually yes, there is something I want." When Lisa returned to the unit she found out that the man she thought was there to guard her sister had left because there was no more danger to the patient. Lisa was confused about exactly who or what her sister was since Raven was obviously not under arrest or considered one of the 'bad guys', but someone important that was worthy of being protected.

"I want you to explain to me how you've survived all these years without the guilt eating you up inside? How can you live knowing you're responsible for an innocent's death and then try to push the blame onto someone else's shoulders?"

Raven wracked her fuzzy brain thinking back to all her missions trying to figure out just exactly whom the nurse was talking about.

"When I was younger I use to wonder what happened to you. What made you leave." Lisa stepped closer and clutched the end of the bed. "Then when I got older, Philip explained it to me."

"Lisa." Raven closed her eyes; she had been so lucky to avoid any direct contact with her family and possible volatile situations. "So has Philip perfected his story over the years or is he still telling the same one?" She wasn't angry or defensive, just curious.

"You're still denying that you're responsible for Derek's death?" Lisa stared at her sister, her eyes filled with hostility and disbelief.

"No." Raven firmly replied. "I never denied it and I will always feel responsible for his death." She sighed in frustration. "I just deny the story Philip tells. That's not the way it happened."

This was different. Lisa had been told that her sister said that it had been Philip who was responsible. "Then why didn't you tell mom the truth? And the police?"

"I did, Lisa, mother wouldn't believe me. She said that I was lying and that Philip told her he wasn't even home. And at the time, the Police didn't believe me either." Raven reached for the cup of water Kris left next to the bed.

"What do you mean 'at the time', did they change their minds? And why weren't we told?" Lisa wasn't ready to believe her sister. Why should her mom and brother lie to her for all these years? "And just what is your version of the story?"

"Look, Lisa, I don't think now is the best time to get into this. I'm very tired and starting to hurt. And emotionally I don't think I can go through telling it right now." She paused to take another swallow of water and to study her sister. Lisa had grown up to look a lot like their mom. Hazel eyes and a short cute stubby nose and light brownish, blonde hair that she kept cut just above her collar. Raven guessed her height to be about five seven or eight and she was still just as skinny as a post.

"You mean you need time to make something up?" Lisa accused.

"If you've already made your mind up that I'm lying, why bother to ask?" Raven's hackles rose; she was angry and frustrated at being put on the defensive.

Kris entered the room with Granny following, to see a silent battle raging between the two women. "Is there a problem?" She looked from the nurse to Raven waiting for someone to break the standoff. If it hadn't been for the foreboding in her gut, she would have thought that her companion was giving the nurse a hard time.

"Meet my sister Lisa. Seems she works here. Small world, huh?" Raven never took her eyes off her sister.

"I'd have to be an idiot to think that this was a happy occasion." Kris mumbled to herself. "Lisa, I'm Kris." She moved over beside the nurse and wrapped her fingers around the young woman's upper arm. "Let's talk." Kris proceeded to drag the rather surprised woman out the doorway, through the unit and out into the hallway beyond. "Is there somewhere private we can go?"

"I'm not going anywhere with you." She tried to jerk her arm free. "Let me go." She demanded when she found her arm still in a firm grip.

"You have two choices. One, you can listen to what I have to say. Or two, I can tell Raven's boss, that would be Colonel Albright, that I found you trying to harm the patient and that you must be involved with the guy that tried to kill her." Kris smiled the smile she was learning from the Captain, the intimidating one. "You choose."

"You...you can't do that, it's not true."

"Yes, I know it's not but I would do it in a second. Then you can spend the day being interrogated by them, then come back here and try to explain it to your boss. I'm guessing that you should have told them that you are related to the patient and shouldn't be treating her. So there's always the question of why you kept that a secret."

"Why are you doing this?" Lisa was scared and she knew that Kris knew it.

Kris lowered her voice when several people passed by them. "Because you upset and hurt someone I care about. So, which is it?"

Lisa pointed towards a small supply room. "In here."

Kris was precise and to the point. She told Lisa the same story Raven had told her about the day Derek died and the events leading up to it. She did her best to keep her emotions locked away, she just wanted to give Lisa the facts, she didn't want her to think she was trying to influence her in any way. Kris took a deep shaky breath when she finished; trying to calm the misery she felt at having to go through that horror again.

Lisa's legs had refused to hold her and she collapsed onto a small stool half way through the story. "What about what happened after? And where did Raven go?" She asked in a monotone after Kris had finished. "How did she start working for the CIA?"

Kris put a stop to the questions she knew she shouldn't answer. "Those questions you'll need to ask your sister." Kris was leaning with her shoulder against the door and her arms wrapped around her slightly queasy stomach.

Lisa stood and faced Kris; she tried to project a confidence she really didn't feel. "Why should I believe you? I don't know you and I certainly don't know my sister anymore. But I do know my mother and brother, and while Philip can be an imbecile from time to time and mother is set in her ways and beliefs, they've got no reason to lie to me."

Kris could tell that Lisa did, at least to some degree, believe her. Especially since it sounded like the young nurse was trying to convince herself as much as Kris that she should believe what she had always been told. Kris decided that she would try to throw a little more doubt Lisa's way. "Why would I lie? Why would Raven? What would she gain? Why would we make up this story on the off chance of running into you?" She saw the warring emotions cross the young woman's face and pushed off the wall with her arms spread out to her sides in a placating gesture.

Lisa opened her mouth to answer. "But..." She closed it when she realized she didn't have one.

Kris moved in for the kill, so-to-speak. "Who was your mother's favorite, Philip or Raven? Who did your mother believe if there was a conflict between them, your brother or your sister? You need to think back to before Raven left. How did your mother act towards her? Lovingly...indifferent...with hostility?" Kris let her arms fall to her sides. "You might want to talk with John Logan, he might be able to shed some light on this for you if you still don't believe me. He was a police officer at the time and knew Raven. He'll be around this afternoon, they work together now." Kris turned her back on Lisa and opened the door. She hesitated before leaving and looked back. "At least you had the support of your family when Derek died, Raven had their anger and bitterness. She had to grow up knowing her mother, who should love her no matter what, resented her simply because she looked like her father. And even with all those things going against her, she still turned out to be a good person. It would be a shame for you to miss out on getting to know her because of old fears and lies." Kris exited the room and closed the door softly behind her, leaving Lisa alone with her struggling emotions.

Raven was sleeping by the time Kris came back. "Any luck, dear?" Granny asked quietly.

Kris shrugged; she was suddenly very tired herself. "Hopefully. We'll have to wait and see." She sat down in the chair beside the older woman after checking on the bed's occupant. "Do you know what happened between her and her family?"

"I know that they are estranged because they felt that she was responsible for her little brother's death, which is ridiculous. Any fool could tell she loved him by the expressions on her face when she talks about him."

None of them saw Lisa any more that day. Kris had hoped the young nurse would have made a decision by the end of her shift, but in reality she knew it would take some time. Kris didn't get a chance to ask John if he had talked to Lisa. She had reluctantly gone home to shower after Raven and Granny had told her she was beginning to get ripe.

The doctor came by on rounds early in the evening and had a few of the tubes and monitors taken out of and off of his patient. "You feel up to drinking some chicken broth for dinner tonight?"

Raven glared at him like he was crazy. "No, but I could go for a burrito or two." She happily informed him.

"Very funny, Captain. You are on a strictly liquid diet at least until tomorrow. Then we'll see about something a little more solid. I don't care how fast you heal." He went through this tough act of hers each time he treated her. At least with the guys, he could always blame their tough act on male ego. He wondered if she thought she had to 'out tough' the men. Although sometimes he wondered if it wasn't the men trying to 'out tough' her.

"You could put it in a blender." Raven suggested hopefully. She hated liquid diets and she detested broth of any kind. Although she had to admit the ice cream wasn't a hardship and neither was the Jell-O as long as it had those cute little bubbles in it. Not that she would admit that even under the worst torture.

"Ew." Kris scrunched up her face. "Burritos and blenders don't mix, Taz. Pardon the pun."

"Do I hear snickering, Doc?" Raven tried to keep the threatening tone in her voice, which wasn't easy, since the blonde was laughing at her own joke.

"Me? No, of course not. No way I'd laugh at you, Captain." He peaked out from behind the chart he was pretending to study, trying desperately to keep the grin from forming on his face. "I'm just going to go and...do something." He slowly backed towards the door and freedom. "I'm sure there's something, somewhere around here that I'm needed for." He finished in a hurry as he turned and escaped. He could hear the laughter coming from the two women and smiled himself. "Sometimes life is good."

Chapter Eighteen:

When Lisa returned to ICU, she explained to Emma about her relationship to the patient and was able to avoid Raven and Kris for the rest of her shift. After she was finished for the day she hung around waiting until she could talk with the ex-policeman. After their discussion, Lisa was more confused about some things, less about others. John had told her another story, one about a young determined girl that meticulously gathered evidence against the gang that she had known as her older brother's friends.

Lisa sat down on the sofa in her small apartment. She had moved out of her mother's house after she had graduated and started a full-time job. She found a small one bedroom on First Hill that

was a short bus ride, or on pleasant days, a moderate walk from work. She buried her face in her hands and sighed. 'It seems that my sister's story had facts to back it up. She also seems to have not only his respect but that of most of the people she works with and the gratitude of the ones she's helped.' It was a total about-face from the way Lisa was use to thinking of her. Thinking back to some of the questions that Kris asked her with adult eyes made some memories take on a new meaning.

Each day Lisa sat and waited on her big sister to come home from school. And everyday her best friend would come in and spend time until dinner playing with her. On this day Raven, as she still called her even though their mother had started calling her Frances, came home with her clothes all dirty and torn. Lisa hid behind the chair when their mother starting yelling at her playmate. 'It's bad enough that you look like him. Do you have to act like him too?' Lisa watched as their mother grabbed Raven's arm and dragged her down the hallway towards their room. 'You must think I have money to throw away, I know he did. Get out of those things and wash them. I'll have to see if they can be mended.'

Lisa leaned back on the couch and closed her eyes. Another memory floated into her consciousness that she hadn't thought about since right after Raven had disappeared.

She had a bad dream, storms sometimes scared her and she woke up crying. Raven had gotten out of her bed and joined Lisa in hers. Her big sister always sung her back to sleep after she had a nightmare. Except this night their mother got home from work earlier than usual. The angry look on her face scared Lisa worse than the dream and storm combined and she started crying again. 'You're scaring her.' Raven had come to her defense. Lisa stared in shock as their mother slapped Raven hard enough to knock her to the floor. 'Don't you talk back to me, young lady. And don't you ever sing or whistle or even hum in this house again. You sound just like him and I won't stand for it.'

Lisa smiled at the memory of her big sister taking care of her. She had exchanged the positive memories for the lies that she had been told by Philip and the anger and resentment of her mother. She wondered if Raven still sang. "I'll have to ask her." She now knew that she would approach her sister asking to become part of her life again.

The 'him' in her memories was their father. Lisa had never made the connection before. She didn't remember him since she was just a baby when he left them. "Now I think I know why mother didn't believe her. But why would Philip lie? Was he scared? But if Raven's story is completely true, he didn't hurt Derek, the others did." Lisa sat forward with her elbows resting on her knees. "I guess I could ask him, but if he's lied all this time he won't change his story now. Probably won't do any good to talk to mother either." She laughed dejectedly. "Probably? Who am I kidding." Lisa shook her head. "Not only am I talking to myself, I'm answering, too."

Lisa decided to try and save what was left of her sanity, especially since she was meeting her mother for lunch tomorrow, and fix dinner. She thought better on a full stomach and she had skipped lunch that day. She reached for the refrigerator handle and pulled. It refused to open. It was ancient and sometimes stuck much to her annoyance. "Hey, come on, open up." She pulled harder. "Please, I'm hungry." She braced her foot against the counter and yanked. This time the

door opened with a pop and she ended up on her butt in the middle of the kitchen floor. "Now, that wasn't so hard was it?" Lisa asked the appliance then realized what she was doing and rolled her eyes. "Oh God, now I'm talking to inanimate objects." She started laughing at herself. "I wonder if I should start looking over my shoulder for the men in the white coats?"

After she had eaten dinner in front of the TV, she had forgotten she had taped two of her favorite shows the other night; she turned her thoughts back to the matter at hand. 'How do I get Philip to admit that he lied and that his 'friends' are the ones to blame? What was the name that John called the leader? It was the same as the little guy in the video game several years ago...the one with the mustache. Fabio...no, uh...Dario...that's not it. Mario, that's it.' Lisa had started to pace. 'I wonder if I can use Mario's name to scare Philip? Okay, so how would I know about him? Gang members are bound to get hurt from time to time and I am a nurse working in a hospital. Maybe he remembers my last name, asks me if I know Philip. Okay, that'll work.'

Pleased with herself for coming up with a plan, Lisa sat down and turned the TV back on. "Wait." She pushed the power button on the remote, turning the TV off again. "If I'm going to throw this guys name around, maybe I ought to learn a little bit about him. Now how am I going to do that?" She had started talking out loud to herself again. "Gayle's older brother is a cop. What's his name? Oh shoot, he asked me out a couple of times." Gayle was Lisa's friend from college. They had met their junior year and hit it off. Lisa had never gone out with Gayle's brother, she had been too busy with trying to keep up with her classes. "Andy's his name. Maybe he can help me out."

Lisa called Gayle to find out how to contact her brother. He worked the day shift so she had called him at home. After explaining what she wanted and some of why she wanted it, he agreed to see if he could dig up some information on the gang member Mario on one condition, that she would have dinner with him tomorrow night. If he was able to get any information for her, she would buy him dinner, if not she would still have dinner with him and he would buy. Lisa had agreed, thinking she would win either way. She remembered that he was a really nice guy and cute too.

She headed for the shower and an early night. The turmoil of the day had left her exhausted and now that she had settled on a plan of action, her chaotic mind had finally wound down.

Sharon wasn't going to stay that night with Kris since Raven was out of immediate danger. Her condition had been downgraded from critical. Really the only danger now was from infection. Dr. Kudirka had never seen anyone heal as quickly as she did and often wondered if it was from stubbornness or her intense hatred of hospitals. He had informed her that tomorrow he would move her to a private room.

"How did the talk go with Lisa?" Raven asked after she had forced down another swallow of the chicken broth she hated. Kris was being very stubborn and wouldn't allow her to have the Jell-O, ice cream or pudding until the entire cup was empty.

"Too early to tell yet, but I think I put some doubts in her mind about what really happened." She stretched and yawned.

"You really should've gone home with Granny. You would sleep better in a bed." As much as Raven enjoyed having her here, she had to try one more time to persuade her companion.

"You just wanted me to leave so you wouldn't have to drink that broth." Kris grinned. "Besides, I told you before that I don't want to sleep in our bed without you. I really don't think I could." She stood and moved to stand beside the bed. "You finished it. Good girl." She praised the older woman like an insecure child. "Here, Taz you can eat your cute green Jell-O now." Kris almost started laughing at the conversation they had earlier. Raven had been so serious when she asked Kris if she knew how they got the little bubbles inside the squares. Kris had to bite the inside of her cheek to keep from spewing the swallow of water across the room. 'It's a rather long and arduous process. I'll make you some when you get to come home.' She had promised.

Lisa woke up early and spent the morning cleaning her apartment. She was absolutely dreading her weekly lunch date with her mother. She just hoped that she would be able to keep quiet about seeing Raven and about the memories that had begun to surface. Maybe she could test the waters and just ask a question about their childhood and see how she reacted. After all the time that had passed, maybe her mother would have mellowed. Maybe she had started to miss her eldest daughter and even regretted what had happened in the past. With those thoughts, Lisa felt in better spirits when she headed out the door.

She pushed open the door to the restaurant and headed back towards the kitchen. "Hey, mother?" She called out. "Where are you?"

"In the freezer, dear. Be out in a minute." Cynthia Chandler was 50 years old, but looked slightly older. Her brownish blonde hair that grew to just below her shoulder had turned gray several years ago. She was the same height as her youngest daughter but was thinner and had a pasty look to her skin. Their eyes were the same hazel color, but Cynthia's were dull and almost lifeless.

"If you're too busy, we can have lunch another time." Lisa offered, raising her voice above the loud noises of the kitchen.

"Don't be silly. You know I always save Tuesdays for us to have lunch." It had been this way for the last couple of years. Even when Lisa was still living at home, they had lunch every Tuesday at the restaurant. "Do you think you'll be able to make dinner this week?" Every Thursday she and Philip were supposed to have dinner with her, but for the past several weeks Lisa hadn't been able to make it because of her work schedule.

"I, uh, don't know. I'll have to check with the hospital tomorrow after the shifts are assigned." Lisa knew darn well what her schedule was, but it gave her a way out.

"Well call me when you know something. Let's go sit down and eat." They always ate from the buffet and Lisa didn't mind since the food was always good. She had to give her mother that, she ran a good restaurant and the employees all liked to work for the woman.

Lisa finished her last bite and wiped her mouth. "That was good but I think I ate too much."

"I don't think I've ever seen you go back for thirds before. Don't you cook at that apartment of yours?"

"Yes, mother. But I was cleaning this morning and I didn't eat breakfast." Lisa explained.

"I should get back to work. Don't forget to let me know about Thursday night."

"Wait, I wanted to ask you something." Lisa paused and waited until Cynthia sat back down. "You remember when I was little and sometimes I would have a bad dream?" She was nervous and she wasn't sure how to take her mother's silence but she had started this so she would now have to finish. "I would wake up crying and I remember someone holding me and softly singing me back to sleep. That was Raven wasn't it?"

There was silence for at least a minute before Cynthia replied. "I never want to hear her name again. She doesn't exist as far as I'm concerned." Her voice was low and controlled. "It was a joyous day when she left, just like her father she was. A bad seed."

"But how do you know? What if..."

"I could look at her and tell, that's how I know. No more talk about her or what ifs. Do you understand? She's probably in jail or dead by now anyway and I say good riddance." Cynthia didn't wait for her daughter to answer her. She threw her napkin down on the table and headed towards her office.

"That went well." Lisa sighed as she watched the retreating form of the agitated woman. At least she knew her mother's feeling on the subject hadn't changed. She stood, put on her coat and slung her small backpack over her shoulder. She had gotten in the habit of using one while in school and now used it instead of a purse.

Lisa passed the bus stop by, deciding to walk part of the way back to her apartment. There was a bright sun shining instead of the usual December clouds and rain. The wind was calm and the temperature was in the mid-forties, making for a pleasantly mild day. Walking would also help her work off lunch since she ate way too much and she was having dinner with Andy at 7 o'clock that night. She turned onto Madison and started the up hill climb.

Kris paused in her typing every once in awhile just to watch her partner sleep. After moving Raven to a private room that morning, the doctor had changed his orders regarding her pain

medication. Kris could tell that the amount of narcotic was drastically reduced since Raven's face was more animated like it would be in a natural sleep instead of one that was drug induced.

Granny had been by that morning and so had John, who had warned them that Hardly had asked to see them in order to apologize for his part in Major Otis' plan. Sharon sent word and promised to stop by after work.

"Afternoon, sleepy head." Kris put down her laptop. "You hungry?" She asked as she moved to the side of the hospital bed.

"Yep." Raven reached up and pulled Kris' head down for a kiss. "I sure miss holding you when I sleep." She placed her palm against the young woman's cheek and caressed it.

"I miss you, too." Kris brought Raven's hand around to her mouth and kissed the backs of her fingers. "But we'll be home before you know it. And the doc said tomorrow you can start on solid food."

"Oh yeah, I can hardly wait. His idea of solid food the first day after a liquid diet includes such delicacies as scrambled eggs and some kinda mush that passes for oatmeal around here." Raven said in mock enthusiasm. "I think I'll stick to ice cream."

Kris chuckled. "Speaking of ice cream, I'll go let them know you're awake and ready for lunch." Kris placed Raven's hand back on the bed. "Be right back."

"See if they've got chocolate this time, please. I'm tired of vanilla." She yelled out after her companion left the room.

Kris grinned as she turned down the corridor towards the nurse's break room where she had stashed a supply of ice cream and missed seeing Hardly and Colonel Albright step off the elevator.

"Come on, Herman." The Colonel placed a gentle hand on the young man's shoulder. "I know she doesn't blame you for what happened."

Herman's head was bowed and his slumping shoulders hunched forward. "You honestly think that?" He asked with a degree of hopefulness in his voice.

"Of course I do." Albright answered as he knocked on a slightly open door and directed Herman into the room. "I'll wait out here."

"Uh...hi, Captain. Can I come in?" He tried to look everywhere but into the piercing blue eyes.

Kris walked back towards Raven's room and stopped beside Albright. "Hello, Colonel, how come you're holding the wall up?" She asked the man leaning against the wall.

"Afternoon, Kris. Sergeant Hardly's in there begging forgiveness." He explained and pushed off the wall to stand beside her.

"Ah." Kris sighed. "I'm not sure whether I want to hit him for being a part of this mess or thank him for being such a dimwit that he fouled it up."

Albright shrugged his shoulders. "I know what you mean. But don't be too hard on him, he's been kicking himself since he found out about how Otis tricked him. He's really an okay guy, he's just got a little too much enthusiasm for his own good."

Kris stepped into the room in time to hear Raven explain why she didn't blame Hardly.

"Look, Sergeant, you thought you were protecting Kris and for that I thank you." Raven grinned. "The only thing I ask is that next time, make sure that you're protecting her from the right person."

Hardly tentatively returned her smile. "Sure thing, Captain."

"Hello, Herman." Kris walked over beside her partner. "Lunch is on the way." She told her.

"Hey, Kris. I was just telling the Captain that I was sorry about what happened." He explained shyly.

Kris decided that she couldn't stay mad at the dolt. "And I'm sorry I hit you so hard."

"You hit him?" Raven hadn't heard the entire story. She had been told about the part that Granny played in saving the day after which Raven had praised the older woman much to Granny's embarrassment, but no one had yet to mention Kris' roll.

"Yeah." Herman beat Kris to the punch. "Over the head with a frying pan." He actually sounded rather proud of the young woman.

Raven started laughing and the others found it contagious and soon joined in. "Gods, I wish I could have seen that." She caught her breath and grabbed her middle. "Ow, shouldn't have done that."

Kris was quickly at her side looking concerned. "Are you all right?"

"Yeah. Just a little too much merriment."

Herman moved out of the way as Raven's lunch tray was delivered. "I should go so you can eat." He started for the door. "Thanks for being so understanding."

"No problem, Sergeant." Raven acknowledged as he was pulling the door closed behind him.

"Bye, Herman." Kris yelled.

He stuck his head back inside to tell Kris bye, but shut his mouth and the door in a hurry when he saw the young blonde lean over and kiss the Captain. Not even he could mistake the kiss for one that was just between friends. As he walked towards the elevator with the Colonel he smiled slightly. 'Oh well, I never had a chance anyway. I guess if I had to lose, losing to someone like Captain Chandler isn't so bad.'

Continued in Part 6.

The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

~ Leather and Lace ~

by Greek Warrior

Disclaimer #1: This is an Uber story and the characters that appear in this story may seem familiar but aren't the same as the ones we all know and love. All the characters that appear here are made up from my deranged little mind. They're fictitious and aren't meant to resemble anyone. This is all done in fun and yes I know I need to get a life.

Disclaimer #2: Taz belongs to the folks at Warner Brothers Studios. Scooby Doo belongs to Hanna-Barbera. The X-Files belongs to somebody other than me, anything you recognize isn't mine folks, I got tired of looking this stuff up.

Warning: This story contains explicit consensual sex between adult women. If you're under legal age in your neck of the woods, go away. If you live in a place that frowns upon that sort of behavior, tell'em to kiss your derriere then talk to your Congressman, or move, or both.

Warning: This story contains violence. We are talking about a certain warrior's descendant, you know.

Note: The quote at the end of chapter one is from Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet'.

Feedback is most welcome as long as it's constructive. Remember, you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar, although I've always wondered why anyone would want a bunch of flies! I can be contacted at XWPSScribe@aol.com. Thanks for reading.

Note: Astolpho's at the Marcello Hotel is a completely fictitious restaurant and hotel.

Part 6

Chapter Nineteen:

Since Lisa didn't have a car and they hadn't decided where they were going to eat, Andy had offered to pick her up. Her apartment was on the second floor in the front part of the building and

she had been standing at the window watching for him. As soon as she saw his blonde head appear from the car that just stopped across the street, she headed downstairs to meet him.

He was even cuter than she remembered; blonde curly hair that was cut just above his collar and he sported short sideburns that were becoming popular again. She also remembered him being taller than she was by about half a foot. He had sparkling blue eyes that always reminded her of someone and now since seeing her sister again, she knew who that someone was.

They met on the sidewalk. "Hey, Lisa. It's good to see you again."

"You too, Andy." She smiled at him.

"Nice place." He tilted his head towards the large old white Victorian style house.

"Thanks. I got lucky finding it." The old house had been converted into six one-bedroom apartments.

They waited at the curb for a car to pass. "I tried to find someplace like this when my roommate got married last year, but had to settle for an apartment complex." There didn't seem to be the typical awkwardness of a first date, maybe since they knew each other in passing a couple of years ago or maybe because they had a reason, other than a date, to see each other. Andy held the car door for her before settling into the driver's seat. "You like seafood?"

"Yes, very much. So, who's buying?" She desperately hoped she was. It would mean he had at least some information on Mario.

He didn't answer until he had pulled out into traffic. "You are." He grinned. "But don't worry the place I have in mind isn't expensive."

"Doesn't matter." Lisa answered seriously. "This may help me right a twelve year old wrong."

He glanced at her out of the corner of his eye and saw the determination in hers. "I know you told me a little about why you wanted this information, but can you tell me anymore about it?" He merged into the northbound I-5 traffic. "This Mario character was bad news."

"Was? You mean he's dead?"

"Yeah, I forget exactly when but it was nine or ten years ago."

Lisa was quiet for several minutes. 'No, I'm not changing my plan. I doubt Philip stayed in touch with them after what happened, so the chances that he would know this guy was dead, are minimal.' She hadn't even realized it but at some point Lisa went from admitting Raven's story had possibilities of being true to completely believing in it and in her sister.

"Hey? You still with me?" Andy exited the interstate and headed towards the north end of Lake Washington.

"What? Oh yeah, sorry. Just thinking." Lisa explained. "And yes, I'll fill you in. You might be able to help me make my plan more believable.

Andy pulled into a parking space. He was intrigued but first things first. "Come on, I'm starving."

"Poseidon's Seafood Shanty?" Lisa questioned with a dubious look.

Andy laughed. "Don't worry. I know the guy who owns it; he's a retired cop. He's got zero imagination but he loves to eat so believe me this place has real good food." He assured her.

Kris snuggled next to Raven. "He's not going to hate you." She had been trying to explain to the stubborn woman that she wasn't to blame for Otis. "My father asked you to protect me and you did. Otis would have still tried to use me to get back at The Division even if he wasn't trying to get back at you." John had stopped by before dinner and told Kris that her father had been informed of what happened and he would call her at the hospital that night. The ambassador also wanted to talk to the captain.

"But you being here with me, put you in more danger. I know if I was him, I'd want to beat the shit out of me."

Kris raised her head from the shoulder it was nestled on. "As far as me being in danger goes, you took care of it."

Raven interrupted her. "Granny took care of it." She corrected.

'Ah, I see part of the problem here, she thinks she let me down.' Kris propped up on her elbow. She tilted her companion's face towards her when Raven couldn't or wouldn't meet her gaze. "How did Otis get the upper hand?"

"What difference does it make?" Raven tried to turn away but Kris held firm.

"Humor me." Green continued to bore into blue. "Did he sneak up on you? Or maybe trick you? Did he get the better of you in a fight?"

"No. It...Sergeant Hardly hit me from behind and knocked me out."

"I know you didn't have any injuries to the back of your head. Where did he hit you?"

"I uh, felt him behind me but I couldn't get completely turned around in time to block his arm, so the blow landed here." She pointed to her forehead.

"I'll assume that Otis took your gun away while you were knocked out. Why didn't he...kill you right away?" Kris really didn't want to think about Raven being hurt again but Kris wanted her to realize that if she hadn't been there, the sergeant wouldn't have been conned into helping and Otis

more than likely wouldn't have been able to get the advantage. "I mean he waited a while before he shot you and then it was in the leg. Seems he wanted to keep you alive, at least at first."

"He told me what he was going...going to do...to you. I now know what the expression blind rage means." Raven paused and tried to piece together the events right before Otis shot her the second time. "I don't even remember getting to my feet. But I was standing when we both turned towards the sound of gunfire coming from Granny's house. He turned back to look at me and his grin turned to surprise when he saw me standing. I think I lunged for him but the next thing I knew I was knocked backwards and felt the burning from the bullet, then the next thing I remember, is coming to and seeing Granny leaning over me."

Kris took a deep breath to calm her emotions. "Don't you see? The reason you got hurt was because you were protecting me. Wait." She placed her fingers gently over Raven's mouth. "You didn't let me down, love. You told me to go to Granny's and call John and I did. He told us to hide until they got there. It wasn't your fault we didn't listen. We both were safe until we decided to try and help you. So you did your job."

Raven knew in her head that she had done everything that she could to keep her partner safe. "But...it's my fault he came after you."

"Otis came after me because I was convenient. So you could say this whole thing was my fault." Kris reasoned.

"That's bullshit." Raven said. "It's Otis' fault, he's the one..." She closed her mouth with an audible snap and look at a grinning blonde.

"Glad you finally see things my way, Taz."

"Oh Hades, you're good, I'll give you that. You were in total control of each twist and turn of that conversation. I need to learn not to engage you in a war of words, Sagira."

"You knew you were wrong to blame yourself in the first place. I just had to remind you of that fact. Now you may kiss me to show me your appreciation of my talented manipulations."

"Oh I may, huh?" Raven chuckled.

The twinkle that had been missing from her eyes was back. So was the confidence and authority that had vanished from her voice. Kris could literally feel her partner's presence fill the room. "Yes you may, my sometimes hardheaded but all the time lovable partner." Kris' lips touched Raven's just as the phone rang.

They both rolled their eyes. "I hope these interruptions don't become a habit again."

Kris grabbed the receiver. "Hello...yes I'm fine, dad, thanks to Raven and Granny." She covered the mouthpiece and whispered. "I don't think I've ever heard him this upset before. Sorry, I missed that. What did you say?" She turned her attention back to her father.

"I said that I almost had a heart-attack when Colonel Albright called me and told me what happened. You're sure you're not hurt and not just trying to keep us from worrying?"

"I'm sure, dad, not even a scratch. I wish I could say the same for Raven, though, she got a little damaged in the crossfire."

"Well tell her that she has my undying gratitude. I don't know what I would have done if anything had happened to you."

"Here you can tell her." She handed the phone to her nervous friend.

Andrew Whitfield repeated himself and Kris watched as surprise replaced nerves. "Thank you, Ambassador. No, I'm not sure I'll be well enough to make it to New York after the talks. But Kris can still come, I know she misses you and wants to see you." Raven saw Kris shaking her head.

"I'm not going without you." She whispered.

"Why don't you and Vivian plan on coming here for a visit instead? We've got plenty of room and you said you wanted to meet Granny." She stared at Kris wondering if she should have asked her first. A big smile from the young woman gave Raven her answer. "Okay then, just let us know when you'll be here. I'll tell Kris you said good-bye." She reached over and replaced the receiver. "You were right about his reaction."

"Told ya." She snuggled back against Raven's side. "Thanks for inviting them. That was nice."

"You're welcome. It seemed to be a reasonable solution." She kissed the blonde head on her shoulder. "It might be fun to have them here. Of course we'll have to refrain from making love in front of the fireplace while they're here. That might be embarrassing."

"Embarrassing? Try mortifying."

"Oh he said to tell you that Viv would call you tomorrow afternoon."

"Oh God." Kris suddenly sat up.

"What? You don't want her to call?" Raven looked at the dejected and self-conscious expression on Kris' face and was confused.

"No, I mean that's not it. I don't think I can...you know...with him in the same house." The young woman was rapidly turning red at the thought.

Raven had wondered many times how Kris could be so shy and uncertain when talking about sex and in a blink of an eye, turn into such an aggressive and uninhibited lover. 'It's amazing what being horny does for her confidence.' "Weren't you going to live under the same roof after you and numb nuts got married. What were you going to do then?"

"I planned on having a lot of headaches and planned on it being that time of the month quite often." Kris answered with only a slight hesitation.

Raven laughed. "Hadn't thought about it before now, had you?" She teased.

"No, I guess I always knew my knight in shining armor would come to my rescue." She lay back down and got comfortable. "We'll talk about whether or not you'll be getting any while they're here, later."

'Oh, I'll be getting some, or you, my friend, are going to be taking a lot of cold showers, cause I intend to frustrate you to the point of insanity if I don't.' She chuckled evilly.

"What was that for?" Kris yawned.

"Nothing, dear, go to sleep." The smile stayed on Raven's face while she imagined all the things that she could do to sexually frustrate the young woman.

Deep down Kris knew she should probably be worried, but she'd deal with it when she wasn't so tired. "You need to sleep, too." She mumbled and lightly patted the stomach that her hand was resting on.

Lisa and Andy decided to wait until after dinner to discuss the problem and plan. Lisa had mentioned that she had cheesecake at her apartment, so dessert and coffee back at her place was agreed upon.

Lisa told him the entire story. "Some of what I read in that file makes since now. The part about the evidence that your sister gathered being thrown out of court is documented. So that part's definitely true. When did your sister leave home again?" He opened the folder and looked over the papers.

"Let's see, it was a few years after Derek's death so that would mean I would have been about ten I think, and that would make it sometime around 1986 maybe '87. Why?"

"Then he died a couple of years after that, along with some of his gang members. Listed as a drug deal gone bad. Oh what a shame." He added sarcastically then filled Lisa in on what the rest of the file on one ex-gang leader contained.

"Bet he wishes he'd gone to jail." Lisa observed.

"Yeah, but he'd be out by now and more likely than not, that kind of scum doesn't get rehabilitated." He checked through some more of the papers in the folder. "Boy, your sister was awful young when she gathered the dirt on these guys."

"I can't believe Ra...she did all that by herself. I would have been scared to death." Lisa looked down at her hands self-consciously.

"Are you not telling me her name on purpose or what?" Andy asked in a curious voice. "She was underage at the time so it's not in the records."

"Yeah. She doesn't know what I'm planning on doing. I haven't gone back to talk to her after our fight. Well it wasn't a fight; I said a few not so nice things. And she kinda asked me to back off." She looked up pleadingly. "I know you went to a lot of trouble to get this stuff and all and I really do trust you not to say anything to anyone, but I'd like to keep her out of it until after I have a chance to talk to her about it."

"It's okay, Lisa, I understand. But you should talk to her; she might not want to dig up the past. She might not want to relive it." He picked up his coffee cup and leaned back. "Why don't you tell me more about Philip and your plan?"

Chapter Twenty:

Kris opened her eyes and groaned. "Oh my God. I can not believe I slept the whole night on your shoulder." She stared accusingly at her companion. "Why didn't you wake me?"

"You've slept the whole night on my shoulder before and to be perfectly honest, I just woke up myself." Raven stretched as far as she could without pulling something loose.

"You weren't hurt before." Kris stood up to do her stretching. "Did you really sleep the whole night through?" Raven nodded her assurance as a knock sounded and Kudirka appeared.

"Morning, ladies." He was checking the chart in his hands and missed the scowl on his patient's face. "You're doing incredibly well."

"You sound disappointed, Doc." Raven stated.

"No, I don't. Just perplexed as usual." He explained to Kris. "Every time she's in here I swear it'll be the time I figure out what makes her recover so quickly. I want to bottle it and give it to all my patients." He sat the chart on the bedside table. "I want to run some tests this afternoon and depending on the results, you might be able to go home in a couple of days. As long as you haven't scared off this nice young lady by then because you'll have to have someone there with you." He grinned.

"Well, Doc I keep trying to lose her but she keeps turning up like a bad penny. I, OW, that hurt." Raven complained loudly when Kris slapped her shoulder.

"Shush you big baby I didn't hit you that hard. See what I have to put up with?" She asked the doctor who was laughing at their antics.

He picked up his chart and headed for the door. "I will not take sides between the two of you. I'm sure you both could beat me up. I'll order those tests for after lunch, which, by the way, won't include chicken broth." He promised on his way out.

"I think the good doctor is scared of us, Taz." Kris was still staring at the closed door he had disappeared through.

"Good, because I plan on being home by New Years Eve one way or the other."

"I didn't know we had anything planned. Did you plan on a big millennium celebration?" Kris knew how the big 2000 virus 2001 set her partner off every time. She didn't understand why it bothered Raven so much; usually her mate could care less about insignificant matters such as this.

"No and it's not the new millennium." Raven protested scowling. "And you know how I hate that."

"Oh yeah, it's that whole Roman numeral thing and zero right?"

"Wrong, it's the whole, 'what dufus would start with the year zero' thing? It sounds kind of ominous, don't you think?"

Lisa walked into her brother's office and up to his secretary. "Is he in?"

"Hi, Lisa. Yes, go on in."

Lisa knocked on his door and entered. "Hey, Philip. I thought since I was close by running some errands I'd stop in and see if you wanted to go to lunch." Lisa knew he had a lunch meeting with an important new client. Cynthia had pointed it out several times at lunch yesterday.

"Sorry, Lisa, no can do, I've got a meeting scheduled." Philip was a few inches taller than she was, with brown hair that had started thinning on top and receding. His gut was beginning to show signs of working behind a desk all day and the fact that he had a habit of eating Reese's peanut-butter cups by the handfuls. He wore glasses when working or reading which he pushed up to rest on the top of his head while talking to his sister.

Lisa smiled. "Another day then." She turned to go but stopped like she suddenly remembered something. "By the way a patient at the hospital asked me if I knew you. Well, of course, I told him you were my brother and he said to tell you hello."

"Really? Who was it?" He guessed it was someone he probably went to school with. He had been in a lot of clubs and didn't have time to keep in touch with everyone.

"Mario." She watched him freeze. "He didn't tell me his last name. Said you'd remember." The color slowly drained from his face. If she had any doubt at all she wouldn't after seeing his reaction. "Philip? Are you okay? You look like you've seen a ghost."

'Oh God, what does he want? After all this time I thought I was rid of them.' "What...what did he say?" His voice was shaky.

"He just asked how you were doing. You know the usual, what you did for a living, if you were married, had kids." Andy had told her not to say he asked where he lived. He thought that would have been a tad too much. Lisa had thought it would make him squirm more but she reluctantly conceded that Andy was probably right.

"Oh...well, I didn't keep in touch with him. He was...he was..." His mouth was stumbling while his mind was trying to come up with something to say. "Into trouble a lot. Hey, uh, do me a favor and don't tell him you've talked to me okay, I wouldn't want him to get any ideas about renewing an acquaintance."

"Philip, you know I don't like to lie." Lisa had her fingers crossed behind her back.

Lisa met Andy at his precinct so they could have lunch together and on the short walk to the diner, he could tell that she was disappointed. "I take it that Philip didn't immediately confess all and beg for forgiveness?"

"No." Lisa grumbled. "I still say we should tap his phones and plant bugs in his office and condo."

"Lisa, I told you last night that was against the law." He chuckled and opened the door of the diner for her. "You've seen a few too many spy movies, I think."

They slid into a booth and grabbed the menus the waitress handed them. "Can I get you something to drink while you decide?" She asked.

"Iced tea please." Lisa said.

"Coffee for me." Andy added.

"I just want him to admit the truth." She propped her elbows on the table and rested her chin in her hands. "And I believe my sister more than ever after seeing the way he reacted to Mario's name. He turned white as a sheet. I thought for a minute that he was going to pass out."

"Give him time to think about it, he may panic and admit to it yet." They ordered when the waitress brought their drinks. Lisa asked about his day and they spent the rest of lunch talking about Andy's job. He couldn't remember any of his other girl friends ever being as interested in him and his work before. He enjoyed the intelligent questions Lisa asked. "I think you should have joined the force." His comment caused a frown to appear on his lunch date's face.

"I wanted to, but mom pitched a fit and forbid it. Don't get me wrong, I like being a nurse and I think I'll be a good one. But I really wanted to be a cop." They were walking slowly back to the station, trying to stretch out their time together. "I remember the neighborhood kids playing cops and robbers and I'd sneak out when mom was at work to join them. I was always a cop." Lisa stated proudly. "And I always got my man."

"Did your mom think it was too dangerous?" Their hands brushed as they walked and their fingers automatically laced together. Neither made a move to let go.

"No, she said women shouldn't be doing 'men's jobs' as she called it. She thought I should be doing something like working in an office until I found someone and got married." Lisa explained. "She wasn't crazy about me becoming a nurse but she didn't stop me."

"But you said your mom works. I don't understand."

"She had to work. My father left us when I was a baby. I think she wants to make my life the life she wanted. Or maybe the life she thought she should have. I'm not sure I understand either. I pretty much went along with it until I got a taste of real independence at school, from your sister mostly. I think mom's going to freak when something important comes along and I put my foot down and tell her it's my life not hers."

They stopped in front of the steps leading into the station. "Good for you." They turned to face each other. "Life's too short to try to please everybody all the time. Or something like that, I forget the exact saying."

"So we should do what makes us happy." Lisa stated. "I think I like your philosophy, Mr. Dixon."

"I'm glad you agree, Ms Chandler, because this..." he leaned over and kissed her lightly on the lips. "Makes me very happy." He grinned like a little kid as he trotted up the steps two at a time and into the building.

Lisa stood frozen with a matching grin. She finally turned and headed for home. She and Andy had made plans for dinner again that night since she wasn't planning on trying to see Raven until she went back to work tomorrow. Lisa decided that a nice long hot bubble bath was just what the doctor ordered, after she called the nurse's station again to check on her sister's condition.

Raven was an extremely unhappy and cranky captain when the tests were finally finished. She had promised Kris she would be a 'good girl' during them, but had made no such promises about afterwards.

Kris knew her partner and planned on being prepared. She had left the hospital as soon as they had wheeled Raven out of her room. She met John in the parking deck and directed him to the nearest toy store where she purchased the newest game system and a nice variety of games. John

set it up when they got back and had just finished making sure he had connected it properly when Raven was brought back to her room.

All Kris had to do was take one look at her companion and she knew that some of the scowl on her face was due to the pain that she was in but tried to play down for Kris' peace of mind.

"Hey, boss." John knew Raven was about one step away from exploding. He also knew that she would kick herself if she lost control that badly in front of Kris, so he distracted her. "You should have seen Colonel 'The Kid' Albright today. He decided to teach the beginners boxing class since Tom wasn't there." John sat down and rested his arms across the bedside table. "Do you remember the new recruit by the name of Tippi?"

Raven was caught up in his good mood and nodded her head. She began to feel better as the pain seemed to subside. She wasn't sure if it was because she wasn't being poked, prodded, x-rayed or stabbed anymore or because of the company. She put her money on the latter.

John described the girl for Kris' benefit. "The top of her head would probably come up to your chin and she probably weights maybe 75 pounds wringing wet. She's standing there in the ring with gloves on that are almost bigger than she is and Albright joins her, all the while explaining different techniques to the class. Then he starts dancing around bobbing back and forth, in and out showing them what he was explaining." He paused to take a breath and to try to keep his laughter under control as by now both Raven and Kris were starting to chuckle at his amusement. "Anyway, he tells her to throw a punch at his face so he can demonstrate how to block and throw a counter punch. While he was busy showing off all his fancy footwork he forgot to block it." John was laughing and gasping for breath. "He was out before he hit the mat. He dropped like a sack of potatoes. And I swear you could almost see the stars and little birds circling his head like in a cartoon."

Raven was laughing so hard that she had to hold her middle and curl up on her side. Kris had tears running down her cheeks she was laughing so hard but she rubbed her partners back trying to help with the pain that she knew Raven was causing herself.

"Sorry." John managed to say once he finally caught his breath. "I guess I should have waited to tell that." He wiped the moisture from his eyes.

"No." Raven straightened out and Kris put another pillow behind her head. "That was great. I needed that."

"Are you sure you're okay?" John asked.

"Yeah." Raven smiled. "What happened after?"

"We all just stood there for a minute until Tippi broke the silence. 'He told me to hit him.' She shrugged her shoulders like what else could I do so we shrugged ours too, then we hauled him to the nurse in medical. He came to after she set his nose."

"She broke his nose? Wow, she must have some kinda punch for a little thing." Kris was trying not to break down again; she didn't want to chance Raven doing any real damage to herself.

Raven grinned. "Is he planning on stopping by tonight?"

"I think so." John replied. "Why?"

Her grin turned mischievous and she wiggled her eyebrows. "Ow, I forgot about my stitches." She grumbled; grabbing her forehead.

"You've got a plan?" John leaned closer, well aware that she could play a devious practical joke after being on the receiving end of a few.

"Yep. Call and find out when he's coming." She asked John. "Kris, we need bandages and something like that black goop baseball players put under their eyes. You know what I'm taking about?"

"Yeah." Kris said, catching on. "Something that we can wipe off that won't stain skin."

Not finding any suitable black goop at the hospital, John left in search of a sporting goods store. Kris was receiving expert instructions from one of the nurses in applying bandages to a broken nose. Kris had forgotten about the surprise that she had engineered for Raven until her partner had complained about not having anything to do. She had left Raven happily playing Tomb Raider.

"You have a devious mind, my friend." Sharon stated. She and Granny had gotten to the hospital before John made it back and Kris had filled them in on the plan. They both wanted in on the joke after being assured that the colonel did indeed have a sense of humor.

All five participants with make-up and bandages in place took their pre-planned positions when their early warning system, which consisted of the nurse's station nearest the elevators alerting the nurse's station directly across from Raven's room, who in turn signaled John, that Albright was headed their way.

As Albright entered the room he was greeted by five people that were hiding behind five sections of newspaper. Knowing John would have gleefully spread the story of his boxing debacle; he crossed his arms over his chest and sighed. "All right, let's get this over with." He waited for their amusing banter at his expense. After all he had suffered through them all afternoon and he was willing to bet that this crew couldn't come up with anything new.

"Hey, Colonel. What's new?" Raven stated, which was the signal for everyone to lower their papers at the same time.

He found himself staring at five very exaggerated raccoon faces complete with white gauze covering their noses. "Oh very funny. I'm never gonna live this down, am I?"

"I've heard of someone having a glass jaw before, but this is the first I've heard of a glass nose." Granny teased.

"I heard that she was so small that she had to use a chair to even reach your nose." Sharon added.

"Great, I'm surrounded by wanna be comedians." He hung his head and sighed.

Thursday afternoon after Lisa finished her shift she headed for her sister's room. She paced up and down the corridor in front of the door, reluctant to enter. 'What if she doesn't want to hear me out? I wouldn't blame her. The first time I see her in ten years and what do I do? I have to go and kick her when she's down.'

Lisa hadn't noticed the nurse leaning on the desk watching her until she spoke. "She's awake if you want to go in." She tilted her head in the direction of the door Lisa kept staring at each time she passed and grinned. "Contrary to popular belief, she really doesn't bite."

Lisa had jumped at the sound of the nurse's voice. "Uh, thanks." She finally took a deep breath, knocked on the closed door and entered.

Raven hit the pause button for the game she was currently engaged in and Kris saved the file that she was working on. Both turned their attention to the fidgeting young woman but neither broke the strained silence that was growing.

"Um, can we talk?" Lisa said nervously. She watched the two women look at each other. "I promise to behave." She added looking at Kris who was definitely a lot more intimidating than she looked.

Raven stifled the grin that threatened to spread across her face as she watched her protector settle back into her chair. Kris made it clear that she obviously had no intention of leaving her companion unprotected. "Sure." Raven finally turned her attention to her sister.

"First of all I'd like to thank you." Lisa noticed she caught Kris by surprise. "Your questions made me remember things that I had conveniently forgotten. And I owe you an apology." She turned to her sister. "I normally don't let others make up my mind about someone for me. I usually wait to hear them out first then decide."

Kris hadn't told Raven what she had said to Lisa after she had pulled her from the room that day. Lisa explained to her sister what Kris had said that made her question the story she had been told by Philip and their mother all those years ago. She also told them of her plan. "If it was going to work, I think it would have by now." She sighed disappointedly.

"Lisa, I appreciate the thought but it wouldn't make any difference whether he admitted it or not, mother's not going to change her opinion of me. And as far as Philip goes, he knows he lied and has to live with the guilt."

"But I don't think he feels guilty at all and that's the problem, he should. Wait." She stopped Raven from interrupting. "Neither one of you are responsible for Derek's death. But he should've taken responsibility for those people being in the house. He should have told the truth." She paused to gather her thoughts. "I don't know what happened to you after you left home for good and I don't know, maybe you would've left anyway, I remember now that mother never treated you like the rest of us. I remember being mad at you for leaving and I think that made it easier for me to believe them." Her far away gaze returned to the present and she focused on the two women. "It may not make her change her opinion, but she will hear the truth and she will hear it from Philip." Lisa stated positively.

Raven felt some of the weight that she had been carrying around for the past twelve years disappear. "What if I said that having you believe me and having a chance for us to be sisters again was enough for me?"

"I don't know, Taz. I think she might be as stubborn as another Chandler I know." Kris shook her head. "I don't think I'd cross her if I were you." Kris could tell that having the truth come out was very important to Lisa.

Raven crossed her arms over her chest and rolled her eyes dramatically when Lisa started laughing. "You do know that in a few months time you have totally ruined the reputation it took me ten years to build?" The older woman pouted.

"Yes I do know that." Kris pinched Raven's cheek. "And that's a cute little pout but it doesn't work with me." Kris lied. She knew that cute little pout worked every time.

By this time, Lisa was laughing so hard she almost fell out of the chair she had collapsed into a few minutes ago. "Are...are you two always...like this?" She managed to ask between taking large gulps of air. "I haven't laughed this hard in a long time." She added once she'd caught her breath.

Raven thought. "Actually, I'd never been like this until I met Kris." She smiled at her partner. "She seems to bring out the best in me."

After a few minutes of comfortable silence, Lisa asked her sister what she'd been wondering about for the past two days. "What happened after you left? Where'd you go? And how did you end up working for the CIA?" She sat forward in her chair and rested her forearms on her knees.

"Um." Raven knew that was bound to come up and she also knew she would eventually tell her sister, but not today. "That is a long and serious story. Better left for a time when we won't be interrupted." She smiled at Lisa. "I'd rather hear about you." Raven asked even though she had secretly inquired about her sister when she was in school. What Lisa had never found out about and Raven didn't see any reason to bring it up, was that Raven had paid for her sister's schooling by letting her think she had won a scholarship from the university.

"Well that'll be pretty boring but okay." She sat back in her chair and thought about where to start. She told them about school and her friends. She blushed when she mentioned Andy. Raven

and Kris glanced at each other knowingly. They talked about books and she and Kris talked about some of the movies they liked. Lisa was fascinated by the fact that Kris had sold some of her short stories and volunteered to be her guinea pig if she ever needed someone to proof her work.

"I guess I'd better go. They'll be bringing your dinner soon." She could tell that her sister was tired and probably missed her afternoon nap, not that the stubborn woman would admit to it.

Kris could also tell that Raven was tired but knew she didn't want Lisa to leave. "She gets to go home tomorrow. Why don't you stop by and have dinner with us? You could ask Andy, too." She suggested and received a smile from Raven for thinking of it. "Unless the two of you have plans for New Years Eve."

"I'd like to have dinner but Andy has to work a longer shift because of the holiday. He was going to stop by the apartment after work but we weren't going out or anything. I'll ask him if he could just stop by your place instead if that's okay?" Lisa explained. "I'd really like to spend more time getting to know my sister again."

"That sounds good. You could come by any time after work." Raven said.

"I'll write down the directions." Kris grabbed her purse looking for pen and paper.

"I'll give them to Andy and I'll take a bus or cab. I don't have a car." She explained.

"Here, give me your address and I'll pick you up." Kris suggested. "It's too far out to take a cab and I don't know if it's on a bus route or not."

Lisa finally agreed after Kris assured her it wouldn't be any trouble. She left the hospital with a smile on her face. She was in an especially good mood for a Thursday night. She had called her mother earlier and begged off dinner that night. She wasn't about to sit at the same table with Philip and pretend that everything was okay. She knew she would have to find a way to force him to come clean or she would have to invent a lot more excuses to avoid him. 'Of course that wouldn't be a bad thing.' She thought.

Chapter Twenty-One:

Kris and Lisa completed their circuit and returned to the living room to find that Raven was still obediently stretched out on the couch. Kris had threatened her with sending her to her room if she moved while she was showing Lisa the house.

"This is a great place." Lisa stated as she stood by the large stone fireplace warming her hands. "Surrounded by all this land with the trees and the lake makes it seem like a secluded getaway." She rubbed her hands together and turned around to face them. "And I absolutely love this fireplace. It reminds me of the one at the ski lodge I visited."

"If you remember the fireplace so fondly, I'm betting you didn't do much skiing." Kris commented.

Lisa laughed. "That would be a safe bet."

"Okay, tell us the story." Raven grinned. "With that expression, it's bound to be a good one."

"Some friends were going skiing one weekend during Christmas break a couple of years ago and I conned them into taking me with them and teaching me. They had been talking about skiing for months and made it sound so great. You know, the feeling of flying down the slopes in the great outdoors, the crisp cool air flowing past you, the togetherness at the end of the day when you got to cuddle with your girlfriend or boyfriend. Well, I didn't have a boyfriend but I thought all that other stuff sounded fantastic so I begged and pleaded until they gave in." She paused to take a swallow of the hot cocoa that Kris had made for them. "Anyway, we get up to the resort about mid-morning and they think a lesson or two before lunch and by that afternoon I'd be on the beginner hill. Well, I get all the equipment on, skis, gloves, goggles, boots, grab my poles and carefully stand up." Lisa started laughing again. "I was on a slight slope and started moving forward when I stood. I moved a couple of inches before landing flat on my face in a snow bank."

"Oh no. Were you hurt?" Kris tried to ask without laughing but was only partially successful.

"No." Lisa assured them. "But I was so bundled up and had on all that stuff that I couldn't get up. It never occurred to me to reach back and release the skis, so I flopped around like a dying fish trying to roll over and sit up. And by this time everyone had gathered around and knew I wasn't hurt and they were laughing so hard they couldn't help me." Lisa paused to catch her breath. "Needless to say, I spent the rest of the time in the lodge in front of the fire drinking hot cocoa." She dried her eyes. "But I had a great time."

Kris and Lisa traded stories while Raven listened and dozed off periodically. Kris excused herself after a while to make sure she had everything ready for dinner. She really just wanted to give Raven and Lisa a chance to spend some time together.

"Anything I can do to help?" Lisa asked upon entering the kitchen. "I hate to just freeload and I'm fairly good in the kitchen."

"The salad is made, I've got the lasagna ready to put in the oven, and Granny is bringing the homemade Italian, piping hot just out of the oven, bread." She turned and opened the refrigerator door. "And the chocolate mousse is still here, by the hardest. I found out that your sister loves the stuff." She offered as an explanation. "Actually I do too." She grinned and turned back around. "I was just about to see if anyone wanted some hot apple cider."

"Raven's asleep. I thought she would rest better if I wasn't sitting in there staring at her." Lisa sat down at the table when Kris poured them some cider.

Kris knew something was bothering her by the way she nervously folded then straightened her napkin. She placed her hand over Lisa's, stopping the fidgeting and waited until she looked up. "What's wrong?" She asked, although she thought she had an idea.

Lisa looked into green eyes that overwhelmed her with their maturity, warmth and kindness. She had to remind herself that Kris was a few years younger than she was. "I remember reading her chart...Raven's chart that first morning before I knew who she was. I remember wondering if the patient would even live through my shift." She paused and stared at the tabletop without really seeing it. "What if I had said those horrible things to her and she...she died thinking that I hated her?" She looked at Kris with a regretful almost terrified look in her eyes.

Kris was aware of the fact that Lisa was practically pleading with her to say it was all right and that she could forgive herself. "Lisa, I won't lie to you. What you said hurt your sister, badly, but she knew what stories and lies you had been told all your life. What's important now is that the two of you put the past behind you and rebuild your love and the trust that should be between two sisters. I know that you two can become a family again. She wants very much to be a part of your life." She squeezed Lisa's hand and smiled reassuringly before leaning back in her chair.

"I want that too." Lisa stated as she took a shaky breath. "How do you deal with the danger she goes through? Or was this an exception?"

"I've only known her for three months." Kris grinned at Lisa's surprise. "But I would venture to say that this is par for the course, unfortunately." By the time Kris finished the story of how they met, Raven was awake and leaning against the doorframe. "What are you doing up?" She crossed her arms in front of her chest and glared at the patient.

"I woke up and everybody was gone." Raven looked a little sheepish at her uneasiness of waking up alone. "Besides, I'm hungry." She changed the subject trying to cover up her unaccustomed insecurity.

Kris decided not to question her partner's unusual behavior. "I just put the lasagna in the oven, Taz. We'll eat about 7:00 but if you can't wait I can fix you something now."

Lisa laughed. "I love that nickname. It just seems to fit her so perfectly."

"Hey, just keep laughing, missy and I'll think of one for you." Raven warned her sister as she joined them at the table. "And I can wait until it's ready if I can have some potato chips or cookies or crackers." She pouted more with each suggestion knowing it almost always got her what she wanted.

Kris rolled her eyes and Lisa laughed harder. "You are not going to eat garbage before dinner." Kris refused to look at her, knowing she was pouting, trying to get her way. "How about some oatmeal? I'll put some sugar and cinammon in it and I'll even throw in a few raisins." Besides, Kris didn't want to admit that she had eaten the rest of the cookies earlier that day.

"Okay." Raven thought she better not push her luck.

"So, does Kris have a nickname?" Lisa propped her chin in her hand and rested her elbow on the table.

"Yes she does." Raven replied. "Sagira." She explained to Lisa what it meant then stared at Kris. "Some of us were kind and thinking of the other when we chose them."

"Yes, honey, I know." She placed Raven's bowl of oatmeal on the table in front of her and sat down. "Of course she had to explain that to me, I thought she was calling me short." She told Lisa.

Lisa followed the interaction between the two women but couldn't quite figure them out. They seemed so close to only have known each other a few months. Then it dawned on her and without thinking she suddenly declared, "You're lovers." She slapped her hand over her mouth but it was too late to stop the comment.

Raven and Kris looked at each other in the silence that followed Lisa's outburst. "Yes we are. Does that bother you?" Kris asked in a neutral voice. She didn't want to assume the worst but she was being cautious none-the-less.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to blurt that out. But you can relax; I think you two make a cute couple. I'm surprised I didn't see it before. Although mother is gonna pitch a fit." Lisa said the last part more to herself.

"What's she got to do with anything?" Raven inquired between bites, her hearing having picked up the mumble.

"I still want her to hear the truth about Philip, from his own mouth and I was hoping she would apologize to you for driving you away and to me for forcing my sister out of my life." Lisa explained resolutely.

Raven finished her last spoonful of oatmeal. "Lisa, I hope you're not going to be too disappointed when that doesn't happen." She leaned back in her chair and regarded her sister seriously.

"Which, Philip admitting it or mother apologizing?" Lisa asked.

"Both actually." Raven clarified.

Lisa leaned back and crossed her arms, observing both women. She could tell that Raven believed what she said but she also thought she could detect a small glimmer of hope in those piercing blue eyes. In some ways she thought Kris was an easier read than Raven and this was one of them. The green eyes were leery and Lisa knew from first hand experience that Kris would do everything in her power to keep her friend from being hurt again especially by the two people that had hurt her the most.

"I've got another idea about how to get Philip to confess, but I'll need your help and your work connections." She looked at her sister. Lisa had convinced herself that the CIA would have all

the right contraptions to execute her plan. "I got this idea from watching an old movie last night. It was about this rich older woman's relatives trying to drive her crazy in order to gain control of her money." She noticed Raven's raised eyebrow and took it as a sign of impatience and hurried along. "To make a long story short, I thought we could somehow use projectors and speakers to make Philip think he was being haunted." She finished in a rush and suddenly wondered if the idea seemed as silly as it sounded.

Raven stared at the ceiling for a minute or two before meeting her sister's somewhat hopeful expression. "Let me get this straight. You want to use electronic equipment to make Philip think he's seeing and hearing...Derek."

Lisa nodded her head. "I really don't think Derek would mind if we borrowed him to get at the truth."

"Is that possible?" Kris questioned. "Are there gadgets that can do stuff like that?" She really hoped so; deep down she wanted the coward to come clean.

"That's not my field of expertise but a 3-D image projector and something like a surround sound speaker system would probably be a start." Raven saw the gleam in Lisa's eyes. "This means a lot to you, doesn't it?" 'Maybe seeing Philip squirm a little wasn't such a bad idea.' Raven thought.

"Yes it does." Lisa answered her sister's question. "And I thought that since you worked for the CIA that you'd have access to that kind of stuff." She looked from one to the other. "So is this something we could try?"

Raven glanced at Kris, both thinking the same thing, that Lisa should be told the truth about Raven's work. Raven didn't want to start a new relationship with her sister by lying to her. But anymore discussion on the matter was set aside for later when Granny knocked on the door. Dinner was not the format for revealing what the captain did for a living.

"How is the patient doing?" Granny directed her question at Kris as she put the bread in the second smaller oven, turning it on warm, then joining the other women at the table.

"She, surprisingly behaved herself today. She stayed on the couch until a little while ago, napped a few times this afternoon and has been a good girl and eaten what I've fixed for her without too many complaints." Kris recapped their day so far.

"Good. Food and rest are the best things for her right now." Granny stated.

"You know, you could ask me, I am sitting right here." Raven grumbled.

"Yes, but you wouldn't tell me the truth." Granny shook her finger at the complaining woman in a scolding manner. "Who was it that didn't tell me she had a concussion and couldn't remember what day it was without looking at her watch?" She paused dramatically. "Mmm? Or what about the time?"

"All right, you made your point." Raven interjected.

"When was this?" Kris asked.

"I don't recall." Raven looked at them with a straight face.

"Very funny." Granny said as Lisa rolled her eyes.

"I was only kidding." Raven said to a serious Kris.

"I realize that. But you better never pull that stoic routine with me and not tell me when you're hurt." The young woman grabbed the front of Raven's shirt and leaned forward until they were nose to nose and green eyes were boring into blue ones. "Understand?"

"I understand, love." Raven stole a not so quick kiss and grinned when she heard Kris sigh.

"Sometimes you really frustrate me, Taz." Kris let go of the crumpled shirt and ran her hands over it, trying to smooth it out.

"I'm sorry about that but I really don't think I can do anything about that now since we have company. But if you see me later..." She left the sentence hanging.

"That's not what I mean and you know it." Kris turned red when she realized where her hands were rubbing and the chuckles from the other two women confirmed that they had noticed also.

"Would you like us to give the two of you some privacy, dear?" Granny asked.

"I'm so embarrassed." Kris hid her face in Raven's shirt. Luckily she was saved any further torment by the buzzer on the stove. "Dinner's ready." She jumped up and shoed everyone into the dining room.

After dinner, Granny insisted on clearing the table and cleaning the kitchen. The others made themselves comfortable in the living room.

"Lisa, I need to explain something to you about my work." Raven thought she should spill the beans before their other guest arrived.

But just as she started the doorbell rang and Lisa jumped up. "That's probably Andy, you want me to get it?"

"Be my guest." Kris was content to stay comfortable snuggled next to Raven on the couch.

Lisa quickly headed for the door; she wanted to talk to Andy before he met her sister and Kris. She wasn't sure how he felt about same sex relationships but she was going to make sure he wouldn't stick his foot in his mouth or worse when she introduced them as partners.

"I look at it this way." He explained. "I get to see more than my fare share of hate and violence so when two people love each other, I don't care what combination they come in, I consider it a blessing."

Lisa kissed him on the cheek and led him into the living room. "Andy, this is..."

"Lieutenant Chandler?" Andy grinned and stuck his hand out to her. "You don't remember me, do you?" Still shaking her hand, he addressed Lisa. "You didn't tell me she was your sister." He turned back to Raven.

"I'm sorry but no, I'm afraid I don't remember you." Raven stood as the grinning man still held her hand hostage.

"How do you know my sister and she's a Captain now." Lisa stated rather proudly then realized that Kris was patiently waiting on an introduction. "And this is Kris, Raven's partner. Kris, this is Andy a friend of mine."

"Hello, Kris." He finally let go of the captain's hand and shook Kris' a little more sedately.

Granny joined them then and was introduced. They all sat down to a few seconds of that initial awkward silence, each of them waiting on one of the others to break it. Lisa came to the rescue. "So, tell us how you know Raven."

"Oh, it was..." Andy thought back. "Six years ago, I was a rookie on the force. I'm a cop." He clarified in case Lisa hadn't mentioned it. "I was one of several assigned to work with an outside group that had been hired to flush out a bunch of neo-nazis that were operating in the mountains east of here. It was a joint effort with other law enforcement departments in the state and the FBI. We hadn't been able to catch them in any criminal act and none of the witnesses had been willing to speak out against them, so we couldn't get any warrants for their arrest. So the brass decided to do something that had never been done before and hired outside help that didn't necessarily have to follow the same procedures we do."

Lisa interrupted. "Wait, why would the CIA have to be hired?"

Andy looked to Raven, fearful that he may have said something he shouldn't have. Raven remembered the mission not long after he had started his story and knew he was somewhat aware of The Division and their activities. "I was about to let you in on a little secret right before Andy arrived." She went on to briefly explain things to her sister.

"Oh." Lisa's forehead wrinkled in thought, then she smiled. "So you're a female James Bond?"

Unfortunately Kris had just brought her glass to her mouth and taken a swallow. The liquid exited a lot quicker than it entered as she started coughing. Raven rubbed her back and handed her a napkin. "Uh...kinda, maybe. But we don't get all the perks like the exploding fountain pen or the cars with a missile launcher in the tailpipe." She chuckled at her sister.

Lisa pouted. "You're making fun of me. I can't help I'm a slave to spy and action movies." Lisa couldn't help but laugh at herself along with the others.

"You all right?" Granny asked Kris when she caught her breath.

"Yeah. At least it was water." She dabbed at the liquid that landed in her lap and on the couch. "And that pout looks very familiar." She pointed her finger at Raven. "I've seen it on this one here, many times." Her statement caused a few chuckles at her partner's expense.

"Sorry, Kris." Lisa said sincerely.

"It's okay. That just caught me by surprise. I've never thought of your sister quite like that before." She looked at her partner and threatened. "You just make sure that those gadgets aren't the only 007 perks you don't get."

Andy looked puzzled then grinned knowingly. "Oh, I get it, you mean the sex." Lisa blushed.

"Hey, Kris." Granny got the blondes attention. "She turns almost as red as you do."

"Can we get back to the story?" Lisa tried to divert attention away from her embarrassment.

Andy picked up where he left off after Raven assured him that she was not a storyteller. "At first I took my cues from some of the veteran officers and they basically resented the fact that an outside group was being brought in to do our jobs." He shook his head. "I changed my opinion pretty darn quick. They came in and in two days, had pinpointed the location of the compound, which was something the FBI and Sheriffs Department hadn't been able to do in three months. And about 12 hours later, they had the camp surrounded. I was lucky enough to be assigned to one of the teams that went in with them. They got in the compound, disarmed the guards and secured the buildings all without a shot being fired. They rounded up all the members of this vigilante group and sat them down on the floor in one of the larger rooms waiting on the trucks to transport them out. The entire time we were waiting, the leader of this group, I forget what they called themselves, mouthed off. He kept yelling that what we did was illegal and it wouldn't hold up in court and that their rights were being violated. Nothing anyone said, would make him shut up and by then everyone was sick of listening to him, one of us in particular." He looked at Raven and chuckled. "The Captain here, grabbed him by his collar and belt, stood him up and shoved his head through a door. That most definitely shut him up; he was out cold. Then she turned around to the rest of them with a glare that could freeze boiling water and I'll always remember what she said." He paused to get a drink for his dry throat.

Kris, Granny and Lisa were sitting on the edge of their seats leaning forward. "What?" Asked a chorus of three impatient voices.

"First off I should explain to you, that in the 72 hours that I had been around her," he pointed to the amused woman, "she hadn't uttered one word, zilch. There were a few of us that had wondered if she was mute." He chuckled. "Anyway, she was glaring and they were beginning to squirm. Then in a commanding voice she informed them, 'Hate doesn't have any rights or laws that protect it. The little girl you beat to death and the old man you ran down just because their skin was a different color than yours, they had rights. The group of teenagers that you decided to use for target practice because they were gay, they had rights.' Then she walked over to two of the younger members and pulled her gun, moving back and forth between the two and said, 'One of them has hair the other has a shaved head. Which one dies because he's different?' She asked the rest of them. No one answered and no one would look any of us in the eye. We all just stood there in silence until someone started clapping, then another joined in, until we all were applauding, even the ones that still resented the outsiders."

"I'm gonna have to get you a white hat and horse like all the other heroes." Kris said and laid her head on Raven's shoulder.

"What happen then? Were they convicted?" Granny asked.

"Yes they were and as far as I know all are still behind bars. And before you ask, I don't know how they got around all the legal rigmarole, I didn't ask. They went to jail and that's all that counts." Andy stated.

Conversation continued until the midnight hour approached. "Hey everybody, it's almost twelve." Lisa announced as she looked at her watch.

"I've got ginger-ale if anyone is interested in toasting the New Year." Granny put her hands on her knees and started to push herself into a standing position.

"Sit." Lisa jumped up. "We'll get it. Come on Andy."

"The champagne glasses are on the counter." Granny told them as they headed for the kitchen.

"Raven?" Kris leaned over and brushed dark bangs back. "Baby, wake up."

"Huh?" Blue eyes opened and took a few seconds to focus on green. "I'm awake." She groaned as she stiffly sat up.

"Are you hurting? Do you need something for the pain?" Kris asked worriedly. "Maybe we should skip the toast and just go to bed."

"No, I'm okay. My neck is stiff, that's all." She explained as she rubbed her neck and twisted her head trying to work the soreness out.

"Here, lean forward and let me do that." Kris sat on the back of the sofa behind Raven and massaged her neck and shoulders.

"Gods that feels good." Raven groaned. "But you better stop or you'll put me back to sleep." She patted the cotton-covered knee beside her. "Thanks, love."

Kris slid off the back of the sofa and returned to her place beside her partner as Lisa and Andy handed out the fluted glasses. Granny opened the wooden doors in the built-in bookcases on the far wall that concealed the television and switched it to the local station that was showing the celebration at the Space Needle.

They all started counting down with the clock on the screen. As the TV crowd cheered, they touched their glasses together and sipped their ginger ale to complete their toast. Lisa and Andy's voice joined with that of Granny's in singing 'Auld Lang Syne'. Kris joined in, a little less off key than the other three.

"Come on, sis." Lisa stopped singing and looked at Raven sitting quietly. "Help us out." She grinned. "You know your voice can put the rest of us to shame. Although Kris isn't doing too bad."

"You sing?" Kris looked at her partner curiously.

Raven's eyes lost focus, remembering the past. "No." She blinked and took a deep breath. "Not anymore." She looked down, concentrating on her glass, to avoid the searching eyes that she knew were staring at her.

Kris looked at the sad expression on Lisa's face and knew it had to do with an unpleasant memory from the past. She turned her attention back to her uncomfortable lover. "You're just being nice and don't want to embarrass the rest of us."

Raven smiled gratefully, she knew Kris was trying to draw the attention away from her obvious distress. She also knew she needed to explain things later.

Goodnights were exchanged after it was decided that it would be safer if Lisa and Andy stayed the night instead of braving the long drive back. Andy hadn't had anything stronger than ginger ale but even with the strict enforcement of the drunk driving laws, some fools still insisted on trying to drive themselves.

After a slightly embarrassing moment, on the part of the new couple when Kris asked them if they needed one room or two, Andy spoke up stating that two rooms would be required, 'for now' he had finished with a wink at his still blushing date.

Raven was grateful for that decision. She knew she didn't have any right to keep them apart and wouldn't have if they had wanted to be together but she still thought of Lisa as her little sister. And it would have felt strange to think of them making love in the room across the hall. She knew in time she would come to think of Lisa as the adult she was, but right now she liked the thought of playing the role of the big sister again.

Kris joined Raven in their bedroom after making sure Granny got safely to her house. "You want to talk about it?" She had debated on her way up the stairs about letting it go for now since Raven was obviously exhausted. But she was sure her sometimes stubborn partner would try to play the importance down if she didn't get it out in the open when her feelings were hitting her full force.

The tall woman finished changing into a long nightshirt, she had to forgo the boxers since the elastic hit one of her still sore incisions, and sat down on the edge of the bed.

Kris watched and waited. She sat down beside the silent woman and ran her hand up and down Raven's back. "I know you hate talking about your past but I really think you should get it out in the open." She waited for several more silent minutes. "It's okay if you'd rather not talk about it, I understand."

"No, it's not that. I was just remembering the last time I sang for Lisa." She told Kris the story of how her mother reacted to catching her singing for her sister. "She had forbid me from singing before, but I thought it would be okay since it always helped Lisa go back to sleep. Seems that wasn't the case. From then on Lisa was too scared to ask me to sing to her and I think that was the start of my telling myself I was never going to be good enough, at least where my mother was concerned."

Kris was fuming, but held her anger in check, knowing it wasn't what her partner needed at the moment. She slid off the bed and knelt in front of Raven, placing her hands on the older woman's knees. "Baby, don't let her take something else away from you. If you like to sing, then sing." For a second she saw the hurt little girl in Raven's eyes and a little of her anger got away from her. "In fact, why don't you make a tape of you singing and I'll go to her restaurant with a tape deck and play it over and over for her."

Raven's gratitude shown in her eyes. "You don't even know if I can carry a tune or not. You might regret getting me started."

Kris grinned at the playfulness in her partner's voice, thankful that she hadn't let her anger get away from her. "Well, if you really stink at it, I'll make sure to take earplugs with me."

"And here I was thinking you loved me no matter what." She tried to pout but ended up laughing instead.

They turned out the light and crawled into bed. "Goodnight, Taz, love you."

"I love you, too." Raven turned on her side to face her partner. "Uh, Kris?"

"Yeah?"

"Would you hold me tonight?" Came the insecure voice.

Kris' anger at Raven's mother almost got the better of her again. Instead she opened her arms. "I'll hold you for the rest of our lives if you want me to." She held on tightly and kissed the top of the dark head resting on her chest.

Chapter Twenty-Two:

The next day after breakfast and after Lisa and Andy had left, Raven contacted John and filled him in on Lisa's plan.

"What did he say?" Kris asked as she poured them another cup of coffee.

"It's possible, it's illegal and he begged me to let him help." Raven grinned. "Seems his mother is after him to become more involved in the wedding preparations and he wants something to occupy his time." She explained.

"Has he told her that he asked you to stand up for him?" Kris rolled her eyes when Raven shook her head. "What's he going to do? Wait until she sees you standing beside him at the altar?"

"What are you thinking about?" Raven asked suspiciously at the dreamy expression on Kris' face.

Kris leaned forward, placed her elbows on the table and propped her chin in her hands. "I can't wait to see you in a tux. You know, everybody says the bridesmaid should never look better than the bride, I think they better start worrying about the 'best man', besting the groom." She sighed, deeply. "Do you think we will be able to dance together? I wouldn't want to upset their families."

Raven choked on her coffee. "Dance?" She had been pondering an idea since she and Kris talked about her singing last night. And had even thought about how to ask John and Sharon if she might be able to sing a song at their reception for them and for Kris, but she had totally forgotten about dancing that would be going on. "I...ah, I don't know how." She admitted sheepishly.

"It's okay if we don't dance." She assured her. "But I could teach you if you wanted me to."

Raven wiggled her eyebrows. "That could be fun. You in my arms, soft music, our bodies moving together. Yep, that's a definite possibility."

Kris cleared her throat and decided that she had better get her mind on something else or they would be doing a lot more than dancing and she didn't think Raven's still healing body was up to that kind of activity yet. "So, you think Lisa's plan has a chance of working?"

Raven shrugged her shoulders and accepted the change of direction. "I hope it does for her sake anyway."

"What about for your sake? Don't you want it to work?" Kris reached for the coffeepot and refilled their mugs.

"Yes and no." Raven paused to gather her thoughts. "No because it's easier not to have to deal with my mother's disapproval of me and I really don't want to get my hopes up that she'll suddenly change her opinion. I also know that if she did change her mind that it wouldn't last long, she'll never accept me being gay because of her strict religious beliefs."

"Why yes?" Kris' anger was starting all over again at the defeated tone in her lover's voice.

Raven's grin was truly evil. "I would love to see her have to deal with her perfect little image of her perfect little boy shot down in flames." She sighed. "Of course she would probably just make up some reason Philip did what he did that would excuse him from blame."

"You know." Kris took a few deep breaths trying to control her temper. "I normally don't pre-judge people, but I really hate this bitch."

The statement from her partner was said with so much exasperation and honesty that Raven couldn't stop the look of total devotion and love that crossed her face. Gone was the insecurity and the self-loathing that always seemed to lurk just below the surface.

"What's that look for, Taz?" Kris moved her chair closer to Raven and laced their fingers together.

"I never told anybody any of this before. I was always afraid that if I did they would agree with her, that I really was as worthless as she had said all along. Then when I got older, I developed an 'I don't care' attitude in regards to just about everything. I was determined that nothing anybody said or did would ever affect me again." Raven brought their intertwined hands to her lips and kissed the back of Kris'.

"What made you decide to change?" Kris laid her head down on Raven's shoulder and sighed at the contentment she felt.

"You mainly. Although I think Granny and John started the change. They were always there for me, not asking questions or expecting anything in return for their friendship. But you completed the change in me by completing me and by giving me something that I can't live without."

Kris raised her head and looked into sincere blue eyes. "What?"

Raven smiled. "Your love, your trust, your understanding. You gave me, you." She leaned over and kissed her startled companion.

The next day when Lisa got off work, John picked her up and headed for Raven and Kris' house. He had brought all the equipment they would need to set up their 'haunting' at Philip's condo and office. Now all they had to do was get in, set it up and get out without being seen.

After several hours of planning, they had agreed that Lisa would 'borrow' Philip's keys and pass them to John, who would quickly cut copies, get them back to Lisa who would take them back to Philip with the excuse of taking them by mistake.

Then they would pick a time that Philip was at his office to set up the equipment in his condo and vice versa. The only thing left to decide was who they were going to get to play the voice of Derek.

"I don't know anybody that would pass for an eight year old. And even more important, I don't want to mix a kid up in something that's illegal." Raven sighed in frustration.

"What's illegal?" Granny asked. She had entered in time to hear the last part of the statement.

They all looked at each other. Raven shrugged and explained, she knew their friend wouldn't give them away.

"I use to do impressions at the nurses talent shows when they needed more people to participate. I could probably do the voice and I would really like to help."

The others look at each other again. Kris grinned. "Well, that was easy."

"Hey, why don't we order pizza? My treat." Lisa suggested. She wasn't ready to leave the relaxed friendly atmosphere and return to her empty apartment and the probable blinking light on her answering machine. She had been totally ignoring her mother lately and she knew she would have to deal with it sooner or later and she wanted it to be later.

Lisa did have a message on her machine when she returned home. Only it was from her brother, not her mother as expected.

'Lisa, it's Philip. I was wondering if you could come by the office tomorrow? I need to talk to you about something. Give the office a call tomorrow to set up a time.' The message ended abruptly.

Lisa stared at the machine, curious as to what her brother wanted. It briefly crossed her mind that maybe her earlier attempt at coercing him into admitting his lie had worked, but she didn't get her hopes up. She plopped down on the sofa and picked up the phone to dial her sister's number. 'Well, whatever he wants, this will be the perfect attempt to get his keys copied.' She thought as she heard the first ring.

Monday morning during her break Lisa called Philip's office, letting him know that she would be by after work. Late afternoon found her sitting in a visitor's chair across from her brother, his desk separating them. She waited for him to finish his phone call and explain the summons. A nervously bouncing leg the only thing giving away her anxiousness.

He finally ended the call. "How was work?" He tossed his glasses on his desk that had been resting on top of his head.

"You summoned me down here to ask about work?" She looked at him suspiciously. "You could have asked me that over the phone."

"No, I was trying to make conversation." He explained. "Can't I be curious about how your day was?"

"You never have before. Why start now?" She shot back at him accusingly. "What's the real reason you called, Philip? I had a long day and I'm really tired." She had softened her tone of voice. 'Got to watch what I say.' She didn't want him throwing her out before she had a chance to grab his keys.

He sighed and leaned forward, resting his arms on his desk. "Mom, called." He admitted. "She thinks that maybe you weren't coming to our Thursday dinners because of me. Look, I know that we haven't always been close but is spending one night a week together so bad? You know it makes mom happy."

'Not been close is an understatement.' She gritted her teeth and managed somewhat of a smile. "Philip, of course it's not you. Work has just been exhausting lately."

"So you'll be there this week?" As he relaxed and leaned back in his chair, he hit his keys with his elbow and knocked them off his desk. He absentmindedly tossed them back on his desk while waiting for his sister's commitment on dinner.

As Lisa opened her mouth to assure him, a knock interrupted her. "Sorry, Philip, but I have a client on the phone and I need an answer to a question."

"I'll be back in a minute." Philip left his office, pulling the door closed behind him.

'Bless you.' Lisa thought as she used the opportunity to snatch her brother's keys from the desk and drop them into her purse. When Philip returned, she assured him that she would be there Thursday night. Raven and John had planned on using the family dinner to get into Philip's condo and set up their equipment and Lisa was supposed to let them know when he left the restaurant heading home.

"I'll call mother and let her know since I need to call her anyway to cancel lunch tomorrow. One of the nurses asked to trade off days this week." She explained as he walked her out to the elevators.

Lisa sprinted out of the building and around the corner to meet John. She handed over the keys explaining that she didn't know which ones were which. John sat in back of the van and cut duplicates of each one as Lisa nervously paced. He handed back the originals and she headed back towards Philip's office.

She met her brother in the lobby. "I was just on my way back up. I must have picked up your keys when I left, thinking they were mine." She held them out for him.

"I know, I was going to try to catch up with you." Philip took them and headed back for the elevator. "I'll see you Thursday."

"You look a little apprehensive." Raven stated to her sister who was pacing back and forth in front of the window.

"I am." Lisa admitted. "Not because of what we're doing, but I'm worried that I'll let my temper get the better of me and I'll say something I shouldn't and give us away."

"You'll be okay." Kris walked over to join her at the window. They were at Lisa's apartment waiting on John. "Just think about him finally having to admit what a lying son of a bitch he's been and it'll make having to deal with him tonight worthwhile."

"That might get me through." Lisa sighed as she opened the door before John could knock. She had seen him heading towards the house while she had paced at the window.

John had heard the sigh and misinterpreted it. He thought that she might be feeling a little guilty since she was dating a cop and what they were doing was against the law. He knew from their discussions earlier that she had wanted to include Andy in their plans until Raven had pointed out that Andy would have to arrest them for what they were about to do. "Don't worry, Lisa. A famous writer once said, 'To do a great right, do a little wrong. And curb this cruel devil of his will.'" He stated dramatically.

Lisa looked at him strangely.

"He likes to quote Shakespeare." Raven explained. "Unfortunately his delivery needs a little work." She said as she walked past John and into the hallway.

Kris followed her. "The Merchant of Venice wasn't one of my favorites." She told John as she slipped past him. "I like the comedies."

"Yeah me too." Raven waited on Kris before she started for the stairs. "A Midsummer-Nights Dream is more my style."

"I'm beginning to think that I'm the only person in the world that doesn't read this guy." Lisa said while closing and locking her door.

"Nope, there's two of us." John whispered as Lisa descended the stairs beside him. "Don't tell your sister, but I really don't like it." He admitted. "I only started reading it because Sharon does. And because it drives your sister crazy when I start spouting quotes."

Lisa laughed. "Your secret's safe with me." She assured him as they joined the other two waiting beside the van.

Lisa stayed mostly calm through dinner; the only thing that betrayed her turmoil was the constant checking of her watch.

"Is there somewhere else you need to be?" Cynthia asked, exasperated by her daughter's lack of interest in her companions and conversation. "Are we keeping you from something?"

"Or someone?" Philip laughed. "A hot date maybe?"

"I do not have a date, Philip." Lisa felt like kicking him. She knew it would give her mother an excuse to quiz her, not that she had ever needed one before.

"I would have thought that you would have met someone by now." Cynthia directed her comments to her daughter. "Are there no nice young eligible doctors at that hospital you work in?"

"Mother." Lisa said tiredly. "I've explained to you before that it's not like the soap operas you watch. We all have a job to do and our patients depend on us doing that job to the best of our ability, not flirting with the doctors. And besides, a lot of the doctors now-a-days are women."

Surprisingly her mother didn't dwell on doctors, eligible or otherwise and Lisa was able to tune out most of the conversation that accompanied dessert.

Lisa said a hasty goodnight and quickly left before her mother could make Philip offer to drive her home. She waited around the corner for her brother to leave and dialed Raven's cell phone number to alert them. She then waited on the van to pick her up. "Did you have enough time?" She asked as she climbed in the front passenger side door.

"Yes." John answered as he pulled back into traffic. "We've tested the equipment and everything's working. So tomorrow night, we'll rig his office and be all set."

Raven was sitting quietly in the back seat with Kris. Being in her brother's place had upset her more than she thought it would have. She saw photos of Cynthia, Philip and Lisa together as a family, but none of her or Derek. It was like the two of them never existed. She knew she should have expected nothing less but she was bothered by the fact that Philip could so easily dismiss them and his guilt.

Kris, aware of the distress her lover was in, snuggled up next to Raven. "Do you still want to go through with this?" She asked in a low voice so that Raven was the only one to hear.

She managed a slight smile. "Yes, I do. I think I've figured out that I need some sort of closure with Philip and my mother. Maybe this will bring it about." Raven also spoke softly.

"And if it doesn't?"

"We'll cross that bridge if we have to. Let's see what happens with this first." She put her arm around her partner's shoulders and pulled her close.

"Okay, Taz." Kris patted the hard stomach her hand rested against. "But if this doesn't work, I'll just hafta go rough him up some."

Raven started laughing and told the two sets of eyes staring at her that 'Rocky' here had offered to play the 'muscle' and beat up Philip for them. It was the perfect distraction to the tense situation and allowed everybody to relax.

They had set Saturday night as the first night of their campaign but had to postpone until Sunday since Philip decided not to co-operate by going out.

Sunday night found the gang, this time including Granny, headed toward the van that Raven had dubbed 'Mystery Machine' which she admittedly stole from the Scooby cartoon and by some strange coincidence, was painted green.

Raven tossed John the keys. "You drive, Freddie."

John caught them against his chest. "Hey, whose Freddie?"

"He was the tall blonde-haired all-American type guy." Kris answered. "In the cartoon." She clarified when John looked at her in confusion.

"Oh, well that fits." He mumbled as he jogged to catch up. "I can see how you arrived at that analogy, I mean we must be mirror images." He chuckled when his boss stuck her tongue out at him.

"Hey, can I be Velma?" Granny asked as the crew climbed into the van. "I always liked her and I've already got the glasses."

"Of course you can." Lisa stated. She remembered watching one of the Scooby movies with the kids when she was working the children's ward. "She's the smart one, right?"

"Jenkies, thanks guys." Granny's statement was greeted with rolling eyes and shaking heads.

"Hey, I was just getting into character."

"You can be Daphne." Raven spoke up and patted Kris' knee.

Kris crossed her arms over her chest. "Isn't she the klutz?"

The warning tone in her partner's voice told Raven that she had better come up with a good response. "She's the pretty one."

"Nice save." Lisa stated and the others laughed. "I claim Shaggy." She quickly added after realizing which two characters were left to chose from.

"But you're not tall enough." Granny protested.

"But she is skinny enough." Raven countered.

Kris chuckled. "Well, we all know which one that leaves for you, hound dog." She turned her head to stare at her companion.

"Hey." Raven stated indignantly. "He's a Great Dane not a hound dog."

John pulled into a parking space on the street behind the building where Philip's condo was located. "We're here." He announced and the others quieted down.

"Okay, let's see what the jackass is doing." Raven unfastened her seat belt and moved to the back of the van. She flipped the switches on the monitors as the others gathered around. "What the fuck is that?" She asked in disbelief.

Five pairs of eyes stared at the screen that gave them an unobstructed view of the living room. Several seconds past in stunned silence then a somewhat weak version of the Tarzan yell blasted through the speakers.

"Oh my god." Lisa mumbled as she shook her head. John snickered and Granny put her hand over her mouth to keep from laughing out loud.

Continued in Part 7.

The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

~ Leather and Lace ~

by Greek Warrior

Disclaimer #1: This is an Uber story and the characters that appear in this story may seem familiar but aren't the same as the ones we all know and love. All the characters that appear here are made up from my deranged little mind. They're fictitious and aren't meant to resemble anyone. This is all done in fun and yes I know I need to get a life.

Disclaimer #2: Taz belongs to the folks at Warner Brothers Studios. Scooby Doo belongs to Hanna-Barbera. The X-Files belongs to somebody other than me, anything you recognize isn't mine folks, I got tired of looking this stuff up.

Warning: This story contains explicit consensual sex between adult women. If you're under legal age in your neck of the woods, go away. If you live in a place that frowns upon that sort of behavior, tell'em to kiss your derrière then talk to your Congressman, or move, or both.

Warning: This story contains violence. We are talking about a certain warrior's descendant, you know.

Note: The quote at the end of chapter one is from Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet'.

Feedback is most welcome as long as it's constructive. Remember, you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar, although I've always wondered why anyone would want a bunch of flies! I can be contacted at XWPScribe@aol.com. Thanks for reading.

Note: Astolpho's at the Marcello Hotel is a completely fictitious restaurant and hotel.

Part 7

Chapter Twenty-Three:

"Is that your brother?" Kris asked as she leaned on Raven's shoulder and continued to stare at the images displayed on the screen.

"Yeah, unfortunately it is." Lisa shuddered but was unable to look away.

"Oh my." Granny chuckled. "He's very...inventive."

"He's a lunatic." Raven stated, the aggravation clearly coming through in her voice.

"Some couples role play to liven up their sex lives." John shrugged. "But Jane there," he pointed to the female figure on the screen. "Doesn't look like she wants to be caught."

The scene they inadvertently intruded upon, had Philip dressed in a fake leopard skin toga that fastened over one shoulder and thankfully covered his butt and groin areas, but left his pasty white bony legs visible. He was chasing around a supposedly helpless female dressed in a two-piece fake leopard skin bikini. Every once in awhile he would stop his chase and pound on his chest with his fists and shout out his version of the Tarzan yell.

"He really should quit." Raven said after a particularly painful sounding yell. "I think he's hurting himself."

"Maybe we should turn it off and give them time to...you know." Lisa suggested.

"Wait." John's shout stopped Raven, as she was about to hit the button to turn the monitor off. "She's about to bounce out of the top that she's almost wearing."

"John, shame on you." Kris slapped his shoulder. "You're an engaged man."

"Yes, but it doesn't hurt to look." He shrugged his shoulders. "And she's really got a nice set of hooters to look at." He grinned.

"You're disgusting." Raven shook her head.

"No." John clarified. "I'm a man."

"Isn't that what I just said?" Raven innocently mumbled.

"I heard that." John stated.

"Give it up, John." Granny laughed. "You're way out numbered."

"Hey you guys?" Lisa got their attention. "Do you think she's his date or...is he just renting her for the night?" Lisa's polite way of asking if she was a hooker.

They looked at her, then studied the woman that made the mistake of running into the bedroom and was now trapped.

"I guess it's possible she's his girlfriend." Kris answered. "What?" She asked when she saw the incredulous stares that were directed at her. "Anything's possible." She weakly defended herself.

Raven snorted. "If she's his date, I'm straight." She pulled Kris into her lap and kissed her cheek. "And if anybody here believes that, I've got some nice mountain property in Florida for sale."

"Eew." Kris exclaimed as she wrinkled her nose and pointed at the monitor. They all shuddered when they saw a gleaming white ass filling the screen. Raven reached over and this time turned it off without any protest.

"This really burns me up." Lisa leaned back in her seat and crossed her arms in front of her chest. "He's one of the biggest supporters in the campaign to rid the downtown area of prostitution." She explained. "The hypocrite."

The group got comfortable in the front of the van and talked for a while, killing time, until John was voted to check on the status of the occupants of the condo. "You waited until I had to take a bathroom break to vote. It's not fair." He mumbled as he threaded his body through the seats.

"They're done." He announced. "This answers that question." He motioned the others back with his head. Sure enough, they watched as money changed hands.

"Huh, I wonder what that little fantasy set him back?" Lisa asked.

Oh, probably a couple of thousand." John answered. "She wasn't 'off the rack', she came from a 'specialty shop'." He looked at the 'and just how would you know' expressions he was getting.

"Something we need to tell Sharon?" Kris smirked.

"I was a cop, remember." He reminded everyone and stuck his tongue out at her.

"Oh yeah, that's adult." Kris ribbed him.

"All right folks, let's get this show on the road." Raven stated, coming to the aid of her Lieutenant.

Granny put on the headset, adjusted the microphone, sat down and got comfortable. John sat down in front of the board that controlled all of the electronic surprises that he and his Captain had rigged and locked Philip's bedroom door by remote. They didn't want their audience to escape before the performance was over. Lisa and Kris sat back and waited for the show to start. Raven fidgeted as she sat beside Granny.

"Philip." The older woman did a good job of imitating a young boy.

Philip was propped up in bed channel surfing when he heard his name called. "Who's there?" He sat up on the edge and looked around nervously.

"It's me, Philip. Your brother." Granny waited for his reaction.

"My brother's dead. Wh...who are you?" He stood and spun around trying to discern where the voice was coming from. "This is a sick joke and I'm calling the cops." He warned.

John electronically disconnected the phone and gave a 'thumbs up' sign to Granny. "The phone doesn't work, Philly." Raven had revealed earlier the childhood name that Derek had called his big brother.

As the nickname registered, Philip collapsed back onto the edge of the bed. "B...but your dead." He started to shake and turned very pale.

"Yes I am. And why is that, Philip?" Granny's voice gained fury with every word spoken.

"Oh God." Philip stood and inched toward the bedroom door. "I know why you're here." He shook his finger at the empty room. "You've come back to get me. Haven't you?" He yelled. "I've got to get out of here." When he tried to open the door and couldn't, he started looking around wildly.

"He's panicking." John whispered. "What do you want me to do?" None of them had expected Philip to react without reason, scared yes, totally irrational, no.

Raven hesitated before she issued instructions. "Unlock the bedroom door. We don't want the ass to jump out the window and kill himself."

Philip was still tugging frantically on the door when John disengaged the electronic lock. They watched as the suddenly released door opened inwardly and met solidly with Philip's head. His eyes rolled back and he bonelessly collapsed to the floor.

"Well shit." Granny stated in her normal voice, interrupting the bewildered silence that had descended. "I didn't get to kid him about his Tarzan outfit."

"Should we check on him?" Lisa leaned closer to the monitor to see if the idiot was still breathing.

"Leave him there." Raven stated. "He'll wake up before long with one Hades of a headache."

"What's the next move?" Kris rubbed her hand up and down Raven's back, soothing the tenseness she found there. "Do we continue tomorrow at his office?"

"No, we'll wait and come back here tomorrow night. We don't want to do this at his office unless we absolutely have to. We don't want to chance witnesses." She explained.

"Good. I don't want to miss anything." Lisa smiled. "You were very good by the way." She congratulated the impersonator and patted her on the shoulder.

"Thank you, dear." Granny turned in her seat and faced her coconspirators. "If we're done here, I suggest that we head back. I for one need to get my beauty rest."

The sun shining through the windows awoke Philip. "Ow, my head." He brought his hands up to block out the offending light. "What am I doing on the floor?" He wondered out loud as he slowly sat up and looked around. 'I must have really tied one on last night.' He thought as he got to his feet. His legs gave out and he sat down on the end of the bed when he suddenly remembered the goings on of the night before. He sat perfectly still, waiting for the voice to start again. "See it didn't happen, couldn't happen." He swallowed hard, as if his denial would summon the long dead. "It must have been a dream, just a nightmare. I mean I haven't been eating right. That'll cause stuff like that, right? Right." He asked and answered himself. He stood up and headed towards the shower, more confident in the light of day. Unaware that his misery was just beginning.

"Did last night go like you thought it would?" Kris asked as she forked the last bit of scrambled egg into her mouth. She hadn't asked Raven last night, she'd known that her partner was tired, sore and a little troubled. Probably from seeing her brother again and bringing up a lot of bad memories and painful feelings.

Raven smirked. "No, I didn't expect him to be such a sniveling coward." She downed the rest of her juice.

"But that just follows along with what he did back then. Why would he change?" Kris had hoped he would be so scared that he would fall on his knees and beg forgiveness.

"He's an adult now. I expected him to...grow up I guess." She shrugged. "Mother always did spoil him though." She finished and sighed.

"Morning, Granny." Kris and Raven both said together as the older woman entered.

"It's cold out there this morning." She rubbed her hands together to generate some heat. "We're gonna get some snow for sure." She poured a cup of coffee for herself and refilled the two empties sitting in front of the women before she sat down to join them. "Do you think we pushed him too far?" She asked, having picked up the thread of the conversation.

Raven thought for a minute then answered. "I have no idea. But we're gonna keep pushing until he either confesses or has a nervous breakdown." She stated confidently. Having decided that seemed to lift a weight off her shoulders. "Come on, let's do something fun today." She slapped her palm down on the table and grinned at her startled companions.

That night found them back in the van, all but John who had been summoned by his mother. Raven had laughed at his condemned man act when he related his mother's threats of pink tuxedos since he didn't seem to care about his own wedding. The others laughed all the way to their parking spot behind Philip's building at Raven's fairly good impersonation of the tall man. They waited and watched. About half an hour later they saw a familiar looking form head into the building.

"More of the same?" Granny asked as she settled herself and picked up the headset.

"Yes." Raven stationed herself in front of the 3-D projectors. "But I think we'll add a few visuals tonight." Kris and Lisa had been coached earlier on the control panel that John had manned the night before and the two young women took up their positions.

Tonight didn't get much accomplished in the way of a confession. Philip fainted at the sight of his brother's image. "This is going to take forever at this rate." Lisa sighed dejectedly and Kris agreed with a nod of her head.

The third night, John was again with them but Philip wasn't. They tracked him down, with the aid of the cameras. He was trying to hide in his office. "You knew he would try to hide." Kris stated.

"I wondered why you and John went to the trouble of installing all that equipment in his office if we weren't going to use it." Lisa chuckled.

"Now we know." Granny added.

"Oh God, not again." Philip hung his head when he saw the ghostly image of his brother seemingly materialize out of thin air.

"You can't hide from me, Philip." The image shimmered as if in anger. "And I really think God has better things to do than listen to a liar like you."

"What do you mean? I'm not...I." Philip took a deep breath. 'No use lying to him, he knows what happened.' Again he hung his head, this time in defeat. "What do you want from me? I can't change what happened to you. I can't bring you back."

"No you can't. But you can change what happened after." Granny muted the mike as instructions were passed her way. Given the events of the two previous nights they weren't totally prepared for the quick surrender. "I want you to admit your sins." Granny instructed the defeated man. She was reading from Lisa's quickly scribbled demands.

"I'll go to confession first thing in the morning." Philip promised.

"Oh no, it's not going to be that easy. You have to admit to mother what you did." Lisa gave up writing and started whispering in Granny's ear.

Philip jumped up from the chair he was slouched in. "No, please...I can't...I'll do anything but that." He fell to his knees and begged.

"And," Granny growled into the mike to shut him up. "You will beg forgiveness from both your sisters. If you don't, I will haunt you for the rest of your days and believe me, there is NOWhere you can hide." She was really getting into this.

"But." He started to try to worm his way out but was interrupted.

"No buts, Philip, be a man for once in your miserable life. And do it quickly or..." The threat was left hanging.

"Okay I promise. But I don't know where Frances is."

Granny looked at Lisa and Raven for clarification, she had never been told Raven's middle name. Raven tapped her chest and mouthed the words, 'he means me'. "Don't worry about that, Philip. I'll make sure she knows that you want to see her." Granny repeated Raven's instructions as they were whispered to her.

'Well at least she'll get the crap scared out of her too.' Philip thought, which made him feel a little better.

As the image slowly started to fade, Philip heard the threatening voice one more time. "Remember my warning, Philip, and move quickly."

They watched for a few more minutes, as the figure on the screen continued to kneel on the carpet in front of his desk. "How long do we give him to tell mother?" Lisa broke the silence.

"And what's the plan if he doesn't confess?" John added as he turned onto Pike and headed for the interstate.

Raven thought about their options. "We could of course continue to hound him night after night, but we can't follow him everywhere...and if he hasn't confessed in the next day or two, I don't think he ever will."

Raven leaned her shoulder against the doorframe while Kris headed towards the blinking light on the answering machine.

'Hey, Kris, it's me. Looks like the talks are starting to wind down, according to father. So call me at home tomorrow, I'd like to get a date set for a visit. Hopefully Raven will feel up to having us under foot. Talk to you tomorrow, Sis. Bye.'

Raven moved behind her lover. "You looking forward to seeing them?"

Kris leaned back into a warm body when two strong arms circled her waist. "Uh huh." The young woman responded and tilted her head to allow Raven's lips easier access to her neck.

Teeth nipped soft flesh. "Do you think your mother or brother will come?" She asked then wanted to kick herself when she felt Kris tense.

"Gee, Taz, you sure know how to kill a mood."

"Sorry, love." Raven hugged the smaller body tighter.

"It's okay." Kris patted the arms holding her and turned her body around to face Raven. "I don't think they'll come. And I must admit that I hope they don't. It would be too strained, even if she were trying to accept us. Besides I'm looking forward to a relaxing visit with father and Viv." Kris laid her head on her partner's chest and sighed in contentment. The gently rocking motion that Raven had started while holding her, made Kris very aware of her partner's warmth and scent and her body responded by making it's desire known. She lowered her arms that had been around Raven's waist and her hands grasped the firm behind and began a sensual massage.

Raven moaned. "I see I didn't completely kill the mood." Her hands mirrored Kris' as she pulled her lover's body into hers.

Kris stopped her errant hands. "Oh no you don't. It's still too soon for bed aerobics, young lady. You are still healing."

"Doc said that I should increase my physical activity." Raven started backing Kris towards the stairs. "And I bet sexual frustration really, really puts a strain on a sore, tense still healing body, that really would be healing a lot quicker if it was in a state of total relaxation.

"You do, do you?" Kris slowly unbuttoned Raven's shirt, ran her hands lightly up the now uncovered bare skin and pushed it off her shoulders.

"Oh yeah." The tall woman's breath quickened. "I sure do." She leaned over and kissed Kris. Raven's hands disappeared behind her back while she desperately tried to pull the still buttoned cuffs over her hands in order to dispense with the garment altogether.

"Well then, I guess I better do something to relax you." Kris stated when their lips disengaged. "Do you think that getting hot," Kris paused to nip an ear. "And wet," a nip on the other ear. "Would eventually sooth your tense body?" She slowly drew her tongue around her own lips.

Raven was definitely hot and she was getting wetter by the second. The buttons on her cuffs went flying as she gave up delicately trying to rid herself of her shirt. "Uh huh." She whimpered.

"Well then." Kris slowly backed up the stairs ahead of her partner. "I guess I'd better go turn the Jacuzzi on." She turned and took off up the stairs, laughing at the expression on Raven's face.

Raven's bewilderment lasted only a minute then she was headed after her tormentor. "You little tease. Wait until I get my hands on you." She yelled.

Raven woke up as the early morning sent rays of sunlight spilling through the miniscule openings in the drapes. She was spooned against her companion's smaller body. When she had gotten her hands on her tormentor last night, she had intended to arouse her lover's body until Kris couldn't do anything but give in to the desire burning between them. But instead of the wild frenzy that both thought their lovemaking would be, their touches were gentle and coaxing, easing each other over the edge. Raven smiled and lightly kissed the bare shoulder that had been revealed when she adjusted their position to block the invading sunlight.

"Morning." Kris turned her head slightly. "Why are you awake so early?" She groaned when she saw the time.

"Don't know." Raven grinned. "Because I'm happy. I'm enjoying the view. I'm hungry for you." She lightly bit Kris' neck. "Take your pick."

Kris turned on her back and held her arms out in invitation. "All of the above."

Raven growled as she moved her body over her partners and pulled the covers up over their heads. "I love you, Sagira." Stated from lips that hovered just above Kris' then descended before a reply could be made.

Chapter Twenty-Four:

Several hours later, hunger of another kind drove the pair to venture from their warm, cozy, and somewhat ruffled nest. A large breakfast was consumed as they playfully fed each other waffles and sausage. Which meant they ended up in the shower since waffles covered in butter and syrup didn't work particularly well as a finger food.

Raven cleaned the kitchen while Kris called her sister. They agreed on the last weekend of the month for the visit and Viv said their mother had not mentioned joining them but that Martin asked to come along. *'I think he's being sent as a spy.'* Viv had said before they ended the call.

"You can tell him he can't come if it bothers you." Raven suggested.

Kris shrugged her shoulders. "Let him come. I don't care if he reports back to mother or not." She stated. "I am however, worried about what, if anything, Philip's up to."

"Mom?" Philip walked into the kitchen and draped his coat over one of the chairs that were pushed under the Formica top table. "Where are you?" After debating with himself most of the night, he decided that he'd rather take his chances with his mother being upset than have to deal with the ghost of his brother for the rest of his life.

"What a nice surprise." Cynthia said as she entered the kitchen and kissed her son on the cheek. "Shouldn't you be at work?" She asked as she moved over to the stove and stirred the bubbling pot.

"Yeah, but there's something that I need to tell you." He led her over to a chair and helped her to sit. "I...I've been having nightmares recently." He wasn't going to tell her that his dead brother had to bully him into telling the truth. He was hoping that if she thought it was his idea to come clean that she might go easier on him.

He nervously paced back and forth while revealing the fact that he had lied about what happened to his brother all those years ago. After his story was finished he ventured a look at his mother. She was staring off into space. "Mom, I'm so sorry. Please say something." He fell to his knees in front of his mother, begging her to forgive him.

"After everything that I taught you, that the church taught you, you brought those kinds of people into our home?" She focused on Philip's pleading face.

"I didn't realize what kind of people they were, not at first, not until it was too late. I never would have associated with them if I had known. I didn't mean for anything bad to happen. I loved Derek too."

"Why did you lie? Why did you let me blame your sister?"

Philip sat down heavily in the chair across from her. "They threatened us and I was scared. And because I knew you didn't seem to love Fran as much as the rest of us. She was the one that you yelled at the most, the one that you blamed for most things that went wrong even if there wasn't a reason to. So I guess I thought one more thing wouldn't matter." He stated sincerely.

"I..." She stopped and thought about the past. She knew she had sometimes been hard on the kids but she had been so tired from working and trying to make a living. And she was hurt and angry with her husband for leaving her. And her oldest daughter had been the spitting image, in both appearance and attitude, of the man that had walked out on them. She knew that there were times that she had been too harsh with the young girl. But Frances had tried her patience on so many occasions, sometimes on purpose Cynthia had thought. "Maybe I shouldn't have been so hard on her about some things."

"Oh my God, guess what happened? You'll never believe it! I can't."

"Slow down, Lisa, you sound like you're about to hyperventilate." Raven had answered the phone to hear the enthusiastic ranting coming from her sister. "Catch your breath and tell me what's going on." Kris had joined her by the phone when she heard Raven's side of the conversation.

Lisa did as asked and took a few deep breaths. "Mother called and asked me to come over to the house. She said that Philip had something important to tell me." She waited for a comment from her sister, but silence was all she got. "Raven? You still there?"

Raven had put Lisa on speakerphone so Kris had heard the excited comments and answered for the stunned woman. "She's still here, just stunned I think."

"Are you headed over there?" Raven cleared her suddenly dry throat and asked.

"Yes, it'll take me about an hour to get there since I have to change buses." Lisa explained. "What should I say if he mentions trying to find you?"

Raven contemplated the best way for Lisa to handle the problem. "If he asks about me don't say anything about us being together again. I don't know how they would react to that and I don't want you out numbered." Raven explained. "I'll be the one to contact them."

"Okay...I uh, I guess I should go now so I don't miss my transfer." Lisa hesitated before saying good-bye and hanging up.

"Lisa." Raven softened her voice. "Don't be nervous. What ever happens, you've got nothing to feel bad about. You were only trying to right a wrong."

"I know. I just want so badly for everything to work out. I'll call you afterwards."

"Why don't Raven and I meet you downtown? We can get some lunch or something." Kris' suggestion got her a grin from her partner and a relieved 'good idea' from Lisa.

Raven started her pacing after the phone disconnected. After about five minutes of watching the nervous bundle of energy, Kris grabbed the car keys. "Let's go."

"I thought we were going to give Lisa time to get to the house and find out what's going on?" Raven's eyes followed her companion towards the door.

"It'll take us forever to get downtown this time of day." Kris threw the comment back over her shoulder. "And if I watch you pace for much longer, you're going to wear me out." She grabbed her heavy jacket and tossed Raven hers.

Lisa walked into the café with an unreadable expression on her face. She pulled out a chair and sat down at the table that the two curious women occupied. She ordered iced tea and a sandwich before she revealed anything. "He admitted it. Told the same story you've been telling all along. But he made like it was all his idea to finally blurt out the truth." She finally explained. "He told mother he'd been having nightmares and that was what prompted him into finally coming clean."

Her food was served and she started eating while her news sunk in and she waited for the questions that she knew would start. She wasn't disappointed as Kris excitedly started throwing them at her. "Wait." Lisa wiped the mayo from the corner of her mouth. "Let me just tell you what happened." She took a swallow of her drink while she collected her thoughts. "I walked in and I couldn't even get my coat off before he launched into his confession. It was like he just wanted to get it over with." Lisa proceeded to tell about the next hour and a half of trying to act like she was surprised by what was going on.

"So he didn't mention the nightly visits?" Kris asked. Lisa shook her head no since her mouth was full.

"I guess we'd better get that equipment out." Raven stated. Reminding herself to call John.

"He also mentioned wanting to find you so he could set the record straight." She looked at her sister while she munched on potato chips. "Again making it sound like it was his idea."

"Did he at least act like he was sorry?" Kris asked Lisa. "Or do you think he's just scared?"

Lisa contemplated silently. "He was remorseful about Derek." She also told them about his excuse to Cynthia as to why he lied. "But I honestly couldn't tell if he felt bad about blaming you or not."

The waitress chose that moment to ask about dessert but they all passed. "Mother was...hard to read. She looked reluctant when Philip talked about finding you. Almost sad, I think maybe she's

ashamed, kind of." Lisa tried to express the feeling she had when she had observed her mother during Philip's confession.

"She should be." Kris snarled. "And it should be more than 'kind of' ashamed."

"My defender's showing her teeth." Raven leaned over slightly and rubbed Kris' tense back.

"Well she's got a helluva a lot to make up for." Kris stated firmly.

Raven paid the check and the three of them headed for the car. "What are you going to do?" Lisa asked as Kris pulled out of the underground parking garage. "Do you even want to see them? Or is it enough just to know that Philip admitted it and mother now knows that you were telling the truth?"

"I hadn't really considered what I want." She stared out the window at the passing buildings. "I guess I'd like for them to see that I'm not the complete failure that mother assumed I'd be."

Kris interrupted. "Do you want to come home with us?" She asked Lisa before she headed for I-5.

"Andy and I have a date tonight so I need to get back to my apartment." Lisa answered. "Is it okay to tell him about all this?"

"Yeah." Raven looked back over her shoulder. "Just don't mention the breaking and entering part."

"Technically we didn't, we had the key." Lisa winked at the grinning image of Kris in the mirror.

"Ooh, I like the way you think." Kris turned right on Boren. "Had a lot of practice splitting hairs, have you?" It was a rhetorical question and Lisa wiggled her eyebrows in a fair imitation of her sister.

That night, Granny and John had been informed of the successful ending to their endeavor and Raven and Kris were now sitting side-by-side staring into a dying fire. "You never did really answer Lisa's questions this afternoon." Kris glanced at the relaxed woman beside her. "What are you going to do?"

Raven yawned and stretched. "I think I'll meet with them and see what happens. But I'm not going to be disappointed if nothing good comes out of this."

"Don't you want her to make up for the things you missed by not having a mother?" Kris asked. "By not having a childhood?"

"Ah, but she can't, love, that time is lost forever." Raven explained. "But I'm not complaining, since you wouldn't be here if all that hadn't happened." She tweaked Kris' nose.

"I love you." Kris' eyes started to water.

"And I love you." Raven stood and extended her hand to the emotional young woman. "Come on, babe, let's go to bed. I'm exhausted; you wore me out last night. You should have known that I wasn't ready for that much physical activity." Raven grinned at the indignant expression displayed on Kris' face.

"Me?" Kris squeaked, "I didn't...I...you."

Raven covered the stammering mouth with her fingers. "You know I'm only kidding." She lightly kissed the lips that her fingers had silenced then rested her forehead against Kris'. "Let's see how long it takes you to wear me out tonight." She wiggled her eyebrows and urged her partner up the staircase ahead of her.

Raven pulled into a vacant space in the pay parking lot not far from the Seattle Center and turned off the engine. She waited for Kris to circle around and join her on the driver's side. "You sure you don't want to wait in the car?" She asked her companion as they turned left at the lot entrance and headed south.

"I'm sure, I'll wait for you outside the building. That way I can pace without too many people thinking I'm crazy." Kris looked up at the uncharacteristically jittery woman. "Are you nervous? You can change your mind, I wouldn't mind going up with you." They had talked about this on the drive into the city. Raven had thought it best if she confronted her brother alone. Reasoning that Philip might be less inclined to confess in front of a second person.

Raven glanced at Kris and smiled. "Not nervous, just...uncomfortable. But I still think it's best if you wait for me. Thanks for asking though." She stopped in front of the double glass doors that marked the entrance to the building where her brother had his office. She squeezed Kris' hand before pushing one of them open and entering.

Philip was pecking away at his keyboard when he heard someone enter his office. Thinking it was his secretary he didn't bother to look up. "I thought you were going to lunch, Betty?"

Raven pushed the door closed and leaned back against it. "Since the desk out there is empty, I'm guessing she did."

"Who?" Philip looked up to see the tall figure casually leaning back. He slowly removed his glasses and stood up. He opened his mouth but nothing came out other than a gasp.

"I understand you wanted to see me." Raven pushed off the door and moved to stand behind the chair in front of his desk.

He cleared his throat. "Yes." His palms were sweating and he rubbed them on his slacks. 'God she's...intimidating.' He picked up his cup and gulped down the rest of his cold coffee, trying to wet his dry throat. "Would you, ah, like...some coffee...or something?"

"Look, Philip, I'm not here for milk and cookies." She saw him flinch at her abrupt tone and sighed. He reminded her of the terrified little boy that ran out of the house on that fateful day so long ago. And suddenly, instead of revenge, she just wanted to get this over with.

"I know." He stared down at his desk, wanting to look anywhere but into his sister's compelling gaze. He had the most unpleasant feeling, like he was being held mesmerized, against his will. He likened it to how the victim of a cobra must feel, right before the serpent strikes out against its prey. "I told mom the truth." He didn't elaborate, knowing she would understand.

Raven's hands gripped the back of his visitor's chair. "Did you now?" She saw him nod his head and slowly raise it and fix his gaze to a spot past her shoulder. "Well gee, that only took 16 years. You want a medal?" She stated sarcastically. Then remembered telling Kris that they probably wouldn't be together if things had happened differently. She sighed deeply as she rubbed her temples with her left hand.

"Mom asked me to see if you would meet with her." He thought it was in his best interest to change the subject.

"Does she?" Raven watched him nervously fidget with his empty coffee cup. "Last time I saw her she told me I was a disgrace to the family and that she never wanted to see me again. You telling me she's changed her mind?"

"I don't know...maybe." He shrugged his shoulders. "Look, Frances."

She interrupted him. "Raven, I go by Raven, Philip."

"Okay." He looked her in the eye for the first time since they had started talking. "Would it be okay with you if I was at the house when you come home?"

Raven thought for a few minutes and decided she would rather be on home ground and surrounded by friendly faces when the reunion took place. "It's not my home anymore and I really would rather not go there again. If you want to, you can bring her by to see me." She moved around the chair to stand in front of his desk. "Give me a pen and I'll write the address and directions down for you."

Philip admitted to himself that he was very curious about his sister after he had been forced to think about her again. He had spent the better portion of last night imagining different scenarios of her life. What did she do for a living? Where did she live? Was she married? Did she have a family? Did she ever make anything out of herself or was she one of the lower classes? "I'm sure that will be okay with mom."

"I'll call you tomorrow to find out what day would be best for the two of you."

Kris gave her partner until they were back in the car and headed home. "How did it go?" She turned in her seat, as much as the seatbelt allowed and stared at the dark-haired woman's profile.

Raven shrugged her shoulders and merged into traffic on I-5 before she related her and Philip's conversation. "At first I wanted to make him squirm and grovel."

"But you didn't." Kris stated confidently. "Because you're a nice person."

"No, I'm not." Raven stated just as confidently.

"Yes...you...are." Kris crossed her arms in front of her chest, defiantly.

"No I'm...I'm not going to win this one, am I?" She glanced at her obstinate companion.

"You're learning, Taz." Kris smiled triumphantly as she patted her partner's thigh.

Raven shook her head and grinned as she turned her blinker on and moved to the far right hand lane, preparing to exit I-5 onto Lake City Way.

As soon as Raven pulled into the garage, Kris jumped out and headed for Granny's to fill her in while Raven called her sister to do likewise.

"Hey, sis." Raven sat down at her desk and propped her feet up.

"I have been pacing the floor waiting for you to call. How did it go? I take it you didn't kill him." Lisa collapsed onto her couch and Andy rubbed her tense neck with one hand.

Raven chuckled and related the conversation for a second time. "I really don't know what to expect. I'm not holding my breath for an apology, though."

"Can I be there when they come by?" Lisa asked.

Raven was truly surprised by the request. "Why? I mean if you're here they'll obviously know we've been in touch before now and that could only cause trouble for you."

"I know and I don't care. I'm tired of being lied to and influenced and manipulated." Lisa leaned back into the comforting massage. "It's time I stood up for myself with mother instead of dodging the issues."

"Okay, I'll see if they can be here Wednesday since you're off then. I'll let you know tomorrow." They said their goodbyes and Raven hung up the phone.

"You look tired." Kris stated. "Can I interest you in a nap?" She pushed off the doorframe she had been leaning against and held out her hand.

"You can interest me in anything that involves you, me and a bed." Raven wiggled her eyebrows as she walked towards and grasped the outstretched hand.

Wednesday dawned cold and wet, which was nothing new for Seattle in winter. The weatherman had promised sun breaks by early afternoon and Mother Nature seemed to be co-operating. Raven sat on the floor in front of the TV with the game controller in her hands. She was busy navigating Lara Croft through an Egyptian Tomb. Kris was stretched out on the couch with her laptop. She would periodically type a sentence then hit the backspace key until it was erased.

"You'll never get that story finished if you don't quit deleting everything you type." Raven glanced back over her shoulder.

Kris stuck her tongue out at the chuckling woman.

"Not now, darlin', we don't have time." Raven turned back to her game.

"Smart ass." Kris directed the comment to the back of the dark head. "You're either a good actor or you aren't the least bit nervous. Which is it?"

"She's definitely not nervous." Granny leaned on the back of the couch Kris was still lying on. "I've really only seen her that way once."

"When was this?" Kris loved to hear bits and pieces of her partner's past.

"I had the flu," Granny started.

"It was pneumonia and I had to drag your butt to the hospital because you were too pig-headed to go to the doctor when I told you to." Raven interrupted. "And you think I'm stubborn." Raven told Kris.

Lisa's entrance forestalled anymore reminiscing. "Sorry I'm late. The traffic on 405 was impossible. I take it they're not here yet?" She sat down next to Kris' feet. She had borrowed Andy's car so no one would have to pick her up.

Her question was answered by the sound of a car driving up. "I'll leave the three of you to greet your guests and I'll drop in a little later after you've had time to talk." Granny headed for the kitchen. "Good luck."

At the sound of the bell, Raven opened the front door for her mother and brother. It seemed like several minutes passed before the silence was broken by Philip. "Can we come in?"

Raven stared at the woman that had made so much of her childhood so unbearably difficult. She could see that the years had taken their toll on her, not so much in aging but in bitterness. The

woman that stood before her seemed to be angry with her lot in life. "Oh yes, sorry." She closed the door and led them into the living room.

"Lisa? What are you doing here?" Cynthia asked her youngest daughter.

Lisa stood and faced her mother. "I have a right to be here, Raven is my sister after all."

"Yes, I suppose you do." She admitted and sat down at the end of the couch, with Philip sitting next to her.

Raven introduced Kris as a friend. They decided earlier not to rub their relationship in Cynthia's face, yet. Kris then headed to the kitchen to get the coffee and tea she had made. Lisa sat on the opposite end of the couch, closest to the chair that Raven occupied.

"Philip said he explained everything to you." Cynthia stated into the uncomfortable silence.

"He told me that he finally told you the truth about what happened." Raven paused to restrain her sarcasm. "But I'm not sure what you want from me."

"I...I guess I just wanted to see how you were...how you ended up." Cynthia looked at the face that still reminded her of the husband that had abandoned her.

Kris sat the tray down that contained mugs, a coffeepot, a teapot, sugar and cream. She then filled everyone's mug with his or her preferred beverage before taking the chair beside her companion.

"Thank you, dear." Cynthia said to Kris as she sipped her tea. "Is this your parent's house? It's a lovely home. They must do very well." She stated, glad for the chance to change the subject.

Kris answered before her partner could. "No, Mrs. Chandler, it's Raven's. And it is lovely isn't it. She had the whole thing redecorated." Kris replied sweetly. If money impressed the witch, she was going to make certain Cynthia knew her daughter had it.

Raven barely kept the smirk off her face at Kris' antics and Lisa had to cough to cover up her amusement.

"This place is yours?" Philip couldn't keep the envy from his voice. "What do you do for a living? This cost some big bucks. It's nothing illegal is it?"

Raven had to bite her tongue to keep from pointing out that the house was hers and Kris'. "No, Philip, it's not illegal." Raven sighed. "As you can see, mother, I ended up landing on my feet after a somewhat rocky start."

"And I suppose you blame me?" Cynthia questioned halfheartedly; knowing deep down she could have been more loving and caring toward her eldest daughter.

Raven shook her head. "Not anymore. At first I wondered what I had done to make you hate me so much. Then I was angry with you, then I hated you, and then I really just didn't care anymore. It wasn't worth the energy it took to sustain the emotions." She stared at the woman that hadn't been her mother for a long, long time.

Cynthia broke eye contact first. "I never hated you. I just hated your father after he left and you reminded me so much of him that I would get angry with you."

"That wasn't my fault." Raven pointed out as she stood and walked to the mantle, leaving her back to the room and its occupants.

"I know." Cynthia continued to stare down at her hands. "I know I treated you badly and took my anger out on you. I can't change the past, but I'd like to get to know my daughter if you feel like sharing your life with us."

Raven turned around to find actual sincerity in her mother's eyes. She returned to her chair beside Kris and looked at her questioningly. At the subtle okay from her partner, Raven decided that she might as well answer some of their questions. "I'll try to answer some of your questions. What would you like to know?"

"Gracious, I don't know where to start." Cynthia wasn't quite prepared for Raven to accept.

"I do." Philip spoke up. "What bank did you rob?"

"Give it a rest, Philip, I work for the government." Raven wasn't about to tell them the complete truth. She hoped that he would drop the subject.

"So you just rob us tax paying citizens. Nice to see how government officials live."

Surprisingly Cynthia was the one that chastised him. "Philip that will be enough."

"Yes, ma'am." He mumbled and glared at Lisa who was trying her best not to laugh at her brother, which was kinda hard since she now pictured him as Tarzan, King of the Idiots, every time she saw him.

"Did you and Kris meet through school or work? Why don't you tell us the story?" Cynthia requested what she thought was a safe topic.

A small shrug of the shoulders indicated a 'why not' gesture from both women. "I was on an assignment. Actually Kris was part of the assignment and we just happened to become close friends in a short time." Raven explained. "We were to protect an Ambassador and his family from possible threats."

Cynthia interrupted. "I thought I recognized your name, you're Ambassador Whitfield's daughter. The papers said that he and his family were brought back from Turkey because of a terrorist plot

to either kill him or kidnap his family to keep him out of the peace talks. That must have been terribly frightening."

"We were very well protected, so most of it wasn't too bad." Kris explained. 'Except for being shot at and chased to the airbase. But she probably doesn't need to hear that.' One look at Raven and she knew they shared the same thoughts.

"That was very brave of you but wasn't it too dangerous for you to be there?" Cynthia questioned her daughter. "Shouldn't the military have been protecting them?"

Philip, who didn't like not being the center of his mother's attention, thought surely that his sister didn't have an important roll. "I believe it's the marines that guard the embassies, mom and I'm sure the men stationed there had to make sure all the secretaries and non-essential people were safe."

"Actually," Kris gritted her teeth. "Your sister was..." The doorbell interrupted her and Lisa jumped up stating she'd get it.

Raven leaned her head towards her defender and whispered. "Don't let him get to you, Kris, his opinion isn't important. I don't care what he thinks about me."

"I do." Was the only response she had time for before Lisa came back, followed by John. "Part of the cavalry's here." Kris whispered and winked.

Raven was touched by the display of her friends, the people that she considered her real family, rallying around her. Which reminded her of how much her young lover had changed her. Less than a year ago she would have thrown them out for thinking that she couldn't handle things herself. "Is there a problem?"

"No, no problem. Can't I just stop by to see how you're doing?" John responded. A raised eyebrow from Raven let him know that she wasn't fooled in the least. He turned his attention to Cynthia. "Mrs. Chandler, I'm John Logan, you probably don't remember me. It's been awhile."

"I remember you." Philip spoke up. "You were the cop that use to haul Raven home when she started getting into trouble. You remember don't you, mom?" He smirked. "You still having to keep an eye on her after all this time? She still getting into trouble, huh?"

"Yes I was." John looked at the man like he was a lower life form. "And I don't think I like you implying that I spy on her, she is my boss after all."

Raven chuckled at the stunned expression on her brother's face. "John, I think you're scaring Philip, sit down please."

"I thought you worked for the government?" Cynthia eyebrows drew together, showing her confusion.

"Mom, John's not a policemen anymore. Raven, maybe you should explain to mom and Philip what you were actually doing when you and Kris met." Lisa suggested.

Raven sighed at the look she was getting from Kris, Lisa and John. They weren't going to let her down play her roll in the operation. 'Okay, fine, I can do this.' She shot a glare at John, warning him to keep his mouth shut. "I work for an anti-terrorist organization. I command one of several teams. We're issued military ranks even though we're not affiliated with the military and John is my Lieutenant. There had been indications of a possible terrorist attack against the Ambassador and we were sent in to protect them and if need be, to remove them from danger. After two attempts to infiltrate the embassy, I ordered the evacuation of all embassy personal and their families. End of story."

There were several minutes of silence before Philip started laughing. "This is a joke right?" No one responded. "Oh come on, you can't really expect us to believe that she's some kind of...GI Jane or something equally ridiculous."

Raven worried when Kris and John looked at each other with a devilish glint in their eyes. Kris turned to Philip. "She saved my life twice in less than twelve hours after we had been evacuated."

John continued. "Several years ago, I was shot in the leg and couldn't walk and she carried me close to five miles on her back through the jungles of Central America to our extraction point." Knowing full well that he was being glared at, he refused to look at Raven. "She would never admit it, but your daughter is a hero, Mrs. Chandler. She's respected by the people that work for her and the people she works for."

"Except for the dear departed Major Otis." Lisa mumbled thinking she wouldn't be overheard but was.

"Whose that?" A very confused and dazed Cynthia asked.

"Sorry, sis." Lisa apologized.

Raven groaned and hung her head. She briefly described his plot for revenge and her injury. Lisa then described her meeting with her sister and how they became reacquainted with each other.

"Well, this is a lot to take in." Cynthia was well aware that her eldest daughter was a complete stranger to her and that Raven could have died with this lie between them. "You seem to have most definitely landed on your feet without needing any help from me or anyone else."

Raven's insides were trying to pull her in two different directions. Part of her wanted to comfort her mother, the other thought that she deserved to suffer. "Mother, I had help. From John who always believed that there was some good in me somewhere. From Colonel Albright, who gave me a chance. To Granny, my longtime neighbor, who was a friend even when I thought I didn't need one. And Kris who trusted me and loved me no matter what. And also Lisa who gave me a chance." She looked at her mother's hanging head. "Mother, maybe things would have turned out

okay between us if I had stuck around. But like you said, we can't change the past. So maybe we could go forward. I don't think we'll ever become a family again but we could try to be friends or at least be civil to each other." Raven put forth the offer and waited.

"I...I don't know what to say." Cynthia was stunned. "You're the one that I treated badly and yet you're the one offering the olive branch." Philip, for once, wisely kept his mouth shut.

"There's one thing that might make all this irrelevant." Raven put her hand over Kris' and squeezed lightly. She decided to go ahead and get their relationship out in the open. "I know that you were involved with the Catholic Church and their beliefs and I'm assuming you still are. So before we put a lot of time and effort into getting to know each other, I probably should tell you that Kris and I are lovers and we are completely committed to each other for the rest of our lives. So if you can't deal with that, we shouldn't waste our time." Raven leaned back in her chair still holding Kris' hand and waited.

"I was taught that those...your kind of relationship is wrong." Cynthia paused. "All my life I've tried to live the way the church told me. To do what they considered right."

Philip grinned. "This is it. Mom'll let them have it with both barrels and then we're outta here.' He didn't like being reminded of his failures and having his sister around makes him remember the day he ran scared and she stayed behind to face the music. 'And now I find out that she's some kind of big shot hero with more money than I'll ever make. It should be me, I want to be the hero and get all the good things that come with it.'

"And look what it's gotten me." Cynthia continued. "A broken marriage, one son dead, one daughter that had to run away and another daughter that barely tolerates me. Not a lot for 50 years on this earth."

Lisa looked stunned. "I don't...I."

"Its all right, dear. I thought I could bully you into thinking like me. It's the same thing that I tried to do to your sister and look where that got me." Cynthia explained. "There are a lot of things I think I need to reconsider."

"You can't be serious." Philip jumped up and pointed towards the two women. "They're perverts. And they live together and...and have sexual relations without being married. It's not right." He stamped his foot.

"You need to calm down." John stood in a defensive stance, waiting for trouble.

"Sit down, Philip." Cynthia pulled on his arm.

"But, mom, you said it wasn't right!" He collapsed beside her.

"Does that mean you don't have...relations?" Raven quizzed her brother.

"Of course not, I'm not married." He replied confidently. Thinking that there was no way for her to know the truth.

"Maybe we should ask Jane about that, huh, Tarzan?" Raven grinned. Cynthia looked confused while Kris, Lisa and John had to bite their tongues to keep from laughing.

Philip looked panic stricken. "How...how did you know?"

"A little ghosty told me."

"What are you talking about?" Cynthia asked, looking back and forth from her son to Raven.

"Nothing, mother, Philip and I are just coming to an understanding about name calling and what's right and wrong. Right, Philip."

Philip swallowed hard. 'God, if she knows about that, what else could she know about?' He really didn't want to know and he definitely didn't want his mother to find out. "Right, we understand each other."

"Well, this has been a very...unusual and enlightening day. And I have many things to think about. Maybe we can all have dinner together soon?" Cynthia stood and turned white as a sheet as she looked at the person who was standing in the living room doorway. "Oh my God."

Chapter Twenty-Five:

Raven and John moved as one and caught her as she fainted. "What the hell?" Raven looked at Granny standing in the doorway.

Kris moved to the older woman's side when she looked like she might also keel over. "What's going on?"

"I need to sit down." Granny stated and Kris helped her over to the chair she had been using.

"Can somebody please tell us what's going on?" Lisa asked.

"I'm going to venture a guess here and say that you two know each other." Raven said as she and John moved her mother to the couch and laid her down. They moved out of the way and let Lisa sit beside the unconscious woman. She held her mother's hand and lightly patted her face.

"You could say that. Thanks." Granny gulped the water that Kris handed her. "Cynthia's my sister. The last time I talked to her was just before I shipped out to Vietnam."

Murmuring from the couch interrupted her. "What happened?"

"You fainted. It seems it's old home week."

"Shut up, Philip." Everyone but the two older women stated in unison.

"Marsha? I can't believe it's really you."

Lisa helped her mother sit up. "Not too fast, you might get dizzy."

"What happened to you? Why didn't you ever come home?" Cynthia questioned her older sibling. "I missed you so much."

"I did. Father threw me out, told me never to come back."

"I don't understand. Why would he do that?" Cynthia was confused since her father had told her that it had been Marsha that hadn't wanted to return.

Granny laughed sarcastically. "He said that it was unchristian for a girl to go gallivanting around where all the soldiers were. I guess he thought I'd come back pregnant and unmarried." She looked at Raven. "Boy, the old bastard's probably turning over in his grave watching you." She looked at Raven.

"Why didn't you try to find me after father passed away?" Cynthia questioned.

"I never knew your married name. I tried several times after I returned to the states, but mother wouldn't tell me, she followed his orders until the bitter end." Granny's eyes took on a faraway look, remembering the past. "If he had died first she might have told me." She refocused on the present. "I can't believe in all these years we didn't at least run into each other."

The silence lengthened as the shadows from the setting sun stretched across the floor. Kris cleared her throat. "It's getting late and I think it'd be a good idea if I fixed us all dinner. That way everybody will have time to consider these new...developments." She hoped Raven wouldn't mind having everyone around a while longer.

The sound of Kris' voice enabled Raven to shake off the surprise that the information had created. "That's a good idea. We've all been thrown a few curves that'll take some getting use to."

John took a rain check, saying he had a date with Sharon and her parents. Lisa had to drag Philip into the kitchen behind Raven and Kris to give Cynthia and Marsha time alone.

"You doing okay?" Kris asked as she hugged Raven and ran her hands up and down her partners back in a soothing manner.

Raven saw Philip open his mouth and glared at him menacingly. "If you say one bad word against Kris or our relationship, you'll be eating through a straw for the next two months. Do we understand each other?"

"You wouldn't..." Philip stopped and swallowed loudly at the cold, calculating expression on his sister's face and realized that she had probably done a lot worse for less reason. "Yeah, I understand." He sulked.

"I'm okay, love." Raven answered Kris' earlier question. "I'm just a little stunned that Granny's my aunt. It's gonna take some getting use to."

"That was a surprise." Lisa agreed as she opened the refrigerator and peered inside. "So, what are we cooking?"

"Dinner was surprisingly pleasant, since Philip kept his mouth shut most of the time." Raven said as she took Kris' hand as they left the kitchen and headed upstairs. Their visitors had left about an hour ago and Kris had refused to leave the mess in the kitchen for tomorrow.

"You sleepy?" Kris asked her partner when they entered the bedroom.

"Not too bad." Raven answered as she headed for the bathroom.

Kris grinned. 'Good.' She had plans for her tall dark-haired lover. She quickly undressed, grabbed her surprise and got under the covers.

"You want me to turn off the light in the bathroom?" Raven asked as she came back into the bedroom to find Kris relaxing in bed. "I guess so." She walked over to stand beside Kris, who was on Raven's side of the bed.

Kris was lying on her side, facing Raven. "You're a little over dressed don't ya think?" She moved her arm out from under the blanket to reveal her bare-shoulder and ran her hand up under her partners sleep shirt. Kris felt herself getting excited when the muscles under her hand quivered.

'Gods, I don't think I'll ever get enough of her.' Raven licked her lips just thinking about her naked lover waiting for her. She proceeded to disrobe in a hurry. "Not anymore." She leaned down and kissed Kris as she pulled the blanket and sheet down to reveal two luscious breasts with two firm nipples standing up and begging for attention.

"Suck them please." Kris encouraged when their lips separated and arched her back, thrusting her chest towards Raven. "I need to feel them inside your hot...wet mouth." She had discovered not long after they became lovers, that if she wanted to get Raven off balance, all she had to do was talk dirty and take charge. Raven had said that there was something about the combination of suggestive language and Kris' angelic face that got her juices flowing.

Raven growled as she knelt beside the bed. "My mouth's not the only thing that's hot and wet." She sucked the soft flesh into her mouth. She alternated between trying to suck the entire breast into her mouth, to licking and nibbling Kris' nipple.

"Oh, baby...that feels so good. You're making me so fucking horny." Kris moaned after several minutes of pleasurable attention. Her body was squirming underneath the bedcover and she knew she was quickly losing control. She pulled Raven's head away from her chest and rolled onto her back.

"I love your breasts, so soft, like silk, just a little longer." Raven begged after being pulled away.

"Oh no, I have a surprise for you, love, pull the blanket down." Kris instructed.

Raven stood and did as she was told. As she peeled back the cover, Kris' body came into view. Around her hips was the leather harness and dildo, which sprang to attention once the weight of the blanket had been removed.

"I want you to ride me, love." Kris reached for Raven's hands and interlaced their fingers. "I want to watch you as I fuck you, hard." She pulled her partner into motion.

Raven felt Kris tug on her hands and swung her leg over her lover's body. She settled on her knees with one leg on each side of her partner's thighs. She freed her hands and leaned over to open the drawer of the nightstand and grab the tube of lubricant. "You are so good to me, love." Raven paused to nibble on Kris' ear. She sat back and opened the tube, pouring a small amount into the palm of her hands. She knew she was wet enough not to need it, but she wanted a little revenge for being denied access to her lover's breasts. Raven wrapped her hands around the toy strapped to Kris and moved them up and down, lubricating the dildo and moving the smaller end inside her partner at the same time.

Kris moaned at the movement inside her. She knew it was payback for earlier. She decided it was time to take control again. "Get on top of me, baby. I want to watch your body while you mount me. I want to see your face when you rise to the pentacle and plunge over into the abyss."

Raven wasted no time in positioning herself over Kris' hips. She threw her head back and moaned as the toy filled her. She slowly rose up and plunged downward a few times before changing direction and moving her hips in a circular motion. She growled, long and low at the feeling of Kris fucking her.

Kris watched in fascination at the ecstasy displayed on the face above her. She reached up and massaged Raven's breasts then pinched her lover's nipples between her thumb and finger. Her hips bucked in response to Raven's skillful manipulation of the toy inside them both.

Raven covered Kris' hands with hers and ground them into her chest. "Gods, baby...feels so good." Her thrusting was becoming more frantic.

Kris freed her hands and pushed into a sitting position. She braced herself with one hand behind her and the other around Raven's waist. "Let go, love." She commanded before taking the breast that was level with her head into her mouth and capturing the nipple between her teeth.

Between the feel of Kris penetrating her and the attention to her breast, Raven's senses were on overload. The spoken demand was all that was needed to send her tumbling over. Her orgasm exploded through her body and Kris followed with her release just seconds behind her partner. Kris fell back against the bed with Raven following her, their bodies pulsing in time with each other.

Raven supported her weight on her forearms and stared into the green eyes below her. "That was...incredible, love." Her body still throbbed from her powerful climax and she was still breathing heavily.

Kris sighed in contentment. "Yes, you are definitely incredible."

Raven smiled. "I had the strangest thought a little while ago. Well, the thought wasn't strange, just the timing."

"You gonna tell me or make me guess?" Kris asked after a short silence.

"You need to be still if you want me to carry on an intelligent conversation, Sagira." Raven kissed Kris long and lovingly before removing the dildo from inside her. She rolled onto her side and propped her head in her hand. "My thought was, that you ought to be writing erotica. I think you would be very good at it. Look at how hot and bothered you can get me with just a few phrases."

Kris considered it then grinned. "I think I might give it a go. Of course we would have to practice each and every scene." She removed the harness from her hips and roll onto her side, facing Raven. "You think you'd be able to keep up with me, Taz?" She challenged before leaning down and lightly biting her lover's nipple causing it to harden immediately.

"Oh...I think...I could manage." She answered as she ran her hand through Kris' hair and held her head firmly to her chest. "Harder, love."

Kris obliged and for many minutes was lost in the sensation of making love to Raven's chest until she felt long fingers massaging her butt and pulling her lower body against her partner.

"Get up on your knees for me, baby, in the middle of the bed." Raven requested.

Kris did. "Do you want me to lean forward?" She asked when she felt Raven move.

"No, love." Raven was on her knees behind her partner and put one arm around her waist and pulled Kris back until she was against her body. She nibbled on the exposed neck, biting down and sucking on the pulse point.

Kris moaned and reached back, placing her hands on Raven's hips, pulling them tighter against her body. "Is this the opening scene for my first story?" Kris tilted her head to allow easier access.

Raven chuckled. "As long as you don't ask me to stop so you can take notes."

"You can be assured that I'll never, ever ask you to stop loving me." Kris turned her head and saw the look of devotion on Raven's face. She raised her hand, pulled her partner's head toward her and captured lips that had just been assaulting her neck and raising goose bumps along her skin, their tongues taking turns exploring each other.

During the heated kiss, Raven felt their bodies meld together and moved her hands down Kris' sides and thighs. She circled around to the inside of her lover's legs and reversed their direction, causing Kris to move her legs further apart. She bypassed the area she knew needed her attention and lightly caressed the firm abdominal area before continuing upwards and grasping Kris' breasts in her hands. Raven alternated between kneading them like mounds of dough and tweaking the taut nipples.

They broke apart, each gasping for air. "Are you trying...to make me come...before you touch me? Because...you've almost...succeeded." Kris panted and laid her head back against her love's shoulder when she felt hands fondle her breasts.

Raven grinned. "It's a thought, but not this time. I want to be inside you and feel your body grasp my fingers when you come. Feel your juices flow down them and into my hand." She licked and nibbled on the ear lobe conveniently located near her mouth while one hand moved downward. Raven ran two fingers between Kris' legs, one on each side of her clit.

"God, you're killing me." Kris moaned. She was about ready to take matters into her own hands when Raven's fingers disappeared. "Please, love...need you." She begged.

"Patience, love." Raven said as her right hand moved between their bodies and her left continued to caress Kris' breasts, alternating between them.

"I don't have any, not when it comes to you touching me." Kris' right hand was still behind Raven's head and she pulled the teasing lips, tongue and teeth more firmly into her neck while her left hand roamed up and down her tormentor's thigh.

The fingers of Raven's right hand had begun a light tantalizing movement from Kris' throbbing nub to her tight puckered opening with the young woman's hips moving in time with them. It didn't take long for Raven to make the choice of continuing the teasing or giving Kris what she desired. She swiftly entered her lover with two fingers.

Kris almost came the moment Raven entered her. "More." She moaned when Raven added a third finger. "Oh God...harder...please, baby." She begged.

Raven stilled her hand. "I don't want to hurt you." Her thrusts were already almost lifting Kris off the bed.

"You won't." She quickly answered her. "Please, love...harder."

Raven placed her foot on the bed beside Kris to steady them both. She re-doubled her efforts, impaling her young lover with each thrust.

Kris moaned in pleasure each time she felt the fingers of her lover fill her. She leaned back into Raven and felt her hard, swollen nipples rub more firmly against her back. Kris wanted to stay in that in-between forever, that feeling in her body after the building of the climax but right before she exploded. But when she felt Raven bite down on the pulse point in her neck, her body erupted with a powerful orgasm, as she cried out her lover's name.

Raven stayed inside her lover until the clenching of Kris' muscles stopped. "You okay, baby?" When Kris nodded her head, Raven brought her fingers to her mouth and tasted her lover's essence. "So good." She groaned.

Kris collapsed onto the bed, pulling Raven down with her. She lay on her stomach with her lover's weight pressing reassuringly into her back. After a few minutes of utter contentment, Kris felt the rhythmic thrusts of Raven's hips against her rear-end and knew her partner hadn't found her release.

"Wait, love." Kris managed to turn over underneath the frustrated woman.

"I can't, baby...I need..." Raven paused and raised herself to her knees as Kris scooted down until her mouth was poised at the apex of her legs. Kris wrapped her arms around her thighs and pulled Raven down to her mouth. "Gods yes." Raven threw her head back as she felt Kris' tongue explore her drenched sex.

Kris wasted no time in running her tongue through the liquid inferno that was located between Raven's legs. She knew it wouldn't take much to send her lover over the edge; she held the throbbing clit between her lips and flicked her tongue over the bundle of nerves. When the body above her stilled in the seconds before release, Kris moved one hand up and grasped Raven's breast, rubbing the erect nipple between her thumb and forefinger.

Raven's body bucked hard when her orgasm hit and she fell forward, barely managing to catch herself on her forearms. She stayed suspended above her lover while she caught her breath. "Sweet Aphrodite, Sagira, that was beautiful, just like you." Raven collapsed onto her back. "Come up here so I can hold you."

Kris crawled up beside the still recovering woman dragging the comforter and sheet with her. She sighed contentedly as she burrowed her head into a comfortable place on Raven's shoulder. "Love you, Taz."

"Love you, too." Raven mumbled as she was drifting to sleep.

Chapter Twenty-Six:

The first-class cabin of the 757 was mostly silent except for the rumbling of the engines and the occasional mumber of voices. Viv sat next to her father in the first row while Martin sat behind them.

"Can I get you anything else, Ambassador?" The flight attendant asked.

"Coffee please."

"Anything for you, ma'am?" He smiled at Viv.

"Bottle of water please." She returned the smile and winked at the blonde-haired blue-eyed young man.

"Quit flirting, Vivian." Andrew whispered after the flight attendant went into the galley after their requested beverages.

She blushed just as the young man returned. He grinned and placed the water and coffee on their trays before moving on.

Andrew chuckled at his daughter's distress before continuing their earlier conversation. "Do you really think we should stay with them? I would think it would be easier on everyone if we stayed at a hotel."

"Kris said there wasn't one close. And Raven was the one that suggested we stay at the house. She said there was plenty of room. And I think you should have let them pick us up at the airport since none of us have ever been here before. We'll probably end up getting lost."

"We'll find it, Kris emailed me the directions to the house." Andrew assured her. "How hard could it be?"

Viv rolled her eyes knowing he hadn't even looked at them yet. 'Famous last words.' She returned her attention to her book.

"Hey." Kris hugged her sister. "We were beginning to worry about you guys. Was the traffic bad?"

"The traffic was fine." Viv answered with a smirk. "Hello, Raven." She acknowledged the tall woman coming down the stairs. "You look like you've recovered."

"Pretty much. Was your flight okay?" She asked while Kris and her father greeted one another with a warm embrace.

"It was boring thankfully, except for Vivian trying to pick up the flight attendant." Andrew answered. "Captain." He reached out to shake her hand.

"Raven will do, Ambassador." She clasped his hand. "I'm not working now."

"Neither am I, so Andrew is fine."

"Okay." Raven pleasantly agreed. "Martin, glad you could join us." She edged an eyebrow up at her partner, reminding her that she was going to give her brother the benefit of the doubt and wait until he revealed his reason for being there.

Kris was sure he was up to no good but stepped forward and gave him a brief hug. "It's good to see you."

"You too, Kris. Thanks for having me." He looked at Raven with an eager expression.

Raven wasn't sure if the eagerness was to see his sister or to pick back up where he left off with her. 'Surely someone told him that she and Kris were a couple.' "Everyone go on in, I'll get the luggage."

"I'll help." Martin announced cheerfully and walked to the open trunk.

Raven decided that she would make sure he knew of her and his sister's involvement before there could be any misunderstanding. "Martin, I don't know if anyone told you, but Kris and I are together."

He sat the bag down he had lifted from the trunk. "Oh, I know, Viv told me not long after you and Kris left Washington." He said matter-of-factly and leaned in to extract another suitcase.

"So you don't have a problem with us?" Raven was a little leery. He didn't seem the type to give up so easily. Especially after Kris had told her how their parents had spoiled him all his life.

"No, of course not." He cheerfully answered. 'Not after I show you that you can have me instead. I won't have any problems at all. I know Kris can't possibly keep someone like you satisfied.'

They brought the luggage in, sat it down by the stairs and joined the others in the living room.

"I thought we would have a nice quiet dinner here tonight and decide what all of you wanted to see tomorrow." Kris was saying.

"It sounds like a very good idea to me." Andrew leaned back on the couch and yawned. "Sorry, it's been a long couple of months."

"Come on, I'll show you your rooms. Dinner will be ready in about a half hour so you don't really have time to rest, but we can make an early night of it." Kris said as she picked up two of the suitcases and started up the stairs.

"That was delicious." Andrew said as he patted his stomach and pushed his empty plate away. He leaned back in his chair and complimented his daughter. "I didn't know you could cook this well."

"Thanks, but I can't take all the credit. Issy and Granny were patient enough to teach me." Kris admitted.

"Where is Granny? I thought we would get to meet her." Viv asked as she sipped her wine.

"She's having dinner with a relative tonight." Raven answered. She didn't want to get into a discussion about her family yet. "I'm sure you'll meet her tomorrow."

Kris smoothly redirected the conversation. "Okay, Viv, spill it. What was that smirk for when I asked why you were late?"

Viv laughed. "Well first we were late leaving the airport because Martin had to argue with dad about who was going to drive. Then we ended up going south on the interstate because a certain step of the directions was skipped over."

"I didn't skip it on purpose, you know." Martin said indignantly, but had the good graces to join in and laugh at himself.

"Let me guess, it was the 'make sure you get in the left lane to merge with northbound I-5' step?" Kris asked.

"You got it." Viv answered, and then continued the story. "Then we got off and got lost because we ended up going west, away from the interstate. Anyway, by the time we found the signs for the interstate heading north, we ended up hitting the rush hour traffic leaving the city."

After the playful ribbing had died down, Kris and Viv cleared the table and Martin excused himself to take a shower before bed. All had agreed earlier to plan their day tomorrow over breakfast.

Andrew stopped Raven from helping in the kitchen. "I wonder if I can have a minute?" He requested.

"Sure." Raven returned to her chair. "And here I thought I had escaped the 'what are your intentions toward my daughter' speech." She grinned and Andrew chuckled.

"I think you've made it very clear that you care a great deal for her. Not many people would willingly die for someone else." He stopped and offered her more wine. Raven declined and he poured half a glass for himself. "Even though that Major Otis was after you, you could have saved yourself or tried to save the both of you. But you put yourself in danger to save Kris. That tells me that you'll do your best to take care of my daughter." He paused and sipped from his wine.

"I love her more than I can say and I'd do anything for her." Raven looked him directly in the eye.

They stared at each other in silence, both refusing to be the one to break eye contact. After what seemed like minutes, Andrew finally looked down. "Are you going back to work?" He glanced up and saw the mixed emotions flash across her face. "I know my daughter and she would never ask you to stop but I know she would worry herself sick every time you left. Wondering if you would be hurt or killed."

"The Division has given me several options that I haven't discussed with Kris yet." She sat up and leaned forward, resting her arms against the table. "If I go back into the field, it's not just me that I have to think about and that scares me."

"In what way?" He prompted her when it was clear she wasn't going to continue.

Raven stared at the wine glass she held by the stem and slowly twirled between her thumb and forefinger. "Before I really didn't care...if I lived or not. In some cases I think that may be why I did survive. I took dangerous chances that ended up saving me and if I hadn't taken them, I would surely have been killed. And now, I wonder if I could take those chances without second-guessing myself. Because now I care if I come back." She looked up to find a sad smile on the Ambassador's face.

"I envy you." He admitted.

'Well that's the last thing I expected him to say.' Raven waited for him to explain.

"You figured out a lot quicker than I did, about what's more important." He sighed regretfully. "All I could think about at your age was my work and status when I should have been thinking of family and raising my children without dragging them all over the world." He focused his gaze on her blue eyes. "I have no doubt that you'll do the right thing for you and my daughter. Whatever that may be." He added after a slight pause.

"What do you think they've been talking about?" Kris asked as she loaded the last of the dishes into the dishwasher. Viv had been periodically sticking her head around the doorframe to peer into the dining room to see if her father and Raven were still talking.

"Probably you." She grinned. "They just toasted each other so I guess they're done."

The two siblings returned to the dining room. "I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm hitting the sack." Viv stated as she pushed the chair she was standing behind, under the table.

"That's a very good idea. I'm beat." Andrew stood and offered his arm to his youngest daughter. "Can I escort you to your chambers, my lady?"

"Thank you, kind sir. I would be most honored. Good night everyone, see you in the morning."
They called over their shoulders as they left.

"Goodnight." Raven and Kris replied together.

"You ready to hit the sheets?" Kris asked while standing behind her partner, massaging her shoulders and neck.

"Let's sit in the living room and relax for a bit." Raven answered. "I know you're dying to know what your father and I talked about." She stood up and held her arm out in invitation.

Kris melded her body next to her partner's and they held each other close as they made their way out of the dining room. "So, you gonna tell me?" She asked as they sank into the cushions on the couch. With Raven sitting at the far end so Kris could lay down with her head in her lovers lap.

"What'cha gonna give me if I tell you?" Raven's fingers played with the soft blonde hair that fanned out across her thighs.

"How about what I'm not gonna give you if you don't?" Kris poked her in the ribs.

Raven chuckled. "We haven't even been together a year and you're already threatening to withhold sex to get your way."

Kris snickered. "Who said anything about sex? I'm talking about withholding food and making you cook for yourself."

"Gods, that's worse." Raven threw her hands up in surrender. "I give up, I'll tell, I'll tell."

"Hey." Kris poked her harder in the ribs.

Martin tiptoed out of his room after he heard the bedroom doors closing. He wanted to catch Raven alone so the two of them could have a nice friendly chat. At the bottom of the staircase he looked into the living room and saw Raven sitting on the couch. He scanned the rest of the room but didn't see his sister anywhere. 'Perfect.' He smugly thought. Just as he was about to make his presence known, Kris sat up beside the Captain and pulled the dark head towards her. He ducked back behind the doorframe to hide. His heart was racing and perspiration broke out across his forehead. 'That was close.'

He cautiously stuck his head out to see if he could quietly sneak past and get back to his room. His eyes almost bugged out of his head when he saw that his sister was straddling the Captain's lap and the kiss had become hot and heavy. He could see Raven's hands moving underneath Kris' shirt and could tell by both women's moans, that they were becoming more intimate by the minute. Now his heart was pounding for a different reason and he had to tear his eyes away from the two women when he felt himself getting excited.

"Off...now." Kris commanded and tugged on the shirt that was hiding her partner's body.

"Wait." Raven removed her hands from Kris' breasts and stopped their counterparts from their task. "We need to go upstairs, baby. Don't think you want your father walking in on us." She reminded her anxious lover.

Kris leaned her forehead against Raven's. "Oh yeah, that's probably a good idea."

Martin hid in the kitchen until he heard their bedroom door close, then he quietly returned to his room. He paced back and forth trying to calm his raging hormones. But every time he got control of his emotions, his mind would drift to the room down the hall and what he imagined was going on behind the closed door and he would start his pacing once again.

Continued in Part 8.

The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

~ Leather and Lace ~

by Greek Warrior

Disclaimer #1: This is an Uber story and the characters that appear in this story may seem familiar but aren't the same as the ones we all know and love. All the characters that appear here are made up from my deranged little mind. They're fictitious and aren't meant to resemble anyone. This is all done in fun and yes I know I need to get a life.

Disclaimer #2: Taz belongs to the folks at Warner Brothers Studios. Scooby Doo belongs to Hanna-Barbera. The X-Files belongs to somebody other than me, anything you recognize isn't mine folks, I got tired of looking this stuff up.

Warning: This story contains explicit consensual sex between adult women. If you're under legal age in your neck of the woods, go away. If you live in a place that frowns upon that sort of behavior, tell'em to kiss your derrière then talk to your Congressman, or move, or both.

Warning: This story contains violence. We are talking about a certain warrior's descendant, you know.

Note: The quote at the end of chapter one is from Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet'.

Feedback is most welcome as long as it's constructive. Remember, you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar, although I've always wondered why anyone would want a bunch of flies! I can be contacted at XWPScribe@aol.com. Thanks for reading.

Note: Astolpho's at the Marcello Hotel is a completely fictitious restaurant and hotel.

Part 8 (Conclusion)

Chapter Twenty-Seven:

Everyone was up bright and early the next morning, everyone except Martin that is. He came stumbling down to the kitchen about an hour and a half after everyone else.

"Nice of you to join us, sleepyhead." Andrew teased his son.

"You want breakfast?" Kris asked.

He knew he would start blushing if he looked up and saw Kris' face so he blew on the steaming cup of coffee Viv handed him. "No thanks, just coffee." He knew it was going to be a long day when he saw Raven enter the kitchen and wrap her arm around Kris' shoulder and couldn't stop the flood of erotic pictures that paraded through his mind. He knew he'd be spending the day horny with no relief in sight unless he took matters into his own hands. 'I haven't had to do that in a long time.' He tried to think of a distraction. "So, what are we going to do today?"

"Well, Snoqualmie Pass is out. It's snowing like crazy up there today. We could go to the Seattle Center or Underground Seattle or take a ferry ride to one of the islands." Kris listed a few choices. "We might want to take advantage of the sunshine and save underground for another day. Is Granny coming with us?" She asked Raven who had just returned from inviting the older woman.

"No, she said for us to have fun. But she said she'd join us tomorrow."

"I vote for the ferry, then the Center." Viv said. "There's also Mt. Rainier and the Olympic Peninsula."

"The Peninsula could be a day trip, maybe stay overnight." Raven suggested.

The ferry ride took up their morning with lunch at the pier. The afternoon was spent at the Center with dinner in downtown.

The ride home was cheerful with everyone planning the next day's activity, everyone but a quiet Martin. Kris turned towards her brother who was sitting alone in the third row of seats in the rented van. "Are you okay?" She kept her voice low.

"Uh... yeah, yeah sure. Just a little tired." Martin looked out the window at the headlights flashing by in the dark. 'I will not be turned on by thinking about my sister and Raven.' That had become his mantra. All day he'd tried his best to avoid looking at them since every time he did, he felt himself getting hard. He re-crossed his legs for the hundredth time on the drive back to the house. 'God, it's going to be another long night.' He wished they would hurry up and get back so he could escape the close quarters he was forced to share with the two people that tormented his every thought.

Granny was at the house when they arrived. She met them in the living room with coffee and home made brownies with vanilla ice cream, hot fudge, whipped cream and nuts.

"Oh my God." Viv leaned back on the couch and groaned after cleaning her plate. "That ought to be against the law." She pointed at her cleaned plate.

"I second that." Raven cleaned the fudge off her lips with her tongue.

Martin watched the pink muscle appear from between sensuous lips and followed with his eyes until it completed it's journey and disappeared back into it's home. He let out a sound somewhere between a moan and a grunt.

"You okay?" Andrew asked him.

"Yeah." He squeaked and cleared his throat. "Way to much to eat. If you'll excuse me I think I'll head up to bed." He was off and up the stairs before anyone had a chance to answer him.

"He's been acting a little strange all day." Kris observed.

"He's just at that awkward teenager growing into adult stage. He'll be okay." Andrew stated.

Martin went into the bathroom, locking the door behind him. Turning on the cold water, he cupped his hands under the flow, leaned down and splashed the chilly wetness on his face. He repeated the process twice more before turning off the faucet and leaning over the basin, letting the drops splash from his face into the sink.

"I've got to get myself under control. I've never let a woman affect me like this before. You're not a horny teenager." He sternly told his reflection in the mirror. But all his eyes could see, was Raven's tongue as it traveled the path across her lips. Which in turn brought back the memory from the previous night's unintended voyeurism.

Martin looked down at the bulge in his pants, convinced that he just needed a quick orgasm, and then he could once again be in control of his desires. He quickly undid his pants and pushed them and his underwear down until they fell to his ankles. He looked at his erection that had parted the tails of his shirt to stand at attention. His hand closed over his manhood but even though his palm had no calluses, it felt rough and crude.

Vivian made her way up the stairs and headed towards her bedroom. As she passed the bathroom door she heard rhythmic grunting noises coming from inside. At first she thought Martin was sick and was going to open the door to check on him, but quickly realized what was going on when she heard the 'Oh yeah' repeated over and over. 'Oh God, he's jerking off.' Viv put her hand over her mouth to keep from laughing out loud. She pressed her ear to the door to trying hear if there were any other exclamations forthcoming, but only heard her brother's ragged breathing. 'This is gonna make great blackmail material.' She thought as she tiptoed to her room.

Raven and Granny sat at the kitchen table drinking coffee. The sun had barely started reclaiming the day from the night, turning the eastern sky into a soft pink, so it was definitely too early for anyone else to be up and about.

"I really think she wants to try and get to know you." Granny stated. "Just give her a little time. She has a lot of adjusting to do." She was referring to her dinner companion from two nights ago.

"And what about Kris? Is she really willing to accept us?" Raven looked up from studying the dark liquid in the mug in front of her, to stare into her friend's... aunt's eyes. 'That's gonna take some getting use to.'

The older woman grinned. "That's part of the adjusting she has to do. But yes, I think she's started to realize that she can have her faith with out being tied down by the rules of her church." She stated more seriously. "You might never be a family again, in the traditional sense. But I think Kris, Lisa, Cynthia and you could learn to be friends, the jury's still out on Philip. I don't think I've met a more unpleasant dickhead in a long time."

"I don't think Philip and I could ever put the past behind us." Raven paused to search her feelings. "But I hope you're right about the rest." She said sincerely.

"How's it going with your guests?" Granny changed the focus of the conversation from Raven to Kris while she added a spoon full of sugar to her newly poured cup of coffee.

"Kris really likes having her father and sister here. But to borrow your phrase, the jury's still out on Martin, she thinks he's up to something." Raven's brow creased in thought. "Are all brothers a pain in the ass or are Kris and I just lucky enough to have gotten two of the dysfunctional models?"

Granny laughed. "Sorry, I couldn't say."

Kris walked up behind Raven's chair and wrapped her arms around the seated woman's neck. "Morning." She addressed both women. "You gonna come with us today?" She asked Granny.

"Depends on where you're going." The older woman smiled.

"Snoqualmie I think. I just checked the weather and it finally quit snowing." She poured herself a cup of coffee and joined them at the table.

"Oh, I think I will, I haven't been up there in a long time. We could have lunch at the lodge if you want to."

The next several days turned out to be very good ones for Kris. She got to spend quality time with her father, something that she had never gotten to do before and she and Viv became closer than they had ever been. Lisa had also joined them on a few outings and she and Viv quickly

developed a close friendship. The only thing that dampened the reunion was Regina's refusal to accept her daughter's relationship with Raven.

The morning of the last day of their visit, Martin had set his alarm early knowing that Raven worked out before the others got up. He wanted to catch her alone. Dressing quickly, he quietly made his way downstairs to the basement where Raven had her equipment set up. He had convinced himself that there was absolutely no way she could resist him if he just turned on the charm.

Martin stood silently watching the woman work. She was wearing a sports bra and cotton shorts. Very short, wet with sweat, sticking to her body, cotton shorts. He actually had to check his chin for drool as he watched the play of muscles bunch and flex as she worked with the free weights. 'Mother is wrong, muscle can be a very good thing on a woman's body.'

"You might as well come on in, I know you're there." Raven commented without stopping the rhythm of her exercise.

"Hi, I didn't mean to interrupt. It's just that no one else is up yet and I thought we could talk." He moved closer and leaned his shoulder against one of the support pillars and crossed his arms and ankles.

"Talk about what?" Raven took in his arrogant posturing in the blink of an eye and knew Kris had been right, Martin was up to something and she was about to find out what that something was. 'Oh lucky me.' She rolled her eyes.

"Is that where you got shot?" His eyes had roamed up and down her body and settled in the general area of her abdomen. He was referring to the scar that disappeared below the waistband of her shorts.

"Yes." She replied in a voice that Kris would have recognized as slightly impatient, but Martin didn't.

"You seem to be something of a wildcat. How can my sister keep you satisfied?" He leered as his eyes once again roamed over the flesh before him. "She's missing the most important...accessory, if you know what I mean." He watched as she leaned over and placed the weight she had been lifting on the floor, then straighten up and grab the towel that was on the weight bench. "There's no way she could please you like I can." He continued to watch as she slowly used the towel to wipe her face and neck. 'God, I want her.' He felt manhood grow hard.

Through the entire monologue, Raven had been thinking of and discarding things that she would like to do to the imbecile. 'Can't do any permanent damage. He is, unfortunately, Kris' brother.' She sighed her displeasure and wiped the sweat from her face. Raven loosened the tie holding her hair back and ran her hands through it. As she tossed the towel to the weight bench she faced she decided to just explain things to him, in detail. Raven's facial expression took on the look of a predator as she slowly stalked across the floor towards her prey.

"Your sister keeps me very well satisfied, Martin." Raven stopped a few feet in front of him and smirked. "She knows all my...special places." She told him in a low sultry voice. "I love the way she...touches me in all my...special places." She leaned towards him. "The way her hands caress my...body." She pulled back. "As for accessories," she glanced down at his crotch and back to his face. "Those are a dime a dozen at any 'toy' store." "Well, slightly more than a dime, but I think he gets the message." She grinned devilishly. "And believe me, she definitely knows how to use it. Probably better than you do, since she's a woman and knows what a woman's body wants." She could've continued her chat with Martin, but the poor boy was sweating and breathing hard. "She pleases me in more ways than you could possibly think of, Martin because of one important thing."

"What?" He finally managed to collect enough moisture in his mouth to ask.

"Because we love each other more than anything else in this world." She walked past him and up the stairs leaving him to contemplate her words and his deflated ego and manhood.

That night Raven and Kris were cuddled up together in front of the fire. Kris was sitting in front of Raven leaning back into her chest for support. "It was great to spend time with them, but I'm glad they're gone." Kris admitted as she stared into the fire.

"Even Martin?" Raven chuckled. She had waited until their visitor's left before telling Kris about Martin's inquires. It was a good thing she did, Kris wanted to catch the next flight out so she could kill her brother.

"I'm going to have a nice talk with him next time I see him." She shook her head. "Although I wish I could've seen his face when you explained things to him."

"Yeah, it was a cross between excited and insulted. His hormones were going crazy but at the same time his manhood was being snubbed." Raven chuckled. "If I hadn't been so irritated with him I probably would have laughed."

A comfortable silence fell between them as they watched the fire burn. The last log burned in half and dropped from its metal supports sending sparks skyward. "Raven, are you sure about not going back out on assignments?"

They had also talked about Raven's work related options. "Yes, I want to be able to come home to you every day. I think training classes will keep me busy enough. I think John and I were trying to out wait each other anyway. Neither of us wanted to quit and leave the other one out there alone."

"Believe me, I'll be more than happy not to have you out there but I want you to be sure you're doing this for you and not me." Kris turned her head to study her partner's face.

"I'm doing this for both of us. I want us to be together for a very long time and that's not going to happen if I get myself killed. You're the most important thing in my life." She tightened her hold on the smaller woman. "You about ready for bed, love?" Raven asked.

"Yeah, I am." Kris responded and rubbed the arm that was circling her upper chest.

Raven spread out the hot coals so they would burn themselves out quicker and closed the fire screen. She stood up and offered her hand to her partner. They walked out of the living room and up the stairs arm in arm.

"I love you so much." Raven brought Kris' hand to her mouth and kissed the palm.

"Show me." Kris requested as she backed towards the bed. She stopped when the back of her legs touched the mattress and frame. Her hands grasped the bottom of her shirt and pulled it up and over her head.

Raven stopped a few feet in front of Kris and watched as the shirt was removed. She stood spellbound as the bra her partner was wearing, went the way of the shirt. "Wait." Raven almost shouted as Kris' hands moved towards her pants. "Let me." Raven pleaded.

Kris reached for Raven's hands and placed them on her hips. "Yes, please." She answered as she looked into warm blue eyes that conveyed more love than a multitude of words ever could.

Raven closed the distance between them and leaned in, covering Kris' mouth with hers. Her tongue accepted the invitation as Kris parted her lips and entered the warm moist familiar area.

Kris felt the soft, sensual muscle searching her mouth as their tongues danced a familiar rhythm and put her arms around her partner's neck, pulling her closer.

Raven ended the kiss by brushing her lips against Kris' eyelids, nose and cheeks before inching her way down to her lover's neck. She paused to gently nip and suck her earlobe before continuing her journey to the base of Kris' neck where she sucked the soft skin until it showed signs of her attention. While her hands moved up Kris' sides and softly caressed her breasts.

Kris moaned when she felt the suction against her neck and moved her hands to the back of Raven's head where her fingers tangled in the dark luxurious strands.

Raven moved her palms over ridged nipples, teasing them and causing them to become even harder. She heard Kris moan again and moved her mouth downward, her tongue and lips leaving a trail of moisture in their wake.

"Oh yes, love...that feels good." Kris moaned when Raven's mouth devoured as much of her breast as she could take in. She shivered in ecstasy as teeth lightly raked the soft skin before gently closing on her nipple.

Raven's teeth held Kris' nipple while her tongue repeatedly flicked back and forth across it, causing it to become almost painfully taut. As she duplicated her actions with Kris' other breast, she had unbuttoned the young woman's pants and pushed them down her legs.

The first time Kris noticed her bare legs, was when Raven dropped to her knees and slowly pulled her panties down. Her breath was coming fast and her heart was beating heavy when Raven lifted first one leg then the other, helping her step out of the material that was bunched around her ankles. She left her hands resting on her partner's shoulders to steady herself. Even though both her feet were back on the floor her legs felt rubbery and weak. "I need you now...I can't wait." She begged.

Raven looked up from her kneeling position into pleading eyes. She could smell Kris' need and kissed the curly, glistening hair, showing her eyes what her nose had already discovered, that her lover was very aroused. Hips moved toward her lips, pleading for more contact. Legs obediently opened wider when Raven placed her hands on Kris' thighs and nudged them apart. Her hands slid slowly upwards and using her thumbs, she parted her lover's folds.

Kris sucked in air as Raven's tongue darted out and made contact with her sex. She was uncertain if the moans she heard were coming from her or her partner who continued to tease her with the tip of her tongue moving torturously slow through her folds and across her pulsating nub. "I...I can't stand." Kris said as her legs began to shake with the effort to hold her upright.

Raven paused in her pleasurable mission long enough to let Kris sit on the edge of the bed. "I want you to watch me love you. See the satisfaction that you give me when you let me make love to you." She looked up into desire filled green eyes while she resumed her previous position.

Kris could see Raven's tongue dart out, inquisitively searching between her legs and clutched at her lover's shoulders, bunching the material of Raven's shirt in her hands. She fought her natural instinct to close her eyes and kept them riveted on the activity below. "Please, baby...inside." She pleaded.

"You taste so good, Sagira." Raven stated between feather light kisses she placed on the inside of her lover's thighs. She pulled back and watched Kris' face as she slowly inserted two fingers. "I love to see the pleasure that you feel while I make love to you." Raven twisted her hand, palm up and curled her fingers to brush against the spot that drove Kris wild.

"Oh good God, love." Kris was breathing hard. "You feel...so good...inside me." Her hips bucked forward, requesting more.

Raven moved her other hand up to Kris' breast, using her thumb to rub across the hard nipple, taking some of Kris' attention away from the activities involving the lower half of her body. "I love the way your nipples feel when you're aroused. So firm and erect."

Kris whimpered and closed her eyes as her head fell forward, chin resting on her chest.

"Open your eyes, baby." Raven requested as she wiggled her fingers to get Kris' attention.

Green eyes opened wide and stayed that way, glued to the fingers that now moved in a slow thrusting motion between her spread legs. "Ugh...mo...more." She clutched Raven's wrist with her hand trying to speed up the pumping activity.

Raven added a third finger at Kris' desperate plea. With each thrust into her lover, she added a twist of her wrist. "I can feel how close you are, baby." Raven quickened her pace and pinched Kris' nipple each time she penetrated her lover. "Let go, love. I'll catch you."

Kris watched in a trance as her partner's fingers moved in and out of her. She felt Raven's love blanket her body and soul as her climax poured through her like a raging river kept too long confined.

When Kris was again aware of her surroundings, she was still sitting on the edge of the bed, leaning heavily on Raven who had both arms wrapped around her waist.

"I've got you, Kris. I love you, baby." Raven whispered over and over until her lover showed signs of consciousness by running her hands through Raven's hair and kissing her cheeks and forehead.

"I love you too." She said and kissed Raven deeply and passionately. "Now come up here and let me show you how much." She grinned as she gathered fistfuls of her partner's shirt and pulled.

Raven, caught off guard by the sudden movement, ended up sprawled across her lover's smaller body. She grinned as Kris wrapped her legs around her waist and rolled them over. "You going to have your way with me, Sagira?"

"You bet I am, buster." Kris grabbed the shirt covering her lover and ripped it open, sending buttons flying when they gave up their hold on the flannel material. She hurriedly moved down, roughly opening the jeans that kept her from Raven's body. Backing off the bed, she tugged them down the long legs and tossed them out of the way.

Raven struggled out of her shirt and peeled her sports bra over her head as Kris moved down her body. She raised her hips as Kris pulled on her pants, helping to quickly get rid of the unwanted obstacle.

Kris crawled back up between Raven's legs and licked her lips. Only using her teeth she grasped the cotton briefs, peeling them from her lover to reveal the prize underneath. "Looks like you sprung a leak, Taz." Kris could see the flood of desire coming from between her lover's legs and knew Raven hadn't climaxed when she had.

Raven watched Kris remove her underwear and moaned. "I want you inside me...filling me completely." She spread her legs to accommodate her lover's body between them.

"You want my tongue or my fingers?" Kris asked before she licked some of her partner's desire that coated her thighs.

"I want your, ugh, hand." Her hips lifted off the bed when she felt her lover's hot tongue on her.

"My hand?" Kris looked up. "I've never...I don't think..."

"Please, baby." Raven's hips were bucking in the air, even without any stimulation. "Use the lube." She bent her knees and placed her feet flat on the bed, spreading her legs wide and opening herself to her partner.

Kris was a little hesitant, but coated her hand in the gel. She knelt between her lover's legs and slowly worked her fingers into her partner. "God, love, I've never seen you so open and so wet." She twisted and pushed her hand until her fingers and thumb disappeared up to her knuckles. Then her hand easily slipped all the way in. "Oh fuck, baby." Kris didn't have the words to describe the feeling Raven's smooth, soft walls wrapping around her fist, or that watching her hand pump in and out of Raven's body, invoked in her.

"Gods." Raven lifted her hips, meeting her lover's hand as it entered her body. She had never felt this complete before. She moaned loudly when Kris curled her fingers and pushed slowly, thrusting her fist fully into her. "So good...so full."

Kris felt the orgasm pulse around her fist, first pushing against it, then grasping it and pulling back into Raven's body. It seemed like it took several minutes for the tremors to stop. "Baby?" She wasn't sure if Raven was still with her or not. "I need to pull out."

"Go slow, very slow." She was still trying to catch her breath and groaned when Kris eased out. "Thank you, Sagira. That was unbelievable."

Kris snuggled up against her lover's side. "Have you had that done to you a lot?" She draped her leg and arm across her partner.

"No, I've never trusted anyone else enough to let them try." She kissed the tip of Kris' nose when she lifted her head to stare at Raven in wonder.

"Thank you, love, for believing in me." She laid her head back down. "Love you."

"Love you too." Raven's body kept her awake a while longer. She was still floating in a euphoric bliss.

The two lovers slept late the next morning, with Kris actually waking before her partner. Kris used these rare occurrences to study Raven's relaxed appearance. She thought back to the previous evening and shivered at the erotic desire that passed through her body.

"You cold, love?" Raven asked, yawning and opening her sleep laden blue eyes.

"Ah, no, definitely not cold." Kris grinned and leaned up for a good morning kiss. "What say we continue your dance lessons after breakfast...make that lunch." She corrected after glancing at the clock.

"You really think I'm doing well enough not to embarrass us at the reception?" Raven stretched and threw the cover off their bodies. She eyed her lover's nakedness and admired the body lying beside her.

"You'll be fine, Taz." Kris went through her own stretching routine before standing and heading for the bathroom. "We also need to see about getting your tux before long. Are all of you supposed to match?" Exaggerating the swing of her hips, knowing she had a captive audience.

Raven gave a wolf whistle and grinned at the display. "All of who?" She asked as she pulled her sweatshirt over her head.

"John, the ushers and you." Kris answered before turning on the water in the shower.

"Don't know." Raven raised her voice to be heard over the running water. "You'll have to ask John." She responded as she entered the bathroom.

"Never mind, I'll call Sharon. They probably decided on black. But I happen to think you'd look good in a pink tux, Taz." Kris referred to the threat John's mother had made. "Can I interest you in a shower?" She asked, holding out her hand in invitation.

Raven grinned and pulled the sweatshirt off a lot quicker than it had gone on. "Always."

Chapter Twenty-Eight:

After a late lunch and a few spins around the makeshift dance floor, Raven and Kris ended up with their arms around each other swaying to the slow rhythm of the lift jazz station Kris had selected. Raven hummed along with the song while her cheek rested on Kris' head. "This is nice, isn't it?"

"Very." Kris responded and sighed deeply. "So is the impromptu serenade." She debated on calling Raven's attention to it.

"I thought about practicing and maybe surprising you at the reception with a song, but every time I thought about opening my mouth, I'd freeze up." Raven didn't mind owning up to her shortcomings, but she hated to admit to fear of any kind.

Kris leaned back to look up at her partner. "It's going to take a while to get past the all the mental abuse you went through. Give yourself some time, love." She laid her head back against the welcoming shoulder. "You've taken the first step just now and I'm very honored that you feel safe enough with me to try."

Raven hadn't even realized what she was doing until Kris had mentioned it. And Kris was right, it was the first time since the night her mother caught her singing to Lisa that she felt safe enough to try and express herself, even if it was just humming in her lover's ear. "I think you're right. Give me a little time and I'll stand below your balcony and serenade you one night."

"It's a date." Kris turned her head and grinned at her partner. "By the way, I talked to Sharon and she said that you're more than welcome to wear a pink tux if you want to."

"You're joking...right?" Raven looked into the serious green eyes.

"Why would I be joking? I called a rental place on Capital Hill, they said they had pink tuxes and rainbow colored cummerbund that look great with an accompanying rainbow colored ascot." Kris had to bite her tongue to keep from laughing at the wide-eyed expression on Raven's face. "They have lavender also if you think that would be better. But I really think that the pink, with your coloring and dark hair would be the right choice." Kris was quickly losing her composure. "Gotcha."

"Brat."

February 14th dawned clear and cool. The wedding was scheduled to start at 10 am, with photo sessions at 9 and 9:30 for the wedding party and family.

"You look very handsome, my friend." Raven hugged a surprised John. "No pink tux huh?"

"You don't know how close it was." John was wearing traditional black with tails. A white shirt, white cummerbund and black bowtie completed the outfit. "You look mighty spiffy yourself, Captain. Or should I say Major?"

Raven was wearing a bushed silk tux, also with tails, light rose in color. A light grey ruffled shirt, grey cummerbund and matching ascot with darker grey pin stripes. The middle of the ascot sported a stickpin made from black opal, with the outline of a raven. "It won't be official until you get back from your honeymoon. I told him I wanted you there when it was announced."

"Thanks, I wouldn't want to miss that. Is that new?" John pointed to the pin.

"Yeah, a surprise from Kris and Granny." Raven fidgeted with her collar then tugged on the hem of her coat to straighten it.

"You know, if I didn't know better, I'd think it was you who was getting married. You sure are nervous." John wrinkled his brow in confusion.

"Huh? Me? No...I just...you know how uncomfortable I get when I have to dress up." She glared at her friend and knew that he knew darn well there was more to it than that. She unconsciously felt the small box that was in the inside pocket of her coat.

"Uh huh...if you say so." John replied.

Raven was saved from more questions by the arrival of Kris and Granny. She met Kris just inside the vestibule of the church. "You look beautiful." Raven hadn't yet seen Kris in her dress.

"Thank you, love." Kris grasped Raven's hands and squeezed them. The dress was also brushed silk. Dusty blue in color, which went well with the light rose of the tux Raven wore. The dress wasn't tight but molded to the curves of Kris' figure well. The dress ended just above Kris' knees and had a rounded collar with a short v-opening and three-quarter-length sleeves. A silver braided belt around her waist was complemented by a sterling silver pendent of a bird in flight around her neck. "All the photos done?"

"All but a couple." Raven spotted the photographer and motioned him over. "I asked him to take a couple of you and me and a couple with Granny and us."

Kris smiled. "That's a great idea."

The reception was held at Sharon's grandparents house on Mercer Island. After the toasts had been made, the food had been devoured and the cake had been cut, the atmosphere relaxed and the dancing and drinking started in earnest.

As a member of the wedding party, Raven had been seated at the main table. Kris and Granny sat at one of the smaller tables with four other people. Raven made her way through the crowd and sat down beside Granny. "Where's Kris?" Raven had been waiting all afternoon for the appropriate time to ask her partner for a dance.

"She went to the little girls room." Granny leaned over and lowered her voice. "Do you know who the guy is that was sitting to Kris' left?"

"The one that's been attached to her shoulder all afternoon, patting her hand and forearm every chance he gets?" Raven scowled and Granny nodded. "Yeah, I asked Roger, Sharon's brother. He works with Sharon's dad. No one really likes him but Roger said their dad felt like he had to invite him." She searched the crowd for Kris' return. "Do you think he's pestering her or is he just a touchy, feely kind of person?"

"He's a little persistent and I know Kris is getting tired of it." Granny saw the storm clouds gathering in her friend's eyes. "Raven, let Kris handle it. You really don't want to deck someone at John and Sharon's wedding."

Raven's firm jaw let Granny know she was far from calm. "Alright, I'll let Kris handle it. But if she can't get him to back off, I'll take him outside and teach him some manners."

Kris walked back into the room intending to find Raven. Only Jeremy found her first. "I believe you promised me a dance." He grasped her by the elbow.

'Great.' Kris thought about putting him off, but decided to go ahead and get it over with. "Sure, why not." She managed a slight smile.

The song, unfortunately, was a slow one. At first he held her at a respectful distance. But as he twirled her away from him and then back, he brought their bodies into full contact and Kris could feel his excitement. She firmly stepped away, putting a little breathing room between them.

Raven spied Kris as she was led to the dance floor and could see that she wasn't thrilled to be there. Raven stood so she could keep an eye on the jerk. She moved closer when she saw Kris had to forcefully step back from Jeremy.

Kris knew that Raven was close; she could feel the irritation flowing from her in waves. She knew if she didn't stop his advances, Raven would. 'Do that again, buddy and you're going to be very sorry.' Kris grinned devilishly when she thought of the perfect solution.

Jeremy, of course, assumed she was grinning at him. He repeated the twirl and felt confident that she would push him away again. But this time when he spun her back to him, Kris raised her knee and planted it firmly between his legs.

"Oh, I'm so sorry. I told you that I wasn't much for these fancy dance steps." Kris had told him no such thing but it got her point across to Jeremy and made it seem like an accident to everyone else.

"Sure, no problem." He limped off the dance floor as inconspicuously as he could. As he collapsed in a nearby chair, he made several offensive remarks directed towards Kris.

Raven overheard his mumbling and moved to where he was trying, unsuccessfully, to get sympathy from the occupants of the table. She towered over the seated man, giving him a look that made his blood turn to ice.

"What do you want?" Jeremy shifted uncomfortably in his chair.

In a voice that didn't carry beyond the table, she answered. "If you bother Kris again, I'll rip off little junior there," her eyes moved to his crotch making him fully aware of what she was talking about. "Shove it up your ass and teach you the literal meaning of the phrase 'go fuck yourself'. Understand?"

He nodded his head. "Yes." He hung his head when he heard the snickers from the others at the table.

"That was priceless, Sagira." Raven joined her partner. "May I have this dance, madam?" Raven linked their arms and escorted her lover back to the dance floor.

The next several songs were slow and romantic. The pair danced together without interruption, lost in the moment of holding each other close and moving together as one.

"Can I interest you in watching the sunset?" Raven smiled at the green eyes staring so intently into hers.

"Sounds wonderful." Kris waited by the door as Raven stopped to grab two flutes of champagne.

Raven guided Kris towards the gazebo located in the backyard. She handed Kris her glass and both women gazed at the spectacular display of pinks, oranges and reds that the sun graced them with. They stood side-by-side with their arms around each other long enough for the colors to change toward the darker blues and purples.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" Kris stared in awe at the display before her.

"So are you." Raven answered and sat her glass down. She reached into the inner pocket of her coat and pulled out a small velvet box. Getting down on one knee, she looked up into loving eyes. "Kris, I would be the happiest woman on earth if you would agree to be my partner, to link our lives together for as long as we are on this earth and for eternity thereafter." Raven opened the box she held in her hand to show Kris the silver antique filigree ring with a one carat round cut blue diamond.

"Yes, love. I want to be with you forever." Kris felt the tears of joy flowing from her eyes.

Raven placed the ring on Kris' left hand and smiled as she stood up to wipe the tears from her partner's cheeks. "You are my heart and soul and I will always love you." Raven leaned down and sealed their commitment with a kiss, as the sun sank below the distant mountains.

The End