

# ~ After the Curtain Falls ~

by Beth Dragon & Kathleen Wolf

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**Feedback:** All comments are greatly appreciated and can be sent to: [kathandbeth@hotmail.com](mailto:kathandbeth@hotmail.com)

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## Act I

The minute the thick bound script hit the floor of the stage the entire company froze and an ominous thud echoed through the large majestic theater. The small figure responsible for the thrown script locked her jaw and stalked down the temporary steps that led to the seating area. She strutted past a stunned director who sat in the front row going over last minute details and past a myriad of support personal. All of who suddenly found something much more important to look at then the star of the play.

Her green eyes danced with anger as she took the steps two by two on her way past the orchestra seating and up to the second tier landing. Brushing her long reddish blonde hair from her face she looked upwards. She knew that somewhere on the top of the three-story scaffolding was a lighting technician, who in her opinion, needed to be told a few things about their job.

"Excuse me!" She barked up into the darkness. "Excuse me, I need to have a word with you!" Her voice was hard and demanding.

"Hold on!" A loud calm response came back, as a figure dressed in black unhooked the safety cable from the light bar she was hanging off of. Checking to make sure that nothing would fall as she descended, she made her way to a lower level of the scaffolding and hung over the side to

find out who was calling her. She brushed strands of long black hair behind her ears as she locked one leg around a bar to balance herself. "You needed a word?"

"Is this the final lighting layout for this scene?" The small woman's tone lowered slightly as she got a bit dizzy from the perilous stance the other woman had taken on the scaffold.

"Except for one or two fillers, yes." Rae braced herself for an argument. She'd worked on enough productions to know when the star was on the brink of giving her a lecture on stage lighting. "You have a problem with it?"

"It's horrible!" Thea screamed up at her, too angry again to worry about the woman's safety. "Don't you see that all of the leads are in shadows! Are you blind?" Pointing towards the stage, she wasn't surprised to see everyone frozen in the same position they'd been in the moment she'd dropped her script.

"I assure you I am not blind." Rae kept her face blank as she reached a hand to the bar above her head to swing out a bit further. "And I assure you that you are not shadowed." She purposely directed the comment at the lead actress alone.

"I am convinced you are blind." Thea put her small hands to her slender waist. "And I know for a fact that I am in a shadow. I want it changed." She clenched her teeth for a minute as the height between them made her dizzy. "And stop hanging off the scaffold in an attempt for sympathy, I don't care if you fall."

"You want it changed do you?" Leaning back onto the scaffold, Rae slowly climbed the rest of the way down and didn't speak again until she had both feet on the ground. Turning she motioned to the scaffold. "Well be my guest. There are a hundred and twenty five lights up there and twenty five over there." She motioned to an area behind the scaffold. "You very well might do a better job, but I doubt it." She turned to stare back at the fiery actress.

"The lights are your job, I'm not about to climb up there." Thea waved off the invitation, even more angry that this technician would make such an ignorant proposal to her. "Fix it now!"

"Fix what?" Crossing her arms over her chest Rae waited for another protest before continuing. "You have the best lighting possible for the equipment I have and the blocking on this scene. I will promise to direct my spot man to focus on you during your monologue but other than that." She shrugged her shoulders. "Sorry, no options."

"There are always options." Thea locked the other woman's blue eyes with her own. "Either I get better light, not just in this scene but in the entire play, or I walk." She turned abruptly and took one step away before fully turning back. "The simple fact is that no one and I repeat no one can play this character like I can."

"Well these are your options, you play her in this lighting or you will be seeing how good you can play her in the dark." The tall woman smiled brightly at the futile ultimatum she'd been given.

"I..." Deciding there was no good in arguing with this stubborn technician, she turned again on her heel and headed for the nearest exit. "I hate technicians!"

"Don't let the door hit you in the ass on the way out." Rae commented when she heard the squeak of rage come from the woman walking away.

"Pig headed Techie!" Thea screamed as pulled the exit door open.

"Love you too!" Rae called back playfully and tried to keep herself from laughing. In the back of her mind she wished again that more drama schools would include a technical element in their programs. At least then she might not have to have one of these arguments on every production.

"Screw you!" The shouted words came just as the heavy door closed automatically behind her.

Turning back to the scaffold, Rae leapt up to grab a high crossbeam and hoisted herself up. The stretch in her forearms felt good and she glanced at her watch. She'd been up on the scaffold for four hours already, no wonder she was starting to cramp. She'd need to take a break and re-hydrate soon.

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"Excuse me up there?" The deep male voice called up into the shadows at the roof of the theater. "I'm sorry to bother you but..." He didn't finish the thought as a loud voice cut him off.

"Hey turn up the level on the L4!" Rae called and signaled to her assistant on the lighting board. "I'm a little busy right now, what is it?" Hooking a leg for safety she leaned over the very top of the structure to look at him.

"Do you think you could talk to Estell?" His voice was spiced by fear. "She's really upset."

"In a minute, I'm busy." Disappearing back into the shadows, she hoped the play's leading man would slink away admirably.

"But... but she's really upset." He stayed in place, at a loss for how else to save the show. If Estell quit the night of dress rehearsal the entire six-week run was over and he would lose his shot.

"Alright." She muttered in an annoyed voice and began her climb down.

"It'll only take a minute." Trying to keep his voice sweet, he hated having to beg a techie for help. Seeing the figure making her descent, he breathed a sigh of relief. "Thank you, thank you!"

"Where is our little pre-madonna?" Rae questioned him as she grabbed a cloth off the scaffold and tried to wipe some of the dirt from her hands.

"She's in the green room." He wrung his hands, looking off toward the stage where the director stood glaring at him.

"Stay here and make sure no one steps one foot on this." Commanding him in a stern voice, she pointed to the scaffold. "Not one finger, got it?" His silent nodding and sudden tremble at her voice made her laugh. "Get a grip Michael." She called back to him as she walked toward the exit. "If we didn't have at least one actress claim she was quitting we wouldn't have a show!"

Moving closer to guard the scaffold Michael grinned nervously. He didn't want to admit to a techie that this was his first production and he had no idea what normal was.

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Finding the door to the green room propped open with a spare chair, Rae ran an unconscious hand through her hair. She sauntered into the large room without invitation or hesitation.

The play's lead was holding court to the extras in one corner of the room. Sparing no dramatics, Estell was telling them all about the horrors of dealing with the technical staff and especially stubborn ones like the crew leader. She knew it was instinct alone that was keeping her words from faltering as she found herself fighting every urge to look up. Taking this opportunity to watch the tall crew leader prowl across the room was almost too much to resist.

Unconcerned with the group, Rae set her eyes on the drinks table and headed straight for it. Reaching into the large ice bucket to pull out a nearly frozen soda, she contemplated putting her head in for a moment, unable to believe how hot she felt. A smile played at her lips and she was very glad that her back was to the beautiful lead. She suddenly couldn't be sure if it was the work or the company that was increasing her temperature.

Thea let herself smile inwardly, happy that none of the throng around her had noticed her surprise at the new arrival. She was even more thankful that none of them had noticed her shock when the technician headed first to get a drink and made no acknowledgment of her. Shooing the extras away before any of them could catch onto her surprise, her mind raced as she tried to figure out just how to start a conversation with this gorgeous woman. She had thought about approaching her before of course, before she's even knew who the tall dark woman was but right now after all the dramatics it didn't seem the best time to start the dreamt up conversation she had. She forced her gaze into her hands when every first line in the world suddenly sounded stupid and childish to her mind. An inaudible gasp left her lips when she realized that she, the star of the play, was tongue-tied. Closing her eyes briefly it struck her that clearing the room of everyone but herself and the crew leader might have been a hasty move.

"So, I hear you've quit the play?" Snapping the drink open, Rae took a long sip before speaking.

"Oh you'd like that wouldn't you?" The speechlessness left Thea suddenly as her momentarily forgotten anger reset itself. She sharpened her most intense stare at the women across the room.

"Yes, actually it would mean I wouldn't still have twenty lights to hang, aim and gel by tonight's dress rehearsal." Staring back with equal force, Rae broke the eye contact only to take a much needed drink.

"Paving the way for to put that little bimbo who is my understudy on stage, that would suit you wouldn't it?" She barked the harsh question across the room in between aggressive draws on her menthol cigarette.

"I'd forgotten about her..." Rae leaned back against the table to think for a second. "No, she sucks." Taking a big swallow she continued. "She couldn't hit a mark if I drew her a stage map." A sudden light smile played on her lips. "Which I have by the way and it didn't help at all." Taking another drink, she walked closer to gap the distance between them. She decided to stop far enough back so that the seated woman wouldn't think she was trying to use her height to intimidate her.

"Well you better work hard at getting the lighting right so you can't see that she sucks." Thea forced her words to come out harsh, though inside she could feel her anger was subsiding. "It's because she only plays the part, she doesn't live it."

"You're right there. She's herself playing a role, she isn't the character ever. She should take up a new hobby." Rae held her adversary's eye for a moment before tipping her head up to take the last of cold soda into her mouth. "I couldn't light her properly with a hundred lights and hey the talent is the job of the actress, I just make sure she looks good." A shrug came with the soft words. Somewhere in the back of Rae's mind a little voice was wondering why she wasn't putting this egotistical little actress in her place.

"Oh, very good answer. You'll have your work cut out for you then won't you." Smoking intently, Thea couldn't help studying the tall woman's every move. "I don't want to keep you away from your scaffold, I'll just finish this and get my gear." She softened her tone and pointed towards the herbal tea on the table next to her. "I can give Truda a call and tell her you need her on stage as I pass her room if you like?"

"Wow!" Rae let the shock show on her face as she pulled a chair from a nearby table and swung it around to sit on it backwards "You're really pissed off aren't you? I thought tall dark and dumb was just being over-dramatic when he came in earlier, but apparently he was right. "

"No, I am not pissed off as you so politely put it." Thea locked her jaw at the idea of being called on her anger. "Tall dark and dumb as you call him at least has a little bit of soul and heart. Not to mention compassion, but I suppose that's not what they have techie's like you for is it? "

"Well, as you actresses and actors are fond of saying, we're just the monkeys they hire to hang the lights. No skill required " Rae cast her a wicked smile before going on. Regardless of how gorgeous this woman was, no one could get off with that kind of attitude. A thousand comebacks played at her lips before her mind settled on one and even she couldn't believe what she found herself saying. "I just can't believe you'd blow off six weeks of rehearsal five hours before dress." She stopped to look at her watch. "And twenty-seven hours before opening night?"

"Please spare me the 'I think how hard everyone has worked' line." Rolling her eyes, Thea took a small sip of her tea, wondering suddenly why she had even bothered to make someone get it for her.

"Oh God no, I wouldn't say that tired line." Shaking her head, she realized that Thea had pulled this stunt before and watched the actress light another cigarette before continuing. "The show will go on without you love. It won't be as good without you, but it will go on none the less. I was thinking of all the hard work you have personally put into it."

"Are you trying to be nice?" Thea raised a curious eyebrow at her.

"Me nice?" Rae raised an eyebrow in return. "Hell I'm just a light monkey, don't think we have the ability to be nice." Lowering the eyebrow she realized that she was smiling again and she didn't even know why.

"Oh stop it, I don't think you are a monkey." Thea sighed and found all of her past anger melting away. Looking into this gorgeous woman's sky blue eyes, she couldn't believe that anyone could stay angry with her for long. "Not enough hair!"

"Thank God." Rae let herself laugh at the backward compliment and moved to place the empty tin can on the nearest table.

"Do you chase all the leading ladies you upset?" Thea asked the question without thinking, lost completely in the stare of the blue eyes before her.

"No, you're the first one." Her own answer made the technician's mind do a double take. It was true, she had pissed off many a leading lady in her day but never had she chased after one. No matter how much she'd been begged. Why was this time so different?

"That you've upset or that you have chased?" Thea asked boldly for clarification when she noticed the flicker in the techie's eyes.

"That I've chased." Rae stammered out a quick answer trying to hide the hesitation in her voice.

"So I guess Michael really put on the 'please help me' thing?" Thea finally forced herself to look away. First at the door, then the plant in the corner, anywhere but this woman's face. Absently, she tucked her legs up under her on the chair.

"Well I've never seen tall dark and dumb so emotional. He should act more like that in the third act, it would do wonders for the scene." She offered the observation with a shrug.

"It would indeed." A surprised smile crossed Thea's face at the mention of such a specific scene and without her consent she found herself again mesmerized by the woman's intense blue eyes.

"Didn't think I watched the play did you?" A smirk came back in return.

"No, I didn't think it was in your job description." The actress shook her head.

"It's not but it helps me get a good feel for the emotion of the piece." Rae answered softly.

"That probably makes you a great lighting director." Thea kept her voice soft in return, astonished that this woman would take so much interest in her work. "Even if you are a stubborn ass." She added with her best smile to show she meant no real malice with the line.

"Stubborn ass? From you I'll take that as a compliment." Smiling brightly in return, Rae couldn't believe it was taking all of her willpower to try and break their eye contact.

"So please don't tell me you have fallen for the leading man. I thought you lit him better than me." Feeling her defenses melting away, Thea quickly decided to change the subject.

"Oh God no, with a nickname like tall dark and dumb do you think I'd fall for him?" Happy for another topic, Rae shook her head at the absurd idea. "You think I light him better than you?" Taking the offered opportunity to break eye contact, she stared off to think about the lighting in third act.

"Yes, I think you do." Thea confirmed gently. "And how many female lighting chiefs are there? Would it be so odd for you to fall for the dashing hero?" Asking the question quickly, she realized her slip back into dangerous territory. Trying to get a grip on her heart, she made her mind switch back to the topic of lighting. "Especially when I'm doing the 'it's no good I can't ' speech."

"Think you could move your mark upstage two feet. Cause I think I can make a big improvement if you do." The comment came somewhat blankly as Rae closed her eyes and re-played the scene in question over in her mind.

"I wanted my mark there in the first place. It was Michael who got it moved back."

"Consider it moved up then, I'll tell the director it has to be, no options. I'm strained enough with the lighting as it is." Rae let a thick sigh escape her as the thought of the pitiful lighting budget ran through her mind. "Your so called director gave me no budget to work with."

"Unless you haven't noticed the director and Michael are rather close." Looking dejected but hopeful, Thea smiled slightly. "I'd sack the director tomorrow if it was down to me."

"Which do you think will be more important to the director? Michael, or the lead actress and the entire lighting crew walking out five hours before dress?" Looking back to lock green eyes with blue, Rae knew she meant what she was saying. She would walk out on this entire production if this woman so much as hinted that was what she wanted. The problem was Rae didn't know why she would do it.

"He'd give you a pay rise to make you stay." Thea added softly. She knew the logistics of the business, it was all about money. Everyone was bought and sold on a daily basis.

"I have creative integrity." A reasonable cover came to her lips immediately.

"Can I get you another?" Glancing at the discarded empty can, Thea stood up and smoothed out her pants with her hands.

"Yeah that would be nice. It gets really hot up by the lights."

"Won't be a second." A high nervous voice called back over a slender shoulder. Standing in front of the table, she gritted her teeth against the cold of the ice water as she retrieved a cola and water from the bottom of the container.

"No rush." Rae took the moment to turn in the chair and stretch out her back.

"Which do you want?" The lead asked as she walked back holding both up.

"I'll take the water, thank you." A little nod came in appreciation.

"No worries." Thea nodded back and smiled as she moved to sit again. "Do you think the dress will go okay?"

"Perfectly!" Rae gave the honest answer quickly and unscrewed the cap of the bottle. Taking a long deep swallow of the cool water before going on. "That's if Michael doesn't freeze up in the first act's soliloquy."

"You sound confident, is that in your job description too?" The actress was surprised. Her own doubts about the production's success weighed heavily on her mind. "He shouldn't." A shred of doubt bloomed in her mind over his inexperience. "He better not."

"My confidence is not part of my job. I've been watching you guys from the beginning and it's all meshed together rather nicely. First day I thought oh God this is never going to come together, but it has." Rae couldn't help smiling at the woman's doubt. "And even if Michael does freeze, someone will be backstage to feed him lines so it'll work out okay." She added with a little shrug.

"I'm not happy with act two scene three." A slight frown darkened Thea's face. "I don't know how to solve the problem though, I have no idea what to fix first."

"That scene is a bit awkward. Why the hell does he have everyone running around so much? It would be so much less distracting if you would all just stay still." Running the scene over in her mind, Rae couldn't help but suggest what she thought would work better. "I think if he had you in the chair, Michael leaning against the west wall and the other two stationary behind the sofa, it would really set off the tone of the dialogue."

"It doesn't call for the movement he's put in, not at all." She shook her head at a loss. "But hey, I'm only the actress." After a little shrug, she looked up to find very sympathetic eyes looking back at her. "Your way would put me in the centre and he doesn't want me centre. He wants the idea of fluidity."



"Fluidity?" Rae blurted out the word and couldn't help making a fake gagging noise at the muddled idea.

"God alone knows why he wants it that way, but he does." Thea smiled at the woman's dramatics.

"The scene is about the stagnant relationships, nothing about fluidity." She stopped the mock choking and her voice took on a serious tone.

"Sorry, I shouted at you by the way." The actress looked downwards and spoke softly. "I don't think I was cross with you, not really. "

"No worries, it's a tense time before dress. I didn't take it personally." Rae's voice was gentle as she brushed the incident away.

"It must be a hell of a scene to light." She looked back into the forgiving face before her and smiled.

"Especially with only the one roaming spot." A slight sigh punctuated Rae's words. "It's a nightmare."

"Well come on, do you see Michael and I as a successful couple, like ever?" She poked fun at the entire play in an attempt to ease the weight the lighting director seemed to be carrying.

"Not even close." Rae laughed as she thought of Thea and Michael together.

"Not even the best acting would make that work!" Her eyes went wide with the idea that her and her leading man could ever be a couple.

"That guy should be playing the butler, he couldn't act his way out of a wet paper bag." Rae muttered to herself as she took another drink.

"Oh come on now, he's not that bad." Thea laughed at her own natural emphasis on the word 'that'. The echo of her own laughter in her ears made her heart stop and she frowned. "Oh now I feel terrible. I was so rude to you earlier and look at me now."

"Why would you feel terrible?" Rae's face saddened a little. "I wasn't that nice myself, let's just call it even."

"I am not really this fickle." She tried to offer an explanation for her change of heart.

"Of course you're not, I'm just charming enough to quell your anger." Rae's soft melodic voice answered as she let the grin she'd been suppressing finally show. When she heard a light laugh escape the beautiful creature in front of her, she was very glad to have given it freedom finally.

"So I have to ask..." Thea started the question but found her voice failing her.

"Have to ask?" She repeated the abandoned statement in an attempt to open the floor to questions before taking another drink.

"Which one of the burly crew are you dating?" The actress felt an unfamiliar tension rise in her shoulders as she asked. "You lucky thing, getting to boss all those hunks around all day while I am stuck on the stage."

"I just get to order them around." Rae shook her head at the idea.

"Hey, whatever form your relationships take!" The actress gave her an exaggerated wink.

"They all think I'm a bitch cause I run a tight ship. I don't think they'd date me if their lives depended on it." The technician ignored the wink and tried to explain the dynamics of her working relationship with the crew. "They all kinda hate that I'm in charge."

"Well you're a woman so I guess it must be a strain for you." Realizing what she'd said she couldn't help but laughing. "Being in charge I mean, not being a woman!" She was glad when the crew leader laughed with her.

"Not too bad, I just don't let anything slide and it keeps them in line. Gotta show them whose in charge from the get go and then they fall right into place." Rae spoke as the laugh subsided but a bright smile remained on her face. "Good thing I am in charge."

"Why a good thing?" Thea asked concerned suddenly.

"Cause I'd have to give somebody some rant for leaving their job to come have a break and chat with the lead." She was glad the comment got the smile she'd been fishing for. "I'll remember to rant at myself later."

"You could leave me and return to your scaffold." Thea looked off and sighed, suddenly sure that was what Rae had been hinting at.

"It'll wait..." Rae leaned forward against the chair trying to catch the actress' eye. "Besides it's funny to think of Michael in there guarding it with his life. I'm going to be here till the wee hours regardless, might as well take a break while I have company to chat with."

"Oh you mean thing, you've left him in there? You really going to be here that long?" Her mind registered the initial comment about Michael after being stuck for some time on the idea that the crew chief was ignoring her job for the sole purpose of taking with her.

"I gave him a very stern 'Guard this' and walked out, knowing Michael he's petrified."

"Want one?" Thea held the cigarette package out as their eyes met and a sudden nervousness overcame her again.

"No thanks." Rae shook her head.

"Oh you're a good girl huh. Do you have any vices?" Thea smiled wickedly as she poised the question.

"Good girl, oh my no!" A smirk pulled at her lips. "And I have a few vices."

"Like what?" Suddenly uncomfortable about her smoking, Thea decided to close the package and do without.

"I have a weakness for shots." Rae motioned to the package when she noticed Thea's sudden abstinence. "Don't not because of me."

"I wouldn't want to make you uncomfortable." Thea whispered softly as she tapped the package on her leg.

"God no, feel free." Rae tried to make Thea understand that the smoking didn't bother her at all.

"It's okay, I shouldn't anyway." She laid the cigarettes on the table behind her.

"Save them for later, I'm sure once dress starts the director's going to have a meltdown and then you'll need them for sure." The technician offered the idea.

"Perhaps we should go out one evening so I can witness this weakness you have for shots?" She took a deep breath as she made the open invitation.

"Sounds good." Rae's answer came quickly and she hoped every ounce of her happiness showed in her voice. "After the hell of this play we'll both need a good night out drinking."

"Night of drinking, too true. Pity it's only running for six weeks." Turning back, she tried to keep herself in check.

"Yes, a hectic little schedule for you." Rae grimaced.

"It's a shame, I would have liked that drink." With a little frown, Thea let herself be dragged back into the real world and away from the fantasies she'd been building in her head. "I guess we should be getting back."

"Should we?" Rae asked with a questioning look, not convinced that either of them should be anywhere but where they were.

"Well to be honest I could chat forever. But you don't have the lighting set up you want, do you?" Thea inquired directly.

"I have an idea, do you have plans for dinner break?" Rae locked green eyes with blue as she asked.

"I don't think so. Dinner break is just around the corner isn't it." Thea sidestepped the hidden invitation. Her heart needed the full invitation to come before she could feel free to act on the need inside her.

"You want to skip out of the theater during the break, go have something to eat and catch that drink?" Rae took a deep breath but didn't dare break their stare.

"I couldn't monopolize you for dinner, after all that young man always brings you sandwiches." Thea couldn't help smiling a little wider at her. "Didn't think I'd noticed huh?"

"I was hoping no one did." A little laugh escaped Rae as she hung her head embarrassed.

"He's sweet. Who is he?" The actress asked softly, her heart melting at the sight of the slight blush in Rae's cheeks.

"Poor little man, I think he thinks that I can somehow get him a better part in the next play." Looking up at the sound of the soft words, Rae felt her previous embarrassment rush away. She wanted to tell the woman before her how rare the hot feel in her cheeks was. Tell her that if the truth be known it had nothing to do with the sandwiches and everything to do with the idea that Estell had taken notice of her previously.

"That's so sweet. Is he any good?" Thea tried to steer the conversation away from the blushing woman herself in the hopes of easing her embarrassment.

"I have no idea. He's the understudy to the understudies, fill in any role if someone's hurt thing." Rae shrugged, suddenly very aware that she'd never bothered to find out anything about him. "He used to sit up with me in the back during early rehearsals. Guess that's why he latched onto me."

"I can look him over if you like, give him a bit of actress attention." Thea gave her a sultry smile.

"Hey you throw any attention his way and I think his head will explode. He goes on and on about how talented you are." Rae turned the comment back on her with a wicked grin of her own.

"Could be that or the fact that you are so very nice of course." She took the return comment easily and turned it back again.

"Me nice?" Rae pointed to herself in amazement. "Now don't be ruining a girl's reputation."

"Do you know his name?" Thea let a little laugh escape her as she asked the question.

"It's Clarke." She rolled her eyes at the pretentious name.

"Consider it done." The actress added. "A little one to one attention is booked for Clarke."

"Guess that means my dinner invitation is shot down." Rae couldn't help the disappointment in her voice. Suddenly hating herself for thinking it had been her that Thea had noticed and not Clarke.

"Oh no!" Thea shook her head, realizing what was going through the crew leader's mind. "Definitely not shot down. I was wondering where we could go? You know this town better than me."

"There's a nice seafood place about ten minutes away. You up for that?" Rae smiled brightly, her heart skipping a little as she realized her invitation was being accepted.

"Love seafood!" Thea exclaimed. "Do they have squid?"

"Of course." Rae laughed at the actress' choice of foods to focus on.

"Consider me booked." Thea reached out the short distance between them to briefly touch Rae's hand, which rested on the chair top.

"Sounds fabulous." The crew leader tried not to show the bolt of electricity the small touch had sent through her.

"You need to change?" Thea cast a little frown at Rae's grease stained T-shirt.

"Yes." Suddenly very conscious of her messy hands, she tried to rub some more of the grease off onto her pants. "A good tech always brings lots of extra clothes, so no worries." The knapsack full of clothes she always carried would ensure she wouldn't have to go to dinner in her current state.

"I should too." Thea looked down at the costume she was wearing and felt very uncomfortable. "You can use my dressing room if you like?" She made the offer in her sweetest voice.

"Isn't that bad luck or something?" Rae inquired with a wicked grin. "Having a techie in your dressing room?"

"That depends on what you do with them." She couldn't resist making the sly comment with a wicked grin of her own.

"As long as you don't ask me to change light bulbs, it's all good." Rae's grin turned into a happy smile as she let the undertone of the comment hang open between them.

"But seriously, do I look like I give a damn about superstition?" Thea added as she stood up. Happy that her bold comment hadn't been abandoned immediately, but enjoying Rae's cryptic comeback at the same time.

"No, no you don't look the type." Rae gave her an up and down glance once she was standing.

"Come on..." She stared at Rae for a second at a loss. "Oh God, what do I call you? Miss. lighting director? Ma'am? Sir?"

"The name is Rae." She answered with a laugh.

"Lovely name." A wistful smile came across Thea's lips. "Where does it come from? Is it Canadian? Is it a family name?" The question's spilled out of her unhindered.

"It's actually short for Raven." She stood up as she spoke but didn't miss the twinkle in Thea's eye as the full version clarified in her mind. "One would say its basis is Native so I guess it is Canadian."

"Well it's lovely where ever it comes from." Thea spoke absently having missed the explanation. She found herself listening to the word repeat over and over again in her head.

"And what shall I call you?" Rae studied the distance in the other woman's eyes and tried to draw her back with the question. "Stage name, Miss. Estell Winters?" She paused to let the actress exit the green room first.

"Oh God no. Never!" Thea brushed the use of her stage name away immediately. "The people closest to me call me Thea, short for Theandra." She stopped to offer her hand in a formal greeting. "Theandra Jones."

"Thea." Rae took the small hand into her own and shook it gently. "It's a very beautiful name."

"I like it." Thea tried to will the blush from her cheeks as they continued walking. She had never liked her name before the moment she'd heard it spoken by the tall beauty next to her. The thickness the woman's accent put on the simple word thrilled her. "It's very special to me."

'Now and every time I hear you say it.' She added the thought in her own mind.

"Raven is actually a nickname reserved for a special few." Rae added honestly.

"Really, a nickname?" Thea asked a little disappointed. She'd liked the idea of someone having the sense to name this beauty properly right from birth. "I dread to think how you got it!" She tried to lighten her reaction to the news.

"Nothing too unexpected." She let a little laugh escape her and ran an absent hand through her long black hair.

"It suits you." Thea smiled brightly as she noticed the unconscious signal to the nickname's origin. "I am sure it was chosen wisely. So your real name?"

"Cassie." Rae screwed up her face at the word. A part of her mind screaming disbelief that she'd revealed the horrible secret to the woman before her.

"Oh don't you look funny when you do that!" Thea smiled sweetly at her. "Is Cassie Canadian?"

"Very." The answer came in a harsh voice.

"My dressing room's right here." Thea stopped them in front of the door that bore her stage name and opened it without making a move to enter.

"Oh and if you hear the big burly fellows yelling O'Keefe, that would be me as well." Rae added absently.

"O'Keefe? You even have a nice surname. So much nicer than mine." Thea gave light to the wanders of her mind. "But then again I think Cassie is better than my name too." She smiled lightly at the slight grimace that broke on Rae's face with the use of the name.

"Why? I think your name is beautiful." She forced away the memories that the name Cassie caused to roar into her mind.

"Do you need to go get your gear?" She asked letting her hand rest on the doorknob of the half open door.

"Yes, it's just over by the backstage exit." Rae motioned towards the door at the other side of the area. "Quite convenient actually."

"Go and get it then. I'll be changing in here while you're gone, just come in when you have your stuff." She smiled softly as she moved into the room

"Sounds good." Rae couldn't help remaining to watch the door close, smiling as she turned away from the door and walked off.

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"Estell?" Michael approached the door to his co-star's dressing room cautiously.

"What?" Thea couldn't help barking the word out when she recognized his voice. Having no intention of letting him in, she headed to the closet and quickly decided on an outfit for dinner. A cream silk shirt and black pants struck her and she pulled them off their hangers.

"Are you okay?" He moved back a bit from the intensity of her yell, shuffling his feet nervously.

"I'm going out for a while!" She called through the door, knowing the reply would bother him beyond belief.

"I talked to Damien. He said he'll fire that horrible lighting crew if you want." His voice was soft until he realized what he'd heard. "You're going out!" His voice got much louder. "Where? You can't go out now!"

"Well I am." Thea let herself scream the words back harshly, annoyed that he would think he could control when or if she went out. Her own anger gave her an idea. "Would Damien pay the lighting crew what they are entitled?" She deliberately banged the closet door closed for effect.

"What are you talking about?" Michael jumped.

"If he fired them, would they get paid?" She moved the door open enough to peer out at him.

"Oh course not." Michael answered confused. "There just stupid techie's we can replace them with anyone."

"Then tell him he can stick his offer!" She slammed the door close.

"I'm lost here." He put his hand on the now closed door startled by the intensity of his co-star's anger. "Why are you so worried about the techie's suddenly? Estell, love, open the door for Michael so we can talk."

"Why do you want to talk to me about it?" In a sudden fit of anger, Thea pulled the door open to stand in the opening. She was wearing only a pair of gray cotton panties and a gray bra.

"Cause you can't quit the play, it'll fall apart without you." He stammered out as he stared at the almost naked form before him. The small petite woman was not muscular, but well toned in all the right places. The gray of the undergarment's set of the light tan held in her skin perfectly.

"Mike, quit staring!" The sharpness in her voice caused him to look away quickly. "We can talk later." She shook her head at his ignorance and slipped the shirt on over her shoulders.

"Michael, you should know it's impolite to stare!" Rae moved quickly to stand and block his view through the door. Locking him with an angry glare, she was sure not to look at Thea having seen from across the room what little the actress was wearing.

Thea wondered if the technician knew that she'd seen her coming and grinned at her tall protector's back in the doorway.

"Is he bothering you?" Rae's low voice caused Michael to swallow loudly.

"A bit." Thea busied herself fastening the buttons of her shirt. "He seems to think I can't leave the theater." Moving quickly to pull her pants on, she sat down at the dressing table to tie a scarf around her neck.

"Now Michael..." Putting a stiff hand on his shoulder, Rae forced the stunned man to turn away from the door. "I believe I put you in charge of a certain scaffold didn't I?" She turned back to see Thea watching her in the mirror and winked. She was happy to see the actress wink back in return.



Thea listened to the echo of Rae's boots as she led Michael away from the door. Grinning madly at her own reflection in the mirror, she brushed her hair and fixed it up with a clip.

"And our star must leave the theatre for a little while." Giving him a little push off Rae tried to prompt him to leave. "I'm just ensuring all goes right with the play by making sure our star is happy. You can't be angry about that, can you?"

"She's going out with you?" Michael looked at the crew leader dumbfounded.

"Yes, I am!" Thea's loud voice called to answer him from her dressing room.

"This was all your idea remember?" Rae smiled widely at the pale faced actor.

"Oh Mike?" Completely dressed, Thea appeared in the doorway with a leather jacket slung over her shoulder.

"Yes?" He sent a sharp glare at Rae before calling back to his co-star in a sweet voice.

"Would you give Damien a message?" Thea's voice was cold. She'd heard his tone and had reached the doorway in time to see his glare. She didn't like or appreciate either of them.

"Oh course." Michael voice was still sickly sweet.

"Tell him I am not quitting the production. But..." She paused long enough to let him breathe a sigh of relief. Taking the silent moment to give Rae a broad smile before she turned back to Michael. "It is my personal opinion, that the lighting crew would work harder and with more diligence if they were given a raise. Tell him he should think on it. If he's smart!"

The only sound for a moment was that of a little laugh that escaped Rae's lips before she could catch herself. She was happy to see the smile back on Thea's face.

"Oh and Michael..." Rae couldn't resist having her own fun with the young man as she fixed him with an intense stare. "Tell Damien that the original blocking and lighting for act two scene three stands. No options."

'Poor Man.' Thea couldn't help laughing silently as she watched Michael flounder under the imposing woman's stare.

Unable to comprehend exactly what was going on, Michael looked back and forth between the two of them before trying to stammer out an objection. Unable to form any comment, Thea gave him a little dismissing wave and he forced himself to walk off.

"Looks like you're all ready." Rae turned and ignored the stunned man. "My turn, may I?"

She motioned to the dressing room.

"Of course. " Thea stepped out into the corridor.

Rae moved past her and went to the area behind the door. Pulling a clean pair of black jeans and a black v-neck out of the bag she carried, it took her only a moment to peel off her working outfit and get into the more comfortable clothes.

"Will I do by the way?" Glancing down at her outfit Thea took a tentative step closer into the room.

"More than do." Rae poked her head around the door between them. "You look very beautiful."

"Is that tech talk for you'll do?" The actress leaned against the doorway and laughed.

"Yes, it is." Rae laughed back as she pulled a brush out of her bag. She knew that it would be a hard task to try and tame her tied up hair after so many hours of work. But she also knew she'd be much more comfortable with it down.

"Well thank you then." Thea closed her eyes as she spoke, taking the time to listen quietly to the sound of Rae switching from the heavy steel toed safety boots she was wearing before to a pair of lighter black hiking boots.

"I'm afraid the real question is will I do?" The closeness of Rae's voice caught Thea off guard when the tall woman opened the door up completely. "I didn't think to pack dinner clothes this morning." She offered with a crooked smile.

"Oh my!" Thea opened her eyes even more surprised by the woman before her now. "Definitely, I love your hair down." Her look was one of silent appreciation.

"Thank you." She couldn't help wondering about the look she was getting as it was sending shivers up her spine.

"And black is just my favorite colour." Thea added absently, still appraising her outfit.

"Mine too."

"So, seafood?" The actress snapped her mind back from its wandering and focused back on the wonderful time ahead.

"Yes." Rae brought her own mind back to reality as well. "My car or yours?"

"Lead on, we can take either one." She stepped back out of the doorway to let Rae exit the dressing room.

"Mine's by the back entrance so it's a bit closer." Rae walked out past her and closed the door.

"Mine's probably easier to get out of the parking lot." Thea added at the same time and they both laughed.

"Yes, true." Thinking for a minute Rae realized the practicality of taking Thea's car. "I forgot I'm probably blocked in by now."

"You can drive mine if you like." Thea dug through the inner pocket of her coat to find her keys. Tossing them to Rae, they began to walk out towards the front entrance.

"Is it good for the star to be seen leaving the theater with a techie?" She looked over at the woman beside her with a wicked grin.

"I don't give a good God damn!" Thea spoke in a low confident voice.

"I'm glad too hear that." A whisper came back in return.

"And besides you're the one who looks like a star at the moment." Unable to resist Thea locked eyes with Rae, trying silently to make her understand that any differences between them really didn't matter to her.

"Me?" Rae gave a little laugh but didn't break eye contact. "I'm afraid I am paled by your brightness."

"You don't have to drive. I can drive us." A moment of uneasiness hit Thea and she looked away.

"No worries, you relax I'll get us there." Rae saw the change in her and silently prayed she hadn't been too aggressive with her compliment.

"You know which one's mine, yes?" Thea watched as the taller woman opened the main door for her.

"The blue convertible right?" She motioned for the actress to walk through.

"Yes." Thea's smile was hidden from the crew leader as she walked past.

"I've never driven a convertible actually." Rae watched the smaller woman, walking through the door to follow close behind. She laughed silently at the members of the cast who had scampered rather hastily into the main lobby as the news of their departure spread.

"It's just the same as any other car." The actress laughed a little herself as she turned to wave briefly at the gathering crowd.

"I doubt that, you'd never drive just any old car."

"Oh Rae, I have a bit of a confession to make before we go out." As they reached the car, the sudden reality of the situation made her mind waiver. Placing a shaky hand to rest on the soft-top

of the car, she spun around to address the taller woman. "And I will understand if you change your mind."

"Yes?" The technician looked at her with a concerned curiosity. "I can't see me changing my mind but go on?"

"Well I think I have just done your reputation a bit of a disservice." Unable to keep eye contact, Thea lowered her eyes to stare at the concrete of the parking lot.

"Disservice?" Rae questioned in a soft voice, a little lost by the sudden turn in conversation.

"Yeah." She continued to stare down as the words stuck in her throat.

"How?" Desperate to make eye contact, Rae bent down slightly.

"I think there is something I should have mentioned before we got this far." Thea found the strength to glance up for just a second before staring down again.

"This is as good as any time." The technician added in a comforting tone.

"Well you may have heard.... Shall we say...rumours on the set." Finding a stray stone to kick, Thea struggled to find the words. "Rumours about me."

"I don't listen to rumours." A strong voice answered.

"No, but you perhaps should listen to these." The actress tried not to smile at the response. She'd expected something so noble from the technician but nobility had no effect on this. The rumours could still hurt the woman all the same. Looking up for a moment, she checked to see where Rae was looking, at the growing crowd in the lobby or to her.

"Well if they're about you, why don't you tell me the truth about whatever sparked said rumours?" The answer came in a low voice paired with eyes that looked nowhere but at the beautiful actress. In the back of her mind, Rae registered the growing crowd in the lobby but couldn't care less. This was her moment, their moment and she couldn't let it fall apart now.

"Hey I don't even know why I was about to tell you this." Thea's voice was light as she broke her train of thought. "We are going for dinner right?" With a bright smile she tapped on the still closed door.

'Thea, get a perspective.' She berated herself as she turned away to face the car.

"You obviously thought it was important and we are going to lunch regardless." Rae smiled at her change of subject.

"Open her up then, it's the button on the key ring." Thea added with a glance back, happy to hear the soft sound of the lock disengaging. She wasn't surprised when a hand came around her to

open the door and offered to help her into the vehicle. With a silent curse and iron resolve the actress moved past the hand and got in on her own.

"Have I done something wrong between the door and here?" Rae crouched down by the seat and asked the question in a confused voice.

"No of course not." Thea responded somewhat flustered, knowing now her attempt to keep distance between them had only succeeded in injuring Rae. "Come on we don't want to be late." She added trying to cut the tension.

"But your uncomfortable all of a sudden, please tell me what's wrong?" Putting a tentative hand on the edge of the seat next to her, Rae used her other hand to hold the door open against the sharp fall wind. "If it's the whole crowd and what their going to say about going to dinner with me you can tell them whatever you'd like to shut them up." A soft smile graced the technician's face.

"Rae, it's nothing, I'm thinking of you. Just come on round and let's go." Thea tried to keep the pleading out of her voice.

Reluctantly, Rae walked around the back of the car and eased herself into the driver's seat. She took a second to adjust the seat to accommodate her long legs and moved the rearview mirror into a better position.

"Very nice car." She hated herself for returning to such an obvious topic in an attempt to break the silence. Starting up the convertible, she pulled the vehicle away from the curb in a smooth arch and headed off towards the restaurant.

"It's okay." Thea added softly, hating the silence but not knowing how to bring fluidity back into the conversation.

Moving slowly down the crowded downtown street, Rae was surprised when a bike courier came out from between two parked cars and sped in front of her. Putting her foot down hard on the brake the responsiveness of the car snapped them both against their seat belts.

"The brake's a bit sharp, you'll have to watch it." Thea blurted out when she landed back against the seat with a jump.

"Yeah, it is. Sorry." Rae responded quickly. With traffic moving normally again, her mind struggled to find some way to open up their conversation. "I hope you didn't mind me moving the seat and the mirrors. I should have asked first."

"No, no worries. I have really short legs, you don't!" Hearing the strained nature of the driver's words, Thea finally realized just how much damage her little outburst in the parking lot had done. "Sorry, I kind of spoiled things back there didn't I?" Finding her voice, she stared out the window at the building's passing by wishing she could say more.

"No, nothing's spoiled." Turning to smile at her, Rae abandoned the attempt when she saw the actress' eyes were firmly fixed to look at the world outside. "I don't know what you're trying to protect me from, but thank you for wanting too."

"It's nothing and if anyone gives you grief when we get back tell them to see me about it. I'll sort it." She made herself stare at the view out the passenger window, though her voice was low and serious.

"Why would someone give me grief?" Rae asked in a soft voice.

"They just might." A quiet voice replied without really answering the question.

"I imagine it will be you who gets much more grief than me." The dark haired beauty offered as she made a slow left hand turn through stopped traffic.

"Different kind of grief I would imagine." Thea's voice remained small. "So where is this restaurant?" She glanced across the car briefly, hoping Rae hadn't noticed how much damper her eyes have gotten.

"Well I think I understand that grief. I'm not quite sure what grief I'll be getting." She split her attention between the road and watching Thea look out the window. "Not too far. Just bad traffic this time of day."

"Always is bad isn't it?" The actress responded absently.

"I'd take a world of grief to get this chance to go and have a wonderful dinner with you." Still splitting her attention, seeing the mist in the woman's eye made Rae sad inside. It seemed impossible to get any real explanation as to what she was so worried about and without an explanation she had no hope of fixing things.

"So Rae tell me." Trying to regain control of her emotions, Thea wiped casually at her eyes. "When you get home at night, after all the madness at the theatre, what welcomes you home?"

"Just my house." Making a sharp right down a small side street, she hoped to bypass a lot of the afternoon traffic.

"You have a house? Near by?" Thea asked turning back to watch the woman driving.

"Yes, not here in the city in Mississauga. It's one of the western suburbs." Rae offered the geographical information freely.

"What's it like?" Thea asked turning slightly in her seat to get a better look at the woman behind the wheel. Secretly happy with the chance to watch her without having to worry about staring.

"Three stories, bottom one finished basement, main floor with kitchen, dining room, living room and a office. Upstairs has three bedrooms and a bathroom. Just big enough for me and all my

stuff." Rae spoke without taking her eyes off the crowded main street she was attempting to turn onto.

"Sounds nice." She stated trying to picture the dark haired woman's house in her mind.

"It is." Rae admitted honestly. She turned briefly to shoot a grin across the car before looking back to the road and pulling out.

"So what about Mr. O'Keefe?" Thea asked the question in a normal tone, trying to hide the inquisition behind her words.

"My father is quite good. He lives in Collingwood." With a toss of long black hair Rae glanced briefly across the car at Thea to catch the actress' reaction.

"I don't think that's who I meant." She laughed loudly at the response. "But it's nice to know you have a Dad whose still an important part of your life."

"Well unless you meant my uncles, there are no other Mr. O'Keefe's." Rae looked at her briefly again.

"Okay well what about soon to be Mr. O'Keefe's? Or are you soon to be a Mrs. Someone else?" Since Rae was answering the questions so easily she decided to try her luck further.

"Nope. None of either." She answered with a shake of her head.

"Is Collingwood far?" Thea asked changing their focus. "Sorry, I know nothing about this country."

"Is this a subtle way to ask if I'm involved with someone?" Rae saw the change in subject immediately and couldn't help but smile as she took a sharp turn to pull into the large empty parking lot.

"Yes I suppose it is." Thea smiled back. "But you have to understand I am English, I can't be straight forward and honest. Especially not on relationship questions."

"Oh sorry." Rae frowned a little before she could stop herself. "Didn't mean to call you on that then."

"No worries." Thea kept a bright smile, trying to erase the frown her words had caused. "And the answer is?"

"The answer is no." The response came in a low sincere voice.

"Well thank you for being so open and honest. You must be a true Canadian!" Thea moved to pat her gently on the arm.

"100% proud to be." Rae smiled brightly in response to the touch. "So shall I use the subtle way or just ask you if you're involved with someone?" She let herself relax as she asked the playfully turned question.

"Go for your life!" Thea laughed as she spoke. "Whichever way you prefer."

"Well which way is best for you?" Rae laughed in return.

"I don't know." She thought about the choices. "I haven't been asked that before."

"I could always ask the people at the theatre if you're involved with someone. Would that get me a truthful answer?" Rae moved the convertible slowly through the large lot.

"It'll get you an answer you probably wouldn't like." Thea looked away quickly, the happiness dropping out of her voice.

"Well, is there anyone in your life who would object to you being taken to dinner?" She attempted to change the tone of the question, silently cursing herself for making such a blunder. Putting the car in a spot across from the entrance she got out quickly and she moved stealthily around to open the passenger door. "Answer I wouldn't like?" She continued in a soft voice once the door was open. "Guess that means you're involved with someone."

"No one." Thea did her best to manage a weak smile.

"There's many?" She asked with a raised eyebrow having noticed how the actress dragged out the word one.

"There's none." Thea's voice was a little forceful as she got out of the car.

"Well I'm glad to hear that." She smiled and offered her hand. "I wouldn't want to be the negative focus of a jealous other."

"This the place?" The actress turned herself into the biting fall wind to look at the small square building a short distance away.

"Yes, not much on the outside but stellar food." Rae closed the door and engaged the car's locks. Together in silence they walked the short distance to the entrance.

Continued in Act II...



# ~ After the Curtain Falls ~

by Beth Dragon & Kathleen Wolf

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**Feedback:** All comments are greatly appreciated and can be sent to: [kathandbeth@hotmail.com](mailto:kathandbeth@hotmail.com)

**Thanks:** To Emma, for her never ending love, support and chocolate. To the Ex-Guards Village for all their feedback and expert advice.

## Act II

"After you I guess." Thea offered motioning to the door when they reached it.

"Oh no." Rae stepped back and opened the first of the double doors. "Ladies first."

"But you're a lady too." Stopping suddenly she turned to the tall woman holding the door.

"Yes, true. " Rae realised the slight flaw in her logic.

"So get in there already!" Thea reached to hold open the door against the wind. "And as for your jealous comment, anyone who would make a fuss over something as simple as dinner would need ditching anyway."

"True, only dinner but losing out on the chance to have dinner with you would make anyone jealous." Rae smiled as she walked through the opening

"You should be careful with comments like that." Thea remarked with a bright smile as she walked behind.

"Careful why?" The technician questioned as indicated a table for two to the waiter. "Smoking please." She told him without thought.

"Because it could go to this actress' head!" Thea swatted her playfully on the arm. "We can go in no smoking if you like." She added in a serious tone.

"And that would be bad because?" Rae looked at her confused.

"Because no doubt you already consider me to have a big enough ego." She responded with another brush of her hand over Rae's arm.

"No bother to me where we sit." The tall woman spoke honestly as they followed the waiter. He weaved his way through the tables to the far corner of the restaurant. Thea couldn't help but smile as she followed the tall, athletic woman. "As an actress, you're forced to have a huge ego. As a person, I don't see anything but beauty." She finished her statement as she slid into the booth.

"Are you that complementary to all your friends?" Thea let a semi-smile play on her lips before she frowned and sat down opposite the lighting director.

"I guess that didn't come out quite right did it?" A frown flashed across Rae's brow. "Can I erase it and try again?"

"Would it come out better?"

"I hope so, because I really did mean to be saying something nice." Rae hated the turn this conversation might take. She could hardly believe that she was having dinner with this woman, the last thing she wanted to do was mess it up.

"In that case, have another go." Thea smiled gently to show that she wasn't really upset.

"Thank you." Rae hid a sigh of relief. "Okay, as any actress in order to ensure the success of the production you have to be very self-confident and never second-guess yourself. Thus an ego is a good and necessary thing for an actress. But as a person such an ego gets you into trouble and here away from the theatre as just you.... All I see is beauty."

Rae watched the young actress's face light up.

"Now that was better." Thea grinned at her.

"Whew." Rae sank back into her seat. "For a minute there I thought I'd sunk myself."

"It was an impressive re-write, but I now have to question your ability as a lighting director." She decided to tease her a little.

"Question my ability as a lighting director?" Rae frowned. "Why?"

"The beautiful part of your statement rather makes me question your eye sight!" The actress laughed, watching as Rae shook her head smiling again.

"So what are you having?" Rae picked up the rather battered menu and glanced at it.

"If they have calamari then I am not even going to look at the menu." Thea could tell just by the way that the dark haired woman replaced the menu on the table that she already knew what she was ordering.

"They do." Rae nodded towards the bar area. "What about to drink?"

"Oh right." Thea followed the line of Rae's vision. "What are you having?"

"Double Baileys on the rocks."

"That sounds great." She thought for a moment. "Mind if I join you?"

"Not at all." Rae was touched that her dinner guest had had the grace to ask.

The waiter soon came over, took their orders and disappeared only to return moments later.

"Good service here." Thea watched the waiter retreat away.

"Very good." Rae nodded.

"So do you come here often?" The young actress picked up her glass and took a sip of the creamy liquor.

"Only on special occasions." Rae replied as she stirred her own drink with the short plastic stick before taking a small sip herself.

"Special occasions? Like what?" Thea queried as a small smile spread across her face. The lighting director placed her glass down and began once again to stir it. The ice cubes made an almost melodic sound as they collided.

"Well I both ruined a play, and then unruined it. That's got to be a special occasion!" She looked up from her drink and caught the young actresses gaze. "But that's not really the most special part of this occasion."

"What is then? Do they serve specials on Wednesday that you didn't tell me about?" Thea gave a half-hearted glance over her shoulder, to look for a notice board. "It's not swordfish is it? I have always wanted to try swordfish."

"They have specials I am sure, but no that wasn't what I was talking about. I took some chances today, and they paid off." The dark haired woman smiled into her drink. "That doesn't happen that often."

"Chances? What did you order?" Thea asked as she raised her glass to her lips and let a gentle frown crease her brow.

"The shrimp, no chance there." The technician laughed. "Sure thing."

"Then it must be the baileys, what?" She smiled and kept up her attempt at comedy. "Does it send you funny or something?"

"Never the Baileys." Rae took another sip. "That's always a safe bet."

"Then I think I am going to have to admit to missing something here." The actress put down her glass.

"That's okay." Rae's smile grew wider still as she changed her focus and looked out of the window just over Thea's shoulder.

"Anything exciting happening out there?" She asked after watching the woman stare for a moment.

"Just a typical Wednesday." Rae stopped gazing out of the window and focused once more on Thea, who instantly looked away. Before she could stop herself Rae moved back in her chair a little. Though she knew she didn't really want to do this, she decided to return to a 'safe' topic of conversation. "So was there anything else as far as the lighting goes that you wanted to talk about?"

"No, I don't think so." Thea managed to answer as her heart sank. She was very curious as to why Rae had returned to neutral territory. "Do you really want to talk shop?"

"No, not really." Rae's voice was unusually quiet as she made her confession. She shifted again in her seat, emitting a small sigh as she settled once more.

"That was an interesting sigh." Thea instantly picked up on the small noise.

"Was it?" Rae looked at her frowning. "Why?"

"Because it could've meant a thousand different things." The actress cupped a small hand around the crystal glass.

"Could it?" Rae leaned forward, putting her elbows on the table. "Like what?"

"Like, \*sigh\* if we don't talk about the play what can we talk about, or \*sigh\* I don't know what else to say, or \*sigh\* you weren't supposed to see through that. Or \*sigh\* this doesn't feel as good as I thought it would, or \*sigh\* I can't believe I am here doing this." Thea expounded her theory.

"Wow, all that could be attributed to one sigh." Rae's eyebrows raised, impressed with the actress' list.

"So you see, the whole of the worlds problems can probably be tracked down to one person letting a sigh escape their lips." Thea was smiling broadly. "There is even a rumour that World War 2 was caused by a simple sigh."

"In that case I shall start paying more attention to my sighs." Rae nodded and smiled back. "Though I think this \*sigh\* said I can't believe I fell back on a cheesy work question, when that is the last thing that I want to talk to you about."

"So what do you want to talk to me about?" The strawberry blonde sat back and lifted her glass once more. Taking a sip she looked at Rae, before setting the glass down. She reached into her coat to get her cigarettes and lighter.

"Anything but work." Rae replied watching as Thea took a cigarette and lit it.

"Name your topic." Thea reached out and pulled the ashtray closer to her side of the table.

"What do you do when you're not at the theatre?" Rae watched as Thea rested the lit cigarette on the ashtray and shrugged.

"I sit in my hotel room and I think about home." The actress answered honestly

"And where is home?" She was anxious to know as much about the young star as she would willingly divulge. She didn't normally like the pre-Madonna's actresses she was used to meeting but for some reason Thea seemed to be different.

"I'm not sure really." A cloud came over the actress' eyes, but it was quickly shaken away as she continued. "I have a house in England."

"But you don't consider that home?" Rae questioned, unsure of how anyone could own a house but not have a 'home'. The reality of that fact stuck her suddenly and she didn't elaborate on her thoughts.

"Not really, I am hardly ever there. And it..." Thea stopped and focused on smoking for a moment.

"Oh that's no fun, everyone needs somewhere familiar to come back to, to put their feet up, relax and get away." She tried to lighten the mood afraid she'd upset the young woman.

"I suppose so." Thea's voice was somewhat flat. After a moments silence, the star stubbed out her cigarette. "I like to explore the places I travel to through the theatre. I haven't seen much of Canada yet though."

"There is lots to explore, it's a big place. But surely you have managed to see the city by now?" She asked hoping maybe she was wrong.

"Michael keeps offering to take me. I haven't taken him up on the offer."

"Now that would be some tour." Rae screwed up her nose and rolled her eyes. "He just wouldn't know where to take you."

"I don't want to seem unfair to him or anything." The actress realised that her comments were a little derogatory. "It's just I don't particularly like him and I always find it helps to like a place if you like the person who shows it to you."

"And I don't mean to be unfair." Rae laughed lightly. "But who does really like him?"

Thea finished her baileys, placing the glass lightly on the table. Rae watched the younger woman's actions and finished her own drink. Subtly she motioned to the waiter to bring another drink for them both, while still giving the actress her full attention.

"So..." Thea smiled lightly. "What does a girl like you do for fun?"

"Fun?" The lighting technician laughed, finding the fact that she had to think about it funny in itself. "I find anything fun, as long as you have the right company with you."

"The right company?" She sat forward a little, the reply catching her attention. "Come on Rae, what are you keeping from me? Who is that special someone?"

"There isn't anyone, Thea that's why I had to think about the question. In some ways I can't remember the last time I had 'fun'." The technician continued laughing. "There's been so much work with the play and everything I've had very little free time."

"For goodness sake then girl, get one of those hunks that you boss around all the time to show you a good time." Thea had listened carefully to what Rae was saying and couldn't help but feel somewhat disappointed. Rae coughed and spluttered a little as the words left the actress's mouth. Undaunted she continued. "I'm serious, someone like you should be being paraded around on someone's arm not going to bed at ten with a hot chocolate and a copy of the lighting directors' manual."

"Let's just say I'm very particular." She offered an explanation. "And the men on my crew, while being great eye candy are not what I'm looking for." Thea grinned instantly and Rae looked at her slightly confused as to what could have made her react in such a way.

"Ah, so you have an image, an idea to fill and you are indeed looking."

The waiter placed two glasses of Baileys on the table, nodded to them and slipped away. Thea took hers instantly and sipped it. She then looked towards the waiter and raised her eyes to Rae.

Knowing what the actress was suggesting, the technician shook her head as she took her own glass.

"I may be looking, but give me some credit." Rae sipped her drink. "For me it's all about the feeling, the connection, the chemistry."

"Hearing you loud and clear." Thea had to nod her approval at this, it was a philosophy that she agreed with. "But you could always use one of those." She hesitated before using the unfamiliar term. "Eye-candies to help you find what you are looking for."

Their conversation was interrupted again as another waiter placed their food on the table. Rae watched as the waiter neatly performed his job and then moved away.

"I don't like wasting anymore time, not for the sake of it. I believe the right person will come along without me spending my time distracting myself." She picked up her napkin and laid it on her lap. The actress did likewise, but her attention wasn't focused on the food.

"But Rae, you aren't going to meet anyone sat in bed reading your directors magazine are you? Have you thought about cutting your hours and working less? You know giving yourself time."

"When the productions finished I'm going on a vacation I haven't picked where yet." Rae replied honestly pleased that the young actress was taking such an interest.

"I can't remember the last time I had a vacation." Thea nodded and spoke with a distant look in her eye. She shook her head a little to bring herself back to the point.

"And besides." Rae continued. "You never know who might come along in the meantime."

"Oh really." Thea stated. "Who do you honestly think you are going to meet whilst drinking cocoa at ten thirty?"

"Boy!" Rae laughed tightly. "I'm starting to sound really pitiful from your description."

"I didn't mean for it to sound that way." Thea suddenly became worried that she'd upset her new friend. "I could be jealous."

"Jealous of me and my cocoa?" Rae asked with a slight frown.

"In England." She commented, distractedly eating her calamari. "That would be called a leading question."

"Would it, how so?"

Thea turned her focus from Rae to the window; suddenly realising she wasn't sure she wanted to follow this avenue of questioning much further as she was sure that an embarrassed blush was already beginning to spread up her neck.

"How's your food?" Thea attempted to reach an area of neutrality.

"It's good." Rae smiled at the change in topic, but unlike the actress it was not a subject she was willing to let go so easily. "So am I going to get an answer?"

"To what?" The actress took an innocent and ignorant approach.

"To my question." Rae tried to catch the actress' eye.

"Question?"

"About my cocoa." Rae reminded her. Thea sighed gently knowing now that she wasn't going to get out of this. "How could my question be viewed as leading?"

"Well, it could be taken as one of two questions. First, whether you were asking me if I would be jealous of having a warm bed and a home to go to, or second you could have been asking if I was jealous of your cocoa, the thing that you shared your bedtime with. Wouldn't you have say the latter of those two could be classed as leading, or am I simply taking it out of context?"

Rae listened to the actress' reasoning, watching the way sparkles glittered in the young woman's green eyes.

"I suppose the later would have been the subtext of my statement." Rae admitted after much contemplation.

"Subtext?" Thea whispered almost silently. She fixed her gaze on the dark woman sat opposite her, not wanting to move her eyes away from the blue crystals that drew her in like a moth to a bright flame. "I think this conversation is straying." She whispered. "Don't you?"

"We mustn't let it do that now must we?" Rae met the actress's gaze.

"Probably not." Thea's voice trembled a little. Still unable to break the gaze, she reached out and found her glass to take a drink.

"If you don't want it to, we won't let it." Rae reassured her. The last thing she wanted to do was make her companion uncomfortable, though she too was unable to break the contact between them.

"Rae." She said quietly as she laid the glass back down. "Out of interest, have you heard rumours at the theatre?"

"Honestly, no." Rae took another drink and shook her head. "And even if I had, I don't listen to them. Whatever is being said is just theatre talk and we both know what trash that is."



Thea managed to break their eye contact as she placed her fork back on the plate and pushed it away. She picked up her glass and gently swirled the baileys and the ice together in an anti-clockwise direction.

"You shouldn't play with fire Rae." She whispered.

"I play with it all the time." Rae met her warning with strength and conviction. "And I turn it into a beautiful light."

"Don't you get burnt?" The actress dared to re-meet Rae's gaze.

"If you respect the fire, the fire will respect you." Rae replied her gaze unflinching.

"Shouldn't we be getting back? Thanks to me you've still got lights to hang." Thea turned away and glanced at her watch, shaking her hair out as she stretched her arms.

"I'm the boss, I go back when I'm ready." Rae could sense that though the actress wanted to run away from this situation she also wanted to face it. "Tell me about the rumours." Her low voice asked.

"I ...I ... I can't." Thea blustered.

"Yes, you can. Tell me."

Something about Rae's tone and posture made Thea question her own reluctance.

"Let's just say, I don't think anyone would tell you to ask me for help in finding Mr Right." A smile spread across Rae's face. She watched the older woman and frowned gently. "A smile is an interesting response. I've never had that one before."

"Who said the right person always has to be a Mr?" Rae replied, still smiling.

Thea watched her face for any signs of mockery or falseness. She found none. She let the corner of her mouth turn up into a smile.

"No one." She whispered. "Well." She said contemplatively. "That's not true. Bigots, prudes, the government, parents, my shrink, Christians, Jews, Hindus, Muslims. Should I stop?"

"Please do!" Rae said still smiling. "Let's just say I'm not one of those people and never have been. I'm not one of the majority."

"You're right." Thea agreed softly. "You're not and it's nice to find someone balanced enough not to be horrified."

"No reason to be horrified." She admitted eating a bit of her dinner and taking another drink with a shrug. Her reward was a bright, honest smile.

"Thank you, Rae. And I hope that when you meet Mr. Right that I at least get an invitation to the wedding." The actress nodded to her.

"Now when exactly did I say I was looking for a Mr. Right?" Rae took another drink, her smile broader than before.

"Earlier, don't you remember?" Thea pointed out not wanting Rae to feel uncomfortable about looking for a partner since the revelation.

"No, I think I said I was looking for the right person." Rae's grin was incorrigible. "I never specifically said that person was to be a man."

"Well..." Thea stopped, realising she had been foolish and as closed-minded as all those people that she detested. "You didn't. I'm sorry."

"No need to be." Rae brushed the matter aside. "I never gave any indication either way."

"Can I ask you a question?" Thea finished her drink and met Rae's eyes once more.

"Of course."

"So is it a Miss, a Mr or either that you are looking for?" Thea had no idea if Rae would respond to such a personal question, but it didn't seem like she had anything to lose.

"I am quite sure I have had my share of Misters so I think it would be a Miss." Rae seemed to contemplate the question for a moment, before speaking.

"Whoever you find." She spoke from her heart. "Will be very lucky."

"No." Rae contradicted with a warm smile of her own. "I'll be the lucky one."

"What makes you say that?" Thea asked, surprised by this answer. So far the lighting director had come across as a strong, confident woman and this sentence seemed more retiring.

"Cause I'm crazy." Rae laughed. "It'd take a miracle to find someone to put up with me."

"I don't know about that, you don't seem crazy to me." Thea commented her mind busy loving the sound of Rae's laughter.

"Yeah." Rae eyes sparkled. "But you're as crazy as I am."

"And to think I was just beginning to enjoy your company!" Thea spoke with an air of mock offence

"Many apologies I meant to say that only Techies are crazy." Rae pointed to her head. "It's all that hanging upside down in high places, blood flow to the brain and everything."

"It's funny, but I kinda like that about you." Thea laughed.

"That I'm crazy? Or that I hang up side in high places?" Rae's right eyebrow arched high in question.

"Both." Thea said simply. The two women's eyes met once more and neither turned away. "You have great eyes, do you know that?"

"Thank you." Rae was surprised that the first compliment had come from Thea. "That's an interesting observation, considering I bet you have never given me a second glance until today when you decided that you were lit wrong."

"Don't believe it." Thea whispered her eyes softening under Rae's continuing look. "I've noticed you." The last word Thea said was in the quietest tone she could manage. "Lots."

"That surprises me, especially since you're the one who is lit so well, while I'm the one who lurks in the shadows."

"I'm one of those strange people." The actress shook her head. "Bright lights tend to hide who I really am."

"I didn't say the lights I saw you under were bright." Rae whispered.

"Just like I don't see you in shadow." She whispered back.

"You don't?" Rae questioned.

"Rae." She narrowed her eyes and looked deeply into the blue orbs that focused upon her. "Are you playing with me?"

"Playing?" Rae queried, raising a finger to her lips as she thought. "No, no playing here. So tell me, just what have you noticed?"

"I know that on the set they call you O'Keefe: that you never touch tea or coffee: that you get your sandwiches brought to you every day and that you keep a black jacket hung on your scaffold and you never put it in your locker." She was aware that she had an impressive list of details regarding the lighting technician. "Want to hear more?"

"Go ahead, really impress me." Rae was stunned, but intrigued.

"Okay, I know that when you are on the set you listen to Tori Amos and Sarah McLachlan on your stereo. You have a cell phone with you at all times, but it is never turned on. You have the nicest Canadian accent I have heard since being here and I know that though you try to hide it, you are a kind, warm and loving person." She paused for a moment studying the object of her previous observations. "I know that you play with the lace of your boots sometimes and I know that when you are getting cross you pull at the front of your shirt. Enough?"

"Yes. I'm quite red enough thank you." Rae was right her whole face was red.

"Oh and I forgot to mention what a lovely colour you go when you are embarrassed." Thea was pleased that she had managed to impress the dark haired woman with her observational skills.

"All I can say is that as you must have been watching me so much, how did you miss the fact that I have spent the last four months watching you?" Rae decided that she had to recover quickly to maintain some element of pride.

This statement took a little of the wind out of Thea's sails. She leaned forward and brought her elbows to rest on the table leaning her head in her cupped hands.

"You're the lighting director." She whispered somewhat cheekily. "You're supposed to notice me."

"You're right but oh so wrong!" Rae picked the short plastic stirring stick out of her baileys glass and twirled it in the fingers of her left hand.

"Wrong?" Thea laughed. "I don't think so."

"Afraid so." Rae replied. "It is my job to notice the star and to make sure she is lit the best she can be, but I meant that I watch you."

"I still don't believe I'm wrong." The comment came close to throwing Thea but instead she decided to rise to the challenge.

"Really?" Rae bit the corner of her lip as she thought. "For example, is it you or 'The Star' who takes her water with lots of ice?"

"Me." She blinked before mouthing the small word. The statement having caught Thea's attention.

"You or your character who spends so much time scribbling poetry on the corners of your script under the pretence of making stage notes?"

"Me again." A cautious smile spread across Thea's features as Rae continued.

"You or her that comes in early on rainy mornings just to stand in the front hall watching the rain splash onto the sidewalk? You or her who brings bread crumbs for the birds in the park across the street?"

"Me." She whispered amazed and somewhat uneasy. How had she missed Rae watching her?  
"How do you know these things?"

"And is it you or your character who has that beautiful smile that I can see right now?"

"Definitely me." Thea replied giving her a perfect example of a stunning smile.

"Just know that you've been noticed." Rae turned her attention back to playing with the stick that she had now placed on the tabletop and was twirling round in varied circles. Thea lifted her head off her hands as Rae spoke once more. "Actually I have a confession to make."

"A confession?" Thea reached out her hand and caught the end of the stick with her finger to halt its course.

"You remember the second week of rehearsal when everything was going wrong and everyone was at their wits end." Rae continued, waiting briefly for confirmation that she did.

"Oh boy do I remember." Thea watched for any movement of retreat in Rae's hand, but the lighting technician kept a firm hold on her end of the short plastic stick. Letting a smile cross her face Thea moved her fingers up the stick, just a little.

"Well, despite taking credit for them." Rae took a deep breath before continuing. "The orchids you received weren't from Michael."

"They weren't?" Thea realised that she had been staring at their hands rather than her usual focus noting that the two were only millimetres apart by now. She flicked her eyes back up to meet Rae's. "You?" She questioned.

"Just wanted to make you smile." The technician shrugged.

Thea was pleased to see for the first time during the conversation Rae acutely appeared the less confident of the two. Keeping her eyes focused on her, she let her fingers creep up the stick until they touched Rae's fingertips.

"Thank you." She breathed, almost silently

"I... I just wanted to make your day better." Rae stumbled over her words slightly. She was unable and unwilling to move her hand as Thea touched her.

"You succeeded so well. Why do you put down what you did? It was a beautiful thing to do. Orchids are my favourite flower." Feeling completely confident and in charge, Thea boldly moved her hand up to cover Rae's as completely as she could. She felt the soft warm skin beneath her palm and closed her fingers over the technician's hand just slightly. "Again I thank you." She whispered.

"It was just a guess, the orchids that is." Rae gave an innocent smile. "You're welcome." She added in a soft whisper of her own. Thea increased the pressure on Rae's hand briefly

"Do you want to leave now?" She asked as Rae glanced down to where their two hands met.

"I could stay like this for ever." Rae answered feeling the temperature in her hand increase and her heart rate quicken just slightly.

"But there are too many people here who crowd your style." Thea grinned, noticing the same changes within herself. "There must be a park nearby."

With her free hand, Rae delved in her pocket. Pulling out some money, she put it onto the table. All without breaking the contact between their hands.

"Shall we?"

Thea merely nodded and though she didn't want to she realised that she had to break the contact to get her jacket. She watched Rae glance at their hands and then at her jacket as she also worked out that the contact had to be broken. The actress reluctantly slipped her hand away and reached behind her. Rae began the slow walk to the door as Thea put her jacket on and retied her scarf. Rae opened the door and stood holding it as the other woman slipped out.

As soon as Thea felt the door close behind her she shivered briefly. In a quick turn against the wind her eyes fell on the woman dressed only in a T-shirt and she then remembered that Rae hadn't even brought a coat. She threw the lighting technician a look of concern, which was met with a broad smile, enough to assure her that Rae in no way felt the cold.

"I really don't want to go back to the theatre." Thea turned back into the wind. "I'd like to walk for a while. There must be somewhere nearby."

"I think there's a park just down a block and then over." Rae thought for a moment and then answered as she motioned into the distance with her hand.

"That sounds great." Thea began to walk down the street. "This way?"

"Yep." Rae hurried to catch up with the smaller woman.

"So, have you always lived here in this part of Canada?" Thea asked as she walked, glancing at the houses and shops that they passed. She watched the cars as they streaked passed at what appeared to be an alarming speed. "We don't really have to cross the highway do we?" She added.

"Yes, I have always lived in southern Ontario." Rae glanced at the traffic. "And no we don't. We take an easy right just here."

"Oh right, that's okay then." Thea continued her examination of the scenery when she suddenly pointed and turned to Rae with a squeal. "Oh is that the park?"

"Looks like it." Rae's attention was on the young strawberry blonde and not on the park in the distance. Thea chose that moment to turn and glance at her companion and with a smile she saw the raven head turned in her direction.

"You're not even looking at the park." Thea laughed.

"Sure I am." Rae grinned, taking a glance up towards the park and then looked right back at the actress. Thea gave a brief sigh and turned her attention back to the park.

"Come on, I want to see the trees." With a light laugh she ran on ahead her hair blowing in the wind. Rae watched her for a moment before she began to chase.

"Trees!" Thea exclaimed as she stood just outside the entrance. She held her hands out to the side and tipped her head back into the wind.

"Lots of trees." Rae whispered as she approached her from behind.

Thea heard the other woman approached and stood very still. She lowered one of her hands to her side and then reached back with it just a little. Rae moved forward and slipped her hand forward so that it came to rest against Thea's. Moving very slowly, Thea spread her fingers and interlocked them with Rae's, giving her time and space to pull away at any moment.

The taller woman did not pull away, in fact she held the smaller hand gently. Unbeknownst to Rae, Thea smiled as she pulled her own hand forward to see if Rae would move with her. Rae willingly let herself be led, as the young actress stepped backwards and drew the lighting director's hand and arm around her waist. For a moment she waited to see if the technician would make any move. To Thea's delight Rae slipped her other arm around Thea's waist and pulled her close.

"Oh God." Thea whispered as she felt the heat of Rae's body on her back, and her warm breath through the wisps of blonde hair that escaped her ponytail.

Responding to the whisper, Rae held the actress tighter and closed her eyes. Thea leaned into the embrace and closed hers as well. The two remained standing this way for some moments until the shout of "Brandy!" made Thea open her eyes and release Rae's hand. Thea focused instantly on an old woman that walked passed once again calling for her dog.

Even with her eyes closed, Rae felt the tension seep into the body she held and then with a slight frown she recognised the gentle shaking of Thea's shoulders that told the technician that she was crying.

"What's wrong?" Rae whispered as Thea made a small step forward to make the taller woman release her.

"I'm sorry Rae." She breathed through her tears.

"Why?" Rae asked confused.

"I... that... sorry." Thea began to walk away.

Rae stood motionless for a moment, trying to work out what had happened before she realised that Thea was gaining ground. She hurried to catch up and in fact overtake the young actress, turning her body she began to walk backwards, trying to see the woman's face.

"Why sorry?"

Thea continued walking her head firmly down until she suddenly seemed to run out of steam and she stopped.

"Please talk to me." Rae pleaded in a small, almost frightened voice.

"You don't want to do this with me Rae, you don't want to get involved." She looked up with tears streaking her pale cheeks

"Don't I?" Rae questioned looking confused. "Something in here is telling me that this is the most worth while thing in the world." She put her hand over her heart. Thea reached out a trembling hand and rested it on the sleeve of Rae's shirt.

"I... I... I am not a good person to do this with." The actress's voice was unsteady. "There is someone out there for you, someone good and true. I..." New tears spilled onto Thea's cheeks. "I don't want to hurt you."

"You won't hurt me." Rae was beginning to panic as she felt the young actress begin to slip away from her. "You are the most good and honest person that I have ever met."

"I am not." Thea said simply.

"I don't believe that and I don't see that." An edge had developed in Rae's voice.

"Oh Rae." She reached out a trembling hand and rested it, its palm cupping Rae's cheek. As the small fingers touched the soft flesh, Thea was surprised to find Rae's skin cold.

For the first time since she had taken flight, Thea met the other woman's eyes. Rae held them, trying to show that whatever the younger woman was thinking was irrelevant to the present. For a moment Thea forgot why she was objecting and she brought her other hand up to caress Rae's other cheek. The dark haired beauty remained silent, her only thought was that perhaps she had been given a chance to prove that this moment was right.

She felt the slight tremble of Thea's hands and could see the struggle behind the green eyes. Though for Rae there was no question any longer.

Thea lost in the moment, closed her eyes and pulled Rae's face gently towards her. Tilting her head, she lightly placed her soft warm lips over Rae's, breathing in deeply through her nose.



Rae's eyes closed in ecstasy as one of Thea's hands moved from her cheek to her neck, pulling her close and the other slid over her shoulder and came to rest at Rae's waist. The taller woman slipped her hands around Thea's slight waist and held her even closer.

Thea gently, with the tip of her tongue began to tease Rae's lips. A soft moan escaped from Rae as she parted her own, just a little. Thea moaned also as she began to explore Rae's mouth. For a moment Rae fought her growing feelings of passion until she relaxed herself and began an exploration of her own. Willingly Thea surrendered to her touch as she moved her own hand up under the taller woman's shirt. Rae gently rested one hand on the back of Thea's neck to hold her as she deepened the kiss even more, while the other found its way down Thea's body to draw light circles upon her stomach.

Thea felt her world centring in on passion and need. Her mind was filled with the taste of Rae's mouth, the smell of her skin.

"Oh Rae." She breathed. "I need you." The hunger was evident in her voice, but she could not even begin to control it.

Neither could Rae as when the kiss was stopped she continued only this time focusing on the soft flesh behind Thea's ear. Thea tilted her head, allowing Rae further access.

"I need you more than anything." She whispered her hot breath on Thea's ear as she continued to gently kiss and suck the soft skin below.

"Rae, we should stop." Thea made an attempt to control her raging emotion.

"Do you really want to?" Rae placed feather kisses along Thea's jaw line before stopping to draw them eye to eye almost lip to lip.

"No." Thea admitted, roughly meshing her mouth with Rae's kissing her deeply almost brutally. Rae growled in response, but pulled back.

"I want you so badly, but not here." Rae panted, trying to clear her mind to think.

Thea looked up, panicked for a moment, before realising that indeed Rae was right. Here they were in a park, kissing like teenagers.

"Is your room far, it will take ages to get to my house?" Her breath still short, as although Thea had stopped kissing her the young woman's hands still touched her body. It was as if Thea realised she was causing a problem so she stilled her hands, coughed lightly and pulled away.

"My hotel is right next to the theatre. We could take a cab, no one would know." Thea suggested her heart pounding, her temperature souring. "All I know is that we have to get out of here. Now!" The flames of her desire were obvious, as was the fire that raged within Rae's body.

"Let's go then." Rae instantly agreed. She took the young strawberry blonde's hand and pulled her back towards the park entrance. "It will only take a second to get a cab." Rae's voice betrayed the emotion she felt, trembling slightly on the words, she was so glad they were in the city and that a cab would be relatively easy to get.

Thea was intensely aware of the heat her body was generating, and she knew that Rae could feel it too, as she held the other woman's hand tightly. Thea looked blindly at the road in front of her, her eyes seeing, but not focusing on the traffic.

"I..." Thea began but her voice faltered "Can you get it?" Rae heard her plea and shook her head a little to clear her mind. She raised her hand and motioned to a passing cab. It pulled over into the side street to meet them.

"Your chariot awaits." Rae said as she reached out to open the door, not once letting go of the small hand she held. Thea threw her a simple smile as she climbed into the hot vehicle.

"To..." Rae stopped and looked at Thea, suddenly aware that she had no idea where the young star was staying. Thea knew why the lighting director was staring at her, but her mind was completely blank.

"The hotel..." She whispered "On..." Her look turned to one of desperation, the name of her hotel lodged somewhere in the back of her mind firmly out of reach. "The street with the theatre." She whispered more to herself than anyone else.

The cab driver glanced in his rear view mirror at his two passengers, a smile pulled at his lips. He could not help but notice the blush in the young woman's cheeks, or the fact that the older of the two was not shivering despite the chill in the air.

"A hotel on Front?" Rae asked gently hoping that this would jog Thea's memory. Carefully she racked her own mind about hotels in that area. "The Royal?" She tried the first one that she remembered.

"Yes." Thea breathed thankfully as the name registered in the recesses of her brain.

"The Royal York it is." The driver nodded to the girls as flicked on his metre and pulled from the side street into the main highway.

"Now I know why the lighting budget is so pitiful." Rae laughed lightly. "If Damien is putting you up in the Royal I am surprised we are getting paid at all." The second statement was whispered in Thea's ear. She could tell from the slight movement of Thea's head that she wanted to look at her, but that she wasn't letting herself. Though her comment did make a gentle laugh escape the young woman's lips.

Rae took a deep breath enjoying the sweet laughter. She was surprised to note that her breathing still hadn't returned to its usual rhythm and she also knew from a quick glance at Thea that the young woman was fighting a similar battle of control.

Thea was brought back from concentrating on her battle of control when she heard Rae's deep breath, without thinking she reached out a hand and rested it on the other woman's knee.

"Are you alright?" The question was laced with concern.

"I'm perfect." Rae took the opportunity of Thea moving forward a little, to slip her arm around the actress' back.

"Oh God..." Thea murmured, glancing at Rae wondering if the other woman was aware of the electricity such a simple move had caused. Though this would have been an empty wonder if she had felt the shiver that raced through Rae when she'd touched her knee. Without thinking Rae spread her hand open and ran it down Thea's side.

Thea closed her eyes as Rae's hand went slowly down her side to her waist, though with a short gasp they snapped open again, haunted by visions she did not want to dwell on.

"Oh God..." Thea whispered again

"No God here." Rae leaned forward to talk into Thea's ear once more "Just one Goddess." The lighting director was unable to resist such a statement.

"Rae?" Thea breathed as the other woman moved a little.

"Yes Thea?" Rae replied softly, lost in the other woman's eyes.

"I..." Thea stammered, suddenly losing her train of thought. Rae smiled at her warmly. The lighting director was more than aware of everything that this young woman wanted to say, for she too wanted to say it, but for similar reasons couldn't. She was about to face her feelings and speak when the hotel doorman pulled the cab door open. Rae's head snapped round as Thea jumped forward on her seat.

"That was quick." Rae muttered as she stepped out onto the sidewalk. She pulled a twenty from her pocket and threw it in the general direction of the driver. "Keep the change." She leaned back in to take Thea's hand and help her from the car. Thea did not say a word as she took the offered hand and climbed out of the cab.

"Good evening Miss. Winters." The doorman's words caught the young actress unaware.

"Good evening." She managed to stammer in reply. Rae nodded gently at the young man before moving passed him to open the inner door. Another barrage of "Good Evening Miss. Winters" called to Thea from the front desk, as she walked through the door. Thea glanced at the members of staff, but her mind was busy trying to reign in her feelings.

'Smile and wave.' She said to herself. 'Just smile and wave.'

Rae ignored the staff and concentrated on closing the distance between her and the elevator without stumbling or in any other way embarrassing herself.

"There's a note for you Miss. Winters." A young dark haired receptionist held up a piece of hotel stationery. Thea looked at the girl and then at Rae only to find the lighting director looking at her, waiting for a reaction.

"I'll get it later." Thea said only to receive a happy smile from Rae who was secretly glad that Thea had decided there were more pressing matters at hand than picking up messages.

Thea had indeed almost forgotten about the message as she stopped beside the lift. She reached out to press the call button on the small silver panel before her, but was surprised when instead of cold metal her hand touched warm skin. It was Rae however, that took a sharp intake of breath as their hands touched, suddenly realising in that instant how much she had missed holding that hand for the brief distance from the car to the lobby.

Instead of moving her hand away, Thea let hers rest on top of the larger one. The hand soon twisted over underneath the actress' and let their fingers interlock. Thea wondered if Rae had heard the gasp that had escaped from her lips as their two hands entwined.

The computerised bell that announced the arrival of the elevator momentarily broke both women's concentration. The door slid open and a group of businessmen emerged. Rae smiled politely and silently urged them to move away quickly. When they had reached the lobby Rae guided Thea inside. Rae watched as the elevator doors closed and then turned to her companion.

"What floor?" Rae asked.

"Sixth."

Without turning back to the elevator control panel Rae reached behind her and hit the button marked six.

"I thought we'd never be alone again." Rae took a step towards the strawberry blonde actress. Thea's eyes never left Rae's body as she too took a step forwards as the lift began to move. Instinctively her hand reached out to hold Rae's waist. In return Rae's hand moved to gently cup Thea's chin.

With a sudden jolt the elevator stopped. A quick glance told Rae that they were on the third floor. As the doors opened Thea moved back and a chatty family entered the lift. Thea coughed lightly and turned her attention to the veneer on the lift wall whereas Rae nodded politely to the father of the group and smiled at the young boy who was wrapped around his mother's leg. Subconsciously Rae's focus was on the mother and her eyes watched as she reached out and pressed the button for the fifth floor. Thea was watching this episode in the mirror at the back of the lift, a thin smile spread across her face as she saw the frustration in Rae's eyes. Thea continued to watch as Rae put her free hand to her forehead and began to massage it roughly probably wondering how many more interruptions there could possibly be.

With a loud ring the elevator announced its arrival on the fifth floor and with another round of polite nods the family departed. Thea raised an eyebrow in Rae's direction as the dark haired woman slid back into her position directly in front of the strawberry blonde.

"Now Rae." She breathed almost silently. "I think this is my floor." She glanced passed the taller woman at the digitised readout and a red six glowed back.

"Oh, right." Rae whispered back as she moved away, but she did not release the hand she had retaken. In fact she pulled on it slightly leading the other woman out through the elevator doors. "Which way?" She looked down both the left and the right hallways. Thea's free hand automatically went to her jacket pocket and found her key-card before pulling gently to the right.

"This way." She whispered.

"Right it is." Rae babbled, not registering her feet moving but instead noticing the dampness between the two connected palms.

"Right here." Thea drew the two of them to a stop.

"621." Rae said the number more to ingrain it on her memory than to clarify. Within seconds Thea had unlocked the door and pushed it open, aware that Rae was watching her every move and seemed to be happy as the door finally opened.

"Please go on in." Thea encouraged. Rae decided to walk in backwards and gently pulled Thea by the hand into the room so that their eyes never left each other's. Reaching up behind the young actress, Rae pushed the door closed and let it lock itself once more. Thea watched the action with a smile, she could tell that like herself, Rae was eager for things to happen. The two got no further than the doorway when Thea stopped and pulled Rae back towards herself. Rae let herself be led easily and soon the two were stood toe to toe. Without a second thought Thea slipped both arms around Rae's waist as Rae took Thea's head gently in her hands. The dark haired woman lent downwards towards the blonde and closed her eyes.

Eagerly Thea closed the meagre distance between the two pairs of warm, waiting lips. Gone was the gentleness and tentative approach of their first kiss. This was more rough, hungry and demanding. As they kissed Rae gently guided Thea back until she was pinned against the door, dropping her hands down she lifted the other woman to equal the height difference between them. Rae felt the shiver cause through Thea's body as it touched the wood of the door and the grip she had become tighter. A small part of Thea's mind screamed out at her to slow down, but her body had more intense and indeed more urgent demands. Rae pushed herself tighter against Thea using only one arm to hold her aloft while the other tried to untuck her shirt. Although Rae was leading here, every synapse within her was searching Thea's movements for any indication that things were going to fast. She did not want to ruin this moment with something as simple as impatience.

"God Rae." Thea hissed as her arms moved up to hold Rae's back, she drew one leg hesitantly around Rae's waist not wanting to trap the other woman, but desperately wanting to eliminate

any space between them. Rae moved her free hand up to the scarf around Thea's neck. With a simple movement and a gently tug the fabric barrier was removed and Rae instantly replaced it with her lips, kissing the exposed collar bone as she moved her hand to Thea's other leg to gently guide it to the option of joining its partner. Without hesitation, Thea moved her other leg round, she could feel the coarse fabric of Rae's jeans through the fine cotton of her own pants. Using simple motions, Thea kicked off her pumps and crossed her feet at the ankles, effectively entrapping Rae completely. As soon as Rae felt more of Thea's weight being supported around her waist, she moved both hands to Thea's hips and slid them beneath the untucked shirt. She began to gently run them up and down Thea's sides. Almost with a will of their own, Thea's hands tangled themselves in Rae's hair and she breathed a guttural sigh. Rae kissed her way back up to the soft skin behind Thea's ear having obviously decided that she had fallen in love with this small patch of flesh. Delicately she began to draw little circles there with her tongue.

Thea knew that Rae must be feeling the intense heat that was emanating from her body and similarly that Rae would know that Thea wanted to move from here to a place from which there would be no return. As she felt the teasing of Rae's tongue by her ear, she knew that she was lost to this dark haired raven.

Rae was trying to think quickly, her head was beginning to spin and it told her to move to somewhere where they needn't worry about standing up.

"Please Rae." Thea's breath was ragged and broken. "The bed."

Rae shifted her hands back under Thea and took the full weight of her soon to be lover in her arms, Thea's statement solidifying the need to move. Thea buried her head into the crook of Rae's shoulder, her lips finding the flesh of Rae's strong neck. As Rae began to walk to the bedroom she cursed the suite that Thea had for being so big and the urgent kissing and attention that Thea paid to her neck made it increasingly difficult for her to walk.

Thea was fighting every urge to ravish the supple flesh beneath her lips. But her gentle kisses and licks soon progressed to more wanton movements, resulting in a sharp nip to Rae's neck. Rae had reached the bed by this time and had turned round to sit down with Thea's knees resting on the bed either side of her body.

"Thea!" She growled in gentle warning as she felt Thea's teeth on her neck.

"Sorry." Thea whispered into Rae's ear before biting the lobe there to show that she most certainly wasn't sorry in the slightest.

Rae growled a second time, but did not say a word. Instead she brought her hands up under the back of Thea's shirt needing to feel the soft flesh covered by the thin layer of silk.

Thea's hands moved suddenly to the front of Rae's jeans, pushing away the fabric of her top as she sought the denim. But as Rae's hands touched her skin, she arched her back towards the other woman. Rae instantly reacted by pressing closer still and kissing the hollow of Thea's throat.

"I can't believe how good you taste." Rae growled as she dipped forward for another kiss. Thea's hands were back at Rae's waist seeking out the metal she knew held a belt in place, when suddenly she stopped. Her hands frozen for a moment before she physically moved back a little.

"Rae, please." She hoped her words would not frighten Rae, but she wanted them to stop the other woman, if only for a moment of clarity.

"I'm sorry." Rae said, suddenly registering the situation. She kept her hands around Thea's back but stopped their motion.

"No, no sorry." She placed a trembling finger gently on Rae's lips. "This is what I want, what I need. I have to know that you feel the same."

For a moment Rae remained silent resisting the urge to kiss the finger that trembled on her lips. The two stayed like that for a moment before Thea's resolve began to falter and she slid the finger that rested on Rae's lips up and across to stroke rich dark hair.

"I want this, I need this." Rae's voice was solid with determination as they locked eyes. "I cannot live without this." The look on Thea's face said she should question the other woman some more, but with Rae's words the last atom of resolve has evaporated. Thea placed both of her hands flat against Rae's chest and pushed downwards with as much strength as she could.

"I can't live without you." Rae added as she let herself fall backwards. Thea followed Rae downwards, landing with her full weight on top of the other woman, not even thinking to break her fall. Rae reached up and pulled Thea tighter to her, not wanting any space to exist between their two bodies. Thea's hands as if drawn by a magnet, found the belt buckle at Rae's waist and within seconds it was undone. In the meantime Rae slid her hands around to the sides of Thea's shirt silently hoping that there was enough give in the silken fabric to remove it without undoing the buttons. Willingly Thea raised her hands above her head to allow Rae to easily remove the shirt. With the silken garment removed Rae tossed it aside and allowed her hands to touch Thea's bare flesh with abandon.

As Thea felt the confines of her shirt discarded, her hands resumed the task they had set themselves. A growl escaped Rae's lips from sheer pleasure of knowing that Thea's hands have resumed their job. Thea grasped the top of Rae's jeans and her hands nimbly unfastened the top button. Swiftly she undid the remaining four buttons in a similar fashion treating them like obstacles that needed to be overcome.

Rae pressed her lips to Thea's in a sudden moment of intense passion, her hands began once again to explore the skin of Thea's back coming to rest on the young woman's sports bra. Carefully she felt around the article of clothing assessing in her mind the best way to remove it.

With building passion Thea slipped her hands around the back of Rae's now loose jeans, she pushed two fingers through belts loops and pulled gently, hoping that Rae would understand the silent request. Rae willingly arched her back, lifting them both off the mattress. With almost practised ease Thea slipped the denim over perfectly formed buttocks and pushed it down the

strong firm thighs. Thea moved her hands back up the thighs and over the rounded cheeks of Rae's ass, not resisting the temptation to squeeze as her hands passed.

Rae sighed lustfully as she settled back down onto the bed. With some effort she worked the laces of her boots loose enough that she was able to struggle out of them and kick them off, her mind registering dully the gentle 'thud' as they hit the carpeted floor.

Desperation had begun to build within Thea, her hands reached for the cotton top that Rae wore as she pulled it up roughly. She hoped this would be enough for Rae to know this too had to go. Rae concentrated momentarily on removing her jeans, by shaking them down her legs, and she used her feet to remove her socks. Rae then responded to Thea's urgent moves at her top. Thea moved with added vigour and pulled Rae's 'v' neck free in one movement.

'My god.' Thea thought to herself. 'You are beautiful.' She stared at the dark haired beauty that lay all but naked before her. The promise of what lay beneath the two remaining items of clothing almost too much for her to bare. Rae didn't notice Thea's moment of contemplation she was busy, her attention focused on Thea's slacks.

Within an instant the pants were unfastened and Rae pushed the down as far as she could manage. She realised that they wouldn't be removed fully in their current position so instead she turned her attention to exploring the newly uncovered flesh. Rae's fingers stroked every inch of exposed thigh. Then at the gentle curve of Thea's backside, she let her open hands explore the contours and valleys she found. Her fingertip touched the light fabric of Thea's underwear and her mind flashed back to earlier in the theatre when Thea had taunted Michael wearing just these items of clothing. Rae silently thanked whatever was responsible for the honour of being there at this moment in time.

"Rae?" Thea whispered as she felt Rae's fingers at the elastic at her waist, her own hands travelled up the long naked torso to the fastening on Rae's bra.

"Thea?" Rae's response perfectly matching Thea's one in timbre.

"Do you know how much I want you?" She breathed as her hands closed around the plastic catch.

"If it's anything close to how much I want you, then God help us." Rae pushed her fingers under the elastic more. With a simple movement with fabric encircling Rae's chest was broken and with featherweight fingers Thea pushed the offending fabric away. The instant the cotton was removed Thea replaced it with her own hands. Gently she cupped Rae's warm breasts revelling in the feel as the dark haired beauty arched forwards into Thea's exploration.

'God himself could not have prepared me for this.' She thought to herself as her eyes closed in passion.

In that instant Rae decided she needed them both to be equal, she moved her hands around Thea's stomach and guided them upwards.



"Oh shit." Thea breathed as she realised Rae's actions, she arched her back to help the other woman remove the sports bra, which was suddenly feeling more like a cage than an item or clothing. Rae closed her eyes to try and concentrate on her task but instead found herself dizzy from the waves of desire and emotion that crashed down on her. Her hands automatically continued their task, and Thea raised her own hands above her head to make the job easier.

The instant the garment hit the carpeted floor Rae moved to take Thea's weight into her hands, she did not suppress the groan of pleasure as her hands touched forbidden flesh for the first time. Thea reached up behind her own head, her hands finding the clip that held her hair back from her face. Rae continued to massage Thea's breasts totally unaware of the trouble she was causing Thea to have with her hair clip. Thea forgot the hair clip, deciding that if Rae wished to remove it she could do it later.

Thea then pushed herself back a little resting her weight back onto her knees, which were straddling Rae's body just below the waist. As Thea moved Rae took the opportunity to remove her bra completely.

Comfortable in her sitting back position Thea took one finger and traced a line from Rae's navel up to the valley between her breasts and then she encircled both generous mounds separately. Rae's breath stilled and her body flexed, she was helpless under Thea's touch.

Thea continued to trace a line up Rae's throat, over her chin, bringing her finger to rest on Rae's lips. She tapped the lips gently with her fingertip, waiting to see if Rae would accept the request. Without a moment of hesitation Rae opened her mouth. Thea dipped her finger into the warm, wet opening and then drew it out again, slowly she began to circle her hips in time with the dipping of her finger into Rae's mouth. To her delight Rae began to move her hips in an opposing motion to the action. Thea wondered briefly if this interaction was driving Rae as wild as it was herself, but not dwelling on the answer she just continued to move.

"Please Rae." She managed to find a coherent voice somehow. "Make love to me." She begged, the request noticeably increased the strength of her hip movements.

Rae did not respond in words. All words were lost to her at that moment. Instead she sat up and pulled Thea close and kissed her deeply. As she held the lighter woman close she gently guided her over and switched position so that Thea's back was against the mattress and Rae was braced over her. Rae noticed the shiver that ran through Thea as her back hit the cool sheet. The look on her face was enough to tell Rae she was delighted with this last move.

She leaned down and kissed Thea quite roughly, her hand reaching down and pulling away the slacks that were now merely in the way. She then graced her hand up Thea's thigh to her stomach.

With gentle insistence Thea arched her back beneath Rae, impatient for this to continue. Rae broke the kiss and trailed wet kisses down Thea's neck, across her collarbone and down into the valley between her breasts. Thea squirmed with pleasure at the other woman's touch. With an easy motion Rae tugged slightly on the waistband of Thea's underwear and slowly dragged it

from her body. Thea shuddered and Rae drew her close. Thea put her arms around Rae and held her tight. Rae shifted her weight slightly and placed her knee against Thea's body, waiting for acceptance.

"Tell me what you need me to do, please." Rae begged in a hoarse whisper. She truly wanted to know everything Thea desired, so that she may make it happen.

"I want." Thea's voice became lost as her mind whirled at the possibilities that lay ahead. She leaned forward a little and clasped one hand around Rae's right leg, just above the knee. "This here." Thea parted her own legs and drew Rae's up between her own. "And then." A smile played across her lips as Rae looked at her eagerly, pushing her knee forwards a little. "I want you to put your hand." She released Rae's leg and reached out for her hand.

Rae pulled back her knee a little and gave Thea her hand.

"Here." Thea said breathlessly as she placed the hand on top of her left breast.

"Oh there." Rae whispered through a sharp breath. Thea knew that Rae could feel the rapid beat of her heart through the soft flesh that Rae began impulsively to rub and caress.

With this motion started Thea began to move the lower half of her body, rubbing it up and down Rae's thigh. A sudden rush inside Rae caused her to move her leg back against Thea as the young actress writhed on top of it. Thea slipped her other leg round Rae's, effectively encircling it as she crossed her feet at the ankle. Rae moved slightly allowing herself to be trapped. This manoeuvre caused Rae to smile and reward Thea with a deep searing kiss.

She responded to the kiss by nipping the end of Rae's tongue, which made the dark haired woman growl a little and push her knee harder against Thea's flesh.

"Have you done this lots before?" Thea asked, panting as her body started to move more rhythmically.

"No." Rae whispered as she nuzzled into Thea's neck. The hand covering Thea's breast started moving in time to the rocking, in response to the increase in Thea's heart rate.

"Good God." Thea cried as she felt the urge building within her. Rae smiled and pulled her leg away, slowing down the motion. Thea glanced at her alarmed.

"What...What are you doing?" She asked as Rae moved to look the strawberry blonde in the eye and then kissed her again. She returned her knee to the place she knew the younger woman preferred and started the rhythm again, only this time faster, harder. Uncontrollably Thea thrust her hips upwards.

"Take me Rae, please." She begged, panting desperately, her juices coating the dark haired woman's leg, leaving Rae no doubt that things were coming to a head. "Please Rae!" She recognised the desperate beg in her own voice as she squirmed uncontrollably against her lover.

Rae broke the contact momentarily and began to move down Thea's body making as much flesh as possible touch. Thea had no choice but to unlock her legs and spread them open for Rae as she moved lower on the bed.

"If I do anything." Rae kissed her way across Thea's stomach. "You don't like or want." She progressed down lavishing kisses on Thea's slightly bucking hips. "Then just stop me."

The actress just groaned in response, her mind and thoughts losing clarity. Her hands reached down and tangled in thick black hair as Rae settled herself between Thea's legs. Thea's last clear thought before she was lost to an exquisite world of pleasure and sensation was.

'I can never go back.'

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Thea opened her eyes and blinked as she realised where she was. She breathed in deeply and smiled as she felt wisps of black hair tickle her nose. Unable to stop herself the young actress reached out and ran her fingers over the long black mane of the woman sleeping beside her. Rae was completely relaxed, on her side facing away from her new lover. Thea could tell by the depth and rhythm of her breathing that she was deeply gone. Thea wondered briefly how often her newfound love slept this way.

With a smile Thea repeated the simple gesture and then gently moved Rae's hair to caress the soft back she had come to adore. It was with some surprise that Thea gazed at Rae's long back. There at the top of her spine, spreading across the other woman's shoulders, its wings outstretched was a large tattoo of a Raven. In a number of different shades of grey and black, with details that would have impressed any artist, the stunning work seemed to be a part of the woman herself. It was beautiful, there was quite simply no other word for it. For a moment Thea wondered how she had managed to miss it before now but then she remembered their moments of impassioned love making the two had recently enjoyed and then lost her surprise.

With a trembling finger Thea reached out and traced over the bird's outline, and then filled in the feathers and other details as she met them. She then traced her hand down to a second tattoo that was under the raven's wing. It was a theatrical mask, the symbol of tragedy. Thea looked at this design closely. The long mouth turned down severely at the corners, and a large tear marred one cheek. The eyes dull and hollow. She had never seen such a mask alone before, whenever she had seen one, it had always been paired with 'Comedy', its 'partner' mask. To see it here on her lover's back, alone was somewhat intriguing. Then again, a lot about Rae was a mystery.

Thea suddenly gave a bright smile and placed a kiss on the mask and on the raven before slipping an arm over the sleeping beauty at her side.

"I have my work cut out for me with you don't I?" She whispered as she placed a kiss on the rosy warm cheek of her lover. "I love you." She added impulsively.

"You too." Rae responded in a whisper of her own. Thea grinned, wondering how long Rae had been awake but didn't ask as she felt the fog of sleep gathering around her and she welcomed it with willing arms. Thrilled to be the one curled up with this mysterious woman. As she felt Rae's hand move up and take her own, Thea knew that the time had come once again to rest. The questions that were to come could wait for now, the rest of the world could wait as well. The next few hours were about nothing more than the two of them and that's all that Thea needed to know, for now that was.

Continued in Act III...

### The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

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## ~ After the Curtain Falls ~

by Beth Dragon & Kathleen Wolf

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**Feedback:** All comments are greatly appreciated and can be sent to: [kathandbeth@hotmail.com](mailto:kathandbeth@hotmail.com)

**Thanks:** To Emma, for her never ending love, support and chocolate. To the Ex-Guards Village for all their feedback and expert advice.

### Act III

Unable to control himself, Michael stalked past Estell's dressing room again. Picking at the front of the miss-fitting costume, he was surprised to see the door slightly ajar. It had definitely been fully closed the last ten times he'd walked by.

"Estell!" Announcing himself in a loud angry voice, he pushed on the door to open it more. "Where the hell have you been? You missed the fitting."

"Michael!" Thea whipped around startled. Lost in thoughts of a tall dark beauty and their recent moments together, she cursed herself for not closing the door completely and saving herself this interruption.

"What?" He asked startled by the intensity of her voice.

"Don't do that!" She barked at him, happy to hear his muffled choke as he realized his forwardness and attempted to catch the swinging door. "If you want to talk to me knock." Her eyes flashing, she threw a forceful scowl in his direction.

"Oh for God's sake." He whispered to himself under his breath as he stepped back and closed the door. A sharp polite knock was the next sound heard. "Estell, are you in there? It's Michael." A strained sweet voice came through the barrier.

"I am well aware I am late and that I have missed the fitting." Hearing the sharpness in her own voice, she stopped and counted to ten trying to calm down. She couldn't blame being late on him, it wasn't his fault. In fact it wasn't a question of fault at all. She'd hoped for at least a few moments of peace after they'd gotten back to the theatre so that she could think. Fully get her head around what had happened that afternoon. Smiling at the wonderful memory, the sound of Michael shuffling outside the door reminded her that her hopes had been dashed. "For God sake come in!" She snapped, realizing the counting has done no good.

Looking a bit lost, Michael opened the door slowly.

"Estell, where have you been?" He kept his voice soft, hoping the new approach might get him a better reception. "I was worried, everyone was."

"Thank you Michael." Stripping off her top and looking for her first costume, Thea managed to keep her voice calmer. "I am as you see fine."

"You look a bit agitated." He continued in a soft voice. "Are you sure you're fine?"

"I hate to be late, that's all." The short response came from the actress just as she found the costume and moved to undo the multiple pins that held it to its hanger.

"I know..." Watching her slyly in the mirror, Michael noticed something and stopped mid-sentence. "Estell, are you all right?" He questioned moving closer. "How did you get that bruise?" He reached out slowly towards the dark mark on the actress' shoulder.

"Michael, please." Thea turned around out of his reach. "It's nothing. I must have banged it!"

Twisting again she tried to see the mark in question in the mirror.

"It's not nothing." He said concerned. "And how could you have banged both shoulders and there by your collar bone?"

She raised her eyes to the heavens briefly before looking back to study the reflection in the mirror. Noticed a fourth mark somewhere she hoped Michael hadn't, she quickly moved to slip into the top of her costume.

"I bruise really easily! I know how lame that sounds." Snapping the words at him, she moved to do her top up out of the view of his prying eyes.

"If you're sure it's no big deal." He responded absently trying to study the marks.

"I'm fine really." Doing up the last of the closures, she turned around to give him a beaming smile.

"That's good." He smiled back. "Cause we are going to get cued any minute."

"Michael, you could do me a favor actually." She used her sweetest voice to try and sway him as she watched him sit down in a nearby chair. "It's going to be a long rehearsal I think."

"Anything?" He bounced back up to stand immediately.

"Get me a bottle of water would you?" She looked at him with pleading eyes.

"No problem." Michael nodded at her and raced out of the room. Ecstatic at the idea that he was again the one the beautiful lead was asking for favors.

'It's good to be an actress.' She thought to herself as she watched him scamper off. Hearing the heavy slam of the door behind him, Thea looked around for the rest of her costume. It was most definitely going to be a long night. 'And all I really want to do is be with Rae again.' The one single thought occupied the four corners of her mind.

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"Okay O'Keefe get a grip on yourself here." Rae stopped what she was doing and braced a hand on one of the nearby light bars for a moment. With her forearm she whipped the sweat from her

forehead. "You have about twenty minutes to hang twelve lights." She continued the pep talk in a rough tone as she started on another light. "There is no reason to even doubt you can do this. You could do twice as many as long as you keep your mind on the job."

The words made her smile and stop in mid-motion. That was the whole problem wasn't it. She couldn't keep her mind on anything but the petite gorgeous young actress who was somewhere in the theatre below getting ready for the dress rehearsal. Their moments together in the hotel had been so quick and intense that the technician wondered if it was the lights alone that should be blamed for her current high body temperature. They had been forced to race back to the theatre

and parted in a frantic hurry as each of them realized they were very late. She'd regretted not having one last chance to solidify with Thea that what had happened had been as perfect as she thought. If only they'd been able to kiss one last time. She shook her head and sent a cascade of sweaty drops falling to the floor below.

"Oh yeah that's where my problem is, right there." She glanced down toward the closed curtains of the stage. "Can't keep your mind on anything but her can you." She laughed at herself. "And it's only going to get harder if you're still up here when she's on stage." Another bead of sweat trailed down the side of her face. The fact that three fourths of the lights around her were already on and warming up was not helping her already soaring body temperature in the least.

"Okay here's the deal." She closed her eyes for a second and spoke to herself in a hushed tone. "You have a job to do." She gave herself a stiff nod and set back to the task of attaching the next light and aiming it. "You have to get this done or that gorgeous beautiful soft..." Her mind lost the track of her pep talk almost immediately. Though she did manage to keep working on the light as she listed off all of Thea's overwhelming attributes to herself. "... Won't be lit proper at all and you can't have that." The motivation to get her job done finally struck her. The lighting needed to be perfect or the woman of her dreams would be on a poorly lit stage. Placing the proper gel on the light she had just hung, she allowed herself to lean backwards over the edge of the scaffold to check the beams placement on the stage. Both legs hooked around the crossbar made her confident that she wouldn't fall. Though anyone watching from below would be quite concerned for her safety.

The sight on the stage made Rae stop. With a portion of the curtain still in her left hand, the young actress stood centre stage near the floodlights looking back at her.

"Hi Rae." Thea mouthed the words knowing no one would pick them up but the technician. She gave a little wave with her free hand nervously.

"Hi Thea." She mouthed back with a sudden bright smile and waved back.

Hearing a noise on the stage behind her, Thea looked back for a second. She knew Michael would be returning with her water any moment and she had to be brief.

"I miss you." Turning around, Thea mouthed the words hoping they might convey all that she was feeling. Grinning to herself at how hot the poor woman on the scaffold looked.

"I miss you too." Rae mouthed the words back slowly and confidently.

Still smiling, Thea lifted her shirt a bit and blew down it. She hoped that Rae would understand her message. The exaggerated forehead wipe and smile that came in return told her the technician understood.

"I have to go." Looking back to see Michael heading towards her room, she mouthed the words with a slight frown and another wave. "See you soon."

"I know." The upside down woman mouthed back with a wave. "See you later."

Grinning like a teenage, she nipped back behind the curtains and skipped back to her room. The only trace of her being there was the slight sway left in the thick velvet curtains as they moved back into position.

Rae waited until the curtains were fully settled before flipping back up to face into the hot lights again.

"Okay O'Keefe, you got your fix." She laughed at herself again. "You should be able to give 100% concentration to work for at least five minutes." Pulling herself up to dangle on another nearby bar, she snapped the safety cord around her harness and moved herself farther down to the next light.

"Only eleven left now." Sighing, she turned back to glance at the stage again. She knew that she wouldn't see the captivating woman there now, but she also knew her imagination would easily fill in the image for her none the less.

"Time to do my job." Rae shook her head hard and tried to concentrate on the lights hoping that if she got them done she could grab a seat in the back in time to see the third act. Thea's monologue made it her favorite.

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The final scene finished and being the last one to leave the stage, Thea was left to drag her tired body from the wings toward her dressing room in solitude. Pulling back her shoulder blades in an attempt to straighten out her stiff back she let out a deep sigh. The sight of Michael propped up against her dressing room door made her wish she had the energy to sigh again.

"Hi Michael!" She forced herself to smile as she got closer to him.

"Hi." Called out of his trance, he looked up from the floor to meet her eyes. "I was waiting for you."

"I kind guessed that." Thea moved past him into her dressing room. "Can I help you?"

"Yeah well." Turning to watch her enter, he leaned heavily against the doorframe waiting for an invitation to enter out of fear of making her upset again "Well I sorta needed to ask you something. Not for me so much, cause I already know the answer. Just so I can button the lips of a few of the chorus people."

"Ask away." Sitting down heavy in her chair, she let another loud sigh escape her. "Okay Michael, come in." She beckoned to him in a tired voice. "Close the door." She added the instruction as an afterthought.



"Estell, You know the blonde." He walked in and closed the door softly behind him, before again leaning against it.

"The blonde?"

"The one in the chorus with the one line who thinks she's the next you."

"Silvya you mean?" She pondered the reference slightly before the name came to her.

"Yeah Silvya." He nodded. "Well she sorta has got this crazy idea and she's been spreading it around to everyone in the cast."

"Michael, what is it?" Thea looked up at him, trying not too look as tired as she felt.

"Estell..." Straightening out his shirt he looked away suddenly.

The young actress struggled to force the smile that threatened to spread across her face to subside.

"Those bruises you have." His voice was timid and low. "Are they bruises or are they..." He made a little face briefly rather than continuing.

"Are they?" She asked in an innocent voice, fighting really hard to keep the smile from her face.

"Estell..." He turned to look her in the eye finally. "You know what she thinks they are. You can't let her be telling everyone that's what they are when they're bruises. I mean you didn't have them this morning." He waffled on, not noticing Thea looking down briefly in an attempt to hide the smile that had finally flared on her face. "So if you have THEM now, that means there is a reason for you being late."

"Michael, thank you for your concern!" Looking up again, Thea used all of her training to bring her face back to a neutral state.

"And the reason Sylvia's giving involves that tech monkey!" He went on in a harsh voice, trying desperately to show her the weight of the problem that existed.

"You know that Sylvia is mainly driven by jealousy." Thea tried to brush away his so-called problem as nothing. "She wants my job and she knows she could never have it."

"Estell, I am concerned." He continued. "She's going around convincing everyone that you and

that techie were having a quickie at dinner. She could never have your job, she has no talent." He added the last part with an adamant nod. "You have to say something, explain to everyone." He pleaded with her finally.

"Michael." The single word came out of her sharply. "If I explain anything it would be that my private life is just that. To stand up against them would be bringing myself to their level and I am not on their level and I don't think you are either."

"Of course not." He moved to crouch next to her. "You are a billion times better than any of them."

Carefully laying her hand over his, Thea did her best to keep her cool with him and the others. The idea of them going around dissecting what had happened between her and Rae made her sick to her stomach.

"How about you and I go have a lovely relaxing late dinner?" Michael put on his best smile and hoped the invitation might draw the actress out of her silence.

"It is lovely that you care so much Michael and I thank you for your concern. But I don't think I should retaliate." Thea removed his hand and tried to ignore his invitation. There was only one person she wanted to be spending the rest of the evening with and Michael was not that one. Seeing the anticipation in his face she knew she couldn't leave the question unanswered. "And would it be better for her to be spreading rumors about you and I? Than about 'that techie' and I?" She let the last words roll sharply off her tongue, her heart needed to show its hatred of the derogatory term.

"All rumours are bad." Michael croaked out through a constricted breath as he tried to regain himself. Moving to stand he went back to leaning against the door. "I don't know why the theatre has to run on them."

"Exactly." Thea agreed in a tired voice.

"Though rumours of you and I might be a little more." His words came with a little shrug. "More manageable."

"Michael, you are very kind to worry but this is theatre life. It doesn't get any better, no matter who you are." She smiled at him sadly. It seems this young man had a lot to learn about what when on behind the curtain. "You could be a saint and never look twice at anyone and the rumours would still be there." Closing her eyes for a second, she knew she'd have to quell his fantasies of a 'them'. "As you said all rumours are bad. I would hate for you to get bogged down by them."

"Look we're the stars here." Taking his courage in his hand, Michael moved closer to her. "We don't have to deal with any of the underlings, so why don't you and I go out for a fabulous dinner and just blow them all off?"

Thea managed to give him a weak smile. She had to give him credit for his persistence. He didn't give up easily. The tired part of her mind just wanted to cut him off at the knees. Point out to him that he was not the tall, dark and beautiful woman who she was so desperate to see again, so any chances he thought they had were dead in the water.

"To be honest all I want is to go back to my hotel room and collapse for the night." The democratic part of her mind tried to sidestep his second invitation. "Sorry."

"You need a drive?" He asked hopefully. "My car is right outside."

"The hotel is just down the road, so no need. Thanks anyway." She sighed under her breath. "Really thank you for caring Michael."

"Okay." He smiled at her, finally defeated. "See you tomorrow before the show then." Moving to open the door he turned to face her one last time. "I will always care Estell. You are a very special woman." His soft voice hung in the room long after he left.

As the door closed, Thea shook her head and let another heavy sigh escape her.

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"Okay Simmons." Rae looked over the clipboard of notes one last time. "I think we're almost caught up. Only need to change the third and fourth lines and we'll be done for the night."

"Right boss." The tall thick man nodded at her and yawned. "You want to do it yourself or shall I?"

"Why don't you take care of it. I'll look after the wiring problem in the sound room." Not bothering to look up, she continued to check off things on her list.

"Sure thing." With a stiff nod he headed up the scaffold.

From the dimly lit entrance hallway nearby, Thea gave an amused sigh as she watched the exchange. She coughed lightly as she stepped out of the shadows and into the auditorium, continuing to study the absorbed woman with a bright smile.

Rae spun around on her heel when she heard the sound. She had somewhat expected to see Damien standing there with more notes for her, but the sight of a Thea made her smile immediately.

"Hi." The soft simple word was nearly lost in the grand theatre.

"Hey there." Rae responded with an equally soft voice and dropped the clipboard to her side.

Looking up to check that Simmons' was far up out of earshot on the scaffold she walked closer. She unknowingly bit her lip as she tried to fight the urge to gather the small woman up in the arms and kiss her again right there and then. "How you doing?" She asked the question in a concerned tone, noticing the stress in the actress' shoulders.

"I am tired." Thea admitted. "And I want to go home." She watched Rae biting her lip and figured out her inner thought right away.

"You need a long hot bath and then to be tucked up into bed." Taking a step closer to block her words from anyone, Rae spoke softly.

"I do, but..."

"Your car!" The technician blurted out the revelation suddenly realizing that the woman's convertible was still at the restaurant a fair distance away. "Oh God Thea, I'm sorry."

Thea couldn't keep the broad smile from crossing her face. Instinctively she reached out with her hand to touch the worried woman's arm, but she quickly pulled it back, still very unsure how Rae would feel about such a display.

"No worries." She spoke the words quickly to cover up her abandoned motion.

"I should have thought of it earlier. You've been waiting around forever." Rae smiled at the raised hand and couldn't help but let her face drop as it was pulled back. "I have one little thing to take care of in the sound booth but I can drive you home then if you like." She wasn't sure how the offer would be taken but she made the attempt regardless.

"That would be great. Should I come with you to the sound booth? I haven't been in one for ages." Thea cringed at the sad line.

"Sure come on." Rae answered happy that the actress wanted to come with her. "It'll give us a bit of privacy." She added in a whisper, still fighting the urge to kiss the strawberry blonde. Motioning up the aisle, she waited for Thea to start walking first. The petite woman stepped forward confidently and began the trek up the aisle to the sound room. Checking with a backward glance that Rae was following.

"Simmons!" She yelled upwards and waited for the standard whistle in reply. "When you're done you and the boys head out. Report at four tomorrow, four sharp!" With quick steps she followed right behind the actress.

"Just in here." She opened the almost hidden door in the wall for Thea when they reached the top of the aisle. Without thinking she moved her hand to the small woman's back with a feathery touch and guided her to enter the small room. The moment of contact made her take a sharp breath as her senses were startled by the want that surged again with the simple gesture.

"Thanks." Thea jumped from the touch and closed her eyes briefly at the flare of passion that welled up and surprised her. "So this is where you do your magic?" She added trying to cover up her reaction and then stopped and smiled realizing what she had said.

"Only magic is what you do on the stage." Rae answered with a little grin as she closed the door.

"Is that the only magic you know?"

"No, I know of at least one other type of magic." Rae continued to grin as she dropped her clipboard on one of the shelves nearby.

"Rae..." Thea breathed the word and stepped forward towards her.

"Yes, Thea?" She questioned moving closer to the actress without thought of the action.

"Hold me." The request was simple.

"Always." Rae whispered as she carefully and softly wrapped her arms around the smaller woman and drew her close. Thea melted into the embrace and rested her head against the taller woman's chest. In an instant Rae bent down to gently rest her chin in soft hair. "I missed you." She added almost silently.

"You get sick of the sight of me I am sure." The tired actress whispered back half joking but half-afraid her words were true.

"Never ever." Rae raised the strength of her whisper to show how serious her words were. "I could look at you forever and it wouldn't be nearly long enough."

"I bet you say that to all the stars." Thea pulled back to see the technician's face.

"I have never said that to anyone." Intense blue eyes locked to green ones.

"Good." Thea whispered and stretched up to kiss her cheek. Rae closed her eyes against the coolness of the lips on her skin. "Rae, I really want to get out of here." She whispered. "You should do what you need to do so we can get leave."

"I can fix this tomorrow." She whispered at the same time. "Let's go."

"Are you sure?" Thea asked absently, happy that they would be no more delays in their departure.

"Yeah, no worries." She winked at the actress. "I need to get a part from home in order to fix it."

"That's convenient."

"Very much so eh?" She laughed a little, surprised herself how easily she was being led away from her work. "You ready to go, your chariot awaits. I'll have you back at your hotel in no time, unless?" She left the ending open.

"Rae, I'm not sure I want to go back to my hotel." Thea's soft words came with a shy smile.

"I have a place here in the city, but if you're up for a short drive." Rae jumped at the opening. "My real home's in the suburbs, we could go there. If you wanted to of course." Her voice was

almost nervous, and her internal voice boomed loud at her assumption that not wanting to go to her hotel meant Thea wanted to be with her.

"That would be great." Thea held on tight for another second, happy when Rae continued to hold her back.

"Yes, it would." Rae repeated to silence the voice inside her head.

"If you are sure." The star added, wanting to make sure the woman felt no pressure. Even after all that had happened that afternoon.

"I'm very sure." A confident nod came with the words.

"Me too." Thea closed her eyes and yawned.

"Good." Rae kissed her softly on the forehead. "Let's get you home sleepy head."

"Lead me where ever, I am sure to follow." She recited the line from a long forgotten play finally knowing she understood what the words meant.

"Let's go love, my jeeps out back." Rae moved out of the embrace to take her hand.

"I haven't been in a jeep since I was little." Thea gave her hand willingly as she gave the little insight for no real reason.

"Well then you're in for a treat." The dark haired beauty laughed. "I'd ask if you wanted to drive but I think we'll be curling you up with a blanket."

"I'll be asleep before we hit the main road." She laughed back. "Come on, anyone would think you like it here!"

"I'll wake you up when we get there or should I just carry you in?" Rae led her out of the small room.

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"You know I can't help thinking you'd make a better hero than Michael does!" Thea laughed as the theatre doors swung closed behind her and they walked out into the cold night air.

"Then again that would make it a very alternative play!" She gave a little nervous laugh and checked to see her new lover's reaction.

"Poor Michael." Rae laughed out loud. "He did look like a deer in headlights tonight." She smiled at the change in the tone of the star's laughter. "And an alternative play wouldn't be so bad." She squeezed the hand in her own as she fidgeted in her pocket to find her keys.

"It didn't help that his costume just didn't sit right." Thea added, thinking that a deer in headlights couldn't possibly look as scared as her co-star had when he first stepped out on the stage. "I think Michael is just beginning to learn what theatre is all about. And I don't think he is liking it much."

"Well, that did look uncomfortable for him." Rae hit the unlock button on the slim remote keychain and moved to open the passenger door. Thea clambered in with a giggle, forgetting at first how high the seat of the jeep was and having to pull herself up with the handgrip at the top of the doorframe.

"Your chariot princess." Rae smiled and bowed with a flourish. Secretly she wanted nothing more at that moment than to kiss the giggling princess silly, but she held herself in check. Their afternoon of passion was no reason to believe she had such a right at any time.

"Well a fine carriage it is." Thea smiled. Looking around at the brand new black shiny jeep she couldn't help but think what a fine carriage it was indeed. The all leather black interior and impressive array of extra buttons and switches told her the jeep was definitely not factory issue.

"Watch your hands." She gave the warning as she moved to close the door then ran around quickly to her side and jumped in. For the first time noticing how easier her height and long legs made it to get into the high vehicle.

"Okay, now I go to sleep and you wake me up when we get there." The actress cleared the instruction when the driver had settled into her seat.

"Let me get you that blanket." Rae turned around and pulled the thick black flannel from its spot on the back seat. "Here you go."

"Deal?" She took the blanket and spread it around her. "Thank you." She added happy for the warm gesture. Running her hand over the blanket she laughed at the idea that someone would miss the running black link in Rae's life. Settling back in the seat she closed her eyes and got comfortable.

"Deal." The Raven smiled back and started the jeep. "The chair tilts back. The controls are on the side." She added softly as she pulled the jeep away from the back of the building.

"Tilt the seat? You want to be able to wake me remember!" The red head warned with a grin. "Don't let me miss anything good!"

"I won't let you miss a thing." Rae pulled onto the main road. "And the offer to carry you in still stands."

Nestling down in her seat, Thea drifted into a light slumber instantly.

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'Here's a question.' Rae thought to herself looking briefly over at the angel sleeping softly in the passenger seat beside her. 'Should I phone ahead and order food or just hope there's something at home?'

'I am starving.' She listened to her stomach growl and then be answered by Thea's sleeping stomach growling next. 'Order food it is.' She smiled as she checked her blind spot and merged onto the highway. Picking up her cell phone from between the seats she dialed the number to the Chinese restaurant near her house. She glanced on the glowing dial of her watch to see what time it was as the phone rang on. When someone finally picked up she was glad to be a regular as the once annoyed voice was soon happy to fill her request. She rhymed off every dish she thought that Thea could possibly like and arranged for it to be waiting on the doorstep by the time they arrived home.

"Hope you like Chinese." She whispered as she stole another glance at the sleeping figure beside her.

"Hummmmm." The soft mumble came in response and made Rae smile.

"We'll be home soon." She added as she turned back to the watch the empty road ahead and turned the heat up a bit in case the actress was cold.

Used to always driving with the radio on, Rae started to sing softly to herself as she flew down the highway toward home.

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"Thea... Thea..." Already having the car parked and the passenger's door open, Rae tried to coax the sleeping woman awake.

"Hummmmm? What?" Thea bolted upright in the seat.

"We're home." Rae's voice remained soft as she jumped back a bit to give the startled woman room.

"Sorry." She cleared her throat.

"It's okay." Rae added trying to calm her. "I didn't mean to startle you."

"Really, I am sorry." She frowned gently, realizing how strange her actions must seem.

"It's okay. Are you all right?" Rae asked concerned by the woman's second apology.

"Yeah, I just..." Thea began an explanation but stopped herself.

"Just what?" The technician asked with even more concern.



"Nothing." The actress looked up blinking and then smiled her brightest smile. "So this is home huh?" She asked trying to look past the tall woman to the house behind.

"Yes, this is my castle so to speak." Rae moved further back out of the doorway and looked to the house with a little scowl. Parked in front of the two-car garage the angle of the roof made it difficult to judge the true size of the house. A bolt of apprehension went through her as she remembered the reason why she didn't invite anyone from the theatre home. But this wasn't just anyone, this was Thea and she would field any questions as best she could.

"Nice." The actress remarked as she got out of the jeep and took a few steps over to get a good look at the house. 'It's huge.' She thought to herself as she studied the red brick exterior and strained to see through the large bay window on the second floor.

"It's okay." Rae shrugged as she moved to close the jeep door. "My favorite place of all is the cabin but that's a three hour drive away." She thought of the small log structure that she'd built with her own hands. "We'll have to go there for a weekend soon." She added softly, sending the small hope out for consideration.

"You have a cabin?" Thea turned from studying the house to look at her surprised.

Rae cursed herself for making the cabin comment. It was going to be hard enough to explain how she could afford this place let alone a retreat up north and her condo in the city. Her heart went a little cold as she realized that her comment might also put too much pressure on the actress. After all, one afternoon of passion didn't mean that Thea would be comfortable with that kind of invitation.

"Yes." She nodded after a long silence. "Just a little retreat for when the world gets a bit too much." She did her best to downplay the cabin.

"Sounds nice." Thea kept her answer simple as her mind whirled around with questions. It was becoming quite clear that she'd underestimated just who Rae was.

"I should warn you about something." Rae said suddenly as she remembered who'd be meeting them inside. "I hope you like dogs." She smiled and moved toward the front door.

"Love them." The actress smiled back genuinely and followed her. Her eyes still glued to the house. She was sure that in the daylight the structure would be twice as impressive as it looked now. She laughed to herself as she removed the imaginary picture of a small quaint house that she'd created for Rae to live in from her mind and replaced it with a memory of the mansion before her.

"Good." The tall woman grinned. "You ready to go inside then?" Her voice was nervous as she watched Thea study the house. It was obvious even in the dark that Thea was surprised and the technician waited for the questions to start.

"All ready." Thea's voice was bright for the late hour.

"Come on then, time to meet Marc Antony." She offered the actress her hand.

"Marc Antony?" The small woman queried as she took the hand offered to her.

"My husky." Rae smiled at the inflection that her English accent put on the name. With gentle guidance she led Thea around the small shadowed walkway and up to the front door.

"You have a husky. How lovely!" The actress smiled at the idea, deciding in a moment that a husky would be the perfect dog for the dark woman that held her hand.

"Oh and I hope you like Chinese." She added. "I took the liberty and ordered while we were driving."

"Do you think of everything?" Thea laughed lightly as she looked at the two large bags waiting on the front steps.

"I try to." Rae smiled. "I might not have what you like though. I can phone for other dishes if there's nothing you like."

"What ever is good for me, for some reason I am famished!" The small woman patted her stomach.

"I figured you might be." Rae laughed remembering the growls that had serenaded her for most of the ride home. "Being under the lights takes a lot out of you." She opened the bolt lock on the front door first and opening the door reached inside to punch a long series of numbers into the keypad on the wall to disarm the alarm system.

"Yeah, an actors life huh!" Thea watched her and tried not to smile. The alarm system confirmed that the inside of house must be just as impressive as the outside.

"Yep. Eating at ungodly hours and sleeping late." Rae laughed and held the door partially closed. "Got to love it."

"I thrive on it." The actress admitted, as she realized why Rae wasn't opening the door fully. She laughed lightly. "Come on then, bring on the dog!"

"Marc Antony!" The tall woman's voice echoed through the house. "She's well behaved so don't worry she won't maul you."

"She?" Thea questioned and laughed loudly. "Or are you warning the dog now?"

"I know, I know." Rae laughed with her as she heard the thumping of paws as the dog pounded through the house to the door. "A friend named her and didn't care that the name didn't match the dog's gender." She shrugged her shoulders and smiled. "And the warning is definitely for you." She opened the door fully, knowing that Marc Antony would come right to the end of the hall and sit at attention when she saw her owner with company.

Thea looked through the now open doorway and smiled at the shiny attentive eyes that moved in the dark. Marc Antony moved to the edge of the hall and stopped when she saw the small woman standing there. Rae reached in and flipped on the light. The tall, majestic white and gray husky was sat up straight. Her pink tongue panting out one corner of her mouth in anticipation.

"She is beautiful." Thea whispered. "Could I stroke her?" She asked a little hesitant despite Rae's no mauling assurance when she saw how huge the husky was.

"She's actually a husky, wolf cross." Rae added picking up the bags on the step and motioning for the stunned actress to enter. "And of course you can pet her." She laughed. "Look at her tail she's dying to meet you." Rae looked down the hall and locked eyes with the dog. "Marc Antony this is Thea." She kept her voice even. "Come say hi."

With Rae's invitation, the dog came down the hall in a controlled bound and sat in front of Thea panting. With a nervous hand the small woman reached down and stroked the dog's head. Immediately becoming more comfortable as the dog stared at her happily.

"Hello." She whispered softly to the dog as she continued to pat her head. The happy noise coming out of Marc Antony and a small nuzzle into the actress' hand told everyone that the dog considered her a friend.

"She loves you." Rae smiled.

"What do you call her?" Thea turned to look back at Rae who hung in the doorway. "Surely not Marc Antony all the time?"

"No, not all the time." The technician laughed and walked past her to lay the bags on the upstairs steps. Thea bent down and continued to fuss with the dog while she waited for Rae to continue. "She also goes by Mac."

"Mac huh?" Thea looked at the husky and dropped a kiss on her head between her ears. "I think I am going to call you Toni!"

"What do you think Toni?" Rae laughed and asked the dog as she took off her boots. Standing up from the dog, Thea slipped off her shoes. "Would you object to eating in the basement?" She questioned in a tired voice. "We can curl up on the leather." She added hoping to persuade her.

"Sounds fine to me." Thea grinned at the dog and then at the tall woman standing nearby. "Does Toni get any?"

"Of course." She grinned back. "She just loves chicken balls. Just let me put the alarm back on." She reached to punch the code into the system.

"Don't we all!" Thea made sure to look away from the keypad.

"Good thing I ordered two boxes then." Rae moved to pick up the bags. "Wouldn't want us all fighting over them."

"Point me in the right direction and I'll get plates if you like." The actress offered trying to be helpful.

"I'll give you the tour." Rae smiled. "This is the main hall." She grinned. "As you can tell and these are the stairs upstairs."

"Okay, okay!" Thea put her hands up in mock surrender. "Stop! Just point me to the basement, I am way too tired to do this right now."

"First double doors to your right are the stairs down to the basement." Rae winked at her. "What can I get you to drink?"

"Anything cold!" Thea answered as she walked down the hall toward the doors.

"The bar is downstairs mix yourself something if you like." Rae called as she moved toward the kitchen.

"Okay, thanks." Thea opened the ornately carved oak doors and flicked on the light.

"Mac, go with Thea." Rae instructed the dog, though she knew the husky was already following the small woman. Dropping the bags on the counter of the kitchen's centre island, she moved around to collect everything they needed.

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Thea walked down the stairs noting the paintings that adored the walls with an impressed eye. Emerging at the bottom of the slightly rounded staircase in the middle of a huge room caught her off guard. Off to her left was a well stocked bar while the far right corner held a large elaborate entertainment unit filled with all sorts of electronics. An enormous L-shaped dark brown leather sectional divided the bar area off from the rest of the room to encase a carved oak coffee table. The walls were painted a deep hunter green and were covered with paintings, as were most of the walls of the house. Thea noted that not one of them was a reproduction and she reminded herself to study them in greater detail later as she moved straight to the bar. One by one she read the labels trying to decide on what she was thirsty for. The choice was a little overwhelming.

"Did you find everything all right?" Rae asked when she reached the end of the stairs. Moving directly to rest the tray on the coffee table.

"Hi!" The actress turned from the bottles she was studying and smiled.

"Hey there." Rae smiled back. "You need help?"

"Not really just weighing up my options!" Thea turned back to the bottles.

"There are quite a few I'm afraid." She laughed and moved towards the bar. She walked around it to bent down to open the small fridge hidden behind the structure and took out two bottles of water.

"I noticed!" The small woman exclaimed at a loss to make a choice.

"I like choice." Rae grinned as she stood up again. "I could show you the wine cabinet if you would like wine?"

"Now that looks like a good start." Thea pointed at the bottled water in Rae's hand.

"Water?" She asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Yeah, sorry to be boring." The actress leaned against the bar.

"No need to be sorry." Rae laughed and moved to swing the fridge door open fully and show her that it was mostly filled with water. "It's my favorite actually."

"There you go!" Looking into the fridge, the blonde started to laugh.

Grabbing two glasses from the rack overhead, Rae used the ice dispenser in the wall to fill them both.

"I love baileys, but you already know that." Thea smiled her mind going back to earlier in the day. "I'm just too tired to drink it right now."

"It's almost three am." The technician flipped her wrist to look at her watch. "It is a bit late."

"Indeed." She nodded.

"Take a rain check on the baileys." Rae winked. "It'll be here whenever you want one."

"Sounds good, but I won't take a rain check the food." Thea moved around the bar.

"Oh not me either." Rae grinned as she followed. "We got a ton of it and I think Mac is dying." She motioned to the dog, which was sat upright by the table.

"She's so lovely." Thea smiled at the husky sniffing the air feverishly. "Come on then, let's make a hole in it!"

"Right behind you."

Thea laughed as she moved around the large table to sit on the sofa.

"So what is your favorite?" Rae asked as she sat down and poured out their drinks. "Maybe I got lucky."

"Hummmmm I love chicken! Any kind." She gave the easy choice, not wanting to disappoint the technician.

"How about chicken balls, Szechwan chicken, orange chicken and chicken chow-mien then?" Rae listed as she pulled container after container out of the bag. "I tend to over order." She turned and grinned. "That's why the place delivers so late for me."

"But I guess Toni likes it!" She pointed to the dog, which was trying to sneak under the table and stick her head in the now discarded outer bag.

"She loves it." Rae laughed at her pampered pet. "This dog eats better than some people."

"Well she looks like she deserves it." The actress noted. "She is beautiful."

"We also have Cantonese chow-mien, sweet and sour ribs, rice, Chinese noodles." Rae continued to pull containers out of the second bag. "Fried calamari, fried shrimp, pepper steak, emperor beef."

"Whoa! Did you order the menu?" Thea asked looking at the now covered table.

"Close." The dark haired woman smiled. "I wanted to make sure there was something you liked."

"You must earn too much." Thea made the comment without thinking. The sudden lavishness of Rae's house came crashing down on her and she winced at the biting nature of her words. She knew better than to make such a comment and her mind instantly slipped into controlling the damage her words must have caused.

"Oh and a whole ream of egg rolls and spring rolls." The dark haired woman added before the comment sunk in. "Earn, no." She added softly. "It comes from investments." She tried to offer a brief explanation.

"Sorry, silly comment." The actress apologized quickly.

"It's okay." Rae shrugged. "It must be odd seeing a techie live in a place like this. Even being the head techie I shouldn't be living this lifestyle."

"Hey it has nothing to do with me." Thea added trying desperately to back pedal. "Your lifestyle looks fine to me. I shouldn't have said anything."

"It's okay to question." Rae turned back to dish herself out dinner. "I know it's odd, no one from the theatre knows I have a place here."

"Why should they?" Thea asked honestly.

"That's what I figure." She turned back to look at Thea and smiled softly. "Unless of course I invite them here."

"But I bet you don't do that do you?" The actress asked in a timid voice, unsure what she wanted the answer to be.

"Did it once." Rae leaned back and grinned. "And I'll let you know how it turns out tomorrow." She winked at the star.

"I like that style!" Thea grinned back.

"Am I eating alone?" She laughed and motioned to the actress' empty plate.

"Sorry." Thea began to take large portions of her more favorite dishes in the huge array.

"Sorry Mac, almost forgot your plate." The tall woman moved to the dog's allotment and laid it on the floor for her.

Thea watched Rae with the hungry animal and felt a warm smile grace her face. She could see so much love in Rae that she doubted the technician ever let anyone witness. She didn't know why it surprised her to see this example of what Rae kept hidden down deep, she'd seen it there all along after all.

"Did you want music?" Rae questioned as she began to eat.

"We could do with some." Thea answered as she leaned back into the couch with her plate on her lap.

"What is your preference?" She picked up the remote from the table.

"I like anything but how about some classical?" Thea asked taking a mouthful.

"Classical coming right up." Rae smiled at the choice and hit the play button for the CD player. The action instantly filled with the low melody of an orchestra. Thea closed her eyes to listen to the music as she chewed on a mouthful of chicken.

"So tell me..." She opened her eyes and looked at the technician.

"Yes?" Rae tried to eat the noodles without making a fool out of herself.

"Did you think that..." Thea stopped and looked away.

"Think what Thea?" She stopped eating and waited for the actress to continue.

"Did you expect today to happen?" Thea finally asked suddenly very nervous.

"No, I didn't expect it." Rae spoke honestly as she moved to put her plate on the table. "But I'm so happy that it did. Did you?" She asked back very nervous herself.

"No, but..." Thea realized her throat was completely dry and she reached to take a big drink of the ice water.

Rae studied her as she took the glass, wanting so much to reach out to touch her arm but knowing she had to let Thea finish what she saying first.

"Rae, you know that I had noticed you for a while now. I just want you to know that..." She found herself floundering again.

"You can tell me anything Thea." The Raven's voice was soft. "And you know I'd noticed you too." The last part came in an even softer voice.

"Rae, I don't want to hurt you, that's the last thing I ever want. That's why I never did anything about how I felt." She blurted out the words feeling completely foolish.

"Thea, I understand." She nodded and reached out finally to place her hand on the star's arm softly.

"You do?"

"I think I knew somehow today that you'd never make the first move." Rae smiled as she thought back to their talk in the green room. "That's why I asked you to dinner." Her smile went a little wider. "I don't know where I found the courage but I knew I had to try."

"Thank you for trying." Thea whispered in a sincere tone. "I had to say yes." She stammered out the words as an afterthought.

"You didn't have to." Rae lowered her eyes slightly.

"I did." Thea found a strong voice as she spoke the honest words. "I promised myself if you asked, I would accept. I never break a promise."

"Now I wish I'd asked sooner." Rae looked back up and smiled.

"Your timing was great."

"Yeah it was."

"I am glad you accept the compliment." Thea grinned broadly.

"I meant more..." Rae blushed when she realized what she'd said. "Oh you know." She grinned back instead of continuing when she heard Thea start laughing. "Love that laugh." Rae's smile went softer.

"You're crazy!" Thea exclaimed with a small shake of her head.



"Is that a bad thing?" Rae turned to ask Mac who had looked up from her almost empty plate.

"It's the middle of the night and we are eating Chinese and stumbling over our words like crazy teenagers." Thea looked to the dog as well trying to explain.

"AROOOOO!" Mac let out a long loud howl in response.

"Even she finds us funny!" Thea laughed again.

"Nope, I didn't think so either." Rae laughed and tossed the dog another chicken ball. "It is funny isn't it." She turned back to look at Thea with a serious face. "Not funny bad, but just funny that we would be stumbling over our words." She smiled warmly.

"Yeah." Thea smiled back at her. "I haven't been his tongue tied in a while."

"I don't think I've ever been." She picked up her plate and leaned back to take a small mouthful. "Who else got you tongue tied?"

Thea looked off and thought about it for a moment, trying to figure out just when the last time was.

"My public speaking examiner!" She exclaimed finally. "Though for very different reasons!"

Rae laughed and fought to keep herself from choking at the answer. Thea couldn't help but laugh as the technician struggled. She handed Rae a tissue in a vague attempt to be helpful. The technician took it gratefully as she tried not to smile and hoped that too much of the sauce had dripped down her chin.

"I should hope for different reasons." Rae spoke again when she got the coughing under control. "I'm not known for being tongue tied. So you have a rare talent." She added the last part in a soft voice.

"Apparently." Thea laughed again softly.

"So what comes after tongue tied?" Rae questioned as she put her plate on the coffee table.

"Oh no! Wait, I can think of another speechless occasion." Still deep in thought the actress commented.

"Which was?" Rae asked curious.

"My eleventh birthday." She replied with a distant look in her eye.

"What happened at your eleventh birthday?"

"My parents bought me a pony." Thea smiled brightly at the memory. "That blew my mind."

"A pony!" Rae commented. "That would be a good reason to be speechless. You must be an only child?"

"That's what I figured." She added taking a sip of her drink. "An only child? Me? Oh no, I have a sister. The bad thing was it was too cold to be riding him so I had to spend the first few months of ownership just mucking out stables." Thea added still reliving the memory.

"Too cold, when's your birthday?" Rae questioned taking a long drink herself.

"January." Thea replied. "January the seventeenth."

"January?" The dark haired woman gave a little pained cough as she looked off blankly at the far wall. "The seventeenth." She added blankly as she slowly moved to lay her water glass down. She didn't even notice that she laid it on the edge of something and it teetered over.

"Yeah everyone used to tease me because it's so close to Christmas..." Thea waffled on not noticing her dinner companion's reaction. It was only as the heavy glass hit the carpet with a loud thud that she looked up. "Rae?" She gasped her concern.

"That's my brother's birthday." Rae spoke in a small voice.

Thea looked between the glass and the technician trying to find some understanding of what was going on. How could the same birthday cause such a reaction?

"Was his birthday." She forced herself to correct the mistake without looking away from the wall.

Thea felt everything slow as her head heard the word 'was', turning she focused her full attention on Rae alone.

"Was?" She whispered, desperately wanting to reach out and touch Rae but not sure if she should.

"Was." Rae whispered back. "He was killed eight years ago."

"Rae... I'm so sorry." The actress stammered. "I... how did it happen?" Her rational mind caught up to her natural inquisition. "No, I mean. Rae, we don't have to talk about this."

"No, I'm sorry." The technician shook her head trying to clear it from the ghosts that had sprung up to fill it with the mention of that date. "It's a long story Thea." She turned to look at her with her heart falling as she realized just how much of the past this little reference would dredge up. A past that could so easily tear Thea from her in an instant. "It's a sad story and I don't come out of it looking very good."

She shook her head and moved her plate down for Mac to finish. An uncomfortable laugh escaped her as she noticed that her hand was shaking. The laugh was quickly stifled as she saw

the spilled water and realized it had been from her glass. Thea moved her plate down for the dog as well as her appetite fell away. The look in Rae's eyes disturbed her.

"Rae." She kept her voice as level as she could manage.

"Yes?" The dark woman looked at her.

"You don't have to tell me anything about it, but if you want to I can listen." Thea spoke in a soft voice as she fought the urge to reach out and touch her. The reaction such an action could bring at this moment would be unpredictable in the least. "We all have a past Rae. There is no reason for it to harm the future."

"Not everyone has one like this I'm afraid." Her words came with a painful grimace.

"Rae, how bad can it be?" Thea offered having made the decision to take a positive approach.

"Oh it's bad." The technician shook her head. "You have a right to know though." Something inside her screamed this fact in opposition to the rest of her brain that wanted to get as far away from the memories as possible.

"You are young and you work in the theatre. You can hardly be a mass murderer now can you?" The actress laughed as she tried to lighten the mood with humor.

"No, not a mass murderer." Rae shook her head again and swallowed hard. "Tommy was the only one to ever get hurt."

Thea eyes forced closed briefly as she realized that humor hadn't been the right thing to try.

"Your brother was Tommy, yes?" She asked the question to try and establish the facts.

"Yes." A slight smile crossed Rae's sad face. "Born Thomas Francis O'Keefe, January 17th, 1973 in the small town of Collingwood." The smile faded quickly. "My mother died while she gave birth to Tommy, so I've always looked after him."

Thea nudged a little closer on the couch while still giving Rae lots of space. She drew her knees up under her chin as she listened intently.

"He died on a very hot day in August." With a sigh, Rae let the words come out without thinking about them. "He took two shotgun hits to the chest at very close range, there was nothing I could do to save him."

Thea used every ounce of her tired strength to control the gasp her gut reaction threatened to let burst out.

"There was nothing anyone could do for that Rae." She whispered in reaction to the words.

"He wasn't supposed to be there." The technician shook her head again as she blinked hard against the tears that welled up in her eyes. "It was going to be the last job."

The star was sure her heart was breaking in two as she watched Rae battle and she knew she couldn't just sit there and watch her fight. Unsure how her comfort would be accepted, but not caring anymore, she reached out and gently touched the technician's arm.

"Supposed to be where?" She asked the question in a gentle voice, trying to hold the crystal blue eyes that danced around frightfully to look at anything but her.

Rae turned her head down to look at the hand on her arm, surprised by the contact and unable to believe that the actress would touch her at all.

"It was an estate job, burglary." Rae started the tale in a blank tone. "Cleo knew the owners were downtown at the yacht club's summer ball. A couple of paintings and a sculpture were to be the take. Easy mark, minimum security, all electronic... last job and then graduation."

Thea tried not to stare blankly as her mind was bombarded by facts and she worked feverishly to work out the order of her impending questions.

"I was already in the building when Cleo got in." The dark haired storyteller caught Thea's eyes and watched for any sign of the hate that she expected to see starting. "I didn't know that Tommy had come with her, didn't know that he was in the car. She'd told him to stay put cause I needed help with the tech. But he didn't!" She barked the last part out.

"Okay Rae." She held up her hand. "Stop, stop right there." She swallowed hard as tears formed in her green eyes.

"Yes, Thea?" Rae stopped and wiped her own tears away with the back of my hand. Trying to show Thea she was with her in the here and now, though she spoke in a scared voice.

"Okay." The actress let a thin smile form on her lips. "It's okay." The relief in her voice was obvious and she moved impulsively to hug Rae. She held on tighter than perhaps she'd originally meant to but she didn't let her arms relax. For a second she'd been afraid she'd been losing Rae completely. Rae slowly put her arms around the small woman, afraid the young actress would bolt out of them at any moment so she kept them loose.

"Oh Rae." She whispered holding tight. "I'm sorry I didn't mean to interrupt." She stammered suddenly realizing that Rae might think she'd stopped her because she didn't want to hear anymore. "I just..." Her voice disappeared as she realized she couldn't exactly explain what she had been thinking.

"It's okay." Rae spoke softly, searching every second for any indication that Thea wanted her to let go. "Interrupt whenever you want. I'm sure you have questions, I haven't made myself real clear."

"I should let you tell the story your way." Thea encouraged. "Please if you can, carry on."

"Cleo and I were inside when we heard the shots." The woman took a deep breath before going on. "Seems Tommy had come in over the fence and the guard had caught him on the front lawn." Her voice was distant. "The guard panicked. He was a hired kid. After eight hours of training they stick a gun in your hand and send you out to save the world. He fired off two shots without thinking and both caught Tommy in the chest."

Thea closed her eyes briefly, feeling just a hint of the pain that the woman in her arms felt.

"I saw him on the lawn through the front window. Cleo went out to him." Her blank stare continued as she saw nothing but his form bleeding on the lawn.

"Oh love." Thea was unable to stop herself from whispering the small endearment as her hand went to stroke Rae's back.

"She could explain being there but I couldn't, so I had to go back out the way I'd came in." Rae whispered softly, deciding only to describe how she'd gotten into the estate if Thea asked directly.

"What happened to Tommy? To the guard? To you?" She asked in an almost silent voice.

"It was supposed to be the last job." Rae pleaded with the past as she cried. "No one was ever supposed to get hurt."

"I know. I know honey." She enclosed her arms back around the tall woman and held her tightly.

"I managed to escape and evade detection." Rae took a deep breath. "The guard was charged with a weapons offense. And Tommy..." She tried to find the words. "He bled out on the lawn before the ambulance could get there."

Thea placed endless light kisses into her hair and pulled her close. Rae held onto her desperately. Without thought the actress began to gently rock them back and forth, trying to offer any comfort she could.

"It was all my fault." Her words were broken by thick sobs.

"No, it wasn't." The actress whispered the words over and over, unable to believe that Rae could believe such a thing.

"I loved him so much Thea." Rae fought against the tears.

"Of course you did. Rae you still love him." She continued to rock her softly. "It's okay to cry love. It really is."

"I don't do this normally." The technician calmed a bit as she spoke.

Thea looked up for a second, trying to see if she could find a blanket or anything to put around them.

"You should." She bent her face down and kissed her head again. "It's good to cry. I cry all the time." She smiled wearily as she noticed a thick quilt just out of reach.

"About what?" Rae asked weakly.

"Everything." Thea gave a little laugh. "Anything." She smiled again as she watched Mac, having read her mind, trot over and pull the blanket within her reach.

"I don't usually cry about anything." Rae's voice was tight.

Thea closed her hand around the soft material with a minimal movement.

"I'm sorry about this." Rae found herself fighting the urge to pull away, though she needed to stay right where she was more than anything.

"No sorries love." She whispered softly. "You have nothing to be sorry for and though I have many questions." She moved back and released her grip though she kept her hands on Rae's arms. "Now is not the time."

"I have lots to be sorry for Thea." Rae added sadly.

"I think what you need now is to sleep, or at least rest." The star moved to throw the blanket out fully and bring it around Rae's back. "And here in my arms sound like the best place to me."

"Thea, your questions have a right to be answered." She offered the half-hearted protest.

"Rae, we all have things to be sorry for. I know my questions need to be answered. But I know you will answer them. There will be a time for them but that time is not now."

"I will, I promise."

"All you need to do right now is rest in the arms on someone who loves you." Thea kissed her lightly on the forehead. "Rest despite all you think you have done and no matter what you may ever do."

"I would like that." The technician's voice was tiny.

"Then do it." She responded in a loving voice and was happy to see Rae smile and move closer to her. "Just lean back, close your eyes, and think of our newfound love. Think how far we have come, and of the adventure we have ahead of us. A raven and a star." The actress moved them both down into a reclined position on the couch. "Rae, that 's you and I." She stroked the woman's arm and lowered the tone and timbre of her voice. "Just think of all that we have seen and done."

"A raven and a star." Rae whispered back as she snuggled into the small arms around her. "I love you Thea."

"I love you too Rae." She thought about the words for a moment. "No matter what and strangely enough I think I always have."

"Always." The technician nodded her head against Thea's shoulder. "Always and forever."

"Rest now my strong one. It is time for the Raven to land for a while." The actress kissed into the black locks again softly as she pulled the blanket up further. "Rest her wings, and let the wind leave her feathers. The world will turn without her watching,"

Mac happily moved to rest her head on the couch next to them.

"For tonight at least." She added and smiled down at the dog. "A star, a raven and a wolf, eh Toni? What a combination." She laughed happily as she closed her eyes.

Continued in Act IV...

### The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

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## ~ After the Curtain Falls ~

by Beth Dragon & Kathleen Wolf

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**Thanks:** To Emma, for her never ending love, support and chocolate. To the Ex-Guards Village for all their feedback and expert advice.

## **Act IV**

Rae felt the tendrils of consciousness come back to her slowly. The soft feel of the shirt against her face and the even softer feel of the skin behind it made her stiffen slightly as her tired mind raced to figure out just where she was. Snapping her eyes open, the familiar sight of her basement and Mac curled up near the couch made her relax. She suddenly became aware of her own positioning. Her right arm was stuck underneath her, while the other held tight across the stomach of whoever this was she was holding onto. She knew somewhere under the thick flannel blanket one of this person's legs was firmly locked between her own. It all felt so safe and familiar that despite her instinctual need to bolt, she found herself snuggling in a bit closer as she remember exactly who it was and how she'd gotten there and how she'd gotten lucky enough to wake up in Thea's loving arms. The soft cadence of the actress' deep breathing made her close her eyes again. In an instant Rae decided this was defiantly the way she wanted to wake up every morning for the rest of her life.

Shifting slightly, she moved her head to look at the face of the sleeping beauty underneath her. She couldn't help but smile at the sight of her protector, still holding tight, despite being in a deep sleep. The soft sound of her snoring was the only real sound in the room. Rae reached up to brush away a lock of stray hair that had settled on her cheek.

Moving back to her spot against the small woman's chest, Rae slipped her free hand under the blanket and began to draw soft slow circles on the woman's stomach as she listened to the slow rhythmic heartbeat in her ear.

Still listening to Thea's heartbeat, she slipped her hand under the edge of the now untucked shirt. She loved the feel of the woman's warm skin under her fingertips.

Thea's first conscious thought was how good it felt to have someone touching her body. The soft, warm gentle fingertips made her groan with pleasure in her semi-consciousness.

The change in breathing and Thea's soft moan made Rae realize her explorations were appreciated. Moving up slightly, she placed a long wet kiss on the woman's exposed collarbone and moved her hand to stroke Thea's side softly. The actress kept her eyes closed but smiled, moving her hand to the back of Rae's head. She gently caressed the dark silky locks as she woke up fully.

"Good morning my sleeping beauty." Rae whispered the words against Thea's neck, before going back to another long kiss.

"Morning my beautiful one." Thea breathed back her voice trying to disguise the passion Rae had sparked.



Rae kissed her way over Thea's neck as her hand moved to the front of the woman's shirt, undoing the series of buttons that held it closed.

"Did you sleep okay?" She asked in a whisper in between feather kisses.

"Just fine." Thea paused to breathe as she shifted her hands to Rae's back. "How about you?"

"Can't remember when I ever slept so well." She answered honestly.

Thea smiled and moved to kiss Rae good morning. When the kiss broke, Rae turned her head to kiss her way lower as the last of the buttons came open.

"Oh no you don't!" Thea twisted suddenly out of Rae's grasp.

"Don't what?" Rae let the actress twist away. Happy that her movement only made her now unbuttoned shirt to fall open completely.

"Don't distract me." Thea replied shaking her head. She glanced down at her state of undress and looked back up at Rae, giving her a bright smile.

"Now how could I do that." Rae questioned in a soft voice as she placed a kiss on Thea's shoulder. "Come on tell me." She kissed her shoulder again. "How could I distract you?"

"Put yourself in my shoes." Thea closed her shirt up with one hand.

"Oh sorry." Rae pulled back and sat up abruptly. She ran a hand through her tangled hair.

"Rae! No wait, what I meant was..." Thea reached out a hand and tried to bring her back. "You wake up being caressed by the most beautiful woman in the world. Having spent the day before making love to her for hours. Then suddenly you remember, that you are the lead in a play that opens in..." She glanced at her watch. "Less than seven hours! Now how do you think you can distract me?" She gave Rae another stunning smile.

"Okay, I understand." The technician smiled back and moved closer to her. "I'll be good."

"Oh I know you are that!" Thea replied cheekily.

"Oh you're being helpful." She grinned at her. "So Miss. Star, what is it you need to do to get ready for this opening curtain in less than seven hours?"

"Well." Thea glanced down. "I am going to need a shower and a change of clothes."

"Have one of those." Rae nodded. "Can find some of those or I can drive you back to your hotel." She knew she'd be disappointed if Thea took the latter option but she knew the choice had to be there.

"And a kiss." Thea added with a grin.

"A kiss?" Rae smiled wickedly at her. "Let's see what we can do about that one."

She moved around to brace herself over the woman on the couch, bringing her face down slowly and letting their lips meet softly. Thea melted into the kiss, drawing her arms up and round Rae's neck and opening her lips beneath her partner's. Sensing the change in the kiss, Rae held back for a heartbeat before giving into what she needed and let her tongue pass into Thea's waiting mouth. Thea increased the strength of her grip as the kiss deepened. Her eyes closed and she inhaled deeply through her nose.

"Now who's distracting who?" Rae pulled back ever so slightly and breathed the words out onto Thea's lips before returning to the kiss.

Thea pushed her body up a little so that it touched Rae's and she thrust her tongue deeply into Rae's mouth. Feeling Thea's push up, Rae took some of the weight off her arms and let herself rest tight against the woman beneath her. She moved aggressively into the deep kiss, wanting all that Thea could give her. Thea was about to commit herself to more than just the kiss, when she remembered the facts. She broke away and coughed lightly, trying to clear the passion from her body.

"Shower." She managed to say.

"Shower." Rae repeated back with a slow deep breath. "It's upstairs let me show you." She added moving herself back up to stand and reached out her hand to help the actress up.

Thea nodded dumbly and took her hand and was pulled gently up to stand.

"I love you." Thea spoke as she steadied herself.

"I love you too." Rae impulsively picked her up into a loving hug. Her mind raced, unsure suddenly if she could ever let go of the precious woman in her arms.

'What a ridiculous situation this is.' Thea thought as held Rae close and squeezed her eyes shut. 'But it feels so right, so good.'

"I want you so badly." Thea whispered, unsure she had said it loud enough for Rae to hear.

"I want you too." Rae growled the words softly into Thea's ear to show she had heard.

"The shower is big enough for two." She added the last part in a soft loving voice.

"Now that makes me smile." Thea whispered back. "Show me."

"Yes, my love." Rae laughed happily and bent down to pick the small woman up into her arms. "To the shower!" She twirled around and walked off toward the stairs.

Thea relaxed into Rae's arms as the technician went up the stairs carefully. Rae knew there was no worry of an accident but she also knew she had to be extra careful. She moved stealthily through to the upper stairs and took the same care with them before going down the long hallway to the master bedroom. Passing through the large room quickly she headed to the master bathroom at the back.

Thea didn't even notice the stairs of the hallway, her eyes briefly took in the bed but mainly she was focused on Rae. Rae gently placed Thea down to sit on the large gray marble counter.

The spacious bathroom was decorated in light shades of gray that was highlighted by the shiny brass fixtures of the large corner Jacuzzi tub and the framing on the two enormous beveled windows that wrapped above it. The separate glass shower was off to the opposite side.

"Think it's big enough?" Rae asked with a sly smile as she stood in front of Thea.

"Wow." Thea breathed as she studied the lavish bathroom.

"That a yes?"

"I think it's great."

"Good." Rae watched Thea looking wide-eyed around the room. "We missed the upstairs tour last night." The last part came with a wink.

"We did." Thea winked back at her playfully. "So is it difficult to operate?" She looked to the shower with a grin.

"The shower?" Rae looked nowhere but at the woman in front of her. "I'll have to give you a lesson it can be a bit stubborn."

"Please be my guest." Thea breathed at her. "I am a willing student."

"Have to get out of these first." Rae gently tugged at the collar of the actress' shirt. "Do you need help?" The request came in a hopeful tone.

"Well of course I do. I am only a student at most things!" Thea grinned.

"Well then." Rae grinned back. "Already have the buttons open just need to slide this off."

Reaching up she put her hands under the material at Thea's shoulders and gently pushed it down off her arms and onto the counter. Thea closed her eyes as Rae spoke and touched her.

"Have to be careful with these." She spoke softly as she trailed her hands down to the closure on Thea's pants. With slow movements she undid the clasp and slid the zipper down.

"You are always careful." Thea whispered trying to concentrate on her breathing.

"Have to get rid of those fully when you stand up." She leaned in and moved to spread her hands across the soft flesh of the actress' back. In response, the actress slid her arms around Rae and held onto her gently. "This is a tricky part." Rae moved her fingers under the closure of the woman's bra and undid the fastener in one sure motion.

"Tricky? I hadn't noticed the problem!" Thea laughed at her skill. Unable to stop herself she placed a few quick kisses on the exposed shoulder beneath her face. A myriad of images flashed through Thea's mind. Images of the two of them caught in each other's arms in the hotel room and in the park. She felt her temperature rise as her heart began to race.

"No problem." The tall woman whispered running her hands up to Thea's shoulders and pushed the straps off. Reaching up between them, she pulled the sheer bra out and cast it absently away. She allowed her hand linger on Thea's stomach. "Shall I keep going." She whispered the words hoarsely into Thea's ear. "Or do you want to be tested on this part of the lesson?"

"I..." Thea trembled beneath Rae's touch, surprised to hear her own voice wavering. "I think I need to finish the course before I try it." She managed finally.

"Good choice." Rae growled low as she moved her hands underneath the actress and slid her down off the counter and onto her feet. "Now for the pants." She kissed her way down soft flesh until she was eye level with her stomach.

Thea couldn't remember a time before yesterday when she had felt this giddy because of someone else's touch. As Rae brought her hands up to the actress' hips she pulled the slacks down to land in a puddle at their feet. Thea's hands instinctively moved into Rae's hair.

"Step out angel." The instruction was soft, as Rae placed kisses on the flesh just above the waistband of her panties. Without conscious thought Thea stepped out. Rae twisted one finger in the material at the sides of the last piece of clothing in her way and gently tugged them down lower. Pulling back to look up into green eyes of passion, she tugged them down completely.

Thea took a short intake of breath, as out of impulse her body moved towards Rae's touch.

She stepped out of the scant cotton item without prompting.

"All done." Rae slid herself upwards, dragging her lower lip over Thea's skin as she moved and pushed her body completely against the smaller woman when she was upright again.

"Rae!" She gasped as her body tingled with all her senses on full response.

"Yes angel?" She asked in the raspy voice of want.

"You are very good at that." Thea smirked.

"Thank you." Rae smiled back. "Are you ready to try?"

"Well I was thinking..." She looked at Rae with a provocative grin. "Perhaps I should test the teacher. Can you take your own clothes off, with distraction?"

"I think that's a very good idea." The fully dressed woman grinned back at her. "With distraction." She repeated captivated by the sight before her. "What do I get if I pass this test?" Her eyes never left Thea's body.

"Anything you desire." The actress raised an eyebrow.

"Can I have you?" The question came in a loving voice.

"You have me already." Thea grinned, intrigued that she would make that request first above all the looming possibilities.

"Hummm." Rae murmured, happy to hear the one thing she really wanted was apparently already hers. "Guess that means I can have something else too, if I pass the test."

"If you pass, yes."

"I'm sure I can think of something good to desire." She winked. "Bring on the test."

"Okay so all you have to do is undress but without acting distracted!" Thea put her hands on her hips and grinned in challenge. "I am allowed to do anything I like in an attempt to distract you. Do you agree to the rules?"

"Without acting distracted, what would qualify as distracted?" She wanted to get all the rules straight.

"Interacting with the pupil." Thea chuckled.

"Oh that's a hard rule." Rae bit her lip. "Okay I'm ready. I agree on the rules."

"Good, begin whenever you're ready." She fixed Rae with her green eyes.

"Okay." Rae moved to pull her shirt out of her jeans, holding eyes with Thea. "So far so good." She winked at the eyes locked with hers and worked at undoing her heavy leather belt and slipping it out of the loops of her jeans.

Thea licked her lips sensually and took a little step towards Rae with her eyebrows twitching. Rae kept on smiling despite her breath becoming hard in anticipation of what her pupil planned on doing to distract her. She pulled the shirt up over her head quickly, trying to break their eye contact for the shortest time possible.

"Yes, you're doing well." The instant Rae's body was revealed Thea reached out a hand and danced her finger tips on the woman's stomach. With a sharp intake of air, the technician's eyes opened wide from the electric touch.

"I guess there was no rule about you touching me." She managed to get the words out in a slow hoarse voice.

"None at all." The actress grinned.

"Very sneaky." Rae whispered and moved her hands slowly to the closure at her back as fingers tip toed up her body. Thea let them skip over the thin strap of material between the technician's breasts. Rae groaned as she undid the clasp, closing her eyes she lost herself for a minute in the sensation before remembering the bet. She opened her eyes again and moved to free herself of the bra.

Thea smirked and traced her fingertips up Rae's shoulders, moving one hand to rest on each side she leaned forward and kissed the shallow of the woman's collarbone.

"How am I doing?" Rae asked in a tight voice just as Thea's lips reached her skin and all possible answer was lost. Using every ounce of willpower she could muster, she kept her hand firmly at her sides.

A non-committal sound came in response, as the actress kissed up Rae's neck and then round to the other side to kiss her way back to her starting point. She moved her head away from Rae's body but left her hands.

The struggling technician released the breath she'd been holding and moved to undo the front of her jeans. She knew her only hope was to get out of the rest of her clothes as quickly as possible.

"You are very good at distracting." She growled as the black jeans fell down and she stepped out of them.

"I'm not really trying yet!" Thea replied as she slid her hands down Rae's almost naked body and lowered herself down to her knees.

"Aren't you?" Rae croaked as she watched the actress' movement.

Leaning forward, Thea kissed her belly button before trailing her tongue down to the top of Rae's underwear. At the same time she ran her hands over the back of Rae's thighs. Thea shook her head in answer to the question without breaking the contact of tongue on skin.

"You know..." Rae tried to keep her train of thought under the onslaught of Thea's distraction but lost it just as quick as it had come.

"What?" Thea kissed the technician's stomach again and trailed her hands back up the stammering woman's thighs.

"I can't remember." The technician shivered under the wet kiss and gave the honest answer in a low voice.

"You still have clothes on." Thea prompted with a sly smile as she returned to her tongue trail. This time exploring along the waistband of the last article of clothing.

"So have I won yet?" Rae questioned with a strained moan.

"No, you are still dressed."

"Still dressed in what?" Rae asked honestly. Her skin burned all over and she was sure she was naked by now.

Thea grinned as she moved away from Rae's body and lowered herself to the cold tiled floor looking up at the dark beauty.

"Take a look at yourself and you'll see." She said staring as Rae smiled and looked down, instantly realizing what the last article of clothing was.

"Well that's easy enough." She said with a grin, locking eyes with the green orbs staring back at her. Thea gave an evil grin in reply and moved to rest back on her hands. She raised her left leg and glided it up and then down the technician's. Rae watched the every inch of the motion stunned by the feel of it as her hands stayed useless at her sides.

"Why don't I do that job for you?" She questioned.

"I was hoping you would ask." Rae raised an intrigued eyebrow.

"You will lose the challenge." Thea lowered her leg sensuously down to rest again on the floor.

"Well what is the punishment for losing?" The tall woman asked with a gleam in her eyes.

"I'm not sure. What do you think the punishment should be?" Thea pushed herself forward and stood up nodding.

"The reward was up to me." Rae shifted her weight onto one hip. "I think the punishment is up to you."

"So I get whatever I desire?" Thea questioned again.

"Sounds good to me." Rae agreed softly.

"Okay, so you want me to get you out of those?" Thea raised an eyebrow.

"No!" Having taken the minute of breathing space, Rae found the coordination to pull the last article down and stepped out of it toward Thea in a quick motion. She reached a slow hand to rest on the actress' cheek.

"I win." She whispered and reached with her free hand for one of Thea's. Raising the small hand she put it to her lips and kissed the inside of her wrist softly. Thea shivered before pulling back suddenly and twisting free of Rae's hold.

"Yes." She stated in a distant bland voice. "You won." She turned her back on Rae and looked at the shower.

Slightly shocked by the change, Rae stayed in place and just watched as the actress turned away. She searched the last few moments in her mind trying to figure out exactly when she'd made the wrong move.

"You can name your prize after I have my shower and we get ready. It's a big day." Thea moved to open the glass door.

"Oh." Rae made the small defeated noise without moving. Still not completely sure what she'd done wrong, but knowing that things had gone downhill in a hurry. Thea heard the noise and turned back. Her eyes were drawn to the other woman's blue beauties.

"I'll get you some towels." Rae mumbled with a slight nod.

"Rae I..." Thea reached out her hand towards the retreating technician. Her movement stopped when she felt hot tears sting in her eyes. The rapid beating of her heart and flush in her body did nothing to help her keep in control.

"It's okay Thea, I understand." She tried her best to smile. "It's a very big day."

"No Rae, it's..." She tried to explain but had to let the argument die. She figured it was best to let the original excuse stand. Trying to explain her self could only make things worse.

'How could you be so stupid to push like this? Why the hell did you have to win anyway?' A thousand curses of self-hatred went through Rae's mind. 'It wasn't a real challenge or anything, you idiot!'

"I'll use the main shower." Rae added in a soft tone and bent down to pick up her clothes.

Thea looked at the tall naked beauty she shared the room with and she knew that both of them were hurting. The presence of that hurt in itself made no sense to her.

'Surely we have the right to be happy, don't we?' She questioned herself, knowing the moment of fear had been caused by something that even Thea didn't admit or think about often.

"What?" Thea heard Rae speak and blinked in her direction.

"I'll use the main shower." She repeated slowly, folding the jeans over her arm. "I don't want to crowd you."



"Please, don't go." Thea asked softly reaching her hand out to touch Rae's arm. She knew the other woman would feel her trembling.

"I won't if you want me to stay." Rae looked down at the hand on her arm and then back up into the actress' watery eyes. "Thea, I don't understand. What's wrong?" She asked in a whisper suddenly. "If it's about last night, if there's anything you want to ask me, even now you can." She let the words tumble out.

"Oh Rae, I'm sorry." She stepped forward and pressed herself into Rae's body. She slipped her arms around the taller woman's back.

"Why are you sorry?" She questioned as she let the clothes slip out of her arms and she moved to hold the small woman closer.

"I didn't mean to do that." Thea let herself sob. The tears she had fought freely slipping down her cheeks.

"Didn't mean to do what?" Rae asked the question completely confused though she held the sobbing woman tight.

"I love you and I want you so much." Thea choked on her tears.

"I love you Thea." The confused woman confirmed the one thing she was sure of and kissed her forehead softly. "And I want you too but there is no rush. I never want you to feel rushed."

"You shouldn't." Thea sobbed.

"Why shouldn't I?" Rae asked in a serious tone. "It's you who shouldn't love me Thea. You have no idea of the person I have been."

"And you don't know enough about who I am." Thea replied desperately.

"I don't need to know that to know I love you." Rae said the words with every ounce of her heart.

"Can we just take our shower and forget the last little while?" The actress asked resting her weight against Rae.

"Of course angel." Rae kissed her forehead gently again, convinced that pressing the issue would only push the woman she needed so desperately to run away.

"Rae, I need you to know this has nothing to do with you." Thea held on tighter. "Or anything you told me last night. Never think it has. Okay?"

"Okay." Rae nodded her head. She knew inside that she wasn't completely convinced.

"No love." She looked up at Rae through green tear filled eyes. "Believe me on this. Please." She raised a trembling finger close to the woman's dark red lips. "Please."

"I'll try." Rae answered the best way she could.

"Thank you." Thea pressed her finger to Rae's lips.

"No thanks." Rae kissed the finger at her lips softly. Thea blinked more tears from her eyes but managed a genuine smile. "I love you Theandra."

"Thea." She breathed, closing her eyes. "I want to always be Thea for you."

"My Thea." Rae said the words slowly. "I love you my Thea."

Thea held her breath for the longest moment before letting it go again.

"Shower." She whispered.

"Shower." Rae repeated and kissed her lightly on the forehead. "I don't want to let go of you though." She added the last words in a whisper.

"Then don't." The small blonde held tighter.

"I never will." Rae held her a bit tighter as well.

"Don't." Thea mumbled the word into her shoulder.

"Never ever." The technician bent to kiss her lightly on the mouth, letting her lips linger. Thea's breathing staggered a little as she gave into the want inside her and returned the kiss.

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"I wasn't that good!" Thea tilted her head back, shook her hair out and laughed lightly. She rested her hand on the arm of the tall man who stood beside her and squeezed it gently. "I couldn't have done it alone anyway."

"But it was, it was!" He responded in a serious tone, smiling brightly at her. The actress lifted a glass of champagne from a passing tray and raised it to him

"Without your direction it would have been useless." She swallowed the drink quickly.

"Oh Estell!" Damien blushed and waved his hand in the air. "You are too kind. We all know you are the true star." He blew her a kiss. Thea beamed and blushed gently. "Though I did put my heart and soul into this." He added to a nearby reporter hanging on his every word.

"Where is my wonderful co-star?" Thea questioned taking another champagne. She looked round, her head beginning to buzz as the noise from the party increased. The chorus members were getting drunker and the mood was getting much lighter.

"Right here gorgeous." Michael turned around with a blonde on both arms. Press photographers clicked away, lighting the room with flash after flash. He waved and moved away again, being swallowed by the heaving crowd.

"They suit you." Thea joked, eyeing the blondes with a slight smile.

"The late edition is in!" A loud voice screamed as two people ran through the crowd with stacks of newspapers. They dropped the pile on a table and moved back. Thea snapped her head round and emptied her glass. Putting it down, she joined the rush to the table where they had been placed.

"Okay, okay." Damien picked up the top paper. "Vanity Fair says..." He cleared his throat and read to the now quiet room. "Estell Winters single handily brought the house down from her first moment of dialogue to the last dying note of her voice as the curtain closed."

"They are known for their exaggeration!" She said quietly looking down meekly.

"Ms. Winters, known for her success in several London plays..." Damien read on. "Has definitely found a home here in the frozen north, which is soon going to melt with the hotness of her stage presence." Damien stopped reading and looked at the young actress. "They love you!" He raised his glass to her and the whole room followed suit.

"Oh please." Thea whispered.

"Also of note...." The director continued when the crowd noise died again. "Were the male leads, played by Michael Bordman and Keith Mannering who in this critics opinion took a few lessons from Miss. Winters and held their own with the veteran despite a few miscues. The directing was flawless and once again the touch of Damien Feleash has led too more gold than Lord Midas. A definite ten and a must see for any serious theatre lover, as I'm sure the production is soon on its way south to Broadway with this depth of talent."

"Well done everyone!" Thea exclaimed happily.

"Bravo everyone! Bravo!" Damien smiled as he downed his glass of champagne the weight of his financial backers finally off his back.

"I propose a toast!" She called to the crowd. "To Damien!"

"Oh my!" The director blushed and bowed his head gracefully to her.

"To Damien!" Michael, though upset, added in.

Thea noticed her co-stars slightly downcast face. She placed a hand on his arm and mouthed. "Well done." to him as the gathered crowd took a hardy drink. Thea took another glass and raised it in Michael's direction, which made the novice actor grin.

At that moment Rae entered the loud crowded room trying to remain unnoticed. A couple of electrical problems and lighting changes had kept her away from the party so far. She searched the crowd and smiled when her eyes finally came on the woman that she wanted. She watched Thea laughing as she raised her champagne in toast.

The young actress walked over to Michael and kissed his cheek lightly.

"They always have to say something negative. And I think that was a very good review for the play." She said gently as she reached his side. "Well done." She reached up and kissed his cheek again.

"Thanks." He blushed under the kiss.

"Why don't you come over and look at some of the other broad sheets? 'The Post' is in and 'Stage floor.'"

Feeling every bit the tech monkey, Rae tried to rub the grease from her hands into her jeans. She was surprised when one of the drunken chorus members handed her a glass of champagne without a word.

"I'm sure they're filled with raves about you Estell." He said in a soft voice letting her lead him. The actress did with relative ease, as everyone was treating her with marked respect. She picked up a copy of 'The Post' as Michael continued. "You deserve them though, you were flawless."

"I was not, but I know how to bluff!" Thea laughed gently as she began to flick through the theatre magazine. "You were great too." She added as she found the review's page. "Here we go." She traced down the page with her finger. "Reviews: Tragedy's Dance."

"Would you read it to me?" He whispered leaned in close to her ear.

"If you like." Thea pulled away with a slightly bemused frown.

"I would, please." Michael leaned gently back onto the table. Thea took the paper and tilted it a little to catch all available light. She coughed a little before beginning the review.

"Set to be a big hit, this drama knocked its premier audience for six. The moment the inspired lighting drew all eyes to the centre of the highly ornamental set you knew that this was going to be a show to remember. The lead, Estell Winters, took the audiences collective breath away with her interpretation of writer Tamara Hamans' character Tess. Competently supported by Michael Bordman and Keith Mannering in their roles as lover and husband. The article goes on about the stage management and props and lighting," A smile played on Thea's lips as she spoke the last word. "And then the article ends by saying... the show is initially running for six weeks, but this

is something special and I think it will be a long while before this show leaves the memory. You should read the next one." Thea put the paper back onto the table and turned to Michael.

"Me? Okay." Michael picked up the paper. He flipped through to the middle. "Here it is." Michael prepared himself in a similar fashion to Thea and began reading. "The roof of the Pantages Theatre came down tonight as the opening of Tragedy's Dance left a full house begging for more of the alluring and captivating Estell Winters."

'Is this my forth or my fifth?' Thea thought as she finished the drink and took another from a waiter.

"Miss. Winters, with the help of such outstanding co-stars as Michael Bordman and Keith Mannering and the help of a superb backstage crew took the play to unseen heights of lavishness and tenderness. Get your tickets quick as this six week run is bound to sell out soon."

"No doubt about it..." A very drunk Damien suddenly appeared and leaned over Michael's paper "We are all stars now."

"All thanks to you." Thea mentally noted how she drawled the 's' a little. Perhaps the last champagne had been her fifth after all.

"Thea, would you mind if I tore Michael away for a moment." Damien said with a slur of his own.

"Go ahead." She waved her hand. Damien took the paper from the young actor and took his arm. Thea watched them both walk away and gave another little wave. She was beginning to feel hot and a little light-headed.

"Hey there." Rae came up stealthy behind the actress when she was alone.

"Rae?" She turned her head both ways before catching sight of the other woman.

"The one and only." The technician came around to her right side.

"We're a hit!" The actress hugged Rae impulsively and then stepped back grinning.

"You're a hit." Rae corrected, having heard most of the reviews from her distant spot in the room. "You were wonderful Thea." She added in a soft serious voice. "You deserve every praise."

"Nah, I just did my job as you did yours." Thea pointed at the technician's chest as she spoke. She could tell she was drunker than she had thought as the world moved a little at the edges.

"But your job sinks or floats the show." Rae wore an open grin.

"But if no one can see me I may as well be crap!" Thea laughed loudly at her own statement.

"As long as no one takes the time to say the lights were bad, it's a good show for me." Rae admitted, watching Thea closely.

"No, they loved the lighting." Thea trailed off her statement, as if unsure what she was going to say. Rae smiled at her, noticing the slight sway in her body and erratic motion of her eyes as they tracked over her chest.

"How many of those have you had?" She asked in a low tone, trying not to sound worried.

"Hummm five, I think." She paused. "Maybe six." She frowned comically and then beamed at Rae. "Haven't you got one?"

"Yes I do." Rae held up the almost full glass she'd been holding down at her side. Thea glanced at it and then looked up as if she had suddenly remembered what she was going to say moments before. The actress finished her glass of champagne and looked around for the tray.

"Look, look!" She said as she staggered a little to the table. Her eyes looking for the paper she had read moments before but she couldn't even remember which one it was.

"Careful!" Rae urged as she moved to try and keep Thea steady without looking too obvious. Thea put her hands over Rae's steady ones and looked up at her with a drunken smile.

"Thank you for saving me I could have slipped!" She slurred her words a great deal.

"My pleasure." Rae smiled. The taller woman looked around to see if there was an easy way to leave the party. She saw that most exits were covered by press or by cast and crew but then again she thought with a wry smile, after four cases of champagne she could have carried Thea out over her shoulder and no one, probably not even the reporters would have noticed. Thea seemed to pause for a moment before looking at Rae with a wink.

"You know you are looking very, very sexy." The actress drawled.

"Thea, I'm full of grease and I'm sweaty." Rae shook her head with a laugh and then she decided to say what she had wanted to for a while. "Whenever you're ready..." She started shyly, unsure how or indeed if to ask. "I was wondering if you wanted a drive home?" Thea stopped grinning and looked at Rae with a noticeable frown.

"Leave?" Thea stated. "Rae, it's a parrrrrrty. Why would I want to leave?"

"I know." Rae added quickly, not wanting to aggravate her. "I didn't mean right away I meant whenever your ready I'd give you a ride."

"A ride?" Thea laughed grinning madly. "You're good at that!" She laughed louder still. A waitress carried a tray of champagne came close enough for the actress to take one.

"Thea, keep your voice down." Rae hissed whilst glancing up at a nearby reporter. "Mixed company has big ears." She warned gently and nodded discretely in the direction to the young reporter. Thea followed Rae's eyes and grinned at the reporter with a twinkle in her eye.

"She is!" Thea called to the reporter with a grin.

"Thea!" Rae's voice was a little sharper, and her eyes were narrowing. The reporter watched the interaction and made her way over smiling.

"And you are?" The reporter questioned her pen ready in her hand. Thea grinned and stepped forward placing her hand on the reporter's arm.

"I'm her driver." The technician jumped in without missing a beat.

"I can tell you who she is." Thea's voice was thick with cheek and charm but soon went quieter. "Who she really is." Rae rolled her eyes as Thea finished her latest champagne and set the glass down.

"And who would that be?" The reporter asked very curious. She'd known that hanging late into the night would get her a big scoop.

"The best person in the world to play with your lights!" Thea laughed loudly and hugged the reporter impulsively.

"I'm her driver." Rae repeated in a low tone at the confused reporter on Thea's arm.

"Oh yeah, she can drive too!" Thea laughed again.

"So are you saying you're romantically involved with your driver Miss. Winters?" The reporter tried to read as much into the exchange as she could.

"Am I?" Thea stopped laughing and frowned, she blinked trying to clear her head a bit. It didn't work.

"Well you seemed to be suggesting that to me." The reporter pushed for further details.

"No, I don't think I am." Thea shook her head. "I'm not having sex with a driver of any kind." Thea shocked herself when the word sex left her mouth and it caused her to blush furiously.

"Then who is your current love interest?" The reporter pushed on. "It's okay to tell me, if not the driver then who?" The reporter knew enough to know that this play was going to be a hit, and so any story about its lead would be a good one

"Love interest?" Thea tried to calm herself, aware that possibly this was getting a little out of hand. "I'm an actress love, do you think I have time for such distractions?"

"Everyone has time for distractions." The reporter quickly grabbed a glass of champagne from a passing waiter and handed it to the actress.

"Thank you." Thea's hand wavered slightly as she took it.

Rae had let the exchange go on before her, not realising she'd been backing away from the two women until the firm wood of the buffet table smacked into the back of her thighs.

"If you are trying to get me to give you an interview you could just ask." Thea looked at the young reporter with a lop-sided smile.

"I would die for an interview with you." The young reporter put the charm on thick. "Toronto knows so little about you and New York is going to be dying to know everything by tomorrow afternoon."

Thea grinned and slipped her arm through the reporter's again unable to resist such a line.

"Come on then, we are wasting time." Thea led her away. "I'll just tell my friend I will be awhile..." She stopped and turned around looking for Rae, not able to see her she turned her full attention back to the reporter.

'I'll catch up with Rae later.' She thought as guided the reporter over to the couch with a false smile.

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Rae watched the two for a moment more. In an instant decision, she used every inch of her long legs to guide herself at a blinding speed out of the room. The revelry around her didn't even stop to notice as she smacked the emergency door open and went out into the alley beside the theatre.

As the safety door closed with a solid thud behind her, she took a deep breath of the cool night air.

"Go home you idiot." She chastised herself in a loud angry voice when she realised she was standing motionless looking back at the door. "She didn't even notice." Turning she drove her hands down into her pockets, happy to find the jeep key there.

"Not staying for the rest of the party O'Keefe?"

"What?" She turned around trying to find the voice in the dark. Standing at the theatre door was Sylvia.

"Going already?" Sylvia repeated, stepping down into the path of the street light.

"Yeah." She nodded finally seeing the blonde in the small light on the back door. "Not my scene."



"But why?" She asked as she came to rest directly in the beam of light. "Miss. Winters is still busy. Very busy, especially with that pretty young reporter, at least she was a minute ago."

"I imagine she is." Rae remarked annoyed. "She is the star! They are often quite busy after opening night."

"You may be best leaving after all, with a bit of pride intact as it were!" Sylvia's acidic voice was obvious as she continued on as if Rae hadn't spoke at all.

"Don't worry about my pride." Rae stayed firmly in place with her voice even and unfeeling.

"If you say not to." Sylvia turned. "But you're right I suppose." She paused walking to the door. "She is the star, you should expect such things." She stopped by the door, turning and fixing Rae with her steely gaze again. "After all, you're just a monkey, a bit of rough I guess. Such things never last." With a flourish Sylvia opened the door and slipped back inside, pleased with herself.

Silently Rae opened the jeep door and slipped inside. She pulled the vehicle out of the lot in a quick arc and raced onto the street.

"Just a monkey!" She cursed to herself as she left the driveway. Tossing the unfolded blanket that Thea had used the morning before behind her into the back seat. "Just a monkey." She said again as she sped through the empty city streets.

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Sylvia hung back sipping champagne and watching the exchange between Thea and the young reporter. She waited until the two of them were near the end of all possible conversation before she approached.

"Is that okay as an exclusive?" Thea asked with a bright smile. She was feeling a lot more under control thanks to the position they had taken by the window and the stiff cold breeze coming in through it.

"That is brilliant." The reporter smiled and closed her notebook.

"Well you know where I am if you need anything padded."

"You've made my career!" The reporter nodded again. "It's going to be a huge article and I'll push the editor for pictures."

Thea offered her hand to the reporter who took it and shook it happily.

"I'll let you get back to the party." She smiled and wandered off.

"Take care won't you." Thea said warmly as she watched her walk away.

"Wasn't she the reporter from the post?" Sylvia slid herself into the empty spot next to Thea. The actress turned, slightly surprised to see chorus member beside her.

"Yes, she was." Thea replied distracted, looking around for Rae.

"You had her ear forever." Sylvia took a thick sip of her drink. "Everyone else has been feeling quite ignored."

"She had the crazy idea that people would be interested in finding about who I really am." Thea stressed the term. Sylvia did not comment on this but instead worked on her own plan.

"I think most of your suitors have gone looking elsewhere in your absence." She purred.

"Meaning?" Thea's eyes hardened.

"Well you know how everyone pairs off at these things." Sylvia smiled at her sweetly. "Then they try to forget it in the morning."

"What are you getting at?" Thea stood up and looked down at the would be actress.

"I'm not getting at anything Estell." Sylvia gave her a look of mock shock. "I was just making conversation and giving you a little friendly advice to pick your mark before it's too late." She added with a smirk. "Cause you might find her already engaged." She laughed into her champagne, looking up at Thea.

"Sylvia, I am not interested in your petty taunts or your childish rumours!" The actress retaliated. "Grow up or get out!" Thea spun on her heel and marched in the direction of her dressing room.

"Ooooo." Sylvia widened her eyes at the retreating actress, before glancing around the room to find her next victim.

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Thea stormed out of the large room and down the corridor towards the dressing rooms. As she passed, she glanced out of the large windows that broke up the monotonous corridor. Seeing the night sky she suddenly felt the need to get some air and changed direction to head towards the parking lot.

The young actress opened the large wooden door that led to the back car park. She took a deep breath of cold Canadian air and glanced up to look at the various parked cars. Taking a few steps, she studied the sea of metal. It was then that the horror set in as she noticed that Rae's parking spot was empty. For a second, she just stared at the empty spot before she turned back to the door.

"Oh my God." She breathed, her mind whirring as she reached back a hand for the door.

"I'll get us some more champagne." Michael slurred as he pulled himself clumsily out of the large limousine. "Be back in a moment. Don't do anything without me!" The giggling inside was loud and only cut off when he closed the door. "Estell?" He questioned as he turned around to the doorway and saw the small woman standing near it.

The actress blinked the tears from her eyes, as she looked up surprised to find the rather drunk and dishevelled Michael. Tactfully, she turned away as her co-star mumbled and tried to fix his crumbled open shirt and stopped to do up his fly.

"Michael." Thea stated sombrely.

"What's wrong Estell?" He asked as his mind cleared a little. "What's happened? We're a hit." He walked closer to her. "What happened?"

"I... I thought I was getting a lift from someone but they appear to have left with someone else." Thea blinked several times before answering.

Michael placed a hand on the wall to keep his balance and looked at the young star. Even in his drunken state it hurt him to see her upset.

"Who? Estell, who would dare to leave you without a ride?" He asked in a slurred voice. He studied her closely trying to determine an answer to his question. "I know I'm drunk but who could be drunk enough to forget to give you a ride?" He questioned. "I can give you a lift if you need one." He glanced back at the limo and rethought his offer. "We can take a taxi."

"No, thank you." Thea gave him a weak smile. The last thing she wanted to do right now was share a taxi with a very drunk highly testosterone charged co-star. "You are having fun."

"Yeah..." He answered somewhat nervously. "I'm having fun you could say." He unconsciously glanced back to the limo. "Damien and I were interviewing some new girls for the chorus..." His voice trailed off, a little ashamed by the truth.

"I am sure that it was an impulse thing." Thea tried to make him feel better. "Michael, it's okay I now what happens after first night. Why do you think there is no show the next day? I suppose like you, my lift got a better offer."

"But look at you." Michael mumbled in a daze without any real coherent thought. "You look almost as upset as that tech monkey did when she drove off awhile ago. It's not right." He paused as his mind registered her last words. "A better offer? I doubt that."

For a second Thea's world became clearer again, as a glimmer of hope sparked in her mind.

"Michael?" She spoke slowly. "What did you say?"

"Better offer?" He looked at her puzzled.

"Not that bit Michael, what did you say before then?"

"I said the only person who looked like she was having a worse time than you was that techie who stormed out the emergency door earlier and drove off like a bat out of hell." He restated his observation.

"Oh right." Thea's voice was small as her mind worked over time again. Michael looked at his 'ideal' woman and hiccupped.

"She and Sylvia talked and she was really pissed after that." He added absently. Thea smiled and nodded thoughtfully. "I think she'll be the only one going home alone after the opening night."

Thea tried to stop the broad yet sad smile spreading across her face as Michael's words reached her mind. She looked at the limousine and then back at Michael.

"I think you should get back to your girls." Thea motioned with her head. "Or whatever you were doing."

"Oh right." He smiled. "Need more champagne." With a nod he moved passed Thea, opened the door and staggered inside. She watched him, waited for a moment looking at Rae's empty spot, before slipping back inside and going straight to her dressing room.

Once there she rummaged around the objects on her dresser and found what she was looking for. She carefully unfolded the scrap of paper and punched the number it held into the telephone. Holding the receiver to her ear loosely Thea waited for an answer.

"Hi, if you know this number, you know who you're looking for, leave a message." The very sound of Rae's voice on the answer phone made a lump come to Thea's throat and a tear to her eye.

"Rae..." She hesitated. "I don't know where you are but love..." She swallowed hard. "I'm sorry." Thea stopped and continued in a more controlled tone. "Tomorrow is a free day. Ring me, please. I'm sorry."

With tears streaking down her face, she put down the phone.

"Well messed up Thea." She hissed and rested her head on her hands and sobbed. She let the tears flow for a while before letting her eyes close and allowing the darkness of sleep to descend over her.

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Rae forcefully punched the disarm code into the alarm system just as the echo of the last telephone ring left the house.

"Hi Mac!" She tossed the uneaten burger she'd stopped to pick up on impulse down on the ceramic tile for the dog. "You've never eaten so good girl."

She pulled off her boots and while still in the hallway pulled off her greasy jeans and socks. She tossed them on the landing to the upstairs.

"Anything important happen today Mac?" She asked the dog absently as she always did. She stopped for a minute to read the note left by her cleaning lady. The poor woman had been in quite the quandary as to what to do with the mess they'd left downstairs.

"Found these on the floor of the bathroom." It said in her familiar scrawl. "Not sure where to put them, Miss. Cassie."

Rae looked at Thea's clothes washed, ironed and hung perfectly on two wooden hangers.

"I'll have to drop those off at the theatre." She mumbled to herself as the fleeting hope she'd once had of clearing out a place for Thea's clothes in the closet and dresser ran from her head. She grabbed a can of soda from the fridge and walked to her office at the back of the house.

She turned on the computer, knowing it had been ages since she'd checked her mail. She leaned back into her soft leather office chair. Only then remembering that she'd heard the phone ring as she was coming in which probably meant there was a message for her. Picking up the phone she punched the autodial to the internal answering machine.

"You have three new messages." The automated voice greeted her as it always did.

'Busy night.' Rae thought to herself as she pushed the retrieval code.

"First new message." The automated voice droned at her.

"Hello Cassie... it's your father. I know it'll be days before you get this but I wanted to let you know I won't be able to use those tickets you got me. Susan and I have dart league that night and we just can't miss it. Let me know if I should send them back or give them away. Sorry princess... you know how it is... besides the theatre is sorta lost on a guy like me... you know?" The older man's gruff voice wavered a little. "Well then I'd better go before I get cut off... talk to you soon honey... give me a call...."

A long pause filled with a static sound almost muffled the last words.

"Love you princess."

"Love you too Dad." Rae spoke the words to herself without thinking. She pulled the receiver away from her ear long enough to erase the message and retrieve the next one.

"Second new message."

"Raven, it's Cleo." A woman's low sultry voice broke through. "Why don't you have your cell on? You know how I hate machines. Anyway, I'm on the Lear jet over ... fuck knows where I am." A laugh could be heard briefly. "But I'm on my way into T.O. so we have to get together. I get in really early so let's do a late lunch." The voice continued almost ordering. "Meet me at the office, there are some papers I need you to sign then we can decide where to eat." The woman stopped for a moment in contemplation. "It's been awhile Raven. Please tell me you've had enough space by now. I got the dailies faxed to me, congrats on the shows opening. I've got tickets for Friday's gala." The voice dropped to a softer pitch. "I miss you." The line clicked off.

Rae pulled the phone back and looked at it blankly. She pushed the button and replayed the message again to make sure she'd heard it right. She put her head down to rest on the hard top of the desk.

"First dad then Cleo." She spoke to herself in a daze. "This is turning out to be a fabulous fucking night."

Without looking she erased the message.

"Third saved message." The machine's voice came in a soft hum out of the phone as it automatically went to the last message.

"Rae?"

Hearing Thea's voice made her scramble to get the receiver to her ear as she listened to the message carefully. The "I'm sorry." caught her off guard. With great care she hit the save button on the machine and hung up the phone.

'Call her!' A happy voice went through her head again and again, though for some reason she hesitated. Taking a deep breath she went through the papers on her desk to find the note that she'd written the hotel number on. Finding it with relative ease, Rae punched the number in quickly.

"Royal York hotel, how can I help you?" A sleepy voice came on the line.

"Can I have room 621?" Rae said nervously. There was a click and Rae listened to it ring several times and then with a second click the receptionist was back.

"I'm sorry the occupant of room 621 isn't answering." The voice asked a bit more awake. "Could I take a message for you?"

"Just tell her Raven called." Rae stated simply and hung up. "Oh you idiot." She cursed herself as she punched the message recall number back into the phone, hitting the codes to play Thea's message again she hit the key for the timestamp function.

"This call came in at 2:24 A.M." The automated voice informed her.

"She just called." Rae cursed herself again for not rushing to the phone, turning over the receiver she scrolled through the call display list. "She called from the theatre you moron." Rae said to herself with a little laugh. Hitting the speed dial to the theatre she hoped that someone would be sober enough to answer.

"Hezzzzzzzo!" Came a very drunken reply after a long number of rings.

"Hello." Rae kept her voice loud and clear. "Transfer me to the line in Thea's room."

"Zea?" The drunk replied confused. "Who? Zorry we have no Zea's here." Rae sighed heavily.

"Estell Winters." She spoke even louder. "Transfer me to her room."

"Ah." The voice seemed to suddenly clear. "Hold on."

"Don't cut me off." Rae added absently as a muffled curse and a series of clicks from the other end of the phone. "Just hit transfer 1000."

"Zorry." The drunken person hiccupped loudly. "Okay, here you go." Suddenly the phone began to ring again.

"Hello?" Thea sleepily answered.

"Thea?" Rae asked for confirmation that she'd been transferred to the right room.

"Rae!" All trace of sleepiness was gone instantly.

"Yeah it's me." She replied leaning back in the leather chair. "Did I wake you up?" She recognised the momentary sleepy tone.

"No, well yes." Thea's voice was light, though the actress was feeling rather sick from so much alcohol. Her feelings of fear and anxiety were catching up on her fast.

"I can let you go if you want to sleep, sorry." Rae looked to Mac who had trotted into the room. She started to wonder if calling had been such a good idea.

"Rae no, please." Thea rushed to answer.

"All right." She confirmed softly, not really sure how to start this conversation between them. It had been such a whirlwind day, with so many highs and low.

"Are you all right Rae?" The actress asked desperately, though trying to keep the edge from her voice.

"Yeah." She stated calmly. "I'm just not one for big loud parties."

"I know I was a fool Rae." Thea massaged her head lightly. "Please don't be nice and pretend it was the party you wanted to get away from."

"I didn't want to crowd you." She sighed. "It was your moment and all."

"IT WASN'T!" Thea objected violently. "It was about success, it was about all of us!"

"It wasn't about everyone Thea." The technician said honestly. "It was 90% about you and 20% about the other leads and the director. Trust me the lighting and sound is only mentioned if it sucks."

"That makes 110% love." Thea tried humour.

"Yeah well then scrap half of the percentage for the others, that's only them thinking it was about them and not you."

"Rae?" She swallowed hard.

"Yes?" Rae replied closing her eyes and leaning back further in the chair unable to get comfortable.

"I love you, I am so very sorry." Thea's voice was full of remorse.

"Thea, what are you sorry for?" She questioned in a small voice doubting that the actress had even remembered what she'd said and done.

"For what I said." Thea whispered.

"I don't like to be pulled into the worlds attention Thea." The technician's tone was sad, though she tried to take all the malice out of her words but needing the point to be made. "Especially not when it's the champagne and not you talking."

"Rae, I know, I know. " She could feel that lump come back to her throat as her struggle for control began. "I don't know how else to say I am sorry Rae. I..." She tried to fight the tears, but they suddenly won.

"It's okay Thea, it's over now." Rae began just before she heard the tears start on the other end. "Thea... Thea..." She pleaded in a soft voice. "It's okay, it's okay."

Thea sobbed bitterly the phone hanging limply in her hand as Rae continued.

"I know you didn't mean to hurt me. I know it wasn't on purpose. THEA?" Rae questioned as she heard the distance come on the phone. "Thea, it's okay angel." She pleaded to the open line. "I love you!" She wanted to whisper the words but knew it would never be heard that way so she spoke them in a loud voice. "Thea, I love you." She tried again. "Please pick the phone back up."



Suddenly the door opened to Thea's room and in an impulse Thea dropped the receiver into its place back in its rest.

"Thea, please pick up the phone." Rae could feel herself starting to panic just as the click and dial tone was almost deafening to her as she sat looking at the phone in shock.

Thea brushed at the tears in her eyes before looking up at the door. One of the theatre cleaners stood looking at the young actress.

"Just checking the rooms, which I can clean." She explained apologetically.

"I shouldn't be long..." Thea stammered and nodded.

"I'll come back then." The cleaner nodded and closed the door.

Thea was still watching the door as the phone next to her rang again. She looked at it blankly and listened to it ring and ring, and ring. She reached out trembling hand to the receiver as it kept ringing.

"Pick up Thea, pick up." Rae shouted to the empty office around her. Mac sat looking at her confused in the corner. "Pick up Thea." She let the phone hit and pass the twentieth ring.

"I'm sorry Rae, I can't." Thea whispered to the phone as she fled the room once again in tears. The cleaner, who had reached three doors down, turned and watched the actress leave with a slight shrug as she retraced her steps to the actress' room. She picked up the ringing phone.

"Hello?" She inquired only to be greeted with a dial tone. With a second shrug the older woman shuffled out of the room to continue her job elsewhere.

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A stream of inaudible curses left the technician's lips as she threw the phone at the nearest wall and watched it smash into a hundred pieces. Mac scampered out of the room afraid, whining in a low howl.

"I'm done Mac!" Her tone was sad as she walked towards the stairs. "I can't do this tonight. A hot shower is what I need." She made the order to herself and walked up the stairs.

Without thought she walked into the shower in the master bedroom. With the first step onto the cold marble of the bathroom floor, the memories of the morning slapped her hard against the face. Even with the awkwardness and distance that had come between them at one point, the memory reminded her heart of a better time.

"Get a grip O'Keefe." She turned out of the room trying to drive the visions of Thea's naked form out of her head and went instead to the shower in the other bathroom.

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Thea looked down at herself and at the stars above her busy head. She cursed gently and then breathed hard. In a sudden sure decision, she walked back in to the theatre's reception area. She made a brief call for a taxi and rushed back to her dressing room to grab the coat she'd worn in that afternoon. A pain ran through her heart as her hand touched the soft felt of Rae's jacket. Trying to keep her emotions in check she ran back outside to wait for the cab.

It was as Thea closed the theatre door behind herself that the rain started. It came heavy and fast. She considered going back inside to wait, but she didn't want to risk missing the cab and the rain made her feel a little better. Lifting her head gently, she let the cold water splash onto her face chilling her deeply. As the rain fell down onto her cheeks and into her eyes, the yellow car pulled up slow and honked its horn.

"Looks like we're in for one hell of a storm." The elderly cab driver commented looking at the actress as she got into the car.

"Yes." Thea said simply.

"Where can I take you young lady?" He asked giving her a warm smile as he turned the windshield wipers up another notch. Thea leaned forward and whispered her destination gently to him before sitting back and closing her eyes against the motion of the car. She tried to think of anything other than the movement in her body and in her head. She felt sicker by the second.

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Thea turned up the collar on the jacket and shivered as the rain began to drench her once more. She reached into her pocket and handed the driver his fee and watched as he quickly pulled away. She turned from the road and made the short walk up the path to the door. With a controlled breath and a silent prayer, she stood directly in front of it. Images of the last time she had been here flooded her: the gentle warnings about the dog, the surprise at the size of the house and the instant feelings of warmth and belonging.

It felt so different right now, and yet just the same. Thea took a second deep breath before she pressed the doorbell once with a trembling finger.

It was the shake as Mac lunged off the bed that woke Rae up more than the door chimes sounding off. She undid herself from the tangled sheets and ran a hand through her still wet hair as she went downstairs. A gentle curse escaped her as she realised she'd forgotten a robe. She pulled the T-shirt she was wearing down hoping it would do for whoever was at the door.

"Probably a courier." She thought to herself as she punched the alarm off. Rubbing the sleep from her eyes she parted one rib of the blinds to look out.

Outside Thea shivered again and fought a sneeze. The wind was picking up and was chilling her to the core.

'What are you doing here? Why on earth would Rae want to see you after all you said?' She questioned herself as she looked up at the door and then to her feet again. The move let the rain drip from her hair onto her canvass shoes.

Rae couldn't believe her eyes when she looked through the glass and saw the small drenched actress. The sight of her shaking and sneezing on the doorstep nearly broke the technician's heart. With unsure hands she undid the bolt on the door and pulled it open.

"Thea." She said the woman's name not knowing what else to say. Mac, having heard the door open, had joined her mistress there. Seeing the outline of her new friend and smelling the now familiar scent of the young English woman, the dog pushed past Rae's legs and snuggled up to the small actress' damp leg.

Automatically Thea's hand went to the dog's head and patted it. She slowly turned her head up to look at Rae. Tears filled the young actress' eyes as she met Rae's blue stare.

"Come in before you catch a chill." The technician mumbled when she found her voice.

"Are you sure?"

"Come in." Rae nodded and reached out her hand. "Please." She added the last part in a soft voice.

Thea reached out a drenched hand and took hold of Rae's. The older woman was instantly shocked at how cold the pale hand in her own was. She pulled on it lightly.

"You're freezing." Rae remarked her voice filled with concern. Thea just let herself be led inside and Rae closed the door to the cold outside air. "Come into the living room there's a blanket in there." She led the younger woman through the hall into the lounge. Leading her straight over to the large couch that faced out to the backyard and ravine beyond. Thea sat down without speaking.

"This should help." The technician moved to take a blanket from the cupboard nearby. She brought it over and placed it around Thea's shoulders and sat down beside her.

"Thank you." Thea whispered unable to think of anything else to say.

"Do you want a tea or something?" Rae asked scared by the woman's paleness and lack of temperature.

"Maybe." Thea closed her eyes momentarily. The car journey had made her sickness return and she was feeling less and less in control as the seconds sped by. She felt her vision begin to blur as a strange numbness crawled into the edge of her brain. "Rae, I think..." She managed to whisper as the darkness pressed harder.

"What's wrong love?" Rae forgot all the awkwardness and question between them and moved close. The actress looked up at her somewhat blindly. The last thing she registered was two concerned blue eyes looking at her, before the black claimed her.

"Thea?" Rae watched as the pupils of the actress' eyes dilated fully before she went limp and fell forward against her. "Oh shit!" She cursed under her breath petrified as she moved the unconscious woman down to lie on the couch. She put Thea's feet up on the armrest, before turning her gently on her side. Rae knew that the alcohol might be the cause of this but wasn't entirely sure that this was the root cause. Her normally calm and calculated mind seized as she looked down at the pale, soaked frozen form of her lover. 'Come on, come on!' She called in her own mind trying to will it to work again.

"Thea? Thea?" She rubbed the younger woman's pale cheek softly, searching for any sign of life in her. "Thea, please wake up!" Her voice was more panicked than controlled.

In her darkness Thea could hear her lover's voice calling to her. She fought to focus her mind against the violent spinning of her head and stomach. Unsure whether or not she could speak

"Rae." With enormous effort she forced her eyes open.

"I'm right here Thea." The technician moved to hold the actress' hand and kept stroking her cheek.

"Rae I'm s..." She had every intention of apologising before she lost her voice. The nausea began to fight back overwhelmingly hard and she lurched forward a little clutching at her stomach. Rae moved back a little and to the side, shifting her hand from Thea's cheek to the woman's back

"It's okay love, its just carpet." Rae smiled softly. Thea took a shallow breath before emptying the pitiful contents of her stomach onto the living room floor. "There you go." She continued to gently rub Thea's back lightly.

Thea retched violently for a while, trying to control her breathing. She hugged her stomach tightly.

"Do you want some water?" Rae asked in a soft voice when a reprieve came. Thea nodded weakly, unable to find her voice. "Coming right up." She dashed into the kitchen and grabbed a bottle of water, a bucket from under the sink and wet a cloth.

"Here we go." She laughed to herself as she put the bucket upside down over the ruined area of carpet and untwisted the cap from the bottle of water. She placed the edge of the bottle to Thea's lips. "Get some of this down." She added softly. "Even if it comes back up again it's better than dry heaving."

"Thank you." The actress whispered taking a few sips and felling it soothe her aggravated throat.

Rae smiled as she moved her free hand she brushed Thea's dripping hair off her face and wiped her cheeks with the damp cloth.

"No need angel." She wiped around the rest of Thea's face. She dropped the cloth on top of the bucket and sat back a little.

"This isn't how I planned this." Thea stated rather lamely.

"I know." Rae's voice was gentle. "But I'm glad you weren't alone for this."

"So am I." Thea admitted, as she scrunched herself up a little in a ball and started to tremble. It was always the same when she was ill. Being cold and wet just made the situation worse.

"We have to get you out of those wet clothes angel." Rae's tone was soft and commanding. "Do you think you feel good enough for me to carry you upstairs?"

"I should walk." Thea stretched out her body a little and made a move to swing her legs onto the floor.

"Are you sure?" Rae asked concerned. "I don't want you getting dizzy again and have you fall over."

"I think it'll be all right." She tried to give her a brave smile. "I might wobble a little."

"Okay, if you're sure." Rae smiled back. "But I'm right here if you need me."

Somewhat gingerly the young actress placed her feet on the carpet and eased herself off the couch. She swayed gently when she got herself upright. Rae mirrored her movements, ready to support her. Mac watched from her place near the large window.

"Made it to my feet." Thea laughed lightly. Rae nodded in agreement and encouragement. "I am so sorry about the carpet." Her words were almost as hesitant as her footsteps towards the door.

"No worries." Rae shook her head and smiled. "I will just have to give my cleaning woman a great tip." She carefully watched her beloved's progress while coming up slowly behind her. The technician turned and patted her leg gently. Mac responded instantly by getting up and coming to her mistress' side, as Thea made it out of the lounge to the hall. Rae pointed for Mac to go into the kitchen to bed. Without hesitation the large dog followed the order.

"I think that I should have eaten more. " Thea commented as she reached the bottom step.

"Always a good idea if you are going to demolish a few bottles of top quality champagne." Rae agreed light-heartedly as she gently placed a hand on Thea's back. The actress placed her foot on the first step, Rae felt a slight sway in the slim body she supported and added a little strength to her hand. "But there's no point worrying about that now." She added softly trying not to sound

judgmental. After all, she had been here more than once. Though usually it was after a bottle of Jack and a few tequila shooters.

Thea placed her hands on both walls and stopped while her head spun. She breathed deeply fearing silently that she would be sick again. Rae leaned forward instantly attentive.

"I... I..." Thea stammered

"It's okay angel." Rae moved up closer to hold her tightly, trying to take as much weight off Thea's shaking legs as she could.

"I don't think the stairs and I are going to get along." Thea whispered honestly, closing her eyes as the world shifted in her vision.

"I've got you." Rae moved her arms to encompass the smaller woman completely. "Here." She encouraged as she moved one of Thea's hands up to her neck. "Why don't you just hang on, and I'll carry you up."

"Would you mind?" Thea asked gratefully.

"Of course not, I'll take it really slow." Rae's voice was low and caring. "Just hold on as best you can." She instructed in a soft loving tone. Thea complied willingly as Rae slipped one arm around the actress' waist and with the other arm reached under her knees. Slowly, trying not to jostle her, she gathered the woman into her arms off the ground. "How's that?" She asked in a quiet voice.

"Good." Thea replied, resting her head against Rae's chest.

"Ready for the stairs?" Rae's voice was still quiet and Thea merely nodded. "Here we go." Rae added softly as she took the first step and then the rest at a slow steady pace. Rae carefully tensed her legs, trying to absorb all the motion whilst keeping her charge as still as possible. She was rewarded with Thea relaxing into her arms.

Rae continued through the house, all the way to the master bedroom without even thinking. With her foot she pushed open the door and carried Thea straight over to the bed. Softly she released the slight body onto the mattress, sliding her arms out when Thea was safely down.

"Now we have to get you out of those wet things." She stepped back to allow Thea the space to remove her wet clothes. The actress nodded and reached for her blouse buttons. Her fingers trembled and her teeth chattered.

"I'll get you some dry things." Rae retreated to the wardrobe without taking her eyes off Thea for a moment. She watched as the actress fumbled eventually unfastening the lowest button. "Angel, do you want me to do that?" She offered helpfully. "No funny stuff I promise." She added as she remembered the morning's episode. With a grateful smile Thea let her hands fall back as her lover moved forward to continue the job.

Rae quickly unfastened the shirt and slipped it from Thea's shoulders, then she eased the rest of the clothes off her small body. She wasn't at all happy with Thea's body temperature and the woman was truly soaked to the bone. Wrapping the bed sheet around Thea's trembling body, Rae hurried to the drawers and grabbed a fleece top and pants. She slipped the top over Thea's head and helped her put her arms in the right place.

"How's that?" Rae asked as Thea managed to pull on the pants and then crawl beneath the duvet.

"Good." She admitted with a small shiver. Rae watched her with a slight frown, concerned that she might be getting a chill.

"How's the stomach?" The technician asked concerned.

"Not good." Thea admitted.

"Can I get you anything? Tea?" Rae tried to think of anything that might help. "More water or something to eat."

"You?" Thea suggested with a little smile.

"Oh." Rae couldn't stop the small noise that escaped her lips. "I wasn't sure you would want me anywhere near." She added honestly in a very quiet voice.

"Love, I don't beg well. I am cold and don't think I will ever thaw out! I feel terrible and I need your strength, I need your warmth." Thea looked up at Rae with watery tired eyes and paused. "I need your love."

Rae hesitated, her heart not able to truly believe Thea words.

"Yesterday I met this wonderful woman who made me feel the most incredible things. Tonight thanks to my thoughtless words I nearly lost her. Now I am laid in her bed, having just ruined her carpet and I cannot believe my luck." She stopped and looked at Rae giving her the brightest smile she could manage. "Make my dream complete and join me, please."

Rae listened speechless.

"I'm not asking for anything other than to be held." The actress stressed her intentions, not wanting Rae to feel pressured in any way.

"I love you." Rae's words came almost silently.

"As I do you." She admitted, blinking as she looked at her lover and her lips trembled as she verged on tears.

"Nothing would please me more than to hold you." Rae climbed into bed beside the shivering actress. Carefully she wrapped her arms around her. Thea curled into Rae's body and let out a shuddering breath. "I thought I had lost you too." She whispered ever so softly.

"I'm sorry Rae." Thea whispered as she closed her eyes

"So am I angel." Rae kissed the wet red-blonde hair gently. "So am I."

"Forgive me?" Thea opened her eyes and looked up at Rae.

"If you will forgive me." She met the actress' gaze. "I shouldn't have bolted, it's an old habit."

Thea turned and raised her cold hand to place it on Rae's cheek. She kissed the dark haired woman's lips softly.

"There is not a thing in the world you could do that I would not forgive you for." She moved her head back before the technician moved to kiss her briefly in return.

"I missed you." Rae held her a bit tighter.

"I missed you too." Thea agreed, turning back sideways and closing her eyes. She breathed in deeply and her mind stilled as her senses registered the smell they had already labeled 'Rae'. "So much."

Rae kissed into Thea's wet hair once more and briefly closed her own eyes before opening them and looking at the window, hearing the distant rumble of thunder.

"Before I fall asleep." A small voice added as the sky went momentarily quiet.

"Yes love." Rae asked.

"Promise me something." The actress kept her eyes closed and her body nestled against the tall woman.

"Anything." Rae answered openly, holding her and looking up as a flash of lighting filled the night sky.

"Promise me that tomorrow we will not spend a moment apart." She made her request known quietly.

"Of course angel." Rae dropped another kiss on a now slightly warmer forehead. "I wouldn't want it any other way." She admitted honestly.

'You can wait Cleo.' The technician thought to herself. 'For once in your life, you can wait.'

"Watch over me until I fall asleep." Thea asked, her voice young and wanting.



"I will my angel." Rae promised, holding her close. She smiled as she felt Thea snuggle in closer, and listened as her breathing became more even and measured. "Until you sleep and forever more." Rae added when she knew the woman in her arms was asleep. "I love you." She added as another rumble of thunder echoed across the sky. Content to watch over her lover until the morning dawn broke through the storm and would bring with it the freshness of a new morning.

Continued in Act V...

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### The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

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## ~ After the Curtain Falls ~

by Beth Dragon & Kathleen Wolf

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**Feedback:** All comments are greatly appreciated and can be sent to: [kathandbeth@hotmail.com](mailto:kathandbeth@hotmail.com)

**Thanks:** To Emma, for her never ending love, support and chocolate. To the Ex-Guards Village for all their feedback and expert advice.

### Act V

The sound of keys in the front door broke Rae from her happy slumber.

"Margaretta!" The word broke into her mind sharply and she gently pulled herself out of Thea's arms. It was a reluctant move, but she didn't want to Thea to be startled by the cleaning woman walking in on them. She quickly tossed on a pair of shorts she raced downstairs.

"Margaretta?" She met the older woman in the hallway.

"Miss. Cassie." Looking up from her cleaning the woman smiled brightly.

"Good morning." Rae tried to wake herself up completely. "You're early today."

"Early birds get a free day Miss. Cassie."

"I need to ask a favor." Rae remembered the mess in the living room. "There was a bit of an accident in the living room."

"An accident?"

"My girlfriend has a flu or something." Rae used the term without thinking. She knew Margaretta was more than aware of her preference for women but to use the term for Thea almost stopped her in her tracks.

"Girlfriend?" A happy smile crossed the woman's face. "When, when?"

"Only a few days." Rae smiled at her enthusiasm.

"The owner of the clothes?" She asked glowing with happiness for her young employer.

"Yes, the owner of the clothes." Rae nodded.

"I could get her something." The woman's long set mothering instinct kicked in immediately.

"Oh no." Rae tried to cover, knowing Margaretta would go overboard if she didn't. "Just something she ate at the party last night I think. It was only the once."

"Rae?" Thea called when she reached the top step. The young actress was wrapped up in a sheet, rubbing one eye with her hand. "Rae?" Her voice called sounding confused and displaced.

"Just in the kitchen angel." Rae called back and moved back to the stairs.

"Is that her?" The older woman's head snapped round.

"You don't have to get up it is just Margaretta." Rae filled in the information and turned to answer the inquisitive woman in a hushed tone. "Yes, that's her."

"But our promise." Thea called as she slowly walked down the steps.

"Promise?" Margaretta laughed and looked at Rae.

"Not apart angel." Rae raced up the stairs to meet her and put her arms around the still sleepy woman. "I just wanted to catch my house keeper Margaretta down here before she startled you."

The older woman moved back to her work in the kitchen, trying to give them privacy.

"Oh right." Thea hugged her back still confused. "Well I'm up now. What hit me?" She added the last question gently as she made Rae move so she could continue down the stairs.

"About two bottles of champagne." Rae grinned at her and ruffled her hair as she passed.

"That'd be it." She put one hand to her temple as she padded down the stairs.

"Steer clear of the living room love." Rae instructed in a soft voice.

"Okay." She answered as she moved toward the entrance to the kitchen. "In here is okay?"

"I'll get the living room fixed up in a jiffy." Margaretta stood getting cleaning supplies at one end of the kitchen.

"Here is fine angel." Rae came in behind her.

"Good morning." Thea called back gently to the excited woman.

"Good morning!" Margaretta replied with a nod and a happy smile.

"Margaretta this is Thea." Rae introduced her with a smile "Thea this is Margaretta."

"Very pleased to meet you." Thea struggled to find her hand in the sheet, offering it once she unraveled it.

"Very pleased to meet you Miss. Thea." The woman took her hand and shook it, her face beaming. Rae rolled her eyes at the older woman's glee.

"I am so sorry, that mess was me." Thea apologized sincerely.

"No worries young lady." Margaretta waved it off. "Happens to the best of us, I'll have it all better in a jiffy for you. Do you need the rest of the house done Miss. Cassie?" She stopped to ask the last question before leaving the kitchen.

"No, just the living room would be great please." Rae was happy for the easy out. Thea smirked at Margaretta's name for Rae, but managed to hide the laugh.

"Be out of your way in a moment." She moved off towards the living room.

"And what do you think is so funny?" Rae put her arms around Thea and hugged her from behind. Thea broke free and perched herself on a high stool at the breakfast bar.

"Nothing!" She spun it round to look at Rae innocently.

"Oh there's something." Rae moved closer to stand right in front of her. "I distinctly heard you trying not to laugh."

"Nope." Thea tried the innocence approach once more, a sparkle in her green eyes.

"You were laughing." Rae snaked her hands to Thea's sides and tickled her lightly.

"Can I get ya breakfast Miss. Cassie!" Thea slipped into a southern Alabama twang as she laughed aloud.

"Oh you think that's funny do you Miss. Thea." She mimicked her accent and tickled her again.

"Oh yeah! It's funny." Thea did her best not to squirm.

"It is isn't it?" Rae laughed and tickled her more.

"Yes!" Thea suddenly hugged Rae tight. "You know she positively adores you!"

"Naw." Rae hugged her a bit tighter ignoring the last comment.

"Afraid so, I have a challenger in the ranks." Thea swatted her on the arm playfully.

"Margaretta?" Rae pulled back and questioned.

"And I may even be losing. After all she took you from me first thing this morning!" She laughed at the look on Rae's face.

"No one could take me from you angel." Rae said softly. "I just didn't want her to scare you if she came upstairs."

"I know love. I know." Thea kissed her gently on the lips. Rae kissed her back allowing herself to become completely lost in the contact. Thea released her hold on the sheet and slipped both hands up Rae's shirt, spreading them across the woman's back. She tilted her head slightly and opened her mouth.

"Mmmmm." Rae moaned slightly before moving deeper into the kiss. She moved her hands clumsily through the sheet trying to find a path to the woman's skin. The actress shifted a little to help her quest as the kiss continued.

Rae moved forward a little pressing herself against Thea's knees as her hands finally made their way into the cocoon of the sheet and came to rest on her hips. Thea moaned gently and then separated her legs allowing Rae closer. She lifted up slightly to release more of the sheet and allow her legs to move free. Rae took the invitation immediately and moved herself fully into the space between Thea's legs to rest her body there against her.

Automatically Thea moved her legs entrapping Rae as she moved her hands over the technician's strong back. Rae growled low in appreciation of the move, as her hands slowly began to travel upwards. Thea broke the mouth-to-mouth kiss to lick and suck her way down to Rae's throat. The technician's hands traced up Thea's ribs before resting full across her breasts. Thea's body was flushed with a sudden surge of passion. A heady, crazy need to have Rae, and have her now. The combination of the soft skin beneath her mouth and the flares of electricity Rae's hands were causing were almost intoxicating. Thea kissed her way over Rae's shoulder as her hand moved all over the standing woman's back.

"God I love you." Rae spoke in a raspy voice, crazed by the soft flesh under her hands and the heat from Thea's kisses.

"I love you." She murmured back in between kisses. The heat rose through her body, her heart began to beat wildly. "Rae I need you. I need you now! "

"I think maybe we should move upstairs." Rae used a low tone trying to retain enough control as to not ravish Thea right there in the kitchen.

"Yeah moving is good." She breathed hard.

Not thinking, Rae shifted her hands underneath Thea and picked her up. The crumbled sheet was abandoned to fall useless on the floor of the kitchen. With sure steps she headed towards the stairs.

"Moving is very good." She growled as she took the stairs two at a time. Thea couldn't help but let her hands travel over Rae's back as she tried to stop her kissing and nibbling but found herself failing. Entering the master bedroom Rae gently kicked the door closed before heading over to the bed. Thea kissed and bit Rae's neck constantly. Dizzy from the kisses, Rae placed Thea gently on the bed hovering over her.

"Shirt off!" Thea panted. "Please and the shorts too."

Rae didn't answer as she moved off Thea long enough to strip off the shirt and shorts. Tossing them across the room in a feverish arc. Thea struggled out of her own top and pants and was naked by the time Rae was.

"Gone and gone." She panted back as she moved closer to Thea slowly.

"Oh God Rae..." Thea launched herself up at Rae and locked her lips with her lover's, allowing her hands to once again roam the tall woman's back. Rae pulled her into a hard embrace to match the deep kiss. Thea gasped from the electric feel that Rae's grasp gave her. Rae's hands went around her and snaked up into Thea's hair, holding there for a second before moving down her back in gentle careful caresses.

Thea arched her lower body up to brush Rae's body, wanting her lover to lower herself. Sensing the non-verbal cue, Rae lowered her weight down slowly. Breaking their heated kiss to move her lips lower to Thea's neck.

Thea groaned and tipped her head back. She could feel her heart pounding and hear her breath coming in broken gasps. Her lower body began to move in rhythm against the strong one that held her.

"You are so soft." Rae spoke the words through the kisses in a breathy tone. She matched the rhythm of Thea's movements.

Thea closed her eyes trying to focus at least one of her senses. Sifting her body slightly, she parted her legs and caught one of Rae's between them. She moved to tangle her fingers in the Raven's hair to draw her closer.

Rae picked up the urgent movement and pressed her leg against Thea. Reveling in the heat against her thigh. She sucked her way across to the middle of Thea's collarbone as she began to trail wet kisses downwards. Without conscious thought Thea increased the tempo of their private dance, her movements becoming more obvious and stronger. Rae kissed the valley between Thea's breasts for a moment before carving a wet trail with her tongue to the right.

"Please Rae." The actress urged her on, as the need inside her grew and her own movement increased. She breathed deep. "Oh God Rae!"

Feeling the increase in Thea's tempo, she kept up with the dance out of both need and want. With a wicked grin against the hot skin beneath her lips, Rae sucked the hardened flesh into her mouth and sucked gently.

"Lower Rae. Please, go lower." She ground her body into Rae's leg. She could feel a light sweat building on every inch of her and somewhere in her mind it registered that her head was no longer hurting.

"Anything my love." Rae pulled back slightly and whispered the words against her skin. As she moved lower, she dragged her tongue down Thea's stomach in a painfully slow progression.

"Ooooooh God." Thea was in agony, her body twitching and throbbing with a need unlike any other she had felt before.

Where her leg had been only moments before, Rae pressed her hand slowly against Thea's inner thighs to open her more. Groaning, Thea realized she was completely under the technician's control. Rae continued to tease, as she moved to settle herself down. Kissing the inside of both the star's thighs in long wet movements.

"Rae!" Thea gasped as she felt the movement so close to where she needed it. "I can't..." She gasped again. "Take this."

"I love you." Rae whispered just as she ended the teasing and entered Thea slowly with her tongue.

"Oh God I love you." Thea relaxed back and let her body go, shuddering and twitching under Rae's exploration.

Rae went on instinct, trying to fulfill her want to bring her lover as much pleasure as possible. Thea's moved her hands back to Rae's head, pushing her lover's face further in, wanting to feel as much of her as she could. Feeling the hands in her hair, Rae pressed herself in harder stopping to suck hard on the throbbing flesh underneath her mouth.

The pulsing between her legs spread right though her body and Thea was completely overwhelmed. Bracing against the bed she pushed herself forward. Rae met her pressure, refusing to back up even an inch as she returned to making quick movements with her tongue.

Thea felt her climax approaching fast and she knew that any second now Rae would be flooded. She made a weak attempt to warn her, but the result was little more than a small groan. The truth was that Rae didn't need warning, as she slowed the pressure of her tongue momentarily before going after her prize with even more want than before.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHH!" Thea threw her head back and cried out as she climaxed hard and shuddered viciously.

Rae met every thrust of the small woman's hips. Focused on carrying her straight into the next orgasm without a break. Thea realized as the wave of pleasure began to clear that the pressure was still on her. She responded to Rae's movement immediately, her ragged breathing picking up from where it had left off. Holding her lips tight against her, Rae moaned and let the vibration carry from her lips into the flesh beneath. At the end of the moan she began to suck softly.

"Rae..." She gasped through broken breaths. "Hhhhan..." She stopped and swallowed. "Use your hand." She gasped as she managed to get the brief request out. "I need to kiss you." She was impressed she'd gotten the last sentence out, as from the waist down her body was a mass of reaction and pleasure.

Rae reluctantly abandoned her position and moved upwards. Pressing her hand full against the heat and wet between Thea's legs.

"Are you sure?" Rae asked with a wicked grin as her massaged her palm against the spot her mouth had been seconds before.

"Oh yeah!" She groaned as she blew kisses at Rae's face. "Kiss me!" The order came in a husky growl.

"Good." Rae answered before kissing her hard. Thea felt as if a bolt of pure magic had struck her. Tasting herself on Rae's lips, her tongue and lips went wild. The kiss took even Rae off

guard. Never before had she felt one more passionate, more hungry but with such love behind it all.

The mixtures of tastes and passion crazed Thea further and as they kissed and she ground herself on Rae's palm. Rae increased the pressure and speed of her hand, encouraged by the thick warm juices that covered it. She let the motion send her fingers closer and closer to where she knew Thea needed them.

As Rae's long fingers entered her, Thea closed her eyes in sheer heaven. She could feel the two digits move inside her and she urged her muscles to grip and relax as they moved. The feeling was driving Rae just as mad as she kissed Thea harder and increased the pressure of her hand.

"More!" Thea gasped almost soundlessly. Rae filled the need by immediately adding another finger. "Yessssss!" Thea breathed between her teeth.

"You feel so good." She growled into the actress' ear before sucking the flesh of the lobe into her mouth. She increased the tempo of her hand slightly trying to gauge Thea's reaction.

Thea could feel herself building again, this was bigger and stronger than anything she'd felt before. She slipped her own hands under her back to add support against the frantic movements of her hips.

"Rae, I'm going to cum so..." She gasped as the reality of her own words hit her. "Hard. Oh Rae!" As her body exploded, she pushed herself off the bed with her hands, driving herself harder onto Rae's fingers.

"Let it go." Rae encouraged softly into her ear as she moved her free hand underneath the small woman to support her. "I've got you." The muscles in her arms strained in effort as she met every thrust of Thea's hips with her hand. Feeling Rae's hold on her Thea relaxed and let everything release. Her warm fluid flooded over Rae's hand as she collapsed into the technician's tight grip.

"You are so beautiful." She purred into Thea's ear as she gently slowed the motion of her hand.

"You make me that way." The spent woman replied as she fought to bring her breathing under control. Sweat soaked hair plastered the forehead of her flushed face.

"I want to make you that way again." The tall beauty purred as she kissed her softly behind Thea's ear, drawing little circles with her tongue and her hand that was still within the actress. Thea gave an involuntary shudder and gripped Rae tight as her internal muscles contracted in a spasm.

"Soon." Thea said between thick breaths. "Okay?" She opened sparkling green eyes looking for confirmation.

"Very soon." Rae murmured as she kissed Thea's neck and moved to suck at the hollow of her throat as she gently removed her hand.



"Miss. Cassie!" Magaretta's frantic voice called from downstairs. "Miss. Cassie?"

Neither of them heard the voice, but the sound of footsteps on the stairs alerted Thea to the woman's approach.

"Miss. Cassie?" The older woman called again.

"Margaretta, I'm busy." Aggravated, Rae yelled back at her through the door.

"There a call Miss. Cassie." The footsteps continued up the stairs.

"Take a message." She yelled returning to kissing Thea's neck.

"They won't leave a message Miss. Cassie, it's urgent."

Thea tried to control herself and stroked Rae gently on the arm.

"Mother of God!" The technician cursed lightly and pulled herself back.

Thea fell back against the soft sheets on the bed and raised her hand to pull it across her sweat soaked forehead trying to relax herself.

"Love?" Rae looked down at her lover a little lost as to what to do.

"Go." Thea answered smiling at her.

"Miss. Cassie!" The voice called from the hall now.

"Whoever it is, they're going to get ten seconds." She gave her a quick kiss.

"Good." Thea smiled and savored the brief kiss.

"Coming." Rae yelled as she grabbed her robe from the chair near the bed.

"And not one second more!" She grinned as she watched her lover move.

"I love you." Rae whispered with a loving smile as she slipped out the door.

'God, how I love this woman.' Thea thought to herself as she snuggled back onto the pillow. Quite glad for the interruption, cause it would at least give her a chance to catch her breath.

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"Who is it?" Rae asked as she closed the door and turned to face Margaretta, already moving toward one of the spare rooms.

"It's Miss. Cleo." The older woman rang her hands as she spoke. "I wasn't sure I should call that out."

"Oh shit!" She cursed to herself. "Thank you, Margaretta." She closed the door to the spare room and moved to sit down on the bed as she picked up the phone.

"Hello Cleo." She spoke in a normal tone, trying to calm her breathing.

"Raven, I have landed. Where are you?" Cleo's voice came back immediately. "Where is my message? Where is my little black bird? This excuse had better be a good one!"

"Hello to you too Cleo." Rae spoke in a softer tone. "I've been very busy with the play. I didn't get your message till three this morning."

"If they are working you too hard give it up darling." A soft voice cooed back through the receiver.

"Cleo, you know I'm not giving up the play." Rae countered. "Please let's not start that old argument."

"Oh all right, I didn't call to argue."

"Good." Rae tried to relax, hopeful that the woman's words were true. "I can't meet you for lunch Cleo, I have a previous date." She used the word before she thought to stop herself, knowing that Cleo would not miss it.

"What?" The sharp word was followed by a deafening silence.

"I promised someone I'd spend today with them." Rae repeated. "In fact she's waiting for me in the other room."

"Someone, someone more important than me?" Cleo continued in a clipped voice. "Blackbird I don't expect that from you"

"Cleo, you can't expect to fly in and give me two hours notice to change my whole day." She hated having to defend herself. "You've been out of the country without a word for six months."

"Oh I see, well in that case." Cleo's voice returned to its normal purr. "Have fun Raven I am in town for a while." A moment of silence hung before she continued. "I am sorry. I know I have been less than communicative."

"Well that's good. We can have lunch tomorrow if you're free then." Rae rolled her eyes at the change in Cleo's voice. "That way I can sign whatever papers you have."

"Darling that would be wonderful, will your toy be coming too?" The question came in a sickly sweet voice.

"CLEO!" She lost control of herself and barked into the phone. "Don't start!" Her voice was harsh.

"Oh have I ruffled my raven's feathers?" Cleo returned to her normal purr. "Forgive me my black bird I have missed you and I am disappointed that's all."

"Cleo, don't do this again okay?" Rae felt the familiar hardened tension in her shoulders. "You don't even know her, so don't put her down. I won't allow it."

"Your friend is more than welcome to join us." Cleo stressed the word 'friend' this time.

"I'll see if she's free." Rae conceded, knowing she'd never really want to get Cleo in the same room as Thea. "What time do you want to meet?"

"And I promise not to put her down... like a sick animal!" A harshness crept into Cleo's voice.

"Cleo, I'm going to chalk that one up to the long flight." Her voice was steely. "But any more and I'm hanging up on you."

"The usual time darling, usual place." Cleo laughed into the phone. "Oh goodness, protective over whoever she is. This isn't like you."

"Two at the Harbour Club." Rae repeated the familiar appointment. "She's special Cleo." Her voice went soft. "I love her."

"You what?" Cleo didn't try to check the shock in her voice.

"I love her." Rae repeated in a confident tone.

"In that case bring her whether she is busy or not. I have to meet the woman who has clipped my Raven's wings."

"I'll ask her Cleo." She sighed loudly.

"Have to go darling." A rustling could be heard on Cleo's end of the phone. "Chao, two at the Harbour Club. Love to your keeper!"

"I'll see you there and bring the papers I hate going to your office." Rae doubted that her words had been heard as the phone went dead. She shook her head at the phone and replaced it in the cradle. Looking briefly to the heavens as she got up and headed out of the room.

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Rae opened the bedroom door and closed it behind her.

"Sorry back now." Her voice was soft and her smile warm. She moved back to the bed and sat down.

"Who was it?" Thea asked from under the tangled sheets where she had crawled.

"It was Cleo." Rae said in a flat tone.

"Oh." The small sound escaped Thea's mouth.

"I have to meet her for lunch tomorrow to sign some papers." Rae rambled on trying to get the conversation out minus the insults.

"How is she?" Thea asked unsure of how to handle this.

"I have no idea." Rae looked at her with a sad smile. "Cleo's not one for small talk. She invited you to come tomorrow."

"I...erm." Thea struggled. "I have the matinee performance Rae, I can't."

"Lunch is at two." Rae added absently.

"The performance is 2:30." Thea cleared unsure if Rae was listening.

"Oh yeah, I forgot." The technician frowned.

"Love are you all right?" She said resting a hand on Rae's arm.

"I'm fine angel." Rae shook the cobwebs from her head and shuffled down to lie next to her with a smile.

"You sure?" Thea's frown was pronounced.

"I'm just a little shook up." She admitted. "Cleo has this habit of disappearing for months at a time and then showing up with papers and deals and demanding lunches and parties."

"Oh I see." Thea said carefully listening to Rae's words. "Are you and her still, close?" She queried and then realising her own statement she added. "I... I don't mean to pry." Thea stammered. "And it's fine if you are."

"No!" Rae shook her head honestly. "Cleo and I are just old friends and business partners. We were over a long time ago." She added trying to be as honest as possible.

"I... I see." Thea lowered her head ashamed that she had asked such an impulsive question.

"You're not prying angel." Rae said concerned. "You can ask me anything at all, about Cleo about my past about anything." She pleaded with her.

"Thank you." Thea said as a deep sadness had entered her tone, not wanting Rae to question her on it Thea looked up with a bright wicked smile.

"Please angel ask me something. I'll prove it too you." Rae moved a hand to Thea's cheek softly. Thea looked up with a bright smile.

"What are you making me for breakfast?" She asked grinning, "That's the best question I can think of."

"Whatever you desire." Rae smiled back at her and pulled the actress close. "Though are you really completely famished yet?" She added with a wink.

"Not completely." Thea replied with a wink in return.

"I hoped not." Rae smiled and moved to snuggle herself back beside Thea's ear. "I was right here if I remember." She kissed the area.

"Ah yes, but I have to go to the bathroom first." Thea slipped out from Rae's grasp.

"Oh okay." Rae pulled back, letting her slip away. "I'll be right here." She smiled and rolled over to watch her disappear into the bathroom.

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Thea walked over to the bathroom sink and turned on the tap.

'What are you doing Theandra?' She asked herself while gazing at her reflection. 'You know nothing about this woman and she knows nothing about you. What hope has this whole situation got?'

Thea moved her head back and looked at the ceiling, she sighed heavily and then shook her head. With a second sigh she looked at her reflection, and ran her fingers through her hair. Catching sight of a brush on the side she picked it up and dragged it through her hair then shook her head again.

'Well Thea.' She told herself as she looked down at her naked body and her fingers traced a slight love bite on her collarbone with a smile. 'Even if it goes to hell in the morning, today is worth living.'

Thea ran her hands down her own sides and smiled.

'And I don't intend to end it standing up!' She grinned and turned off the tap.

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Hoping Thea would be at least a few minutes in the bathroom Rae rolled over and picked up the phone. She was happy the operator was able to connect her and was even happier when the person on the other end was quick and to the point. She glanced back at the door to the bathroom figuring as long as the tap stayed on she had time.

"Yes, that's the order." She smiled. "ASAP... there's double in it for you if it's speedy." She hung up the phone and rested back with her arms under her head quite pleased with herself. Even though the dark cloud of Cleo hung in one corner of her mind she pushed it away. She would not let Cleo ruin this, not this time.

Thea opened the door to the bathroom and put her head round it.

"What are you doing?" She asked noticing Rae's different position.

"Hello gorgeous." Rae turned to look at her. "I ordered a surprise." Thea stepped into the room and padded across to the bed.

"A surprise? When is it going to get here?" Thea's voice was enthusiastic. Rae smiled happily.

"Miss. Cassie!" A voice called from downstairs.

"For the love of God." Rae rolled her eyes to the ceiling. Thea grinned as she reached out a finger and traced a pattern on Rae's arm.

"Should I take the wild animal out?"

"LET MAC OUT IN THE BACK SHE'LL BE FINE." Rae yelled trying to concentrate past Thea's distractions.

"Very good Miss. Cassie. I think I have finished then. If you are sure there is nothing else I can help with." The cleaning lady called.

"One second angel." Rae jumped up and kissed Thea lightly. "I should give her a little bonus for being so helpful."

Thea nodded and watched Rae as she fished in the drawer and pulled out some money.

"Go for it." Thea said as Rae moved to the door. Rae blew Thea a kiss and went downstairs.

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"Everything is done Miss. Cassie." Margaretta said as Rae stepped into the hallway.

"Thank you, for all the extras." Rae handed her the folded up bills.

"Thank you Miss. Cassie. But there must be something more I can do for you both. Yes?"

"No, no, in fact you can have tomorrow off as well." Rae said thinking about the morning to come.

"But Miss. Cassie, with Miss. Thea sick...." Margaretta began.

"Miss. Thea's feeling much better." Rae managed to keep a straight face. "I'll take care of her it'll be okay. Why don't you go, have a good day. You could go shopping, buy yourself something nice."

"I could stay and cook you both a nice supper."

Rae almost laughed out loud.

"No Margaretta." She opened the door and shivered a little as a hint the cool air came in through her light silk robe. "You go home and have a nice day with that husband of yours. We'll be fine." She added with a smile trying to convince the older woman.

"Very good. Have a good day Miss. Cassie." With a nod she shuffled out of the door.

"I will, thank you." She was about to close the door when the small hatchback pulled into the driveway.

"You ordered these?" The young man raced up the drive with the wrapped package.

"Yes, I did." She quickly signed the clipboard he had and added a generous tip to the total. "Thanks for being so quick."

"No problem!" The young man said happily when he noticed the figure. Rae slipped back inside. She shut and locked the door. She ripped off the packaging and left it on the hallway floor and raced upstairs.

"Angel, surprise is here." Rae called as she entered the room. Thea put down the photo of a tall slim blonde that she had been looking at and turned to give Rae a smile.

"I love surprises." She turned to see her tall lover stood behind her, trying to keep control of the armful of orchids. "Orchids!" She gasped. "They are beautiful, thank you love."

"Well I figured Michael couldn't claim these ones." Rae looked down at the flowers smiling. Thea raced over and hugged the flower laden woman.

"I just wanted to make you smile angel." Rae beamed. "But the hug is even better."

"Thank you so much." Thea raved.

"No thanks." Rae smiled.

"I will thank you if I feel the need!" Thea said adamantly.

"Well then thank away." Rae grinned as she looked at Thea's sparkling green eyes. "Where should they go?"

The young actress looked at Rae and then at the orchids.

"Give them here." She held out her hands and grinned.

"Okay." Rae held out the armful and placed them in Thea's arms spilling a few on the carpet.

"Stay there." Her instructions came with a smile.

"Okay." Rae curiously watched Thea's every move. The young actress and laid the blossoms on the bed, spreading them out carefully. Then she picked up the ones that had fallen and put them on the bed too. She looked at them all for the moment and the picked out five and placed them carefully on the side table. She moved back to Rae and untied the silk tie at the tall woman's waist.

"On the bed, on your back." Thea breathed, sliding the fabric off Rae's shoulders. All Rae could do was nod as the fabric slipped away, her eyes glittered. She moved slowly to the bed backward not losing eye contact with Thea, gradually she went down onto her back. Thea moved carefully and stopped by the bed.

"Roll around." She instructed with a smile, her eyes locked with Rae's. The techie laughed for a moment and then rolled back and forth once.

"Again." Thea directed, with a smile Rae repeated the move. Thea walked gracefully to the side of the bed. "Once more."

Rae did as Thea asked grinning, completely unsure of Thea's next move. Thea licked her finger and began to trace her wet finger over her lips.

"Just once more." Thea breathed. "For me." She added cheekily. She loved the look of curiosity and pleasure on Rae's face.

"Anything for you angel." Rae said in a low tone as she rolled back and forth slowly.

"Now come to the edge of the bed, near me."

Rae made the move in silence rolling over on her stomach right next to Thea's leg.

"Sit on the edge, with your legs on the floor." Thea smiled as she caught sight of the crushed blooms scattered on the bed and her lover's flesh. Rae moved to sit up with a raised eyebrow placing both feet on the floor and not breaking eye contact with her lover.



"Spread your legs and keep your feet on the floor." Were the actress' next instructions. Rae completed the motion with a slight grin. A part of her mind knew she had never let anyone command her around like this but with the words coming from Thea they were heaven sent.

Thea licked her finger again and then reached out and touched Rae's warm flesh, just at the shoulder. She traced a line across travelling until she reached the centre of Rae's chest. Then she drew it down. Rae shuddered under her touch. Thea sunk to her knees between Rae's legs as she drew her finger lower still. She circled Rae's belly button with her wet trail and then moved to go lower, but stopped.

Rae watched and felt her every move silent. Thea gazed up into Rae's blue eyes from her place between her legs. Rae held green with her own. Keeping the gaze, Thea brought her finger to her lips again and licked it sensually. Rae licked her lips in unconscious mimic.

"You taste of orchids." Thea whispered.

"Do I really? I can't think why." Rae whispered back. "Do you like orchids?" She asked playfully.

"I am passionate about orchids." Thea replied.

"Oooooo." Rae let the tone fall very low and slow. Breaking eye contact Thea inched closer and slipped both hands behind Rae's back, then lower to her ass. Rae jumped a little from the electricity of the touch. Thea lowered her head and sunk lower on her knees. With surprising strength Thea found a comfortable grip on Rae's ass and then pulled the woman closer. Rae moaned at the hands holding her and shifted forward under their instruction.

Thea moved her warm wet mouth onto the soft warm dark damp patch between Rae's legs. Rae took a deep sharp breath with the contact and she tried to keep her feet flat on the floor and not arch up onto her toes. Thea nestled herself in as she dragged her tongue roughly the full length of Rae's clit, as she reached the end Thea repeated the action.

"Oh God!" Rae let out the words in a low throaty moan. Thea repeated her action: once, twice, three times and then on the forth time as she reached her lover's engorged centre that was now open and easily accessible as she teased her tongue on the edge of the warm wet orifice. Rae moaned again without words and shifted her arms behind her a little to lean back on them as her hips went forward out of need. She swallowed hard and tried to find a breath in the now airless room.

Thea darted her tongue in and out, and then round clockwise. Rae's legs went taunt as she stretched up onto her toes. Thea reversed her direction and dragged her tongue counter clockwise. She tried to keep calm but as her lover reacted Thea shivered and she pushed her tongue deeper still. Rae moaned low pushing her hips off the bed slightly as she braced up on her hands and toes.

Squeezing Rae's ass Thea delved as far as her tongue would go. Rae growled under the pressure of Thea's hands as the first sparks of her impending orgasm began to flare up her back. Thea moved her face slightly as she nestled her tongue inside flicking and licking, as her nose rested on the hard nub just below Rae's entrance, pushing it overtime she licked with her tongue. Rae moaned again as her she clutched onto the sheets underneath her hands.

Thea released one hand from Rae's ass and let it snake up her lover's body. Landing it on the soft mound of her left breast, the thumb rubbing over the hard raised nipple.

"Oh God Thea!" Rae managed to find the three simple words and blurt them out in a quick thick voice. Thea worked on getting the flicking, licking and rubbing in sync. When she achieved this she increased the tempo, changing the licking to sucking. Rae clenched her teeth and moaned as the speed increased. Her hips rocked without her guidance and her arms threatened to give out underneath her.

Tasting Rae's fluid made Thea almost lose the synchronisation but she controlled it where as everything within Rae was focused on Thea's touches. Her breathing becoming nothing more than ragged heaves as Thea moved faster again. Rae's chest rose and fell hard under Thea's hand. Thea's ears hummed with the mixed sounds of their desire and passion. She wanted her lover to experience the heaven she had earlier.

"Tttttthhhhhhheeeeeaaaaa!" Rae dragged the word out as a warning as she tumbled over the edge and into pure pleasure. Thea sucked hungrily as Rae released.

Rae bit her lip hard as her body hung on one heartbeat longer before going on without her. Thea's hands slipped from their place and instead found Rae's waist and held tightly. Pulling the other woman closer still, her sucking and rubbing becoming frantic. She drank eagerly from her lover, the taste of orchids and sex filling her every sense.

"Please don't stop." Rae begged in a low sultry tone, feeling her next orgasm rising before the first had even played itself out completely. Thea had no intentions of stopping, she kept up the complete pressure and instead of easing at all she lowered one hand and trailed it over the hairs at the top of Rae's mound. She traced it over her hip and round the side.

"Ohhhhhh." Rae's sound turned into a wordless deep moan as the movement of Thea's hand tuned each of her senses to the hilt. Thea's mouth, tongue and nose still moved furiously as she drew the hand along the underside of Rae's thigh. Rae shivered under the touch. Thea's calculated move brought her hand to where her tongue worked feverishly. The next time Thea thrust with her tongue she slid a finger in with it.

"Sweet Goddessssss!" Rae hissed the words out with the new sensation as it filled her from head to toe with a dizzy feeling. Sweat pooled at her temples and wept into her hair. Her weak arms finally gave out under her and she fell down to rest on her elbows.

The feeling of warmth and wetness that covered her finger made Thea shiver. She drew her tongue and finger out and this time slid two in with her tongue, enjoying the feel of the ribs of

muscles inside her lover's tunnel. Thea worked on a rhythm with this. Rae let out a low pleased scream as Thea's fingers and tongue moved in to fill her. Thea's rhythm started slow, but was soon fast and heated.

Rae somehow managed to rock her hips, rising and falling with the tempo that Thea created with her hands. Thea's own body now was aching for release but she wanted to make Rae let her self go completely before anything else.

"Sweet Thea." The high pitched words came out as Rae gasped for air and braced herself for the wave that crashed down out of nowhere. Her hips rocked violently and she shook uncontrollably. She screamed again, loud and deep as everything in her world became about the woman touching her, loving her.

Thea moved her mouth back keeping the rhythm with her fingers going, though slowing it gradually. She licked her lips.

"I thought so, you taste of orchids there too." She gasped breathlessly grinning madly, before sliding three fingers deep inside her lover aiming to take her breath away completely. All Rae could do was make a wordless noise in response. Thea pulled her hand back a bit and then thrust again moving her whole body up she lay on top of Rae's sweat covered body. Rae gave a long moan and thrust herself against Thea's hand.

Thea added a forth finger boldly and then wriggled them around inside. Rubbing on the ribs of muscles urging them to contract and force her hand out in her finally flood of orgasm. Thea moved each finger on a different muscle and began panting loudly, licking and kissing Rae's body.

Rae's eyes shut closed on their own as she fell completely on the bed, the movement inside her driving her already overloaded senses to a place they'd never been before. Her insides went tight against Thea's hand, before in a loss of breath the final wave rocked through her.

"That's it love." Thea encouraged.

The sound of her lover's voice drove her further as her hips locked down and all the motion came inside with a flood of hot liquid. Thea kept everything still for a moment as things settled a little, before pulling her hand free of Rae's body. Lovingly she lifted it to Rae's breasts, dancing there for a moment before Thea replaced her fingers with her lips. Tasting the heavenly mixture of sweat, Rae's fluid and orchids.

"I love you." Thea said softly between licks and kisses.

"Oh God Thea." Rae murmured out with the little voice she could find. "I love you."

Thea stopped her oral assault of Rae's spent body as Rae moved her arms out from behind her and captured Thea's head in her hands. Gently she guided the actress' face upwards.

"I love you so much." She repeated when Thea's face was close to hers and kissed her lovingly on the lips.

"As I love you." Thea ran a hand over Rae's hair.

"Though I think you're trying to kill me." Rae gave a little grin as another shudder rolled through her.

"Nah." Thea whispered. "If I were going to kill you, I would have used a gun!" Thea let Rae think about her statement, before smiling with a glint in her eye.

"I'd rather die in your arms my love." Rae said in a low sultry tone letting her hand drop to Thea's stomach to draw patterns there with a feather fingertip.

"You should move up and lie properly on the bed." Thea said gently. "If you can move."

"That's a big 'if' love." Rae laughed.

"You want to try?" Thea asked with a grin. "I could help you."

"Help would be nice." Rae grinned back. "Then I could thank you for that help."

"You could? You honestly think you could?" Thea smirked, satisfied with her lover's spent state.

"Oh yes." Rae growled. "I most definitely good."

"In that case let me see how I can help you. Tell me what to do."

"Well you could help me get my legs on the bed."

"Okay." Thea slipped off Rae and as she placed her feet on the floor she remembered how uncomfortable she was inside. Perhaps this wasn't such a good idea, just touching Rae's legs may send her over the edge but she was determined to try. She cupped her arms around Rae's legs.

"Ready?"

"Ready!" Rae nodded.

Thea pulled gently to see how much Rae was going to help her. Rae lifted every so slightly, hiding the fact that she could move and would when the time was right. Thea smiled and put a little more effort into lifting them. She managed to get them to bed height and then began to move them over.

"Still okay?" Thea asked.

"Yes, working wonderfully." She encouraged. "I'm almost in the right position."

"What more can I do?" Thea asked as she released Rae's legs.

"Come here." Rae gave her a sultry smile and held out a hand to her. Thea took it and moved closer. With a laugh Rae shot up, embraced Thea and pulled her down on top of her gently. "No, I meant come here." She said the words in an even lower more sensuous tone.

"Woo!" Thea said as she felt herself be pulled over. "Rae!" She growled laughing.

"Now let's get you comfy." Rae laughed back.

"Okay go for it!" Thea played along happily.

Rae worked her hands down the small woman's body and guided one knee to each side of her own stomach. Thea bit her lip as her legs were parted, a flare shot up between her legs reminding her how close she was to the edge.

"Now for the tricky part." Rae smiled and using her arms pulled them both up into a semi-sitting position with her back firmly supported by the wall. She raised her legs to bend her knees and braced them behind Thea's back for support.

"Nice move!" Thea breathed almost silently.

"Thank you." Rae breathed back and kissed the neck just in front of her.

"Rae..." Thea said her voice loaded with warning.

"I know angel." Rae whispered back having felt the dampness already on her stomach.

"Good!" Thea gasped.

"I won't make you wait." She added in a hushed tone as she moved one hand up under Thea's leg to where she knew it was needed.

"Oh God Rae." Thea thrust forward as a gentle glide of a thumb past her centre told Rae to not waste time. "Ahhhhh!" Thea gasped as she felt the movement of Rae's hand.

With a hard thrust she entered the wet opening with two fingers and used the position of Thea's body to give her complete access. Thea's breath quickened and her body began rocking. Rae started at a slow rhythm keeping time with her thumb on the outside.

"Oh shit." Thea braced her hands on Rae's shoulders squeezing hard as her body pushed in response to Rae's actions.

Rae locked her mouth onto the hard nipple of Thea's left breast and sucked. She shifted her legs a little to lock Thea in a smaller place and increased the movement of her fingers and thumb. Thea moved sharply, as Rae changed her actions. She groaned as her heart beat raced on.

Rae released the nipple only to take it lightly between her teeth as she flicked at it with her tongue. Matching the ever increasing rhythm of her hand with that of her mouth.

Thea suddenly realised that Rae's hand was moving fractionally too slow for the building need bearing down hard. She pushed the rhythm forward as the grip she had on Rae's shoulders grew even tighter.

The slick wetness running down her palm and her arm made Rae's insides shudder. She smiled against Thea's breast with the change in tempo and moved not only to meet it but to double it as she added a third finger.

"Jesus Rae!" Thea gasped.

Rae moved her free hand to Thea's ass and held it tightly. Thea began to move her hips in a circular motion, as well as the in out motion trying to drive Rae's fingers deeper. Rae matched the circular motion by going against her in a circle of her own, keeping the tempo of the in and out at a feverish pace. Missing only a heartbeat she switched breasts and gave the nipple on the right the same treatment.

"Rae, I am Oh... I... oh... Oh shit... RRRRAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!"

Rae growled against her skin and drove her hand deeper and harder than ever before. Fluid flushed from Thea, but she wanted more. Rae didn't slow the rhythm, though she tried to go deeper and harder with each new thrust.

"Fist me angel." Thea begged. "Please!"

Rae moaned low and entered with the remainder of her fingers curling them up carefully once inside and driving harder. She moaned from the sweet sweat the friction was building up between them. Tears slipped from Thea's eyes as she felt Rae driving into her. She let go of all of her passion and just let her bodies unchecked reactions rule. Rae pulled back to watch Thea's face, finding herself being driven closer and closer to release from the sight.

Thea's muscles spasmed and clenched Rae's hand as she opened her green eyes and caught Rae's.

"I love you." Rae whispered to her softly. Unable to say anything, Thea tried to make her eyes show that she loved her too. Rae nodded that she knew just before Thea's final orgasm hit suddenly and hard. Thea cried out and released Rae's shoulders and collapsed forward completely spent.

Rae stilled her hand slowly then gently pulled herself out. She moved her arms to cradle the woman against her.

"Thank you." Thea whispered.

"My pleasure." Rae said back in a whisper she reached up and gently brushed the sweat soaked hair from Thea's forehead. Thea was aware of Rae's hand moving over her head but didn't have the energy to react. She nestled into Rae's strong body and kissed the place her lips rested.

"Wake me up when you are ready to make me breakfast." She said happily.

"I'm ready now angel." Rae whispered softly. "But you sleep for awhile, breakfast can wait."

"I'm sorry love." Thea said trying but failing to lift herself off Rae's chest.

"Sssssh angel." Rae gently held her close. "No sorries, sleep angel."

"Just twenty minutes, don't let me sleep longer than that." She closed her eyes again. "Twenty minutes okay?"

"Just twenty." Rae smiled and kissed her gently on the forehead. "Sleep angel." Rae coaxed her. "I'll be right here when you wake up."

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"Thea? Thea?" Rae used a soft voice to call the woman laying on her awake.

"Hummm." The actress replied in a sleepy voice, before nestling down further against Rae's body.

"Wake up love, time for breakfast." Rae kept her soft tone and kissed the actress on the forehead.

"What time is it?" Thea asked, her eyes still tightly closed.

"It's 2:30." She glanced at the clock on the dresser nearby.

"2:30?" Thea sat up in a hurry and instantly regretted it. It was as if all her muscles reminded her at the same time how it had gotten to be so late in the day.

"Yes." Rae smiled. "What's wrong?" She asked stretching her arms above her head.

"Nothing." Thea replied smiling brightly, though wincing behind the façade.

"Good." Rae smiled back at her. "Though if you're still tired I could bring you breakfast in bed?" She made the offer with a loving smile.

"No, it's okay. I'm ready to get up. You got any pj's?" Thea asked brightly tipping her head from side to side.

"Coming right up." The technician nodded and moved out of bed without any sign of tiredness or soreness. "Let me see." She opened the door to the large closet across the far wall of the room.

"How about these? You might have to roll up the pants." She smiled and brought the silk pajama-set over on the hanger.

"They look great." Thea slipped on the top and made quick work of fastening the buttons.

"The green will set off your eyes." Rae said with a little smile. "And for me?" She turned and walked over to the tall dresser next to the bed and pulled out a pair of black drawstring cotton pants and a short sleeve white shirt. She slipped into the baggy pants with ease.

"How does it look?" Thea asked.

"Looks beautiful." Rae finished slipping the shirt over her head and moved closer to the silk clad beauty. "In fact so good I'm not sure how long I can last before I ask you to take it off again." She spoke in a low purr.

"Just remember breakfast." Somewhat gingerly Thea swung her legs out of the bed and pulled the bottoms on, rolling up the cuffs several times.

"Yes angel." Rae laughed. "Why do you think I woke you up in the first place?"

"So what am I getting?" Thea gingerly stood up and pulled the drawstring at her waist tighter. Constantly reminding herself to keep smiling despite the soreness and aches she was experiencing.

"Your stomach was growling so much it was waking the dead." Rae smirked and headed toward the bathroom. "Just have to brush my teeth and then one fabulous breakfast for my beauty." Thea tracked the technician's path out of the bedroom.

"What would you like?" Rae stuck her head back out of the bathroom, toothbrush in hand.

"A surprise!" Thea glanced at the crushed orchids on the bed and smiled.

"Maybe they'll be more surprises later." Rae grinned around the toothbrush in her mouth having followed the actress' eyes to the bed. Thea grinned back and raised her eyebrows to show she liked the idea. "What's your favorite?" The question came as the tall woman disappeared into the bathroom again.

"FOOD!" The star laughed.

"How does pancakes sound?" Rae's voice came over the sound of running water.

"Great." Thea called back.

"Good." Rae came out smiling. "I think there's strawberries down there too." She raked her brain. "Or chocolate chips."



"Pancakes are fine, the others we can use later!" The small woman grinned and rushed over to kiss Rae lightly on the cheek.

"And here I thought you were struggling with being sore." Rae said softly with a little grin.

"Did I say I was sore?" She jumped on the defensive immediately.

"No, but your moving like you are." The soft answer came back. "I was just worried."

"Sorry, I am a little." Thea responded her voice back to calm and loving. "But I am not sure that will deter me!"

"No sorries angel." She smiled. "It's okay, I can bring you breakfast up here if you like."

"Nope, it's good to get moving. I may have a bath later to relax things a bit." Thea tried to keep herself upbeat and downplay her reaction.

"Okay." Rae nodded. "I put a new toothbrush out for you by the way."

"Thanks, I brush my teeth after breakfast." Thea walked to the door. "Shall we?"

"No worries, just wanted you to know it was there." Rae started to follow her. "We shall."

Thea grinned at her. "So pancakes for the beautiful lady." She headed down the stairs.

"You had better lead just in case I fall over." Thea followed her out. "Pancakes it is!"

"Hold on." Rae reached her hand back.

"I am fine!" Thea slapped the hand playfully.

"Oh feeling spunkier already." The technician laughed and then suddenly stopped. 'Oh shit!' The thought hit her suddenly. 'I forgot about Mac!'

"What?" Thea questioned just as Rae raced down the stairs leaving her behind. The actress raced down after her all thoughts of pain forgotten as she made her way to the back door.

"MAC!" Rae yelled loudly after she opened the door and saw the husky was not near the porch.

"MARC ANTHONY!" She called again walking out into the backyard a bit. "MARC ANTHONY!" She called again with a little more panic in her voice.

Thea watched as Rae stood calling, hearing the change in her lover's pitch. She walked up behind her cautiously.

"Stay here." Rae instructed in a worried tone. "I have to look for her."

"What's wrong love?" She whispered not quite sure what the grand panic was all about. "Love?" Thea called as the tall woman moved further away from the backdoor.

"It never takes two calls." Rae turned back. "Never!"

"Rae wait, we can both look." Thea glanced around for something to give to the barefoot woman to put on her feet. Grabbing a pair of shoes from the mat near the door she slipped them on and then grabbed a pair of runners. "Rae come here." She held up the shoes as she came out the door after the technician.

"Please Marc Anthony don't do this today." Rae pleaded to the sky in a whisper as she came back to retrieve the shoes. Her mind raced as she moved back to join Thea at the door. "You'll get a chill love." She tried to act calmer. "I'll look for her."

"Why don't you go out the back gate and I go out the front gate?" Thea prompted her. "And we meet back here in ten?"

"Thank you." She took the runners and slipped them on. "Love you don't know the neighborhood." She tried to think logically.

"No, but I know the dog!" Thea said a little forceful. "I am not looking at the scenery! I am looking for a large gray and white furry thing."

"Okay, okay." Rae said defeated. "Back in ten."

"Has she got a leash, if I find her?"

"She'll follow you." The tall woman was confident of this fact. "Mac's never had a leash."

"Okay, in ten." Thea glanced at her watch and turned and ran back to the house.

"Ten." Rae repeated and took off into the trees at the back of the yard.

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It was only when Thea closed the front door that she realized that she was stood in a Canadian suburb at three o'clock in the after noon in a pair of green silk pj's and that she couldn't get back into the house. On top of that it was bloody freezing.

"Shit!" She cursed animatedly before heading off down the street. Wrapping her arms around herself in an attempt to keep warm

"Roof! Roof!" Mac's telltale bark came from out behind two parked cars in the distance.

Thea jogged toward the noise, smiling at the passerby's as she did. Wishing she'd at least had the sense to grab her own shoes, as Rae's were falling off her with every step.

"Roof! Roof!"

"Toni!" She called and then stopped, remembering that was her name for the dog.

"Roof! Roof!" The dog poked its head around from between the cars carrying a big tree branch in her mouth. Deciding to drop the branch, she bounded out heading in Thea's direction. "Roof! Roof!"

"Oh come here." Thea bent down and opened her arms to the dog. Mac barked again and picked up the pace as she raced into the small woman's arms. "Hello beautiful." She ruffled the dog's shiny coat and covered her head in kisses.

"Roof!" Mac licked the actress' face.

"Where have you been?" Thea sighed and smiled standing up slowly.

"Roof!" Mac cocked her head to one side trying to figure out the question.

"Well did you have a good time?" Thea asked as she patted her back.

"Arroooooo!" Mac howled in response.

"Do you need your tree?" Thea asked looking at the branch Mac had dropped. The husky looked back and then trotted away in the direction of the house. When Thea didn't immediately follow she looked back for a moment.

"Roof, roof!"

"I guess not." She laughed as she followed the husky home. Mac trotted a short distance ahead, going straight to the front door and waiting patiently for the actress to catch up.

'What a crazy situation this is!' She reflected to herself as she caught up with the dog. Moving to pat Toni on the head she smiled down at the dog. "This would ordinarily be the easy bit but unfortunately I don't have a key."

"Roof!" Mac pawed the door lightly.

"I know love but Rae's looking for you so I can't ring the bell." She patted the dog again.

Mac's ears suddenly perked up and she raced around the garage. When the small blonde didn't follow immediately the husky came back around to bark at her.

"Crazy mutt." Thea whispered as she followed.

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"Thea, you found her!" Rae's happy exclamation came as she returned into the backyard and saw her husky bounding towards her. She bent down to give the dog a big hug. "You scamp where have you been?" She ruffled the dog's fur. "I'm going to have to have a word with you."

"Yeah, I found the dog." Thea smiled and waved as she entered the backyard watching the reunion.

"Are you all right?" Rae stood and asked the question concerned as she moved toward the small shaking woman. "You look cold."

"Sort of." Thea said sarcastically.

"What's wrong?" Rae looked her up and down for injury.

"Rae, it is freakin freezing. Half your neighbors think I am crazy being in green silk pjs in the middle of the afternoon, in the middle of the street looking for a dog called Toni. When they all know her name is Mac. They must think I'm the biggest lemon cause it was the dog who showed me to come around to the back." Thea walked back towards the house and stood in front of the backdoor.

"My neighbors are idiots." Rae smiled. " And I think you suit green silk pjs any time of day." She started to laugh. "Like a lemon?" She questioned the reference.

"Argh!" Thea threw up her arms, realizing how much colder the move immediately made her. "Rae, I am gong inside to thaw out!"

"Let's go in the house love I'll make you those pancakes and a baileys to warm you up." The technician smiled again as she moved towards the house "Mac you are in so much trouble." She shot a sad look at the dog. She moved ahead of Thea and tried to open the door. "Angel you didn't leave the front door open by any chance?" She asked in a soft tone.

"What?" Thea bumped into her by the door waiting for her too open it.

"The front door did you close it?" She asked again.

"Of course I damn well closed it. Don't you have thieves in Canada?" The actress' voice came out of chattering teeth.

"Yes love we do. That's why all the doors in the house lock automatically when they close. That's okay though." Rae tried to smile. "I just have to get the spare key."

"Then get it and hurry up!" Thea ordered afraid she was losing the feeling in her feet. "I am freezing."

"Give me a second." She smiled to herself knowing Thea was not going to like this.

Taking a deep breath she leapt up to take a hold of the overlying peak of roof above the back door. Thea suddenly stopped and thought about why she was turning this into an issue but lost her thought watching Rae. With another breath the tall woman lifted herself up half way and with her hands walked around to where the small roof met the larger one.

"Good God Rae." Thea mumbled closing her eyes.

On steady feet, Rae scampered up onto the roof and moved her way across the peak to the bridge of the main roof.

"It's okay angel." She called down trying to be supportive.

"I'm not watching!" Thea called as she heard more noise from the roof. She felt Mac moving to sit by her side and she lowered her free hand to pat the husky.

Smiling at her lover's closed eyes, Rae performed a controlled backward lift to land on her knees on the main roof. Standing up she walked across the peak to the chimney and moved a loose brick at the bottom to pull out the spare key.

"On my way down now." She called as she retraced her steps.

"Are you down safely yet?" Thea asked after a moment.

"Almost." She said when she got to the middle roof and took the fast way down by somersaulting off it to land in front of Thea with a small thud. "Down now, with one spare key." She jangled the key in front of Thea's closed eyes.

Thea opened one eye suspiciously, trying not to smile. Seeing the key before her she beamed and then hit Rae hard in the arm.

"You could have fallen to your death, you idiot!"

"What was that for?" Rae asked. "Love, it was perfectly safe." She tried to explain. "That was a simple climb."

"There is nothing safe about heights without harnesses. Now open the door!" Thea smacked her again playfully.

"Right away angel." She opened the door promptly. "I guess you'd prefer I returned it later?" She asked with a grin.

Thea stepped through it and her teeth chattered loudly. Rae came in with Mac close behind and closed the door.

"You see this key?" Thea grabbed the key once they were all inside in the heat. She stalked through to the hall where she'd noticed that Margaretta had left her purse. Picking it up she

marched right back to meet Rae in the kitchen entranceway. "It is going here." She clipped it onto the ring on her purse.

"01171973." Rae said softly.

"And by the weekend I will buy you a key safe so you can keep it in a normal place!" She ranted on. "What?" She stopped to stare at the dark beauty.

"01171973." Rae smiled at her when she finally stopped and repeated the string of numbers. "If you're going to have a key you need the entrance and exit code for the alarm system."

"I... I said until I get a safe." She stammered for a moment.

"Safest place I know is with you." Rae turned back to go into the kitchen and opened the cupboard to take out the pancake mix.

"I can't Rae." She felt her eyes flood with tears as she followed the technician into the kitchen.

"Why not Thea?" Rae turned to her. "It's just a key and a code."

"Can I?" Thea held the key in her hand as a tear escaped and slid down her cheek.

"It's just making this your home too." Rae added softly and moved to close Thea's hand around the key. "I'd get you the spare car keys but I don't think you'd want me up on the neighbors roof." She grinned.

"Oh Rae." Thea threw her arms around the taller woman and held her tight.

"I want you to feel at home here too." She added seriously. "Not like a lemon when you get locked out wearing green silk pjs."

"I love you." Thea whispered.

"I love you too." She whispered back.

Continued in Act VI...

**The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive**

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~ After the Curtain Falls ~  
by Beth Dragon & Kathleen Wolf

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## **Act VI**

Rae held Thea tight for a few moments before breaking away from her.

"You ready for breakfast?" She asked.

Thea looked up at Rae from the embrace and brushed the woman's dark lips with her own.

"Ready." The actress nodded.

"Good." Rae kissed her back lightly.

Moving out of the embrace Thea dropped the key into her purse and dropped the leather case onto the floor by the back door.

"I should warn you though, I'm a horrible cook." The tall woman grinned and turned to get a large bowl.

"Not to worry, I can see a fire extinguisher from here!" Thea laughed moving to slide herself onto one of the high stools near the island.

"But has it been used recently!" Rae grinned even wider as she measured out the pancake mix.

"Get on with it!" Thea laughed again.

"I can start a fire in the living room too help warm you up." She added, still worried about the young woman's exposure to the cold for so long.

"No, if you stop talking and start cooking the heat from that will help." Thea teased.

"Right away." Putting the frying pan onto the gas burner, Rae threw some butter into the pan. Turning back to the counter she added water to the simple batter and began mixing it. "Would you get me a glass of juice angel?" She asked as she went about her task. "Got my hands full."

"Sure." Thea smiled and slipped off the stool. She looked around the kitchen lost as to where to begin. "Point me in the right direction for glasses."

"Your kitchen too." Rae smiled back at her. "Check the place out. Margaretta changes things around so much your guess is as good as mine." She laughed as she began to pour batter into the hot pan.

"Okay then." Thea began to open cupboards, finding the glasses in her second choice. Even after she found them she carried on and looked through the other cupboards. Remembering Rae's juice order she moved to open the fridge and smiled at the number of choices.

"Which one?" She asked looking over everything else inside as she asked.

"What's on the menu?" Rae asked testing the pancakes and flipping them.

"Apple, orange, grapefruit and tropical punch." She listed off the technician's options.

"Tropical fruit please." Rae answered and looked to the small woman by the fridge. "You should try some it's a really good blend."

Thea took the carton out of the fridge. Breaking the seal she poured some into the glass she had found earlier.

"There you go love." She held the glass out.

"First round of pancakes are almost ready." Rae smiled and took the glass taking a big swig.

"Thank you angel." Reaching into the cupboard beside her she was glad to find it still held the plates. "Now to find the syrup, did you see it honey?" She asked as she bent to look in the small cupboard to the right of the stove.

"Syrup?" Thea questioned.

"Maple syrup." Rae turned to look up from her crouched position. "The stuff you put on pancakes."

"And what would that look like exactly?" Thea asked. "I put orange juice on mine and sugar."



"Clear bottle full of dark thick stuff." Rae smiled and then screwed up her face at Thea's choices. "Has Aunt Jehmima written across the front. You're telling me that you've never had syrup?"

"Oh that! Top cupboard on the far right." Thea laughed when she realized what Rae was looking for.

"See you're at home already." Rae followed her instructions and found the syrup right off.

"Never had syrup." Thea admitted.

"You have to try it, it's the best stuff on earth." Rae smiled and pulled another smaller plate out of the cupboard. She moved the smallest of the pancakes onto it and smeared it lightly with butter before dousing it in syrup.

"Okay I will, just for you."

"Try this." She handed it too Thea with a fork.

The actress took it and cut a small piece off, tentatively putting it into her mouth. Rae watched her waiting for a reaction. A smile spread wide across her face as she took a second mouthful.

"So?" Rae asked.

"This is good!" Thea pointed to her plate with her fork.

"I thought you'd like it." The technician smiled and dished the bigger pancakes onto a large plate. "Convert you from orange juice and sugar right quick." They both laughed as Thea continued to eat.

"Next round for you angel." She handed her the next plate stacked high with pancakes. "Have to keep that stomach of yours from growling." She made a low growl in mimic and Mac joined in.

"I am so hungry." Thea laughed and turned to smother her plate with syrup.

"Good thing you're hungry." Rae laughed. "I got a ton of batter here." She poured out the next batch into the hot pan.

"Always hungry!" Thea replied happily munching away.

"Good, good." Rae took a big drink of juice.

"So what should we do with the rest of our day?" Thea asked as she slipped a piece of pancake to Mac.

"So angel?" She poked at the cooking food. "What would you like to do on your day off?" She turned and asked at the same time. Thea laughed at their identical questions.

"I saw that by the way." Rae's voice was low. "She's supposed to be punished remember."

"Oops!" Thea shared a mock worried look with the dog.

"She almost got you hypothermia." Rae flipped the latest pancakes off the stove and onto two plates. "Round two for you and one for me." She smiled and flipped off the stove and moved over to take the stool next to Thea. "Have you forgotten cold and out in silk pjs at three in the afternoon?"

"No, she didn't. Did you angel?" Thea stroked Mac somewhat roughly. "It was your big mean owner that tried to kill me wasn't it?" She added with a smile and fed the dog more of her breakfast.

"Oh I did, did I?" Rae raised an eyebrow. "When did I do that?"

"Yep." Thea slipped off the chair and went to the back door. "Oh you know, with your..." She imitated Rae's accent. "Oh Poor Mac!" She dramatically raised a hand to her forehead, grinning madly and glancing over her shoulder at Rae. The technician was staring into her pancakes. "We have to look for her!"

"Yeah I tried to kill you." Rae's agreement came in a low tone.

Thea stayed where she was for a second, looking at her tall dark lover and then she came back over to the island.

"Hey!" She said trying to look Rae in the face, her tone gentle.

"Hey." Rae returned the blank word as she took another mouthful of breakfast.

"I was joking love." Thea stressed. "You know acting. It's kinda what I do." She reasoned with a little laugh.

"You do it well." Rae gave a little smile.

"Well thank you." Thea bowed. "I am a star you know." She laughed again.

"Yes, you are." Rae's smile turned a bit more genuine.

"But let me guess..." She made her way back to the stool. "I should leave the acting to the theatre?" She asked the question as she settled down to sit again.

"No." Rae's voice was soft. "I just have to get better at figuring out when you're acting."

"Sorry love." Thea kissed Rae on the cheek gently. "Really I am."

"So am I." Rae kissed her back on the cheek lightly.

"These really are good." Thea said brightly convinced the momentary shadow over Rae had been moved away.

"I'm glad you like them. You want more?" She motioned to the stove. "I can make them for you in a snap."

"No, but they were great. I want to know what we are going to do with the rest of the day." Thea asked putting down her fork.

"I have no idea." Rae shook her head thinking. "Any ideas?"

Thea picked up a piece of pancake and dipped it in some of the syrup on Rae's plate, with a wrinkle of her nose she popped it into her mouth.

"I always have ideas." She laughed. "We could go to the theatre! To check out the competition."

"You really want to do that?" Rae abandoned her fork and tore a small piece of pancake off with her fingers, sliding the piece around in the heavy syrup on her plate.

"Or a zoo. Do you have a zoo? I love zoos and libraries and art exhibitions. Well I could go on and on." The actress laughed again.

"Yes, we have a zoo but it's mighty cold out angel." Rae brought the piece to her lips and then turned it away offering it to Thea. "Lots of libraries and we have the Royal Ontario Museum."

"I could wear real clothes rather than pajamas!" She took it gratefully and licked Rae's fingers in appreciation.

"Ahhhh!" Rae moaned disappointed. "I liked the pjs myself." The attention being paid to her fingers made her smile.

"Really I was hoping you liked me without them best!" She gave the woman's sticky fingers a last lick and sat back smiling.

"Oh well." Rae tore another piece of syrupy pancake off with her fingers. "I didn't know without them was on the table for an option." With a smile she offered it up for Thea, syrup dripping down her fingers.

"Well at the zoo or museum it's not!" Thea caught the dripping syrup with her tongue and worked her way up to the pancake.

"That's true, that's why I don't vote for them." Rae watched the small woman's every move.

"Rae, though it would be lovely, can we really spend all day in bed?" She asked as she closed her warm mouth around Rae's fingers. Her tongue playing with the fingers she had trapped inside her mouth.

"I like that idea." Rae grinned, both for the idea and Thea's move. "Of course we don't have to stay in bed. There's the whole house waiting for us."

"Tell me more." Thea said quietly around her captured prize. Rae slipped the short distance to stand off the stool and moved a bit closer to the captor of her fingers.

"Well there is the kitchen here." Rae purred. "I seem to remember you making a comment about strawberries and later." Thea smiled and closed her eyes as her tongue continued to lick Rae's fingers. "Though my favorite." Rae growled lightly as Thea closed her eyes. "Would be the option of the sheepskin in front of the fireplace."

Thea concentrated on turning what she was doing into the most arousing motion she could with a series of licks and gentle sucking motions. Rae moved her free hand to Thea's leg and gently slid it over the outside of her thigh up to her hip and back again. Thea moaned lightly and moved one of her hands out to touch Rae's stomach. Her fingers playing with the fabric.

"God you're driving me crazy!" Rae admitted when the moan reached her ears. Moving closer to Thea, she slid her hand back and forth over the top of Thea's thigh now. Thea opened her mouth and released Rae's fingers.

"Did you like being sane?" She asked softly as her fingers inched up with v-neck and twirled circles on Rae's flesh.

"Not at all!" Rae growled as she pushed herself closer and continued the motion on Thea's thighs with both her hands.

"So if I asked you to point out the kitchens finer points." Thea focused on drawing her other hand up to join the dance on Rae's stomach. "Where would you start?"

"Hummm." Rae locked eyes with her. "I'd start with the beautiful woman at the counter and ask her what she wanted for dessert."

Thea slipped her hands around to Rae's back under her top and stroked the other woman's sides lightly.

"Strawberries the strawberry blonde would reply." Thea grinned at her. "Obviously!"

"Obviously!" Rae winked at her.

Thea breathed deeply as she felt the now familiar tingle begin deep in her being.

"They're just a few feet away in the fridge." A wicked glint sparkled in the technician's eyes.

"Rae, I think you should get my strawberries." Thea breathed the instruction as she slid her hand off Rae's body and brought them back to rest on her knees.

"Okay." Rae moved slowly away from the other woman's hands to the fridge. Thea took the moment to look away and blew cooling air at her forehead.

"Strawberries, strawberries?" She murmured as she opened the door and took the basket off the lower shelf. "Right here where I thought they were." Moving back, Thea's eyes returned to her as Rae pushed their plates down the counter out of the way. Placing the basket of strawberries in their place.

"Do you always have fresh strawberries in your fridge?"

"No, not always. We were lucky this week." Rae smiled. "How do you like your strawberries?" She asked as she took one from the basket, rolling the small piece of fruit between her fingers.

"Depends with sugar if they aren't sweet enough or with cream when I am feeling decadent and naked when I am feeling..." She stopped, knowing she wasn't sure she was helping herself cool down here.

"When you're feeling?" Rae questioned.

"Simple." She added finally.

"And how are you feeling right now?" The tall woman moved her empty hand to trace her finger over Thea's collarbone. She was struggling with the building fire inside her that wanted things to go much faster but she knew the slowness would make things that much better.

"Right now?" Thea asked her voice trembling slightly.

"Right now." She repeated in a breathy tone.

"Hungry." The reply came as clear green eyes met with blue and the actress breathed heavily out.

"For strawberries or for something else?" Rae asked raising the fruit to her lips.

Thea formed a small circle with her lips around the strawberry and traced her tongue around the small sweet fruit, before biting off the end to let the juice trail down her chin a little.

"Sweet enough?" Rae asked watching the juice trail down the actress' skin and licked her lips.

"The strawberries are sweet." She moved her mouth back to the fruit and bit off more of the soft flesh but nipped Rae's fingers deliberately. "But I can think of something sweeter."

"So can I." Rae moved the strawberry away, the little nip to her finger had fueled the growing want inside her and she moved closer. Thea watched her toy being moved away. "Though I want to double check the strawberry rating." She said in a low whisper as she very slowly and deliberately licked the trailing juice from Thea's chin. She was very careful to avoid the woman's lips for the moment.

Thea breathed out deeply when Rae's tongue touched her flesh and her skin broke out in tiny bumps of pleasure.

"The strawberries are sweet." She breathed against the wet area under her mouth. "But there is much sweeter underneath." She licked at the corners of Thea's mouth before slowly drawing her tongue across her bottom lip. "Much sweeter." She purred repeating the motion with her tongue.

Thea shivered and closed her eyes as wave after wave of pleasure broke over her with every touch of Rae's tongue.

Moving away from Thea's lips, Rae kissed wetly across the woman's soft jaw line. Using her hands to push back the actress' hair, she began to softly suck on her earlobe for a moment before moving further back to lick and suck the soft area behind her ear.

"Rae..." Thea breathed.

"Ummm?" Rae mumbled as she happily devoured the flesh there.

"I..." Thea lost all train of thought to Rae's oral exploration and instead she moaned deeply and tipped her head back.

"Um humm." Rae mumbled again now lavishing her attention on the length of her neck and then resting again to concentrate behind her ear. She slipped her hands out of Thea's hair and too the front of the silk top. Moving with sure motions to open the buttons that kept it in place.

Thea moaned again, this time in a slightly higher tone. She knew she was quickly losing all thought of restraint and her mind fought to keep its focus. Heavy with passion her heart fought back even harder and she found herself pulled between the wants of the two.

Once Rae had the silk top open she brushed back the shirt and placed her hands full to hold the weight of the young beauty in her hands. Massaging gently as she again sucked on Thea's earlobe. Explosions of pleasure shot through the young actress as Rae's hands touched her and without worry of the way ahead she let herself give into the feeling.

Rae's hands felt of fire when they touched Thea's breasts. The heat bursting up her arms to pool with the inferno inside her. She breathed hard and fast against Thea's neck as she sucked it gently as her hands continued their motion now to place a concentrated caress on the woman's hard nipples. The technician licked her way across Thea's collarbone and slowly kissed her way up the other side of her neck.

It was Thea's mind that would not give up its silent fight as it forced an image into her mind that would remind her why she always checked the path ahead and never let herself give in like she was. As the image hit her, panic and raw negative emotion flooded into her heart and body.

"Rae stop!" Thea literally leapt backwards, over balancing on the tall stool.

It took Rae's senses a second to register the change as it came even before Thea's words. She moved away immediately, but reached out a hand when she realized her lover was about to fall over. Her hand latched around Thea's slim wrist and pulled her back up so that the stool again sat on all four legs. She let go as soon as she was sure Thea was safe.

Thea's mind still whirled with the idea that she was going to fall, even as it registered the stable grip on her wrist and the whole world being righted again. She opened her eyes as the tight grip left her wrist and looked around in momentary panic.

"Are you all right?" Rae asked concerned. "It's okay angel you didn't fall." She added softly, though she didn't move closer, as she knew something had changed long before the slip.

Thea took a second as things registered their presence in her mind. The place: Rae's kitchen. The person: Rae. Who is? Your lover. She checked off the various things in her mind before clicking back into the real world again.

"Sorry." She spoke automatically, her normal response at this moment after the panic. She swallowed awkwardly trying to clear her dry throat.

Rae watched helpless as the look of panic crossed over the actress' face and then change to sad contemplation. The apology caught Rae off guard.

"Angel, there's no reason to be sorry." Rae said softly. "We don't have to do this." She added. "We can do anything you like. I'm sorry if I did something wrong." She cursed herself. Why did she always have to be pushing? Why was she diving in her and scaring the hell out of Thea so much?

"You didn't." Thea came back to reality instantly. "That was me. All me." She shook her head.

"No, Thea." Rae corrected. "This error had to be mine and I'm sorry." She replayed every move in her head, trying to find something different that could have triggered the reaction. Tried to find the move, the action that she'd made to get such a scared response.

"Don't say that." Thea asked very, very quietly as she raised a trembling finger to Rae's lips. "Don't say you're sorry."

"But I scared you." Rae whispered. "And I never want to do that."

"Don't say it, please." Thea's voice was strange to her own ears. She didn't even like to think how it sounded to Rae.

"Angel, please tell me what's going on." She pleaded softly. "Please tell me what scared you."

'Fool!' Thea's mind screamed at her. 'What are you going to tell her?' Thea desperately racked her mind for an excuse, something that didn't sound dumb or improbable, but nothing came to mind.

"Please angel." Rae added. "Whatever it is you can tell me."

"I think I thought I was going to fall off the stool." Thea offered finally.

"Oh." The technician let the small word escape her softly as she realized the actress was lying. She knew she'd noticed a change in Thea long before she'd almost fallen. In fact Rae knew that the only reason Thea had almost fallen was because of the change.

"I can't afford to hurt myself Rae." The small woman slipped carefully off the stool. "Not with the production." She moved to pick up their plates.

"Of course not angel." Rae let the continued excuse grow without calling it. All she knew for sure was that whatever had sent Thea bolting out of her hands it was something that scared her much more than being injured.

"In here or do you have a dishwasher?" Thea asked trying to regain her bearings, praying that Rae would let the topic drop without pushing.

"Dishwasher's here." Rae opened the fake cupboard face to show the shiny metal machine.

In silence they went about cleaning up the kitchen. Both of them lost in their own thoughts and having no idea how to reach out to the other.

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Rae opened the back door and motioned for Mac to run out free. Closing it, she moved to zip up the front of the fleece jacket she wore and pulled on her flap mittens to ward off the chilly cold. Taking one last longing look back at her house she moved down to follow Mac into the trees and the familiar path they walked.

'Okay O'Keefe.' Her monologue started immediately. 'She says it isn't you, but are you really believing that? Maybe it was the key and the code.'

Rae picked up a branch from the forest floor and twirled it in her hand.

'You scared her that had to be it.' She nodded to herself. 'Too much too soon, I mean she hasn't asked you a damn thing about Tommy yet or about the money. Not even about Cleo for that matter.'

Mac came in a run to circle her and then went off again.

'What the hell are you doing anyway?' She stopped mid-step and looked up into the canopy of green pine needles. 'You know nothing about her. Well you know she got a pony when she was eleven and that she has a younger sister and the same birthday as Tommy.'

Speaking her brother's name made her stop for a second.



'But you also know that you've never felt about anyone like this before. Not even Cleo, not even back when you loved her.'

Rae threw the stick when Mac approached and watched her chase off after it.

'She makes you feel so complete somehow.' Rae smiled to herself. "With just a little look or touch."

"Okay O'Keefe!" Rae gave a gentle sigh as she bent down and picked up the stick that Mac had returned. "First off your not going to screw this up by pushing the poor girl too much, from now on all actions thought out and deliberate. No more codes and keys just cause the mood strikes you, but you're not going to shut down on her either."

Rae felt the nervous energy building inside her and she broke into a fast run. Mac realised her change and moved to keep up with her, loving every second.

'You will walk back into the house and everything will be fine and if it's not you'll talk about it. You won't run from it or let things slip away in the silence.'

Rae picked up the pace of her movement feeling the pull in the tight muscles of her calves come out slowly as she ran. Her mind on the other hand pulled at the corners as she tried to resolve the conflict between it and her heart.

'Now you will not do the whole close up thing!' One part of her mind screamed at the other. 'You will not do this to Thea, not to her. No matter what it is that she's not telling you about. No matter if it's you pushing her or something else entirely. You've been doing so well so far. Hell you blew off Cleo that's got to be a first.'

As her thoughts again turned to the tall blonde, she moved off the normal path and headed up the steep incline to her left. Mac kept pace with her finding more fun in their romp then exercise.

Pushing her legs to climb the thick moving underbrush of the ravine wall she finally felt her mind stop its whirling, as balance became her first and only priority.

'That's it O'Keefe!' The hard voice inside commented one last time. 'Have to stay in shape cause you never know when you're going to need...' As she reached the top she forced the familiar thought from her mind.

"Not this time." She crested the ravine and kept running. "This time is going to be different." She spoke to the trees around her as she hurdled a fallen log at full stride without missing a step. "This time I'm not going to hide."

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Thea turned off the water and wiped a wet hand over the steamed up mirror in the main bathroom. She wasn't sure why she had come to this one. Rae had shown her the other. But this

one was where she wanted to be. She ran her hand over the mirror again and then ran the same hand through her dampening hair.

"What are you doing Theandra?" She asked herself as she watched yet another tear slide down her face and drip off her chin. "Do you want to loose her? Cause that's what you are going to do."

She leaned heavily on the sink and shook her hair. She slowly lifted her head again and looked at her reflection. Running a hand down over her naked body, the memory of the feeling of Rae's fingers on her skin made her close her eyes and shiver.

"No Thea, you don't want to lose that. It's like she is the only one who will ever touch you in the way she does." The actress closed her eyes again as she reflected on the fact that coming from her the statement was a big one. A lot of people had touched her, but none had ever made her feel as Rae did.

Moving away from the sink, Thea walked over to the large tub and stepped in. Sighing as she felt the contrast of the hot soapy water to her now cooling skin. Settling down in the huge tub, she rested her head back on the bath pillow. Moving her leg to stretch out made her wince as a flair of pain flashed across her stomach.

Thea closed her eyes again and unbidden her mind played to her the scene from the kitchen. The memory of Rae catching her arm not letting her fall was the one she wanted to centre on but instead all she could think of was the fact that she was drawing Rae deeper and deeper into something false. A shiver made Thea open her eyes and steady herself against the walls of the bath.

"Oh Thea." She asked herself as she ran her hand over her legs and arms. "You need to make a choice." She smoothed back her hair as she watched the steam curl in spirals round the room. "You either need to let go or take charge. You can't mix what is happening now with the past, though you can't afford to forget the facts either. You have to relax or leave girl. Those are your choices." She washed herself down as her mind whirled over the situation.

She watched the last of the spirals dissipate before pushing herself up and out of the bath. Her decision made. She stepped out and reached for the nearest towel and wrapped it round herself, tucking it in tight. Turning, she pulled the plug and let the water empty out of the tub.

Still in the towel, she walked through to the bedroom and smiled at the tangled sheets and crushed orchids. Thea tidied the bed and placed the five orchids she had separated in a tall vase on the side. She left the crushed ones on the bed and just pulled the sheets up.

"Tommy." Her mind assessed, when her eyes fell upon a picture of a much younger Rae with a younger boy. Walking over, she took the photograph from its place on the dresser and sat down on the edge of the bed with it. Her finger traced over Rae's face.

"I'm not going to leave Rae, I can't." She said solemnly. "Because I love you, and all I can do is ask that you forgive me for not doing it when it is over." A tear splashed onto the glass.

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Rae broke back into her backyard still at a fast pace. She knew she'd pushed even Mac the last half kilometre. Sweat seeped back into her hair and pooled under the heavy fleece of her sweater.

As Mac stretched out on the cool grass for a rest, she went through a slow series of tai-chi figures to calm her muscles and reacquaint them to a normal temperature before she went back into the house. As her mind freed up, her thoughts started to whirl again.

'Okay, so I'm not just doing this to avoid going into the house. Am I?' When the question was asked she wasn't happy with the answer in her head.

"You're back." Thea's voice came from the door suddenly. The actress was dressed in a pair of grey joggers she'd been forced to turn up at least four times to keep from tripping on them and a grey sweatshirt. She'd found them both in the closet and hoped that Rae wouldn't mind her borrowing them. Her wet hair lay loose on her shoulders.

"Oh yeah." Rae looked to the door as the voice drew her out of her motion.

"Must have been some run." She called looking from Rae to Mac and then back again.

"Only a short one." Rae said finishing the last movement and stretching her hands above her head. "Got to wear her out." She smiled at Mac and headed toward Thea and the door. She concentrated on making each step closer as her mind screamed at her to turn and keep running.

"I can imagine!" Thea called brightly. "Want anything?" She took a step back into the house.

"Desperate for a drink." Rae admitted. "Come on Mac." She called back to the dog, which followed her into the house.

Thea could feel her hands trembling as she held the door open.

"What would you like?" She asked still smiling, though the intensity of it wavered a little.

"A water would be great." Rae answered as she peeled off the fleece and hung it on one of the hooks by the back door. Thea checked it was safe to let the back door go. "Though you don't have to get it." She added in a tight voice.

"I want to get it." Thea moved to the fridge and opened it. Finding a bottle in the door, she took it out turned and offered it to her lover. "Does Toni need anything?"

"Thank you." Rae smiled and took it from her. Quickly undoing the lid and gulping down the cold liquid. Hearing her name, the husky padded over to sit by her water bowl.

"She's subtle isn't she?" Thea said moving to fill the bowl with tap water and then returned it to the floor, stopping only to stroke the dog once.

"Always." Rae wiped a dribble of water from her chin and sat down on the small wooden bench near the back door to take off her runners. "Did you find everything you needed for your bath?"

"Yes, I found everything. Thank you." Thea nodded. "Do you want a shower or a bath? I could run you a bath." She glanced back at the husky nervously as she asked.

"A bath would be nice." Rae kept her voice soft.

"It would." The actress brightened instantly, pleased her offer had been accepted. The smile on Thea's face kept Rae from saying anything else. "Shall I run it?" She tried to keep herself from sounding like an excited child, happy to perform. She knew she'd failed when her own question rang in her ears.

"That would be nice." Rae answered in a soft slow voice as she tried to convince herself it was okay to say yes to this. After all Thea had offered and she seemed quite like she actually wanted to do it.

"Great." Thea bobbed and then turned to hurry towards the upstairs before stopping and turning around again. "Do you like bubbles?" She asked in a hurried cadence.

"A little known secret is I love them." The tall woman smirked trying to lighten her own mood.

"One hot bubbly bath coming up, top room?" She asked without thinking.

"Top room?" Rae questioned confused.

"I meant the master bathroom."

"Oh, yeah." Rae smiled.

"Come up when you like." Thea said as she dashed off, not waiting for a response.

"Be right behind you in a second." Rae called to her as she chugged the last of the water. Staring at the now empty container, she moved without thinking to toss it in the recycle box near the door.

"You're doing fine so far." She tried to reassure herself. "Just keep thinking and you'll be fine." With one last deep breath she headed upstairs.

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Thea folded up the green pjs she had worn and placed them on the pillow that she had slept on almost without thinking. She then went back into the bathroom to check the water level.

Rae came into the bedroom silently, hearing the water running she looked to see a bit of Thea's

reflection in the mirror.

The actress was sat on the side of the tub, watching the water level and checking the temperature. The sound of the water lulled her ears and made her oblivious to Rae's entrance.

Rae had the sticky shirt half way off before it struck her that stripping naked to walk into the bathroom might give the wrong impression. Pulling the material back down, she stopped to pull off her socks and tossed them down the laundry shoot. Turning towards the bed, the sight of Thea's green pj's folded neatly on the pillow caused her to smile.

'Maybe things aren't as bad as I thought.' She looked to the dresser, her mind instantly registering the change in the position of Tommy's picture. Without thought she went to move it back to the proper spot.

Thea checked the water and happy that it was going nicely she turned and headed out of the bathroom to the bedroom.

"Sorry, I hadn't heard...." Thea stopped when she saw the photo in Rae's hand.

"Pardon?" Rae turned to the voice.

The flustered blonde tried to look at Rae and not the photograph, desperately trying not to look guilty or embarrassed.

"Pardon?" Rae asked again, none of her focus on the picture and all of it on the strange look on Thea's face.

"The water!" Her mind racing, Thea turned and pointed to the bathroom. "It's nearly ready." She tried to make her voice sound natural.

"Thank you." Rae spoke with a soft smile. Thea returned it with an uneasy one of her own. "The photo was taken my first year at university." She found herself talking without thinking and a part of her knew that if she thought about it she wouldn't be talking. She placed the picture back on the dresser.

"It's lovely." Thea said honestly, taking a slight step forward. "I guess that's Tommy with you?" She posed the question gently.

"Yes, that's Tommy. He always did take a good picture." Rae frowned a little. "But there isn't many of the two of us I'm afraid."

"It's a great picture." Thea walked the distance between them and almost reached out to touch the picture. Just before her mind kicked in and she stopped her hand just short of the metal frame.

"May I?" She whispered.

Rae could only nod, though it was the most genuine approval she could give. Thea picked it up and looked at it. The two happy faces that beamed back at her made her smile. Rae had her hand and arm around her brother's neck in a mock headlock. He was wearing what was obviously Rae's university sweater.

"How old was he then?" She asked.

"He was sixteen." Rae said almost silently. "He'd come down into the city to celebrate my birthday."

"He looks like you." Thea traced the faces in the picture and then without thinking she raised her finger and traced Rae's cheek. "Same cheek bones." She whispered.

"Naw..." Rae tried to joke. "He got all the good looks."

"Were his eyes such a beautiful blue?" Thea kept her hand at the side of Rae's face.

"Yes." Rae swallowed hard, letting her eyes close briefly.

'Not so hard.' She chastised herself, hearing the effort Rae had made to give the answer. 'Give the girl space and time.' Thea dropped her hand.

"Sorry." She whispered. "We don't have to talk about this."

"You would have liked him." Rae added finding her voice again.

"I'm sure I would." Thea admitted as she replaced the photograph and went to turn off the taps.

Rae's hand almost went to move the photo back to its proper angle. The angle it had sat at on that dresser for an eternity.

"No, it's fine like that." She spoke softly to herself and turned to follow Thea into the bathroom.

Thea shut off the water and stood by the bath when she heard Rae come in.

"Thank you for making up the bed." She hated herself for the mundane words but she really did want to show that she'd noticed.

"I looked around for candles but I couldn't find any." Thea waffled and then halted herself when she heard the bed comment. "No worries."

"Candles?" Rae looked off to think. "Wait I think there are some in the spare room. Do you want me to get them?"

"It's okay." Thea tried to be accommodating. "I just have candles with my baths and I wanted to get some burning for you. Then I remembered it's just a me thing!" The actress laughed.

"Sounds lovely." Rae admitted.

"Next time." She said sincerely.

"Deal." Rae nodded with a smile.

"I should... er... do you..." Thea pointed to the water and then to Rae and then to the door several times. "I should leave you to it." She managed to put together a sentence at last.

"It's okay, you could stay and keep me company." She tried to make the offer without any overture in her words.

"I wouldn't want to be in the way." Thea hated herself for the statement.

"You wouldn't." Rae smiled at her. "Ever."

For godsake, they'd made love until she'd been exhausted only hours before and now here she was acting like a child visiting a family friend. The little word 'fight' filtered into her brain again and she looked up at Rae feeling a little more confidence.

"I could wash your back." She suggested finally.

"That would be nice." Rae tried to put the perfect amount of enthusiasm in her voice. The truth was that she was so happy just to hear that Thea would entertain the idea of coming anywhere near her.

"You should get in, it's going to get cold."

"I have to get out of these." Rae said suddenly as the sticky feel of the sweaty shirt started to make her feel itchy.

Thea tactfully turned round and looked over at the sink and the mirror where she had stood earlier.

"It looks the perfect temperature." The tall woman moved to quickly shed her running clothes.

Feeling rather guilty Thea watched Rae's every move in the mirror. Stepping into the bath, the technician let herself sink down into the bubbles and tried not to look at Thea in the hopes of easing the woman's newfound shyness. She closed her eyes as the hot seeped into every inch of her slowly, burning at first but relaxing to a nice temperature as her skin adjusted.

Thea's heart and body overcame the moment and then without thinking she pulled off the sweatshirt and slipped the joggers down as she walked over to the tub. She placed a loving hand on Rae's shoulder.

"It is a perfect..." Rae's voice caught as she turned from looking absently at the bubbles to the owner of the hand at her shoulder.

"Move forward then." Thea said gently not as an order but as a suggestion.

"Temperature." She managed to finish as she slid forward.

"Good." Thea whispered as she climbed in behind Rae, her hands steady on the other woman's shoulders. Thea slipped her legs either side of Rae's body and leaned back against the tub. Rae raised one hand to cover the small one on her shoulder

"Very good." Rae whispered.

"Lay back." She encouraged Rae with a gentle tug at both shoulders. Silently Rae leaned back to lay against her, closing her eyes as inch by inch their skin met under the water. Thea's hands gently massaged the strong shoulders beneath them. "Welcome home." Thea breathed without thinking as she let her own eyes close filled with an overwhelming sensation and love as the simple meeting of flesh on flesh solidified the one fact she knew. Rae's touch made her feel like no other had and that was the important thing.

"Home." Rae repeated in a whisper as she leaned a little heavier against the woman behind her and allowed her shoulders to relax into the small hands on them. Thea felt Rae relax slightly but she continued to gently rub and stroke.

"I missed you." Thea breathed.

'You can't hide from this.' Rae's mind admitted to itself.

"I missed you too." She murmured back.

Thea moved her hands forward on Rae's shoulders a little so they moved more on her collar bone lightly pressing as she kissed the raven locks in front of her and rested her cheek against them.

Rae moved her hands to the legs at her sides and caressed the calves under the water gently with her hands.

"I'm sorry." Thea whispered. "For earlier." She added trying to clarify.

Rae opened her eyes at the words, hearing the difference in this sorry then the ones she'd gotten in the kitchen.

"Whatever it is Thea." She spoke back in a whisper. "No matter what it is..." She let the beginning lay silent for a moment.

"I will tell you." Thea said sincerely. "Just not now, not today."



"Tell me in your own time angel." Rae answered meaning every word. "Not until you are completely ready and whenever that is I will be here to listen and love you."

"Thank you." Thea forced the tear that threatened to fall back inside and she kissed the head that rested on her again.

"No thanks." Rae's closed her eyes again under the kiss. "Just the facts."

Thea let her hands drop a little lower so they came to rest on the top of Rae's breasts and she stroked gently back and forth.

"I think I love you Cassie O'Keefe." She said before the words could be stopped by her cartwheeling mind.

"Thank you." Rae said simply wanting to show her that the moment was the actress'. Never having heard words as beautiful, she relaxed completely into the woman behind her. "Thank you for giving me a real home." She added in a whisper trying to explain.

"I have never had a home either Rae, let's make this one ours."

"I would really like that."

"Me too." Thea kissed Rae's head once more as the technician moved to try and meet the actress' eye. She needed that window of the purest green to tell her this wasn't a dream. Almost knowing what she needed, Thea looked down and smiled.

"Turn over." She prompted in a gentle voice, happy to see Rae move slowly to turn in the frothy water and bring them face to face.

"So angel." Rae asked softly. "What would you like to do with the rest of the day?"

"I want to spend it with you." She replied without losing her smile for a moment.

"We've got the same plans." Rae smiled back at her and with a very deliberate telegraphed motion kissed her softly on the lips, pulling back after a short time.

"Any specific plans?" The actress asked, wondering why Rae had pulled back. She tried to keep the frown from her face as she wondered.

"Anything you would like my angel." Rae smiled at her, happy that the kiss had been well received. Despite the desire of her body, she would not push as she had in the kitchen that morning.

"But I don't know what Canada has to offer." Thea replied bending her mouth down to Rae's. All of Rae's senses jumped as she realized Thea was moving to kiss her again. The actress stopped unsure she had made the right move.

"Anything you need." Rae whispered as she moved closer.

"I need you." She placed her cool lips on Rae's.

"Oh God I need you." Rae mumbled her want heavily into the meeting of their lips.

"You have me." Thea opened her lips, ready to receive Rae's exploring tongue. Rae didn't keep her waiting as she moved to deepen the kiss immediately. Moving her hands slowly to Thea's sides under the water and bracing her hands against the smooth side of the tub.

Thea tilted her head a little to deepen the kiss and lifted a hand to slip it around Rae. The move encouraged Rae on and she moved slightly higher in the water to allow the kiss to go even deeper.

"Mmmmmmm." Thea made a moan into the kiss as she moved her legs over Rae's and locked her ankles. Rae moved one hand from the wall to trace it slowly down the curve of Thea's hip and down her leg.

"Let's get out of the bath before it cools." Thea moved back and placed little light kisses on her lover's lips between the words.

"Good idea." Rae agreed, meeting each small kiss. Thea released Rae's legs and reluctantly dropped her arms. Though she gave her the freedom to move, she returned to a long deep kiss.

Rae shifted onto her knees to begin what she could tell was going to be a slow movement out of the bath but slow suited her fine. As the kiss continued she sucked lightly on the woman's lower lip urging the actress to rise up out of the water. Thea draped her arms around her tall lover's hips and allowed the hands at her waist to guide her up gently to stand.

"We're making good progress." Rae stopped to smile before moving back for another urgent kiss.

Thea hummed into the kiss as she let her hand roam free over the strong woman's body, urged on by the low moan she heard.

Carefully Rae stepped out of tub and was instantly joined by Thea to stand on the thick bath mat.

In a sudden deliberate movement she broke away from Rae, and making sure she had her lover's complete attention, she sunk to her knees on the mat. She raised a gentle hand and Rae took it softly in her own.

"I believe you said earlier something about showing me every room." Thea pulled on the hand. "What are the finer points of the bathroom?" She asked as she grinned.

"Yes, I did." Rae grinned and allowed herself to be led down to kneel on the bath mat as well. "Well once again my first choice." She moved the hand in her own to kiss it lightly. "Would be the absolutely breathtaking beauty before me."

"Really?"

"Most definitely." Rae moved herself closer slowly. Shifting to the side, Thea moved her legs out from under her and in a neat compact move was sitting on her butt rather than her knees. She moved her legs out and captured Rae's with them.

"Show me what it can do." Thea instructed.

"Hummm." Rae purred kissing her way slowly up the soft part of Thea's arm. "Well it can... " She moved herself back on her knees to reduce some of her height. "It can do many things." She suckled softly on the pulse point at Thea's wrist.

"Like?" Thea bit her lower lip as she watched.

"Hummm." Rae hummed against her skin. "What was the question again?"

"I think the question." Thea began as she moved back to lie down. Her back arched up slightly and her arm strained between them. "Was did you do so much running this morning that you are too tired to make love to me?"

Rae moved closer, using one arm to brace herself over Thea as she continued her concentrated assault on her wrist and inner arm. The move caused the reclined woman to close her eyes.

"Oh no." Rae kissed her hand one last time before moving to brace herself nose to nose with her lover. "Nothing could make me too tired for that privilege." She brought her lips down to kiss Thea softly but with every ounce of the passion and energy coursing through her. Thea literally trembled from the tenderness of the kiss. "Are you cold?" She asked in a gentle tone, kissing the actress' cheek lightly.

"No, I'm not cold." Thea replied honestly. Rae moved one of her hands slowly down Thea's cheek. "More like needy." The actress moved her hips unconsciously upwards as the familiar throbbing began deep inside her. Rae pressed her own hips down against the motion as she moved to kiss Thea's neck. Rae moved herself down Thea's body in long wet kisses.

"I want to fulfill your every need." Rae said gently as she moved. Thea groaned and moved her body to touch Rae's as much as she could. Running her hands over Thea's damp skin in slow lightly pressured movement. "No one has ever made me feel like you do." Rae admitted as she pushed herself harder against her.

"Nor me." Thea said as she arched her back high and Rae moved her hand underneath her back to hold her up tight against her. "You make me feel..." She stopped. "Beautiful." Her voice was a whisper.

"Thea, you are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen." Rae whispered the tired line back meaning every word with her heart. She moved back up to kiss her softly.

"And you are the most loving I have ever known." Thea breathed as she returned the kiss with love rather than passion. Rae's kiss was as Thea's, not passion or unbridled need but of love alone. Thea lost herself in the kiss for some moments before she broke their kiss.

"Is that the end of the bathroom tour?" She asked softly.

"Do you want it to be?" Rae asked softly back as she ran her fingers over Thea's neck and collarbone lightly.

"Perhaps." She watched the fingers on her skin. "But..." She held Rae's eyes before continuing. The technician looked at her intently waiting as her fingers slowed but did not leave the actress' skin. "I believe the bedroom is next." She smiled broadly.

"Oh the bedroom." Rae smiled back. "That would be next wouldn't it and there is a big comfy bed in there."

"Ready?" She asked in a breathy tone.

"Whenever you are my love." Rae answered as she brushed her lips over the actress' before moving up and off of her. As she moved up she offered a hand to the reclined woman to help her up.

"Always ready." Thea took the hand smiling.

Rae rose in one sure movement and gently pulled Thea up with her.

"So the next stop on the tour is the bedroom." Rae smiled widely.

"Yes, please." Thea said as she found herself on her feet.

Without speaking Rae lead her with a gentle hand through the bathroom back into the bedroom and to the bed. As she stood beside it she gently pulled on Thea's hand to guide her closer. Thea willingly let herself be gathered up in the taller woman's arms.

"So this is the bedroom." Rae said almost silently as she bent to kiss the soft flesh of a bare shoulder. Her hands roamed over the small woman's back.

"What do you use it for?" Thea asked enjoying the hands on her body.

"Well before yesterday." Rae's hands made one slow trip down over the curves of Thea's ass before moving upwards again to her back. "It used to be used only to sleep in."

"And now?" Thea felt her heart rate quicken and her temperature rise as her body responded to the touch.

"But now it has so many possibilities other than sleep." Rae let her hands linger down again to caress over Thea's thighs and around her hips before repeating the motion with more pressure in her fingertips. At no time did the wet kisses on Thea's shoulder stop. "Would you like a more in depth tour of the bed itself?" She kissed her way up to Thea's neck, pulling the woman in her arms even closer.

"Make love to me Rae. Here, now, on your bed. Do it slowly, tenderly, but leave me spent and exhausted in your arms. Make me tremble inside and make me see the stars in your heavens." Thea's voice was low as the actress surrendered herself. "Show me a new possibility of this our room."

"As you wish." Rae whispered as she moved to kiss her again softly. With a strong but loving hand to the middle of her back, she gently guided Thea around and down to lay on the bed. She moved back to kiss her neck again softly when they were settled. Her hand came around slowly from its place at Thea's back and moved to caress her stomach before going downwards.

"The first time I ever saw you." Rae began to speak in a soft low tone as her hand move to memorize the angle in the actress' hips and the curve of her thigh. Thea just immersed herself in feeling and experience of their lovemaking. She silently hoped Rae would not mind her lack of action or doubt her devotion because of it. She just wanted to be loved, loved for no other reason other than the person making love to her wanted to fulfill her desires. Thea listened carefully as Rae spoke and knew in her heart that the technician would do just as she needed.

"You were standing outside the theatre in the rain. It was a very hot day in August." Rae shifted to rest more of her own body against Thea's side. "Everyone else was complaining about the heat and humidity and then even the fact that it was raining. But you just stood out there in it laughing." She moved up to kiss her softly on the lips. "And I knew then I loved you and that I wanted to spend the rest of my life making you happy any way I could."

Rae's mind doubted this had been what Thea wanted from her at this moment but she finished the memory needing for it to be told to her at this most intimate of times when not one word of it could be awkward. Unable not to be completely still, Thea drew a finger along Rae's arm, her eyes still closed, mesmerized by the words coming from Rae and the actions that warmed her body and soul. Rae moved her hand to Thea's inner thigh and lightly dragged her fingers in friction against the soft skin.

"Thank you." Thea breathed. A part of her wanted so desperately to return the favor and tell Rae when it was she'd known that Rae was different. But because of when that moment had been she knew she couldn't and besides this was Rae's moment and nothing should touch it.

"No thanks." Rae kissed her softly again. "Just the facts. I needed you to know." The last words came in a whisper. As she moved to explore the flesh of the woman's neck with her lips as her the motion of her hand continued and slowly got closer until it finally dragged over Thea's damp curls with a slight touch.

Thea moaned and pushed forward, her body reacting unbidden. Rae increased the pressure of her touch, allowing her thumb to enter the wetness slightly as she repeated the caress again. Her own breathing got deeper as the heat pouring into her hand increased. Unable to continue the soft teasing, she slipped two fingers inside the actress and split them to rub against either side of woman's wet center with a slow steady pressure. Thea moaned deeply as she breathed in.

Revealing in the pleasure that Rae was giving her, Thea moved her own hand. Not moving to explore Rae's body, but down to meet the hand that moved against her with precision and skill.

Her mind worried what Rae's reaction to her movement would be as she interlocked her fingers with those of her dark haired lover. She gently added her own pressure to Rae's movements.

Rae moaned her approval at the move and waited to see if Thea wanted to guide both their hands. Thea slackened the pressure to let Rae know that she was still very much in charge and closing her eyes she let go of time and space to concentrate solely on the pleasure being given to her.

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"Come on, we have to see day light some time today." Thea said as she pulled on the fleece top Rae had leant her before.

"Why?" Rae asked from the bed, her smile was obvious.

"Because I fancy a night on the town." Thea said returning to the bed. She leant over her lover and kissed her lightly.

"A night on the town I can do, but why do I have to move now." Rae captured Thea in her arms.

Thea leant down again and kissed Rae deeply, her tongue teasing for a moment before she pulled back.

"Because I have no clothes and I am not going to a club in a fleece!" She laughed. Rolling off the bed to pick up the pants on the floor by the bed and threw them at Rae.

"I'll give you ten minutes and then I am leaving without you." She laughed and jogged out of the room and down the stairs to wait in the newly tidied lounge.

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Rae smiled in appreciation as Thea turned slowly and then looked at her lover, her red-blonde head tilted slightly.

"What do you think?" The actress asked.

"It'll be great." Rae replied honestly. They had been to at least seven shops and in the end Thea had brought them back to the first one they had visited.

"It's only a night club love." Rae said as Thea nodded and slipped back into the changing cubical.

"I know but I have to look good." Thea's voice joked from within. "Can't have you ashamed of your date."

"Couldn't happen love." Rae said smirking happily. "Couldn't ever happen." She whispered softly she sat back in the chair and waited for her lover to reappear.

Continued in Act VII...

### The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

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## ~ After the Curtain Falls ~

by Beth Dragon & Kathleen Wolf

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**Feedback:** All comments are greatly appreciated and can be sent to: [kathandbeth@hotmail.com](mailto:kathandbeth@hotmail.com)

**Thanks:** To Emma, for her never ending love, support and chocolate. To the Ex-Guards Village for all their feedback and expert advice.

## Act VII

Rae pulled the jeep into the alleyway knowing to Thea it would seem like a blind move but she knew from experience it came out into a large parking lot that few of the out of town club goers thought to use. She pulled the jeep into a parking spot that would be easier to get out of later and with a smile she shut off the jeep's engine.

"So you ready?" She turned to Thea.

"I think so." Thea replied nervously.

"It's a great club really." Rae tried to be positive. "Just looks like a dive on the outside."

"I bet it is, I just feel a bit like a kid!" Thea replied honestly.

"You are one." Rae grinned at her, with a simple movement she got out and moved round to open Thea's door. "If you don't like it we can leave, just give the word. There are a hundred places we could go too." She needed Thea to know that nothing about the evening to come was written in stone.

"I will." Thea said as she moved to climb out.

"Good." Rae smiled and offered her hand. Thea took it and hopped down. Rae let Thea move clear and slammed the jeep door shut.

"Oh and if anyone says or looks at you anyway you don't like tell me." Rae's voice was icy and serious.

"Are they likely too?" She asked frowning gently.

"Nothing big or heavy angel." Rae lightened her tone realising the effect it had had. "Might get a few overanxious drunk admirers, but the bouncers here are really good for cleaning out the riffraff. They have a no question policy."

"I don't think I'll be the one plagued by admirers." Thea laughed gently then added in a more serious tone. "Bouncers are good."

"We'll see." Rae laughed, as she looked her up and down slowly before meeting Thea's eyes. "In that outfit I won't get a second glance." She squeezed her hand. "You look beautiful."

"Are you sure?" Thea glanced down at the outfit they had bought about two hours earlier.

"Positive." Rae confirmed.

"I feel a bit scruffy." She suggested not sure if she had used the right word.

"I'm positive." Rae repeated moving forward to give her a light kiss.



"Rae?" Thea asked reaching for Rae's hand. "Before we go in, and so I don't make an absolute fool of myself in there..." Her voice trailed off, then she made a second attempt. "How ... well ... tolerant will they be?"

"No one will even bat an eyelash." Rae smiled at her, adoring the fact that Thea was so sensitive.

"Sure?" She leaned closer.

"Positive." Rae whispered as Thea closed the distance between their lips and kissed her gently.

"Good." She whispered.

"You ready to go in?" Rae asked softly when the kiss ended. "Ready to dance up a storm?"

"Ready and waiting." Thea replied happily, ready to follow Rae to the end of the world.

"Let's go then." Rae grinned and pulled her off towards the alley. "Shortcut."

They walked through the alley and emerged onto a busy street as cars and taxis sped by.

"Good short cut." Thea looked to see the line up of people outside the club that stretched far down the street.

"Got to love it." Rae smiled at her.

"How long will we have to wait?" Thea asked happily as she approached the queue.

"I predict not long." Rae smiled at her and continued to lead her past the line. "We go VIP."

"Rae...." She started to argue then she paused hearing the VIP statement. "How?"

Rae fought with telling her directly why but decided she couldn't do it just like that.

"A friend of yours is part owner in the club." Rae stopped their walk and answered in a soft voice.

"Oh." Thea looked up in slight confusion, but then realized what her lover was telling her.

"I should have told you." Rae bit her lip, perhaps coming here had been a mistake. It was just that here she knew that Thea was guaranteed safety as well as a good time.

"No, no it's fine." The actress tried to move past her shock.

"Diversified investments." Rae smiled slightly and Thea made an attempt to return the smile.

"Apparently so." She said gently though inside she was beginning to feel that twinge of panic that had haunted her all day. Once again she was reminded of just how much she didn't know about her new lover.

"Are you upset?" Rae asked timidly.

"No, not at all." Thea said realising that Rae might be picking up on her subconscious vibes. "In fact I like perks!" She added grinning.

"Well no line is one." Rae smiled though she was not convinced that Thea was completely okay with this. She had expected at least one question on the subject. A 'hey when did you buy it?' would have put her mind at more ease. In fact anything other than straightforward acceptance would have been good.

"Rae?" Thea asked quietly as she slipped her arm through Rae's.

"Yes Thea?" Rae turned to her breaking from her previous thought, maybe she was getting a question after all.

"Has this got anything to do with Cleo?" As soon as the question left her mouth Thea regretted it. What a stupid conclusion to jump to, completely unaided. Her thoughts were reinforced when she saw Rae's face fall.

"Cleo also owns a portion." Rae admitted honestly. She knew that no matter how much talking about Cleo hurt, she couldn't hide any of it. "She's the one who named it The Asp." She added trying to make Cleo's involvement seem normal.

"I... I'm sorry." Thea apologised as Rae answered. "I had no right to ask that."

"Yes!" Rae stopped their walk again to turn and looked Thea in the eye. "Yes you did!" She assured again when Thea looked away a little almost ashamed of herself and the question. "You can ask anything Thea." Her voice was soft. "I will do my best to answer whatever you ask me."

"I can't." Thea argued. "What you own, what you don't own and who you own it with is your business Rae. After three days I can't expect the world from you."

"Angel, you didn't ask me for the books to the place." Rae tried to joke. "It was a good question, something you need to know. Almost all of my investments are partnered with Cleo's. She looks after the business side of everything. I just reap the benefits." She shrugged her shoulders at the admission. "I am a very silent partner."

"Rae, you don't have to tell me anything. You know that don't you?" The actress stressed.

"I know I don't have too." Rae confirmed. "I want to. It's hard for me Thea." She continued not knowing where she'd found the words. "But I want to tell you, all of it."

"Please, if you do, that's fine. But if you don't that's fine too." Thea needed to be understood.

"I know it is." She conceded she knew that. "You would never push, I know that."

"I love you and would love you even if I found out the most terrible thing in the world about you." The actress added with a smile and caused Rae to swallow hard. "Truly love, I do." She whispered as she looked at Rae long and hard.

"As I love you." Rae looked back at her.

"Do you?" Thea asked her voice no louder than a breath.

"Yes." Rae whispered back. "More than anyone else in the world."

"More than you did Cleo?" Thea's green eyes burrowed hard into Rae's blue.

"Much more." Rae held her stare easily, as her words were true.

"Let's go in love, I am getting cold." Thea finally broke the stare.

"You'll warm up quick inside." Rae tried to muse as they approached the entrance. A velvet rope on all sides blocked off the large double doors to the club. Two tall, wide bouncers controlled the small one door entrance. It was an almost laughable display of force. The two men wore walkie-talkies and headsets. Thea slipped her hand into Rae's as they approached.

"Where's Peter?" Rae asked the bouncer closest to the ropes as they reached them. She didn't recognise him by sight.

"Peter's upstairs." He mumbled at her, his tone annoyed.

"Get him on the headset please." Rae began in a nice voice trying to give the guy a chance.

"Get to the end of the line like everyone else." He turned to grumble at her and pointed to the ever-growing crowd.

"When did you get hired?" Rae asked him in an icy voice. "Cause unless you want to get fired tonight I suggest you get me Peter."

"Look whoever you think you know I don't care." He stood his full height and met Rae eye to eye. "End of the line!" He barked the words at her.

Rae cast a slight smile to Thea before she turned back to him. She needed Thea to know that all of this was okay and slightly expected with a new guy on the door.

"When they hired you..." She kept her voice low and even. "I'm sure they told you the code names for the owners and their chosen guests right?"

"So what?" He turned to look at her wondering how she knew that inside information.

"Well!" She glared at him. "Why don't you say the raven has landed over that little headset of yours and see what happens?"

"The raven?" He took a deep breath as his mind recognised the name from somewhere.

"Yes, into the headset please." Rae smiled at him. Without hesitation the bouncer did as he was told. He was visibly pained when the response came back too him.

"Peter is coming right down to meet you on the first floor." He moved to open the rope for them.

"Thank you." Rae said and patted him on the shoulder. "Good job by the way. Ready angel?" She turned back to Thea as the barrier into the club fell.

Thea nodded mutely. She glanced at the bouncer and then Rae, over and over for a moment.

"Good." She squeezed Thea's hand and led her up the stairs inside the door to the first floor.

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The entrance was draped in velvet curtains, leading into a long rectangular room, with windows wrapping two sides of it. Several pool tables littered the floor, and myriad of circular leather booths filled most of the remaining space. Thea walked beside Rae looking everywhere, soaking up the ambience and the smells. Against one wall was a long bar, specialising in martinis. A Sinatra song played all around, channelled through a number of speakers at a comfortable talking level.

"So what do you think?" Rae asked as she led Thea towards the back and an empty table. The room was about half full.

"It's different to how I expected." Thea said honestly.

"How so?" Rae asked curious.

"No flashing lights and loud bass line." She explained with a smile.

"Second and third floor." Rae pointed back towards the stairs. "We can head up there whenever you want."

"Ah." Thea paused. "This is very nice. Can we stay here for a while?" She slipped onto a leather seat.

"We can stay wherever you like angel." Rae slipped in beside her.

"This has a nice feel to it." Thea said gently, smiling happily.

"Here comes Peter." Rae suddenly announced as she rolled her eyes at the young man walking towards them. He was shorter than Rae was with blue hair and bright silver pants. Rae slid her hand over Thea's thigh and whispered as the man finished his approach. "Very nice feel indeed."

"Raven!" His voice boomed. "You should have phoned ahead I would have met you at the door."

Thea sat back a little, happy to watch their interaction.

"Wanted to check out the system Peter." She commented in a disinterested tone.

"Is Cleo with you?" He asked looking around.

"No." Rae answered him in a dry tone.

"Oh good my champagne supply is much too low for her arrival." He laughed at his own joke. Thea watched silently noting both the joke and Rae's reaction to the topic. "But seriously..." He sat down without asking at the other end of the booth. "You here for business or pleasure?" He looked visibly worried.

"Totally pleasure Peter." Rae replied.

"Good, good." He cast a sideways glance at Thea. "I'm Peter." He reached out and offered his hand.

"Estell." Thea shook it.

"Estell." He nodded. "Consider Asp your new second home, as any guest of Raven's has the run of the place."

"Thank you, it looks an impressive place to have as a second home." She said politely.

"Thank you." He nodded again habitually. "So Raven?" He turned back to her. "I'll set you both up at the bar right away, all floors?" He questioned to keep from getting himself in trouble.

"Yeah, clear all floors." Her voice was emotionless it was obvious to Thea that Rae was tiring of this conversation.

"Good, good." He looked back to wink at Thea. "Hope you don't drink like the Raven cause I was hoping to make a profit tonight."

Thea watched Rae closely, she flashed her attention briefly to Peter when he asked her a question.

"No, but I hope you have good dance floors. I may dance so hard I damage them." She tried to hold a charming smile.

"Best in the city." He grinned back. "I like her Raven." Rae shot nothing but ice back at him. "I bet Cleo approves." He winked at her.

Rae moved on him in a shot before she could even talk herself out of it. One hand went to his throat as she dragged him up out of his seat. Suddenly realising what she had done she promptly dropped him.

"Rae? Rae!" Thea hissed soothingly as she placed a hand on Rae's arm.

"Just set up the bar tab Peter and call off the goons." She knew before she looked that the bouncers were on their way to the table.

"It's all good, all good." Peter put his hands up in surrender and waved off the big boys in black. "You have a good night Raven, I've gotta look after your investment." He smiled at her and dashed away trying not to look scared.

Rae slowly came to feel the soft hand on her arm.

"Sorry, I just..." She turned slowly to look down at Thea in the booth, not knowing how to explain herself.

"It's okay love." Thea said softly. "Sit down, it's okay." Rae to her own surprise, promptly did what she was told. "Are you all right?" She kept her hand where it was.

"Yeah." Rae tried to focus on the feeling of the hand on her arm. "I just..." She tried to explain her unexplainable actions but couldn't find the words to say 'I wanted to rip his throat out and the truth is Thea I could'.

"You just got cross." Thea gently interjected. "That's okay love." She was reluctant to move off the subject. Rae's violent reaction had surprised her and she wanted to at least acknowledge it.

"But I shouldn't have went after him." Rae admitted softly.

"Maybe not. But the fact you sat down and let it go, tells me that you were in control." Thea reasoned gently. "So do you think a girl could get a dry martini on the rocks?"

"I'll just be a minute." She turned to smile at the small woman who she was sure was probably petrified of her at this point. Thea gave her a smile of her own before leaning back a little. "Be right back." She slipped off towards the bar in a confident stride.

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Rae walked slowly through the growing crowd to the table balancing the martini in one hand and a double bailey's in the other.

"One dry martini for the gorgeous lady." She said in a light loving voice trying to erase the moments past.

"Why thank you!" Thea smiled brightly.

Rae placed the drinks on the table and took her seat again after much contemplation on whether to sit beside the actress or on the other side. Thea's smile told her to take her original spot.

"You're welcome." She nodded and took a sip of her drink.

"You have a fascinating range of patrons." Thea commented reaching out for her drink.

"Yes." Rae took a glance around. "It runs the gamut really."

"It has a nice atmosphere." Thea agreed sipping her martini. "Have you had it long?"

"Just over a year." Rae watched the swelling crowd. "Wait till you see the patio, it's my favourite floor."

"Changed it much?" Thea asked keeping her voice and tone light.

"Sorta." Rae laughed. "It used to be an advertising firm's head office, Peter came to us to pitch the club idea."

"Wow." Thea was genuinely impressed. "I wouldn't have thought he had it in him."

"He's got quite the head for this really." Rae winked. "Just sometimes he forgets that club life rules don't apply 24/7."

"So you like him rather than loathe him huh?" Thea appraised hopefully.

"Yeah." Rae smiled back.

"Can I ask you one question about this whole situation?" Thea asked looking into her glass, swilling the ice around.

"Of course." Rae tried to keep the smile on her face. "Anything."

"Why take all the crap you get as a lighting director if you are part owner of the biggest club in town?" Thea picked up the glass and swallowed, her eyes looking for Rae's.

"Cause I love the job." Rae spoke softly and held her eyes. "I love taking nothing but a bunch of knotted wires and a few light bulbs and changing the entire mood of a play."

Thea held the look for a long moment and then looked away

"Must be an impressive few light bulbs!" She said brightly.

"And because it gives me the chance to just be me." Rae turned to look in her own glass.

"Without everyone worried about what I own." The two sat in silence for a moment.

"Have you ever thought of having a floor with a live band? You know a little instrumental quartet?" The actress questioned suddenly. The truth was Thea wasn't comfortable talking about money and assets with Rae, not yet.

"Live band eh?" Rae looked at her and thought about the suggestion. "That would probably work great on the patio."

"Oh yes a piano, an oboe, perhaps a session singer. That kind of thing." The actress mused as her mind wandered.

"That sounds great." Rae nodding loving the idea.

"Call me old fashioned but I love the sound of a voice and a piano, lots of cigar smoke." Thea grinned. "Bit like the set of Casablanca!"

"Cigar smoke eh?" Rae raised a surprised eyebrow.

"Or a pipe, one better!" She laughed and the technician laughed with her. "Then again perhaps I am just a sad stage actress who should have starred in black and white romance movies!"

"Well technically there is a no-smoking ban in Toronto." She motioned to the crowd around them. "But as you can see it's not really enforceable."

"I think whole city bans are a little silly." She said absently as she glanced around.

"You would be beautiful in black and white." Rae remarked in a soft tone.

"With Humphry Bogart trying to kiss my hand." Thea laughed out loud, truly appreciating the comment. She reached out her hand towards Rae in classic style.

"Lucky man." Rae smiled and took her hand gracefully in her own and kissed the back of it lightly. Thea smiled and pulled it back.

"At this point in the movie I would burst into tears and tell you 'it would never work' and dash out of the door." She bubbled. "And you would take a puff of your cigar, turn to the pianist and say..."

"Think we could re-write?" Rae asked taking a strong slug of her drink and watched Thea burst out laughing. "I swear that's what he said."

"Close I guess." Thea laughed and drank more of her martini.



"Well I always thought he was a fool for going back to the pianist when the girl had fled." Rae laughed.

"True. So you are telling me that instead of saying 'Play it again Sam' he actually said, 'write it again man'." Thea enjoyed the sound of laughter on Rae's lips.

"It's all in the sound editing!" Rae continued to laugh.

"You mean one of the most famous lines in the world was just badly dubbed?" Thea loved the banter of such relaxed conversation.

"Sssssh." Rae looked around playfully. "It's a trade secret."

Thea let impulsive overtake her and edged forward to kiss Rae.

"I love you." She slipped back into her place after the contact.

"I love you too." Rae smiled brighter than ever before.

"So what's your favourite film?" Thea asked, sitting back and nursing her glass. Rae slipped her arm around the back of the booth cradling Thea's shoulders lightly.

"My favourite film?" Rae stopped to think for a minute. "That would, that would be..." She tried to think of something that would seem more appropriate but one choice kept repeating in her head. Thea drank a few more sips, looking intently at her lover. "The Wizard of Oz." She finally gave voice to the honest answer.

"Really?" Thea found herself as always amazed by the woman she'd fallen in love with.

"Yes really!" Rae nodded back shyly. "I know that's not the first one you think of when you see me."

"I spent the whole of my life from age two to six wanting to be Toto!"

"Toto?" Rae questioned.

"Oh yes, all my friends wanted to be Dorothy!"

"And you didn't want to be like everyone else." Rae spoke the words not so much as a question but as a statement.

"Who were you?" Thea asked eagerly.

"I was the tin man." Rae said softly.

"The perfect choice." Thea leaned up and kissed Rae gently on the cheek. Rae just smiled enjoying the gentle kiss.

"Hi. Do you need any drinks?" A bubbly waitress with short brown hair came up to the table. Thea stopped gazing at Rae and looked down at her nearly empty glass

"Another round please." Rae requested finishing her own drink. "And four of the floor special shots." She winked at Thea with a grin.

"Thank you darling." Thea blushed, suddenly realising what she had said.

"Coming right up." The waitress nodded and moved off towards the bar.

"I'm sorry." Thea apologised immediately.

"Why?" Rae turned to her.

"For calling you darling." Thea's blush spread.

"Why sorry?" Rae questioned further and gave her shoulder a loving squeeze.

"Well you might hate it." Thea explained. Rae studied the blush that had crept up Thea's face.

"Humm let me think." Rae leaned over unable to resist and kissed Thea's cheek softly. "Nope, I like it, any other reasons?"

"No." Thea replied cooling down a bit. "Apart from it was very forward of me. It was all that talk of old movies you see."

"Too bad." Rae grinned at her mischievously. "I was hoping I'd get to kiss you more."

"Since when did you need a reason to do that?" She asked teasingly.

"Hummm." Rae pretended to consider the comment. "Guess never." She smiled and moved slowly to kiss her.

"I like that guess." Thea whispered.

"So do I." Rae whispered before kissing her again.

"But I suppose there has to be a limit!" Thea pulled back after a long time.

"Does there?" Rae asked still leaned in close but waiting for an answer before she moved.

"Yes, as we are in a public place we should limit ourselves." Thea smiled and leaned a little closer to Rae.

"For the first time I'm happy to say." Rae grinned and leaned a little closer. "This is not a public place, I'm part owner."

"Does that give you special measures?" She asked her voice deep as she raised a hand to Rae's cheek.

"Um hum." Rae murmured in a low tone.

"Like?" Thea growled.

"Well if you didn't want this to be a public place anymore I could have everyone cleared out and shut it down for the night." Rae gave the suggestion in a sultry tone.

"That's a little extreme love, I was thinking more along the lines of private room. An office maybe, for later." The actress held the short distance between them.

"Private room is just in the back." Rae winked at her. "That was going to be my second suggestion."

"I like suggestion two. Don't forget it!" Thea laughed but made it a deep sexy one.

"Suggestion two it is then." Rae nodded.

"Here come the drinks!" Thea sat back a bit smiling at the waitress. Rae reluctantly sat back and looked up the woman.

"Sorry." She apologised for interrupting and quickly moved to lay the drinks and shots on the table in front of them. Thea watched the young girl's actions and then turned her attention back to Rae.

"No worries, thank you." Rae laughed and turned back to Thea. "You ready for a shot love?"

"What is it?" Thea eyed the glass and Rae suspiciously.

"It's called a broken down golf cart." Rae grinned knowing the bright green colour of the milky shot would be causing the question. "Don't ask where the name comes from as I have no idea."

"And it is made of?" Thea asked taking a glass.

"Creme du Mint and Bailey's." Rae picked up one of the shots. "It's actually quite tasty."

"The name probably comes from the fact that it is green."

"Probably." Rae shrugged with a laugh.

"Well a broken down golf cart would be stranded on the green!" She laughed and sniffed the drink.

"Oh God!" Rae laughed so hard she had to put the drink down as bit of it ran over her fingers. "Never thought of that!" Thea watched Rae laugh delighted. She beamed happily. "A toast!" Rae finally got her laughing under control and picked the drink up again with sticky fingers.

"To what?" Thea raised her glass like wise.

"To angels on earth." Rae said with a soft loving smile.

"To angels on earth." Thea agreed. "Down in one?" She added nervously.

"Of course." Rae nodded.

"Ready?" She tipped her glass to touch Rae's.

"Steady!" Rae clinked them together. "Go!"

Thea tipped the contents of the small glass into her mouth, paused briefly before swallowing and then coughed slightly as she put the glass down. Rae brought the shot glass to her mouth and swallowed the shot in one gulp, licking her lips.

"So what do you think?" Rae asked as she put the glass down.

"Not bad." Thea nodded actually tasting the drink then.

"Wait till we hit the second floor." Rae smiled. "You'll love the oatmeal cookies."

"If you say so." Thea frowned gently.

"What's wrong?" Rae asked seeing the change in her face.

"Just remember what a mess I made of your carpet." Thea's thoughts were more on her behaviour at the party though.

"Oh angel." Rae smiled softly at her. "Don't even think about that, carpets can always be cleaned and..." She lowered her voice. "And misunderstanding's can always be straightened out as long as we are willing to try."

"Are you sure? If I do anything embarrassing just throw a bucket of water over me. It usually helps." Her smile returned as bright as before. "Though in this top." She looked down at the thin material. "That might not be a good idea."

"Maybe later then eh?" Rae grinned at her licking the spilt drink from her fingers.

"Maybe." Thea agreed.

"You ready for the next one?" Rae teased.

"Why not?" Thea challenged.

"Just what I like to hear." Rae picked up one of two remaining shots and handed it to her. "I think this toast is up to you." She commented as Thea took the glass and looked at the thick green liquid.

"Okay, well how about a song quote?" Thea smiled.

"Always good." Rae agreed.

"Or maybe a movie quote." Thea contemplated. "Or even poetry?"

"Whatever strikes you angel." Rae encouraged.

Thea continued her eyes glazing happily. Rae held her stare at the actress completely contented.

"How about?" Thea prepared to quote one of her old movies. "To all the men I've loved before..." She smiled. "And the woman I love now." Adding her own ending to the old quote.

"To the woman I love now." Rae repeated the end purposely leaving out the beginning.

"A fair enough interpretation." Thea appraised before touching glasses and downing the drink. Rae watched her tip the glass up before doing the same. Thea heavily put the glass on the table. Rae enjoyed the familiar taste of the sludgy green liquid sliding down her throat. She placed the second shot glass to balance upside down on the first.

"I always knock them over." Thea admitted looking at the mini sculpture.

"Just a habit from university." Rae smiled back.

"The local one, yes?" Thea asked.

"Very local." Rae laughed. "It's about five blocks north east. University of Toronto actually."

"Great place for a Uni."

"Right in the middle of the city." Rae agreed. "It's got a good Theatre program."

"If I had known I would have checked it out!" She grinned.

Rae caught the waitress' attention and signalled for four more shots and mouthed what type she wanted.

"So tell me about the next floor up, I take it we are just making our way upwards."

"Whenever you like angel." Rae began. "The second floor is the so called alternative floor."

"Okay, so that would have alternative music?" Thea offered.

"Yes classic alternative." Rae laughed when she realised her omission. "Walls are painted black mostly, risers and such against one wall for the more adventurous dancers and strange glow in the dark paintings."

"Well for a second I was wondering what kind of club this was!" Thea laughed.

The waitress arrived and managed to slip the shots on the table gracefully before sliding away.

"You scampy!" Rae laughed and shook her head. "Ready for the next round?" She moved the shots to line up in front of them.

"Are you trying to get me drunk?" Thea asked reaching for a glass.

"Not if you don't want to be." Rae offered in a serious voice.

"Well, if you know a good hang over cure fine, next round it is. If not, I have a matinee tomorrow!" The actress smirked.

"Well that would depend on what you thought of the one I had this morning." Rae grinned unable to resist the comment.

"Oh that one was great but I didn't make it out of bed until two thirty!" She couldn't help but remind her lover, though she doubted that Rae needed any reminding.

"Very true." Rae conceded.

"So you have any others?"

"Lots of water when we get home and Tylenol." Rae offered.

"And what?" Thea asked as she had never really been a sickly person and wasn't at all in with any kind of medication.

"Tylenol." Rae smiled. "Headache medicine."

"Oh right, like Nurofen?" She asked with a smile.

"Nurofen?" Rae asked confused.

"Headache pills, English version!" Thea laughed.

"Oh!" Rae laughed back and nodded.

"And this works does it?" She didn't want to spoil the evening but she had two performances to think about.

"I find it does, but you might not want to take chances." Rae conceded.

"Well just two more." Thea smiled. "I believe the toast is yours!"

"Okay maybe we should spread them out then." Rae suggested.

"No, why the hell shouldn't I live a little!" She exclaimed as the atmosphere and music seeped into her.

"That's the spirit." Rae smiled and handed her a shot. "My toast then." She thought trying to find another one. "A toast to not being hung over in the morning regardless of how much we drink!"

"Indeed!" Thea agreed. Rae moved to clink their glasses and then downed the thick three-layer drink. Thea downed the drink in record time.

"These are my favourites," Rae commented as she licked her lips.

"What..." Thea coughed. "Was it?"

"B52!" Rae grinned.

"Oh good and what was in that?" Thea looked at the empty glass.

"Top layer is Grand Marnier." Rae began. "Middle is Baileys and the bottom is Kaluha."

Rae placed the glass right side up atop the small stack she'd started.

"Nice." Thea licked her lips and pushed her glass over to Rae's. "Here you go, have mine." She moved her other two empties over

"Okay." Rae placed the glasses upside down to follow the pattern. The structure sat almost as tall as the technician did.

"So we downing this one and then going on up?" Thea asked taking the next shot glass.

"Sounds like a plan to me." Rae picked up her own shot. "Your toast."

"To matinees and lunch dates!" She wrinkled her nose.

"To matinees and lunch dates." Rae repeated trying to keep the confusion out of her voice she wasn't sure what had really prompted Thea to make the reference.

"So you know I will be missing you tomorrow. I knew on the rotation you weren't lighting me." Thea downed her drink before she explained. "It hadn't made a difference before yesterday." She knew it had made a small difference as she'd always been studying the schedule to see when the tall beauty would be working if only for the hopes of something like yesterday happening.

"They'll be following my directions." The techie offered placing the glass in its place on the stack. Thea held her glass out to be added as well.

"I know." She said gently. Instead of taking the glass Rae put her hand on Thea's and gently guided it over to the stack. "I'll knock them over." She warned.

"Not if you believe you won't." Rae slowly guided her hand closer. "I believe you can do it."

Thea let her fear disappear as she felt her hand melt into Rae's. With a gentle clink the shot glass was placed atop the others but even then Rae didn't take her hand away.

"See you can do anything you put your mind too."

Thea wasn't really aware of anything until she felt Rae's hand pull back slightly and she found herself staring at the perfectly balanced glass. She heard Rae's voice and found herself smiling

"With you, maybe I can." Thea breathed.

"No angel." Rae spoke in a serious voice. "With or without me you can do anything. The only thing that can ever hold you back is believing you can't."

Thea said nothing and hated her mind for screaming at her. For though she wanted to believe Rae, she simply couldn't.

"Time to move upstairs." She said brightly making a move to stand.

"Ready to dance are you?" Rae stood up quickly.

"Ready to rock and roll!" Thea agreed. "I will follow you." She reached out her hand to the raven-haired beauty.

Rae took it happily having been a heartbeat away from offering her own.

"Onwards and upwards." She laughed.

"To the second floor." Rae laughed and made her way through the crowd being sure to block enough of a path for Thea as well. When they reached the stairs it was less crowded, but she held the blonde's hand and continued upwards until they reached the doorway to the dance floor on the second level.



The dance floor was busy and the standing area around the bars were a constant change of people getting drinks, chatting and dropping off empty glasses.

"So what do you think?" Rae turned to ask as they entered.

"Busy." Speaking loudly above the loud music in the background, Thea gave her honest first impression. "But it looks great!" As soon as Thea heard the rhythmic base line she felt herself moving slightly to the beat. She smiled happily at Rae.

"Wait till you see the third floor." Rae smiled back.

"I can hardly do so!" Thea found herself moving subconsciously to the beat. "Do you think we can find room on the floor?" She asked nodding to the crowded floor.

"Oh yeah, come on." Rae squeezed her hand and led her off towards the dancing area.

Thea followed happily as they moved, weaving through the dancing patrons till they reached an open area near the middle of the floor off to one side. As they reached the spot Rae turned and smiled at her.

"Very nicely done." Thea appraised impressed.

"Just lucky." Rae grinned back.

"And remember don't laugh at my dancing!" Thea's brain began to automatically learn the beat and move her body with it.

Rae began to dance herself. She was familiar with the song and so she subconsciously began to sing along though her voice was lost in the music.

"Same courtesy." Rae nodded back at her. "Though for the record you look great."

"You too." She closed her eyes and lost herself in the song. Thea was aware that this was the danger with bringing her to a nightclub. She tended to get lost in the music and the dancing and become pretty unsociable.

Rae danced along though her main focus was Thea and her every movement. It was easy to tell how much the actress enjoyed the music.

'Then again.' Thea found herself reflecting. 'When have you ever been to a nightclub with someone like this? Who makes you feel this way?'

Rae smiled to herself as she watched Thea's body turn gently to the beat of the song. Her heart and body both glad just to be sharing the same space as the young woman. Glad to watch her enjoy the dancing. Glad to be able to witness the real 'star'.

Thea smiled as thoughts of Rae penetrated the usual wall of music. She opened her eyes to see where the other woman was in relations to her. As Thea opened her eyes, the music melted into an even faster song, marked by heavy guitar breaks and a woman yelling lyrics. Rae had moved closer long before the crowd had closed in on them. Thea smiled and moved even closer as she felt the crowd swell behind them.

Noticing the change in the crowd, Rae moved part of her attention to the growing throng. She knew how easy it was to have unwanted interruptions in this sort of setting and she vowed to herself to get any such things under control long before Thea could notice. As she examined the crowd her eyes fell upon a young man dressed in black as he turned in his dance and his focus fell on the petite blonde.

On the other hand seeing Rae close to her made Thea relax again and she threw herself into an energetic interpretation of the song oblivious to Rae's change. Rae slowed her movement into something more deliberate and waited to catch his eye. The young man looked up from his appraisal of the young actress and came into the stare of the tall woman's icy blue eyes. Rae slowly shook her head quite against the best of the music. It was obvious that the man had not come out to make enemies that evening as he put up his hands in surrender and he turned back without missing a beat in the music.

Thea opened her eyes again and gave Rae a charming smile. Rae let herself relax back into the song as she smiled back at the actress. She could feel her adrenaline kicking in as the music flowed eloquently into the next track. She could feel the flush on her body, and the sweat forming lightly on her brow. The young actress loved this kind of nightlife. She had missed it.

The DJ mixed the next song into the ending of the last without a flaw and the room was filled with the thumping of a loud drum beat mixed with the oddity of extra loud strings. The desperate poetry like lyrics of the lead singer came in blurted words over the music and was almost lost within the song. Rae ran her hands through her hair to brush it off her face as she put more effort into her dancing.

The movement of Rae's hands caught Thea's attention. She moved closer to Rae, and ran a hand down the front of her top very lightly, keeping to the rhythm of the song. She stopped at her trouser top.

Rae kept dancing as she locked eyes with Thea waiting for the small woman's next move. Thea judged the beat of the song, and then slid her hand round the back of Rae's leather pants and boldly stroked her ass in rhythm. Moving her whole body lower as she did so.

Rae kept up her movements as she followed Thea with her eyes. With the hand moving against her ass she could no longer blame the cramped quarters of the dance floor for her rising temperature. Thea smiled as she pulled back her hand and ran it over her own body, twisting sensually as she danced. Thea fixed her eyes on Rae's excited blue orbs.

Rae realised that she'd become locked in her spot and that the majority of her movement was coming from her hips and upper body. Thea continued to twist and move, her hands moving

lightly over her body, touching it now and again. Rae just danced on mesmerised by Thea's movements, she unconsciously moved closer without hindering the gorgeous woman's dance.

Thea danced closer still, slipping an arm around Rae's waist and grinding her hips against her. Meshing satin with leather as she kissed Rae brashly on the lips and then pushing herself away from Rae with a spin.

Rae didn't know how she danced on as Thea had her senses and mind going at light speed. Thea watched as Rae's eyes sparkled. She sauntered rhythmically back to the other woman. Rae's mind reeled. If she'd ever doubted it before, it was obvious to her now that this woman owned her body and soul. Thea's body was getting hotter, her pulse raced. She reached up and wrapped an arm around Rae's neck, deliberately resting her fingers near to Rae's pulse point.

"Feeling hot?" She whispered as Rae came closer to her.

"Oh you know I am!" Rae growled back.

Thea lowered her other hand to stroke the leather covering Rae's thigh.

"Need a drink to cool off?" Thea teased.

Rae let her hands go to Thea's waist as the woman's small hands went up from Rae's neck up and into her hair

"Why would I want to cool off?" Rae asked pulling her closer as they danced against one another.

"No idea." Thea hissed and moved the hand on Rae's thigh in slightly, pressing against more sensitive flesh. As she weaved against her tall lover. Rae took a sharp breath at the movement of Thea's hand. Thea was completely oblivious to the others in the room this was all about Rae and her. Nothing else. No one else. She moved her hand upwards across Rae's black body suit her fingers enjoying the feel of heated body beneath the fabric. Rae slipped her hands down over the satin pants to pull Thea's hips closer to her still. Thea loved the strength with which Rae held her, she could feel the sheer power and energy from her lover through this the merest of touches.

As the last song merged effortlessly with the next, Thea decided to make touching Rae a priority with the new rhythm. Rae danced on as the song merged, her only goal as the rhythm that bounced through the floor into them changed was to be as close as possible to Thea for every note. Thea felt a bolt of passion as she realised that Rae was working on a similar premise to herself. Her hands touched Rae's body on her arms, her stomach her legs. Light touches all rhythmically perfect, each one heated and meaningful.

Rae began to let her hands move freely, covering more and more of Thea as she moved to the music. Thea loved the way Rae moved and she felt herself feeling rather than watching each new move her partner made. Rae felt everything but the woman she wanted and the music drop away as she moved without thought and did nothing but feel. The thumping under her feet and within

her chest were almost in unison. The light touches of Thea's hand and the press of other parts of her body made Rae shiver. A thin layer of sweet sweat began building on her from the rising temperature and the exertion.

Thea could feel her body switching into the new but oh so familiar pattern of matching Rae's every move. She began to feel her body reacting to the dance in deeper ways.

"I love you." She moved as close as she could to Rae's ear and whispered. Thea circled her hips on Rae's leg, her hands on Rae's body. With the heat from them soaking through Thea felt they must be searing a mark onto Rae's body beneath the thin fabric. For a moment she thought about moving back.

"I love you." Rae leaned down to look Thea in the eye as her hands went to the slender woman's waist. As soon as Thea heard and felt Rae's response she forgot all thoughts about moving away and instead moved her hands higher and fitted her body into its usual place in front of Rae as when they embraced. Rae drew the slight body as close as possible lifting her slightly off the ground, but keeping the dance going despite the change in position.

Unable to resist Rae any longer Thea kissed the taller woman heatedly on the lips, forgetting for a brief moment that they were in a bustling nightclub surrounded by strangers. Rae kissed her back, her only thoughts were of Thea and the contact between them.

Thea opened her mouth hungrily, overwhelmed by the moment. Rae groaned into the invitation and moved to explore Thea's mouth with insatiable want. It was only when Thea felt a hand on her satin trousers that she knew she should break the kiss. If she didn't stop this soon she wouldn't be able to stop it at all.

Rae found herself unprepared for the break, but grinned at Thea's move and kept dancing. Thea looked at Rae her head tilted slightly, then moved away, with a glance over her shoulder through the crowds of people. Thea located the bar in her mind as she turned and grinned at Rae again.

Rae moved quickly and with great purpose to follow her young lover. The actress waved and slipped under the arm of another dancer. She moved past person after person quickly and nimbly. Rae controlled her feelings of initial worry as the crowd threatened to swallow Thea's path. But she kept a steady confident pace and the dancers almost knew to leave her room lest she topple them over in her wake.

It was only as Thea slipped past two very tall dancers right at the edge of the floor that she realised she may well be losing sight of her lover. She turned looking around for Rae.

By this time Rae had decided everything was quite safe and so she decided to have her own fun. She kept an eye on the small actress as she side-stepped off the path. Quickly her long legs carried her around the crowds, approaching Thea from behind.

"Looking for me?" Her hot breath whispered into Thea's ear in a low tone. Thea jumped a little and whirled around. She hugged the other woman tight.

"All my life I have been." Thea whispered and was happy when Rae hugged her back.

"Me too." Rae added holding her close.

"Drink? Or up a floor?" She questioned.

"Why don't we get a drink up there?" Rae tried to compromise.

"Now that's a good idea." Thea slipped her hand into Rae's. "Lead on love."

Rae just smiled and moved on towards the stairwell. She breathed deep in the cooler air that waited in the large open staircase. Urgently she led Thea up the two flights to the third floor.

The minute they reached the third floor landing, the thick pumping baseline of the music could be felt even more than it could be heard. The glow of the various neon signs that decorated the walls gave the air an electric quality. A thin layer of artificial smoke covered the dancers and above them a laser show added atmosphere.

To the immediate right of the doorway was a small bar, while a longer version lay against the left wall halfway into the room. The dance floor was a jumbled mash of twisting bodies as the large crowd drank and danced.

Rae guided Thea over to the smaller bar to the right. Thea watched and listened, absorbing as much as she could, her body familiarising itself with the new base line.

"What would you like?" Rae asked trying to be heard over the music.

"Water." Thea replied. "For now."

"One water." Rae still held Thea's hand as she moved them in closer to the bar. "Two waters and two zambuccas." She gave her order to the busy bartender. The woman tending bar was a flash of tattoos and piercings as she moved to do her job. Thea glanced from the server to Rae to the dance floor and back again. She glanced at her watch and angled it up to the nearest light source.

"One water for the lady." Rae handed her the large plastic glass. Thea took it with her right hand and took a sip, before lowering her watch and then taking a longer drink. "So what time is it?" She asked noticing the move.

"A quarter after eleven." Thea relayed lowering her drink. "How you doing?" She asked, looking at Rae for signs of tiredness.

"Having the best time." Rae kissed her impulsively. It was only a brief contact but she hoped it would show that she really was enjoying herself. Thea loved the brief contact with Rae's lips and she gave the Canadian a smile.

"Good!" She said sincerely. "Me too." She drank more of her water and watched the dancers.

"You sure you're not up for a drink?" Rae asked holding the two shots in one hand. "No pressure but I wanted to offer before I did."

"Hey, I intend to match you all the way." Thea grinned holding out her hand. "Want to test your hang over cure." Rae raised her eyebrow as she handed the black shot over to her. "What is my poison this time?" The actress asked looking down.

"Zambucca!" Rae let the word roll off her tongue.

"Details?" Thea asked holding up the dark drink.

"That's it, that's all." She laughed. "That's the name of the alcohol it tastes like black liquorice."

"Liquorice? I hate the stuff!" Thea laughed gently.

"I can get you something else." Rae suggested.

"To liquorice!" Thea loudly tapped her glass against Rae's. Rae watched as Thea downed the drink regardless of hating it. Thea made an 'ugh' sound, and shivered. "It was great!" She managed a smile.

Rae laughed and downed her own shot, the hard taste of it made her take a deep breath as the liquorice caused her throat to tingle.

"Got to have at least one Zambucca." Rae moved closer to her lover. "Especially just to find this out." She moved to kiss her without warning. She licked her tongue over Thea's lips to show her the secret. They both now tasted solely of liquorice.

"Am I going to taste like this forever?" Thea laughed.

"No, not too long." Rae laughed back.

"Does it wear off quicker if you kiss me?" The actress asked with a wry smile.

"Yes, it does!" Rae smiled. "You want it to wear off quicker?"

"Yes please!" Thea's response was eager.

"My pleasure." She abandoned her water and the empty shot glass on the bar. She moved to take Thea's face into her hands as she kissed her slow and deep. Thea had to remember to keep a hold of both of her glasses as she felt herself weaken under Rae's mouth. "Is it gone yet?" The technician moved back a fraction after some time to question in a soft voice.

"Not quite." Thea whispered breathlessly. "But hold on a second." She put her glasses down on the bar and slipped her arms around Rae's waist.

"Okay, try again!" She requested gently.

"My pleasure." Rae moved in again to kiss her in the same soft manner. Taking the time to enjoy the taste and feel of the woman in her arms.

Thea lost herself for a moment before breaking the kiss. Rae moved back a little and turned back to her water. The two stood drinking for a moment before Rae watched the crowd swell up in anticipation as the first notes of a Latin beat pounded through the dance floor. Thea listened to the first three notes of the new song and then pulled Rae's hand. Everyone knew the song even before the deep calls of the lead singer rippled ahead of the pulsing background of the high tempo music.

"Come on, come on!" Thea raved.

"Lead on." Rae laughed and let herself be pulled out on the floor.

Thea found a niche fairly central to the dance floor, by the time the song had really got going.

"You can samba can't you?" She asked as she let go of Rae and began to move her body.

"I can what?" Rae questioned, pretty sure she couldn't.

"Samba!" Thea arched her back and danced a little off to the left with careful and precise foot movements.

"Nope." Rae moved to the fast beat as best as she could. "Think you can teach me?" She asked watching Thea's complicated movements both amazed and intimidated.

"My pleasure!" Thea grinned taking Rae's hand. "Ready?" She listened to the song's progress.

"Ready?" The tall woman tried to figure out what she was going to have to do.

"Just follow my movements and mirror me." Thea explained moving Rae's hand gently to the music.

"Okay lead on." Rae smiled.

With the start of the next bar, Thea stepped foot over foot to the left for a count of five and then pulled Rae forward slightly so that she could lean back. Then she straightened and moved back foot over foot to her starting place. Rae tried to keep up, knowing she'd missed the foot movements slightly though she enjoyed the dip. Thea then repeated the whole set of moves but this time going to the right.

"Okay?" Thea asked as they made the return.

"I think I might have it." Rae had studied the movement and broken it down into the easiest parts.

"So this time hold me close, right here." Thea took Rae's hands and put them on her hips.

"Like this part." Rae growled.

"Then I put my hands here." Thea continued putting both hands flat on Rae's chest. In her mind Rae hoped the DJ was playing the extended version of the song, she wanted this to go on for ever.

"Like that too!" Rae winked at her.

"Just wait till the chorus!" Thea promised and Rae laughed.

The chorus started and Thea pulled Rae to a stand still and ran her hands down the front of Rae's body. Going down to the floor, and then back up, moving her hands in time to the music.

"Okay love the chorus." Rae grinned and closed her eyes briefly.

"This is where it gets tricky." She said as the tempo of the chorus built. Thea suddenly stood up, took one of Rae's hands and curled it round her waist. She then twirled out from Rae's body and then back in.

Rae managed to follow this movement better than the others, little more familiar with this bit. Thea then ground her body into Rae's before repeating the curl and twirl to the other side. Rae met the move with her own body.

"You're a natural! Now we just put it all together and improvise with a few Latin high kicks, and we are well away." The actress beamed.

"No problem." Rae laughed. She tried to keep all of the steps straight in her mind. A task made a little harder by the sudden strike of all the alcohol she'd downed in the last hour. However she smiled as she closed her eyes and let herself feel the music and the proximity of the actress so close to her now. Opening them again she glanced at the rest of the dancers, some following the samba and others just going with their own interpretation. Rae watched attentively, waiting for the right time to try out what she'd learned.

"You lead I'll try to follow." Rae suggested.

"You're suppose to do that, I taught you the mans part!" Thea smiled gently.

"Oh!" Rae laughed. "Okay lets see then." She took a deep breath and moved closer to Thea, placing her hands as she'd been instructed. "How's this?" She questioned.

"Great so far." Thea whispered holding Rae close.



"So we start going to the right yes?" Rae heard the approaching repeat in the song. Thea nodded, resting her head against Rae's body. "Here we go." Rae held her tight and began the steps to the right, before bringing them back to the start and then heading to the left concentrating on the feeling of Thea against her. To her surprise the steps seemed to come naturally.

Thea moved with Rae, with ease and pure enjoyment. The couple soon returned to the middle position and Rae waited remembering this was Thea's time to lead. Thea heard the music change and then worked her hands over Rae's body trying to be rhythmical, rather than erotic. She failed and had to concentrate hard to steady her mind.

Rae's breathing stilled as Thea went through the movement. She tried to remind herself that it was only a dance, but the response inside had nothing to do with dancing.

Thea moved back up to stand. Rae moved to take her hand and start the twirl portion she'd been taught. As Thea moved out she felt the blood rush through her ears, her body was on fire and she knew that she had to do something about it, soon.

Rae let Thea spin out with a tight but gentle grip on her hand, before pulling her back into a tight embrace. The growling want inside her was getting to be too much, she knew they either had to slow this down or do something about it as soon as possible.

"Rae?" Thea hissed as she clung to the woman's body. "Do you have a 'little room' on this level?" She concentrated hard on her words.

"Yes in the back." Rae growled.

"Could we?" Thea asked, moving her lower body against Rae's in the rhythm of the song.

"Please!" Rae tried to keep the beg out of her voice. "This way." She stopped the dancing to take Thea's hand, leading her through the crowd towards the back of the room. Thea willingly let herself be led. When they reached the almost hidden doorway in the wall, Rae gave a nod to the bouncer guarding it. Already knowing Raven the bouncer opened the door without question.

The door lead to a short hallway with only one door and emergency stairway.

"There's an office back here." Rae led her down the hall without stopping and opened the door.

"You sure?" Thea asked looking up at Rae, trying to keep her passion from being obvious.

"Positive!" Rae winked at her. "Door locks, so no interruptions."

"Great, lead on." She allowed her passion to show in her voice.

Rae couldn't keep the smile off her face as she reached for the door. Her heart was racing and her temperature was high. She could hardly believe the change in herself, though a quick glance over

her shoulder reminded her who had caused it and reminded her just how happy she was to have changed.

Continued in Act VIII...

## The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

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# ~ After the Curtain Falls ~

by Beth Dragon & Kathleen Wolf

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**Feedback:** All comments are greatly appreciated and can be sent to: [kathandbeth@hotmail.com](mailto:kathandbeth@hotmail.com)

**Thanks:** To Emma, for her never ending love, support and chocolate. To the Ex-Guards Village for all their feedback and expert advice.

## Act VIII

Rae pulled Thea gently into the club office and stopped to lock the door. The loud music from the third floor, though muffled, still echoed and thumped into the small room.

"So where were we?" She moved close to hold Thea again.

"We were dancing the samba." Thea wrapped herself around Rae's body. "But I had a different dance in mind."

"And what dance would that be?" Rae questioned as she kissed the actress' neck.

"One that we..." She breathed heavily. "Have practised quite a bit recently."

"Humm." Rae murmured, quite focused on her task as she licked and sucked her way over the hot flesh of the other woman's throat.

"Oh Rae..." Thea tipped her head back as her hands travelled over Rae's body and grabbed the woman's ass through the leather. Rae growled against her in appreciation of the aggressive move.

"The leather is great." Thea growled back. "But you look better with out it."

"Same comment for the satin." Rae moved her hands down to the front of Thea's pants anxious to rid the small woman of them.

"Oh no, no, no!" Thea broke the embrace and waggled a finger at Rae, laughing gently. "You take yours off, I take mine."

"What?" Rae smiled as the words registered. "Oh okay. Good deal."

Thea reached her own hand to the top of her pants and with ease she unfastened them and slid them off. She was not surprised that the air in the office felt no cooler to her than the dance floor had been. Rae watched her movements as she undid the closure on the leather and worked to take them off. She pulled off her boots and stepped out of the unwanted material.

"So anything else we should get rid of?" Rae asked amused knowing the body suit she had on left her somewhat dressed still.

"The body suit has to go." Thea breathed as she looked at Rae and slipped off her shoes.

"And what are you taking off to match?" Rae asked with a sly grin. Thea held out her arms and stood before Rae.

"Name it." She tried to will her heart to stop pounding. She wanted to ravish Rae, but knew that this game would make the end so much better.

"Well..." Rae raised an eyebrow and moved to walk around her appraising what Thea still had on. "I believe the shirt and the panties would be a fair trade."

"Both? Hmmm." Thea pretended to think. "Very well."

"I'm glad you agree." She whispered, moving close behind the actress but purposely not touching her.

"After three?" Thea asked as Rae continued her circle until she was once again standing in front of her lover.

"After three sounds good." Rae growled. "Do we both count?"

"You can." Thea's eyes never left Rae's.

"Well then." Rae held green eyes. "One..." She widened her own stance. "Two..." She took a deliberate long breath. "Three!"

Thea grinned and slid her panties down first, rotating her hips towards Rae. Rae watched the movement before moving with a slow deliberate hand to undo the snaps that held the body suit closed. Thea removed her top breaking eye contact only briefly.

With her body suit undone Rae dragged her hand back up her stomach pulling the tight material upwards to bunch up under her breasts, before with both hands she peeled the damp material off her and let it drop.

"So shall we take an inventory?" Rae said slyly.

"Lead on." Thea replied.

"Well I am left in my bra and panties." Rae smiled. "And you only in a bra."

"You're over dress!" Thea interjected.

"I am." Rae laughed. "So what do you have to bargain for what I have left?" She decided to play this little game till the end.

"My bra for your bra!" Thea offered.

"Fair trade." Rae nodded her head. "Your count."

"One." Thea slid her hand over her body. "Two." Resting it between her legs. "Three."

Rae watched her movement momentarily distracted from the trade at hand. She reached behind her and undid the clasp to the bra and slid it off letting it drop to the floor.

"And yours?" She questioned when Thea hadn't moved.

"So now I am naked and you still have those on." Thea finished the deal and looked at Rae's underwear.

"Well yes." Rae agreed. "Any ideas how to fix that?"

"Yes I have." Thea grinned. "You have to keep them on!" She stepped forward and traced a finger over the front of Rae's panties.

"That's what you want is it?" Rae questioned as the muscles in her stomach fluttered under the attention.

"Not really, but you're the one who wanted two of my clothes for one. I think you should have to suffer!" Thea pushed her hand further down between Rae's legs, still on top of the cotton.

"I'm going to suffer am I?" She breathed heavy and closed her eyes briefly.

"Aren't you?" Thea stroked a single finger back and forth leaning on Rae's sensitive spots through the material.

"Well I don't think suffering quite describes..." Her voice trailed off as the wave of pleasure flooded her brain.

"You like this then?" Thea asked as she added two fingers to the stroking.

"Um humm." Rae mumbled her approval.

"Nice isn't it." She dropped her tone to a more sensuous sultry one.

"Heaven." Rae whispered back.

"But with these on, it can't go any further." Thea whispered as she stretched up to nip and suck Rae's ear. Her other hand pulled at the elastic.

"I have no objection to giving them up without a trade." Rae tried to find the words. "Say a present of sorts."

"That would be a very nice present." Thea teased gently, her hand still stroking. The motion turning into more of a pressured rub now.

"Consider them yours." Rae moaned.

"I will." Thea breathed as she curled her fingers under them, and met with Rae's warm wet flesh. Rae moaned again wordlessly. Thea kissed her way around Rae's neck. Rae's complete being was centred on what Thea was doing to her.

Thea's fingers began working rhythmically below. She felt them slipping a little with Rae's aroused passion. Her other hand gave a little tug on the elastic top. Rae's hands moved to caress Thea's shoulders and collar before slowly moving lower. She found it hard to concentrate with all that the woman's hands were doing to body.

"God Thea..." Rae moaned as her hands came to rest on the soft flesh of the woman's breasts. The flesh there was hot and erect.

"Take them off." Thea begged surprised at the animal passion in her own voice. She slipped her fingers out of Rae's panties, and stepped away from her.

"Anything you ask." Rae conceded in a heavy voice. She moved her hands to her hips and pulled them off and stepped out of them. She held them in her hand and offered them to Thea. "Your present." She smiled and winked. Thea took them with her teeth, and grinned as she tossed them aside.

"On the desk." Thea ordered and Rae moved without speaking to sit down. Her feet hung just slightly out of reach of the floor. Thea watched her with hungry eyes, then she came over and knelt between Rae's legs, placing wet kisses on the inside of Rae's thighs.

Rae ran a gentle hand through Thea's hair as she shivered under the kisses. The actress kissed the left and then the right leg, loving the feel of Rae's hand in her hair. Then she placed a delicate kiss on Rae's centre. Rae moaned from the kisses, every nerve in her body was on total alert and the mere feel of Thea's hot breath against her was enough to drive her mad.

"I love you." She kissed her way across Rae's stomach and then back down again. This time gently probing with her tongue as she sought out her lover's passion.

"Oh Thea!" Rae's words came in a ragged cadence. "I love you."

Thea licked with greater force, her hands on Rae's thighs. Slowly she slid them up. Rae leaned back a bit, her hips coming forward into Thea's exploration. The beat of the thick baseline of the dance floors music came up through her hands and seemed to mimic Thea's movements.

Thea moved her hands to Rae's ass and pulled her forward onto her mouth. Rae moved even further willingly. The increased pressure being just what her body screamed for. Thea pulled one hand back to help her lips and tongue with their exploration, dipping into Rae's hot wet tunnel.

"Thea!" Rae rolled the word out in a growl, her teeth clenched against the building fire inside her. Thea moved her face back a little, her hand keeping the rhythm.

"What do you want?" She asked huskily.

"Hard!" Rae hissed her desires. "Fast, take control of it all."

"More?" Thea asked bringing two fingers to the edge of Rae's sex. The smell and feel of her lover made her feel even drunker than the alcohol she'd consumed.

"Yes!" Rae agreed closing her eyes trying to concentrate on an answer. Thea slid them in. Rae was aware most of the noises she was making couldn't even be described, let alone cover as an agreement.

Thea worked the three fingers inside Rae and let the forth rub against her clit. Thea kissed the top of Rae's mound, while thrusting deep.

Rae shook her head slightly as she took three quick breaths in and exhaled long and hard. Thea kept the pressure and the thrust constant her own need building. Her kissing became heated and hungry.

"You are everything." Rae whispered in a sudden almost calm voice as the muscles in her stomach, hips and insides locked tight. Thea could feel Rae's juices coating her hand. Rae breathed in one last time in panic as the orgasm rocked through her out like nothing she'd felt before. Thea's own breathing staggered as she felt Rae's release.

"God you are beautiful." Thea whispered.

Little trails of white passed over Rae's vision as the spasms of it broke through her from head to toe again and again. She vaguely registered the words in the distance. Though the only things real to her were Thea's touch and smell.

"You are everything." She breathed again softly as it lowered from its peak but still held her tightly in the ecstasy.

"More?" Thea asked as she gently pulled her hand back a little moving her fingers out an inch. Rae reached her hand down to still Thea's.

"Give me a second." She said weakly trying to get the dizziness out of her head.

"Sorry love." Thea breathed. "Are you okay?"

"Oh no sorries." Rae caressed Thea's face. "You just. Wow!" She couldn't think to how to explain.

"I'll have to take my hand out. You ready?" Thea asked gingerly and Rae nodded. Thea carefully drew her fingers out of Rae trying to be gently and smooth. Rae's insides flared up again at the movement and she briefly closed her eyes against the almost overwhelming intensity of the pleasure it brought. Thea then gently got to her feet and leaned towards Rae. Rae ran the back of her hand softly down Thea's cheek and leaned in to kiss her.

"I love you." She whispered just before their lips met. Thea lost herself in the kiss. Rae channelled her returning energy into the kiss. Moving hungrily to claim Thea's mouth with her lips and tongue. Thea responded willing, her own fire intense.

"I think we need to switch positions." Rae pulled back long enough to let Thea know what she wanted now.

"Anything," Thea gasped moving back a little. Rae slipped off the desk and moving her hands to Thea's waist turned them around and guided her back towards the desk to sit. Thea sat down and didn't manage to control the shiver that went through her as she felt the wet varnished desktop beneath her naked ass. Rae went back to the heated wet kiss as her hand led Thea's legs to part.

"What do you want?" Rae asked in a heated voice as her hand moved closer to the source of Thea's heat. "What do you need?"

"I need you." Thea gasped the proximity of Rae's hand to her centre driving her closer to the edge than she thought possible.

"You have me." Rae kissed her neck as she slid her fingers inside slowly. Thea shuddered with Rae's entry. Rae moved two of her fingers to sit still inside of her as a third moved in a pressured circle over Thea's centre. Thea's muscles clamped down immediately on Rae's fingers, her hips jerking forwards. "Only you have me." She moved her free hand to Thea's ass and pushed the woman further onto her hand.

"Ahhhhhhh." Thea cried out as her body spasmed sharply. Rae increased the pressure of her movement on the outside as her fingers began a slow hard rhythm. Thea squirmed on Rae's hand her juices flowing, her body sweating and her heart pounding.

"You are so beautiful." Rae cooed into Thea's ear as she began to move her hand faster. She moved her lips to the pulse point at Thea's neck and sucked in rhythm with it. With a sudden intense shudder Thea felt her muscles lock and her heart almost stop, as the wave of release splashed over her. A growl escaped her lips. Rae felt Thea's insides tighten around her and she fought to keep the rhythm of her movement up against their strength. Thea cried out again as orgasm after orgasm rocked her body. She felt the strength and effort her lover made to keep her going.

Rae held her tight as each wave hit her. The movement of her hand kept going strong. Thea embraced each wave of passion: one, two, and three. Before her body began trembling. Enough was enough. With a groan she fell back on the desk.

Rae slowed the movement of her hand, knowing Thea needed time to catch her breath.

"You are everything." Rae spoke softly.

"No." Thea gasped. "That would be you."

Rae leaned down to kiss the reclined woman's stomach. She looked up at Thea and smiled.

"I love you Thea." Rae said softly.

"I love you too. Help me up would you. I want to hold you." Breathing hard Thea met Rae's eyes.

"Anything." Rae softly slipped her hand out and moved to help Thea sit up, cradling the exhausted woman in her arms. Thea leaned heavily against Rae, loving the sound of her heartbeat. Rae buried her face in Thea's hair breathing deeply and caressing her back.

"You do the most amazing things to me love." Thea admitted almost silently.



"As you do to me angel." Rae kissed her shoulder softly. "Your cold love." She held her tighter feeling Thea tremble. "There's an emergency blanket in the closet." Thea smiled and nodded to encourage Rae to get it. She let go of her tentatively and moved quickly to snatch the blanket from the closet and moved back to wrap it around the star's back.

"This should help." She smiled and moved back to hold her.

"Make sure it covers you too." Thea smiled warmly. "After all we can't have you getting cold."

"Here take the corners in your hands." Rae moved to put them in place. "You hug me and I'll be all covered up."

"We could always get dressed." Thea suggested as she followed the instructions and brought her arms around Rae.

"We'll have to in a bit." Rae snuggled back against her loving the warm and the feel of the embrace.

"Yeah in a while." Thea mused.

"In awhile." Rae repeated happily.

"Now what would my Blackbird be doing in the office when there is a great track playing on the dance floor?" A loud voice with a slight Canadian twang to it suddenly announced itself as the office door swung open.

"What the fuck?" Rae turned to the voice at the doorway enraged at the interruption. "Cleo!"

"Raven!" A broad smile spread across the tall thin blonde's face. With a slow deliberate move Cleo stepped in and closed the door behind her. Her eyes looked Thea up and down and then she fixed her dark brown eyes on Rae.

"Cleo, I don't remember inviting you in." Rae pulled back and moved so that Thea's could have the blanket. Her rage made her miss the fact it left her with nothing. Thea looked at Rae and the other woman horrified.

"I wasn't aware I needed an invitation to my own office." She drawled as her smile grew even wider.

Thea was dumb struck though she knew she had to say something soon. Cleo glanced around the room, her eyes falling on the discarded clothing on the floor. With grace she bent down and picked up Rae's black body suit and held it out to the technician.

"Cleo, go back into the hall and I'll be out in a minute." Rae shot back at her, snapping the body suit from her hand forcefully. "And we both know this is not only your office."

"I could just turn my back." Cleo smirked and leaned against the doorway.

"And I could pick you up and toss you into the hall!" Rae snarled.

"Raven!" Cleo snapped. "You're very brittle! Did I interrupt something?" She tried to look around the tall, enraged woman to Thea.

"In the hall Cleo!" She snarled again. "NOW!"

Thea clung to her blanket tighter, feeling foolish.

"But I haven't had an introduction." Cleo said trying to fix brown with green.

"I don't think you deserve one after acting so childish." Rae moved to block her view.

"Childish?" She snapped her head back to stare at Rae. "I'm not the one rutting like an animal in an office." She snarled, turning round opening the door and closing it behind her with a slam.

Thea stared at the closed door, her mouth open and her eyes wide. Rae just glared at the closed door, her breathing short and enraged. Feeling her nails starting to cut into the flesh of her palms, she let her hands relax. Thea looked around her locating her clothes and reached out a trembling hand towards her bra.

"Thea..." Rae turned when she saw the movement in the corner of her eye. "I'm so sorry." Her voice was soft and scared. Hanging her head she collected the actress' clothes and moved to place them on the desk beside her.

Thea did not reply she just took her bra and brought it under the blanket. She shook her head in Rae's direction. With careful movements she managed to get both her arms into the bra and move it to a comfortable position.

"Should you go and talk to her?" Thea whispered as she took her top from the pile.

"I don't care if I ever talk to her again." Rae's voice was tight as she moved the body suit down over her head and into place. "She crossed the line!"

Thea did not feel she could comment on that, Cleo's words certainly had been pointed but for all she knew that could just be Cleo's way.

"Goddamn you Cleo." Rae cursed to herself as she finished buttoning her pants and moved to sit and put on her boots.

"Rae." Thea said softly as she watched the other woman dress.

"Yes?" She looked up.

"Sorry, I got you into this." The actress whispered.

"No Thea!" Rae said with a confident force. "This is not your doing, this is all Cleo."

"But..." Thea began until she noticed the anger in Rae's eyes and then she fell silent. "You had better see what she wants." She whispered.

Rae moved closer to the actress though made sure to not breach too close.

"No Thea." Rae's voice was soft. "Cleo is not my priority, you are."

"I'm okay." Thea's voice stayed quiet. "I should get dressed, do you two need the office?"

"No Thea." Rae shook her head, cursing Cleo silently again. "The last place Cleo needed to be in the world was in this office, in this club. She's just jealous." She slunk back to sit again.

"With reason?" Thea asked, she couldn't help the aggression in her tone.

"No, Thea, no!" Rae pleaded with her realizing what the question was asking.

"Go and see what she wants Rae." Thea pulled on her satin pants. "I will be here when you get back."

"Thea, I don't want to leave you." Rae spoke in a whisper.

"Go and see what she wants." Thea repeated, her voice controlled and calm.

"If that's what you want." Rae laced up her last boot and stood up.

"I think this is about what is right, not what I want." Thea replied, her mind whirling though her voice was calm.

"Right?" Rae looked at her stunned. "Why is what you want not right?"

A flare of rage sparked in Thea's eyes and she stood up fastening her pants with a flourish. When she turned to Rae her eyes were blazing.

"Because I want to go out there and slap her across the face!" Thea replied. "And that would NOT be the right thing to do. But it is what I want to do."

"Thea, you have every right to slap her." Rae answered. "It was Cleo who didn't have the right to do and say what she did."

"No Rae, I don't. I don't know her. The only one who can do anything right now is you." Thea reasoned trying to calm her explosive temper. "So please go and find out what she wants."

"Fine." Rae conceded not knowing what else to say. "Do you want to stay here or meet on one of the other floors?"

"I may go and get some fresh air. I'll see how I feel." Thea replied honestly.

"Okay." Rae said almost silently and moved toward the door.

"I love you." Thea called as Rae reached the door and a sudden sadness engulfed her. Rae turned slowly around.

"I love you Thea." She moved her hand to her heart.

"Don't be long." Thea smiled somewhat weakly.

"As quick as possible." Rae left the room.

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Rae stalked down the hall as her rage returned, opening the door to the third floor with some force.

"Where the hell is Cleo?" She barked at the bouncer she found outside of it.

"She went up to the roof." He replied nodding towards the stairs.

Rae didn't respond, she just pushed her way through the drunken crowd to the stairs. Taking them two by two, she went up to emerge into the cool air of the patio. She looked around the half-filled roof for the tall blond.

Cleo drew her short knife under her manicured nail as she leaned against one of the tall chimneys on the roof. She lodged one of her knees up with her foot-resting flat against the brick work.

Rae noticed her right off and moved in long steps to where she was.

"What the hell was that stunt about?" Rae questioned right off in a harsh voice.

"Nice to see you too blackbird." Cleo pushed herself off the wall, flicking her knife round to close it. She slipped it back into her boot.

"Cleo, that's not the point." Rae backed down a little, wondering what stance Cleo was taking. Her usual one was not to meet aggression with such softness.

"Isn't it?" The tall blonde asked looking from Rae to the skyline. "I am sorry for interrupting you. If I had known honestly I wouldn't have come in." Her voice was a gentle purr as she apologized. She took a step away from the wall and from Rae.

"Cleo..." Rae shifted her weight back to stand less defensively. "How could you have not know I was with someone in there? I'm sure if Peter called to give report on me that he also mentioned I was with someone."

"I guess I was just excited that I might be able to see you." Cleo said flashing her eyelashes. "Peter may have mentioned something, but I didn't catch it."

"Since when are you that excited to see me?" Rae questioned.

"I haven't seen you for a long time darling." Cleo reached out a hand to Rae, waiting to see what she would do.

"I know Cleo." Rae took a step closer but did nothing with the hand extended to her. Cleo waited for a moment before lowering her hand. "But we were having lunch tomorrow, surely one day didn't warrant that little fiasco."

"Fiasco? Blackbird, I am sorry. I will even go downstairs and apologize to your distraction if you like." She took another step towards Rae. "If it would make you happy."

"She is not a distraction!" Rae tried to keep the bite out of her voice. "Her name is Thea and I am in love with her." She felt the feeling solidify in her heart. For her to say this to Cleo was above saying it to anyone else.

"Love?" Cleo barked at her after a sharp brief laugh.

"Yes Cleo, love!" Rae barked back seeing the change and knowing it. "Not lust, not a distraction but love."

"What do you know about love?" She hissed as her eyes hardened and fixed on the technician.

"I'm learning." Rae tried to defend herself, the wind suddenly pulled out of her sails by the remark.

"Learning?" Cleo snarled suddenly bitter. "And who is teaching you, her? The silent redhead?" She laughed again.

"Yes!" Rae snapped back quickly.

"When you get tired of your lesson blackbird, let me know." Cleo turned and began to walk back to the stairs.

"Cleo?" Rae turned and watched her leave. The tall long legged blonde stopped. "What did you hope to find coming here?"

Cleo remained still for a moment before taking a couple of long strides back to Rae's side.

She looked deeply into the blue crystals of Rae's eyes.

"I hoped to find..." She responded, her voice back to its almost feline purr. "A fucking good time!" She spat the last words as her hand flicked out to grasp Rae's chin. Pulling the tall woman to her, she meshed her lips to Rae's before pulling back and stalking away. Rae stood cold and stunned against the kiss.

"See you tomorrow Blackbird!" She called as she reached the steps. "Don't be late." With a short laugh she jogged down the stairs.

"Bring the papers!" Rae called to her when her mind started to work again.

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Cleo jogged down the remainder of the steps and strutted into the third floor dance room. Her lip curled into a stellar smile as her eyes rested on the slight figure of the strawberry blonde at the edges of the dance floor crowd. Changing her face to one of vague hurt she moved toward her.

Thea ran her hand over her hair as she emerged through the semi-secluded door. She had considered going down the private staircase, but this way she could keep an eye open for Rae.

Cleo moved quickly to catch her at the doorway before she could enter the crowd.

"Hi there!" She started in a sweet voice.

Thea was somewhat surprised when a tall blonde stepped into her path. With a blink she looked up, only then registering who it was. She coughed lightly.

"I'm glad I found you." Cleo smiled not breaking her happy enthusiasm. "Since Rae didn't introduce us, my name is Cleo." A hand extended out towards her. "Though you might have caught that during the fiasco." She purposely used Rae's word as she swallowed back the acid she felt towards the small woman to whom she offered her hand.

"Estell." Thea said finally extending her own hand. Her momentary stunned state fading enough for her to talk. "It wasn't the best way to meet." She added with a false smile.

'Okay Thea.' She told herself gently. 'Time to act.'

"No, and I apologize for that." Cleo frowned slightly. "I'm afraid no one thought to mention to me that Raven was..." She smiled softly. "Busy."

"As we had no idea you were here this evening, I am sure if we had Rae would have introduced us earlier, under more." Thea paused as she thought. "Normal circumstances."

"That would have been so much nicer." Cleo nodded softly. "Nothing good ever comes out of our Raven's rage."

Thea realized that her dislike for this woman was growing more and more every second. Just something about Cleo made her skin crawl.

"I wouldn't know." Thea replied carefully choosing her words.

"Wouldn't know?" Cleo tilted her head and purred in question. "You must be the music to soothe her savage beast."

"Must be." Thea replied innocently and sweetly. "Or maybe I am just not a catalyst." She added softly, maintaining her smile.

"Well I've always had an explosive effect on people." Cleo licked her lips. "But from what Rae tells me you're more the school marm of love."

"Really?" Thea stared up into dark brown eyes. "It was a pleasure meeting you Cleo." She forced her words to be even and calm as she broke the conversation.

"Oh yes." She purred again. "Definitely a pleasure. I'm sorry you can't come with Rae tomorrow for lunch."

"So am I." Thea replied, for the first time in the conversation being honest. "Though I am sure you have a lot to talk about. From what Rae tells me you have a lot to catch up on."

"Oh yes, a lot to catch up on." Cleo hissed before her voice went sweet again. "I'm dying to find out all about the woman who has captured my Raven's lost heart. What is your schedule tomorrow maybe we could have a late dinner instead?"

"I have a brief window between 5:30 and 7:00 and that's all I am afraid." Thea answered with a gentle shrug.

"Plenty of time." Cleo gushed happily. "I'll have a limo pick you up at the theatre and take you back before the evening show. You can tell Rae of the change of plans, yes?" The last of her words came in a soft purr.

"Are you sure you want me crashing the party as it were?" Thea breathed deeply.

"To be honest Estell." Cleo lowered her voice and looked uneasy. "I think if you were there it might make things a bit better. Raven and I had quite the falling out a short time ago and I'm afraid my little intrusion has only worked against my attempt to make up with her."

"It couldn't have helped." Thea urged honestly. "How about I ask Rae what she thinks and if she agrees then she can tell you when she meets you at two?" She tried not to frown, unable to work out the sincerity of this woman.

"That would be fine." Cleo smiled at her happily. "Her and I can get all the boring legal out of the way and then free up dinner entirely."

Thea began to feel herself relax which she couldn't understand as moments before she had been ready to slap this woman.

"I get so scared when she yells like that." Cleo turned her face away and rolled her eyes out of view. "I don't know what else to do but come right back at her."

"Scared? Of Rae?" She couldn't stop her question or keep the disbelief from her voice.

"Yes..." Cleo said quietly. "Though I know she'd never really lay a hand on me, she would never do that." Her voice pleaded for Thea to believe her.

Thea couldn't work this out at all. The drinks she had had suddenly caught up with her, as had the level of energy she had recently expelled.

"Never really?" Thea stressed the last word not sure what the tall blonde meant.

"Tonight was just a big misunderstanding." Cleo broke into her thoughts when she saw Thea's mind whirling. She purposely ignored the question to let it sit and fester in the actress' mind.

"Cleo, I was just on my way to get some fresh air." Thea looked to the stairs. "I don't want to delay you from whatever it is you were doing."

"Raven is on the roof." Cleo nodded towards the stairs. "I bet she misses you by now."

"I..." Thea looked to the stairs. "Thank you." She extended her hand to Cleo. "See you tomorrow."

"No Estell." Cleo took her hand and shook it. "Thank you. Yes, tomorrow."

Thea drew her hand back and walked to the stairs glancing over her shoulder at the tall woman. Reaching the stairs she rushed up them to head towards the roof.

Cleo waved at her before turning toward the door to the inner hall.

"How perfectly nauseating!" Cleo commented to herself as waved at the bouncer to open the door. "Get Peter up here, I want that office gutted!" She barked the order at him as she went inside. The bouncer nodded and called for Peter over his headset.

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Rae stared off through the wrought iron bars to the lights of the city. Her mind tried to still itself but all of Cleo's hateful words sparked questions inside her. Unconsciously she wiped her hand across her lips again trying to get rid of the lingering feel of Cleo's unwanted kiss.

"Rae?" Thea stood a little way behind her lover.



"Thea?" She spun around at the soft voice. "Hi." She took her hand from her pocket and gave a little wave.

"Are you all right love?" She asked taking a step forward, trying to assess her lover's mood from her body language and from what she could read it wasn't good.

"Oh yeah, fine." Rae gave a short smile and stuck her hand back in her pocket. "You okay?"

"I was missing you." She replied honestly closing more of the distance between them.

"Me too." Rae gave her another short smile

"Rae, love." She said as she advanced. "Look at me." Rae looked up from the ground barely able to hold her eyes. "What's wrong?" She gasped shocked at the look in her lover's eyes. Her hand reached out and touched Rae's arm.

"When I tell you I love you... " Rae looked down at the ground and up again. "Why do you believe me?"

"What?" Thea questioned briefly before realizing Rae needed an answer. "Because I see it in your eyes." She added moving closer still. "I hear it in the timbre of your voice."

"But what do you see?" Rae questioned further. "What do you hear?"

"Rae, what is this about?" Thea asked trying to catch the woman's eyes.

"Thea, I don't know a damn thing about love." Rae laughed tightly. "Or about loving someone." She looked away. Thea watched her movements and listened to her words, carefully examining them in her head.

"Of course you do Rae." She replied even and steady.

"No, I don't Thea." The technician laughed again sadly.

"Why would you think you don't?" She asked frowning slightly.

"Thea, look at me." Rae frowned back. "I'm not the poster girl for love and stuff."

"Rae, I am looking at you." Thea retorted in a solid voice. "And I see the right person to love me. That's all I need."

"You sure?" The question was asked in a small voice.

"Of course I am sure." Thea said smiling gently. "Rae, I knew from the moment I touched you, when our fingers touched in the restaurant. From the first time I heard you laugh, I knew that I loved you. No, I don't know all the answers and I don't know all the problems we will face." Her

voice softened. "But I do know that you are capable of great love my darling. Perhaps greater than me."

"Oh no Thea." Rae shook her head. "Your heart is bigger than anyone's on earth." Thea stepped forward and slipped her arms around Rae's body and laid her head on her chest.

"No mine is just more obvious." She gave a little laugh.

"I love you Thea." Rae spoke softly and placed a kiss on her forehead holding the actress tight.

"How do you know you do?" Thea asked gently, making Rae think about her statement.

Think was just what Rae did as they stood there embraced. But no matter how she questioned only one answer came.

"Because for the first time in my whole life my heart, my mind, and my body all agree and what they agree on is that I love you." The answer came in a whisper finally.

"I think that's enough evidence, don't you?" Thea looked up grinning. "Time to go home I think."

"Yep!" Rae nodded answering both questions at once.

"I am looking forward to being held all night long." Thea reached down for Rae's strong hand.

"Holding you is how I want to spend every night until the end of time." The tall woman moved her hand into her lover's smaller one. "Though I'm afraid neither of us are legal to drive."

"A cab?" She questioned gently, closing her fingers over Rae's.

"Yep." Rae smiled. "Do you want to stay here in the city or go back to our house? I have the condo if you don't want to go to the hotel." She added sheepishly.

"I want to go home." Thea replied honestly. "Any where with you will fill my requirements."

"Home it is." Rae smiled.

"That's my way of saying, you choose!" The actress leaned up to kiss her lover's cheek.

"How about the condo? That'll let us sleep in later without having to worry about coming into the city." Rae offered smiling brighter after the kiss.

"Perfect." Thea replied, truly not minding where they went as long as they went there together.

"You ready?" Rae asked squeezing her hand. Thea nodded and held on tightly.

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Carefully avoiding a shallow puddle in between two chimneys the tall thin figure stepped out into the moonlight and watched as Thea and Rae hand in hand moved to the stairs. She was secretly glad that Rae had called for the bouncers to clear the patio prior.

"Pathetic." She hissed tossing her hair back, her brown eyes glowing. "You will learn my blackbird." She hissed as she walked across the roof to the railing wanting to watch below to see when the two would appear.

"You will see how weak she makes you." She looked down at the streets. "I will watch as she breaks your spirit and clips your wings." Her lips drew back into a snarl.

"And when you crawl back to me!" She raised her voice aloud. "Will I show you how to fly again?" She stepped up onto the ledge and leaned over the railing to let the wind toss her long blonde locks.

"Will I Blackbird!" She screamed as a tear slid down her cheek. "Or will I let you die." She hissed in a lower tone as she watched the happy couple appear onto the street below.

For a moment, Rae glanced behind her and then looked up to the rooftops before placing an arm around Thea to guide her into the waiting yellow cab.

"I think I will watch you both die." Cleo growled before turning and going back inside.

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Rae turned the key in the large lock and listened to the thick snap of the bolt letting go.

"It could be messy." She warned Thea with a smile, opening the large oak door to show a darkened loft.

"No worries!" Thea smiled.

Rae reached to a large pillar to the right of the door and flicked on the soft lights that lined the two windowless walls to their right and immediate left. The open kitchen was directly in front of them and backed onto a wall of floor to ceiling windows that looked out over Lake Ontario. The large living room area was defined by an ornate Oriental rug and enormous leather couch that centred on a fireplace and entertainment unit. Elevated from the rest of the room against the far corner and wrapped with windows was a king size bed. One doorway broke off to their right to the bathroom.

"So what do you think?" Rae stepped in and led Thea in by the hand. Thea took in her surroundings, once more almost overwhelmed by her lover's taste.

"It's amazing." Thea replied tightening her grip.

"Only a little place." Rae shrugged.

"I don't mean this in any other way than an observation..." Thea began as she looked around taking in the apartment. "But that looks like a great bed!"

"Wait till you sleep on it." Rae grinned at her. "I had it built in like that, it's one of a kind."

"Why doesn't that surprise me?" Thea turned to her lover and kissed her gently on the lips. Rae just smiled and kissed her back again gently.

"Do you want something to drink or eat?" Rae questioned when the kiss ended. "Or do you just want to curl up?"

"I think I have to be a bit of a spoil sport and go straight to bed with all the singing and other activities today, I need as much rest as I can get before tomorrow's performance. Do you mind?" Thea yawned as she spoke.

"Not at all angel." Rae shook her head. "I'm in the mood for bed myself. My luck after the evening performance tomorrow I'll have a good fifty lights to change." She laughed.

"Oh don't even say it." Thea reached up and stripped off her top and folded it carefully. She made the short walk over to the bed, laying the top on the floor next to it and sitting to slip off her shoes.

"Say what?" Rae questioned as she took off her boots and then moved to follow her towards the bed.

"That you'll have lots of work after the performance." She put her shoes together and slipped off her satin pants, folding them she put them on top of her shoes.

"Oh that. Yeah." Rae frowned when she thought about the conflict in their schedules. "It's early there shouldn't be too much to do." She tried to stay positive. "Angel, there are drawers built into the stand over here." She moved around the small stairs that went up to the bed and opened one. Hastily she took out the contents and stuffed them into another drawer.

"I heard Damien talk about the wiring in the theatre." Thea turned to watch Rae from her spot on the edge of the bed. "Is there a problem? Because it's an old place?" She watched the technician's movements with a smile. Without hesitation she picked up her clothes and moved down towards the drawers.

"What was he saying?" Rae left the empty drawer open and moved to rid herself of her heavy belt and pants. "Yeah there is a bit of problem with the age of some of it. I keep finding empty leads in the walls."

"Something about power surges." She placed the folded pants in first and then her shirt. Removing her bra she slipped it into the drawer as well then pushed the drawer closed softly. Yawning she walked back towards the bed.

"Yep, those too." Rae laughed as she watched her lover move. "I had to rewire the whole backstage in the summer."

"What a nightmare." She mused as she pulled back the bed sheets.

"A bit!" Rae smiled as she pulled off her bodysuit and tossed it aside. Tossing away her bra and underwear to join it she fumbled through the drawers to find a t-shirt.

"Which side?" Thea asked looking to the bed.

"No preference." She smiled again, pulling out a white shirt and slipping it over her head as she walked back to the bed.

"Are you feeling cold?" Thea watched Rae pull on the v-neck. "Or have you just gone off me?"

"Feeling cold?" She questioned back. "Gone off you?"

"The shirt?" Thea pointed. "Why do you need it?"

"Oh the shirt." Rae looked down and smirked. "We're going to sleep."

"Yes and I had planned on holding that lovely body of yours all night long." Thea added with a smile.

"T-shirt gets in the way eh?" Rae walked up to the bed smiling lovingly.

"If you want to keep it love that's fine by me." Thea conceded not wanting to seem pushy. "Though without it I would feel a bit overdressed." She laughed as she got into bed.

"Nope." Rae slipped the shirt back off and left it on the floor by the foot of the bed. "Not after the holding all night suggestion. Overdressed?" She questioned as she got in under the covers beside her.

"Well I do now." Thea moved right up to Rae instantly.

"But how could you feel overdressed if I was the one in the t-shirt?" Rae pressed up against her snuggling as she questioned only to feel the brush of silk into her hips.

"Well I'm still wearing an item of clothing. That I can't say I was expecting to be wearing!" She laughed gently and nestled into Rae's shoulder.

"Well you could always take it off." Rae moved her arms around the small woman.

"No it's okay, I think it's best it stays on." Thea closed her eyes. "Don't forget the alarm."

"Why is that?" Rae yawned. "And what time do you want it set for?" She reached over to take the small clock off the shelf.

"Just because." Thea kissed the flesh beneath her lips. "How does ten sound?"

"Just cause why?" Rae teased with the question. "Ten sounds good." She set the alarm and placed the clock back in its spot.

"Go to sleep." Thea said laughing.

"Yes my love." Rae kissed her forehead softly and snuggled in to a comfy spot.

"Love you angel." Thea whispered as she settled down.

"I love you too." Rae whispered sleepily but sincerely.

As the soft lights of the harbour came in through the window they drifted to sleep in each other's arms.

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Rae exited the jeep and tossed her keys to the fresh face man running the valet. She smiled when he tossed the claim marker back to her so that she wouldn't even have to break stride. The door was promptly opened for her and she walked through knowing that her jeans and leather jacket were not the usual attire for this place. Though she also knew that she had enough pull that no one would say a word. She strolled through the large front annex and entered the short hall to the restaurant, as she approached the Maitre-de she pulled off her sunglasses.

"Is Miss. Eaton here yet?" She asked him trying to pull his attention from the list in front of him.

"Yes. Her usual table." He nodded towards the bustling room.

"Good." Rae moved by him and towards the large booth in the corner that had been marked as Cleo's.

Cleo took a sip from her glass of wine and then put it back down on the large glass table. She reached her hand to the side, and rested it on the thigh of the petite blonde that was sat beside her. Cleo leaned over and whispered something to the other woman, who laughed lightly and took a drink herself.

Rae approached the booth, her mind wondering just what game Cleo was playing here. On the table in front of Cleo was a pile of paper and a mobile phone.

"Good afternoon." Rae sat down in the chair. Guessing the move would shock the blonde, who looked drunk on Cleo's power and charm. Cleo looked up with a sly smile. Where as the other woman looked stunned, glancing at Rae and then at Cleo.

"No worries doll." Rae grinned at her. "I'm not crashing I'm expected."

"Raven." Cleo said her voice a thick purr. "Be nice."

Rae just smiled and nodded politely at the blonde.

"This is Brittany." Cleo said.

"Brittany." Rae repeated trying not to laugh at the pretentious name. "Nice to meet you."

"I'll leave you two to it." The young woman nodded at Rae and then she leaned over and kissed Cleo's cheek.

"Thank you Brittany." Rae said again purposely repeating her name in a heavy tone.

"I'll have some one come and get you when the business is done." Cleo kissed the woman deeply and fiercely. Rae looked away from the display and motioned for the waiter to bring her a drink.

Cleo finally let the other woman slip past her, her hands resting on Brittany's hips as she moved away.

"I was wondering if we were suddenly going to start doing business with an audience." Rae waited till the blonde had left before she spoke.

"I don't mind an audience." Cleo smiled as she watched the blonde disappear.

"You do for business." Rae said in a low tone. "Or do you suddenly want to discuss the contents of the vault with everyone?"

"You're spiky today Blackbird." Cleo took a large drink from her wine.

"No, not spiky." Rae returned to her normal tone. "Just curious what papers you've got to return from Monaco so hastily?"

"Perhaps or maybe the actress was too tired to perform this morning?" She added with a hiss, taking another sip.

"That would be none of your business Cleo." Rae locked eyes with her. "Can I see the papers please while we trade barbs?"

"Sorry." Cleo falsely apologised and took the top paper and handed it to Rae.

"Why are you sorry Cleo?" She took the paper actually shocked that to hear the apology and began to read it.

"I was just showing an interest in you 'love' life." Cleo took a pen from beside the pile of papers and Rae took it absently as she began to read.

"Why would that make you sorry?" Rae read over the standard sale agreement for a rare 17th century watercolour before signing off on the deal. "Next?" She laid the paper face down in the front of her.

"I get this impression you want me to steer clear of the subject." Cleo handed Rae more papers.

"No, the subject is fine Cleo, just steer clear of the nasty backhanded remarks." Rae took the thick binding of documents, skimming the top portion she looked back up at Cleo.

"Problem?" Cleo asked catching her eyes.

"This is all stock mixing." Rae laughed. "You know this means nothing to me, I trust you think it's a good manoeuvre?" She asked the question sincerely.

"Of course." Cleo replied.

"Good enough for me then." Rae turned to the last page and stopped just short of signing.

"And Raven." Cleo leaned forward, her hand moving closer to Rae's.

"Yes Cleo?" Rae's voice softened.

"I don't want to fight with you. I am sorry for my comments and actions since I have been back."

"I don't want to fight either Cleo." Rae smiled at her, the ice inside melting just a little. "I accept your apology, why don't we just start with a clean slate now?" She signed the paper and turned it over to rest on the other.

"That suits me fine Blackbird."

"Next please?" She smiled as she held out her hand for the next papers. Cleo just slid the rest of the papers over to the dark haired woman and sat back. She sat watching Rae as she looked at them.

"How have you been?" The blonde asked.

"I'm just going to sign all the stock ones." She commented absently as she went through the pile, stopping to read only those about sales. "I've been busy but things are good." She answered reading over a lengthy document. "How have you been?"

"Up and down." Cleo responded. "You know me."



"You were in your favourite part of the world." Rae smiled at her before going back to the document. "Had to be more up than down."

"Perhaps." Cleo responded her tone showing she wasn't sure about the truth in this answer.

"Convince me Cleo." Rae looked up from the dwindling stack of papers and tried to hold her eye. Cleo looked away sharply.

"I have had a fabulous time." She said looking out of the window to her left.

"You always do." Rae looked back to the paper. "Which of the Fisher paintings is this deal for?" She asked absently.

"The small one you don't like." Cleo said, a slight smile gracing her lips.

"Oh okay." She laughed and signed off on the deal. "I didn't want to lose the one in the living room yet."

"I have told you that one is yours." Cleo sighed gently and looked back out of the window.

"Hold up here." She questioned as she read the last document. "You want to sell the Monet? To who?"

"Is there a problem?"

"You know that ones still being looked for by Interpol."

"Blackbird, are you suggesting I don't know what I am doing?" Cleo looked at Rae her brown eyes savage.

"Of course not Cleo." Rae backed down. "It's just, it's the Monet. It just sorta jumped out at me, some warning would have helped."

"Raven." Cleo's voice was hard and low. "If you want to be involved in this side of the dealings give up your little charade and join me. If not, just sign your name on the dotted line and accept my judgement."

"Fine..." Rae moved the pages back to sign her name. "You're right this is your arena not mine. All signed, anything else on the corporate agenda?" She took a big drink of her water. "None of those proxy things this time."

"Not this time no." Cleo's breathing evened back out and she turned her attention back to the window.

"So how is our little company doing?" Rae asked trying to regain her attention. "That little thing that you do all the work on and I just reap the benefits"

Cleo turned her attention back to Rae pleased that the other woman actually seemed Interested.

"It's going well. I may have to be out of the country for a bit again soon, as we are setting up a new office." Cleo looked at Rae thoughtfully.

"Where?" Rae smiled at her trying to act as interested as possible the truth was the company bored the hell out of her.

"London, England." Cleo replied. "I don't suppose I could interest you in taking on the top position?"

"Cleo you know I'm not qualified." Rae shook her head lightly. "And I already have a job."

"Qualifications don't matter Raven, you know that. It's all about who you are, not what you have written on a scrap of paper that I could buy for you." Cleo watched Rae for a moment. She knew that the other woman would not for one moment think about taking her up on the offer.

"I am pleased for you Cleo. You've been wanting to make a major move on the UK for awhile now. Congratulations!" She smiled. "You know I could never swim with the corporate sharks like you do." She laughed. "I'm too stubborn."

"You can't blame me for trying Raven." Cleo lowered her head and looked up and Rae through her eyelashes.

"No can't blame you Cleopatra." Rae smiled as she let the word slip out slowly. "Never blame you for trying."

"I meant what I said on the phone blackbird." Cleo's voice was soft and low revelling on the fact that Rae had used her full title.

"I missed you too." Rae let herself admit this despite feeling like the words somehow betrayed Thea. Though she knew nothing that pointed to that.

"Why do we always fight after I have been away Raven?" Cleo asked her voice purring, smooth and soft.

"I don't know Cleo." Rae shook her head lightly. "We always have though, even back in school."

"Yes, but back then we used to know how to make up." She reached out a long thin finely manicured hand and touched Rae's hand lightly.

"Yes, we did." Rae let the passionate memories flash by her for a second before pulling her hand gently back. "But we were different people then Cleo."

"Are we really so different now?" She kept her hand where it was and her voice was even softer, as she watched the emotions fly behind Rae's eyes. "Have we changed so much?"

"A lot has changed." Rae tried to find footing as her mind questioned again what Cleo had asked.

"Things have changed, but have we blackbird?" Cleo pressed on.

"No Cleo." Rae found her mind again. "I'm still a girl from small town Ontario whose father comes home every night with diesel on his hands and you still come from a family with three hundred years of history and enough power to have the Prime Minister's home phone number."

"Raven, that's not what I am talking about and you know it." Cleo wasn't giving this up without a fight. She's seen a weak link in the chain of armour Rae was wearing and needed to work at it. "I am talking about who you are, inside. Can you look me in the eye and tell me you are no longer that girl who would fight, not just to take part, but to win? Who felt the thrill of the chase, loved the wind in her hair?"

"No, I'm still her Cleo, you know that." She looked her in the eye. "But now I know it all has consequences." Her answer was sad. Cleo looked at Rae, her eyes burrowing deep through the blue right into the heart and soul.

"Blackbird." Cleo's voice was ultimately tender.

"Yes Cleopatra?" Rae blinked away the memories and looked at her.

"We all lost many things. Your loss was perhaps the deepest, but when I am away from here. When I am in some distant land, away from home. I think maybe I lost the most." Cleo looked Rae deep in the eye. "Because I lost you." Her voice was almost a whisper.

"Cleo." Rae whispered back. "You haven't lost me, I'm right here. We just can't be what we once were."

"I lost you the night your brother was gunned down Raven." She responded suddenly, her voice was hard once more though she kept the volume low. "You never forgave me for that and I can never make it up to you." She added her tone wavering a little.

"I never forgave you because it wasn't your fault Cleo." Rae placed a hand on the table and gripped the edge. "It was mine and no, I can never forgive myself or make it up."

"When will you stop torturing yourself over that?" Cleo watched with perverse pleasure as she rubbed the raw nerve. Rae let the question hang unanswered knowing full well they both already knew the answer. "The only one responsible for Tom's death was the guard who shot him." She waited to witness the reaction her statement would get.

"Cleo, this is old territory." She tried to break the conversation. "You know the answers to all of this."

"And so do you, in your heart of hearts." Cleo retaliated. "You sit there blaming me, blaming yourself, blaming the world for something that just happened. The only person responsible for

Tom's death was him." She snapped. "He got out of the damned car. He tried to follow us. He got himself shot. Not you, not me."

"That's enough Cleopatra." Rae pleaded with her in a monotone voice masking the anguish inside her.

"Enough? Enough?" Cleo repeated in tight edge in her voice. "It's not enough. I lost the most important thing in my world because a boy couldn't do as he was told." Her eyes blazed. "It will never be enough."

"I don't want to talk about this anymore." Rae stated flatly and drank a large amount of water.

"I spent week after week, month after month trying to teach you to fly again." Cleo spoke with her voice full of exhaustion. "I knew then the Christmas after we buried him that you would never fly with me again."

"I put my brother in the ground." Rae held her with steely eyes. "I put my nineteen year old baby brother in the cold icy ground because for the first time in his whole life I let him down. You're lucky you didn't have to put me down next to him let alone see if I could fly!" She snapped the last words knowing the memory they would drag back, the one that Cleo always ignored.

"He put himself into he ground." Cleo spat back. "And he nearly took you with him. I can never forgive him for that." For the first time Cleo latched on to this usually forgotten memory. "I hated him every second I looked into your empty eyes."

"All three times you came to visit me?" Rae shot back in a hard voice.

"Now that is enough." Cleo said suddenly quiet.

"No, I don't think it is." Rae leaned forward in her chair. "It wasn't enough before, why is it always enough when it comes to this? Cleo? I've always wondered why."

"Why what?" She hissed leaning her shoulders forward as she hunched her body a little, covering her face with her blond hair.

"Why can't you talk about those months? Did I embarrass you Cleo? Did all the little social butterflies and thick walled papa's boys you say you hate finally look at you with a condemnation you couldn't scare away?" Cleo remained silent though a slight tremor began lower beneath her left shoulder blade. "Did you finally find that there was one thing in the world you couldn't buy?" Her voice was a sharp whisper. "Did it shock you to know you couldn't buy my sanity?"

"Enough!" Cleo spat flinging her arm across the table sending wineglasses and water flying. "Never push me. Never take me there." She stood up and stared down at Rae her eyes wild.

"Cleo, you had to sign me in." Rae stated honestly watching her rise.

"Was I supposed to watch you die?" Cleo gripped the sides of the table and leaned down.

"No." Rae shook her head. "But for just once it would be nice to hear you say it was okay to be sad."

Her hands still firmly gripping the table Cleo controlled her breathing and then as it slowed she took one hand off and brushed it over her hair, she cleared her throat and looked at Rae.

"I have to go and get someone to fix this and arrange for Estell to be picked up." She moved slightly away from the table.

"What?" Rae jumped on the question. "Pick Estell up why?" She moved to stand.

"She's joining us, after the performance. I said I'd have a limo waiting." Cleo turned and tilted her head slightly.

"When was this planned?" Rae asked off balance her mind trying to figure out where all of this was coming from.

"Last night." Cleo smiled broadly. "I won't be a minute. When the waiter has cleared order her favourite drink."

"When?" Rae asked again.

"Oh when I bumped into her. Is it important?" The tall blonde's smile turned into a grin.

"No, she just didn't mention it." Rae slumped back into her chair trying to think.

A broad wicked smile spread across Cleo face as she turned back towards the bar area.

"You haven't changed that much then Raven. A night in bed with you made me forget the world too." She said as she sauntered away to rejoin her date at the bar. She slipped an arm around Brittany's waist as she told the bartender to bring her the phone.

Rae's mind didn't register the comment as it reeled trying to figure out why Thea hadn't mentioned meeting up with Cleo again at the bar or that she was coming to join them. Rationally she knew that Thea wouldn't have kept it from her deliberately, but that didn't explain why the actress had failed to mention in at all. Rae paid no attention to the busboys cleaning up the mess around her as she thought about this vastly deteriorating situation.

Continued in Act IX...

# ~ After the Curtain Falls ~

by Beth Dragon & Kathleen Wolf

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**Feedback:** All comments are greatly appreciated and can be sent to: [kathandbeth@hotmail.com](mailto:kathandbeth@hotmail.com)

**Thanks:** To Emma, for her never ending love, support and chocolate. To the Ex-Guards Village for all their feedback and expert advice.

## Act IX

"This way Miss. Winters."

Thea looked up and took in her surroundings. It took her some moments to find her lover, and when she did she was not exactly happy with what she saw. Rae was sat back in her chair, holding a glass of water just a little too tightly. On the other side of the large glass table sat Cleo. The long legged blonde was dressed in blue jeans, with a white open necked shirt. She had her hand on the thigh of a young woman who Thea thought looked at least ten years younger than the business woman.

"Here we are Miss. Winters." The Matre-de moved gracefully away.

Thea nodded softly and looked at the three women.

"Good afternoon." She said softly reaching out a hand to Rae. "Hi love." Her voice was gentle.

"Hi." Rae tried to keep the tightness out of her voice. Her mind was a million miles away, still thinking about all of the past that she and Cleo had dug up again but also concerned with why the young actress hadn't told her about this meeting. Realising that Thea's hand hung empty she

moved to take it. "How was the afternoon show?" She asked trying to find a smile. It was with relief that Thea squeezed the hand in her own.

"It was good." Thea sat down in the empty chair beside Rae. She looked up at Cleo and at her guest, then back at Rae. The atmosphere between them was almost palpable.

"That's good. Thea..." Rae looked to the others at the table. "You remember Cleo and this is her friend Brittany."

"Yes." Thea smiled. "Hello Cleo, Brittany." She nodded at the two of them.

"Thea, so glad you could make it." Cleo beamed as took a sip of her wine. She purposely avoided looking at Rae. "And so glad to hear the matinee went well. Hopefully the day will continue without any unforeseen problems."

"I am sure it will." Thea watched Cleo lean back to put a possessive arm around the Brittany. Strangely she found the tall blonde more approachable than her lover at this very moment as

Cleo smiled back at her.

"So little star." She raised a hand to wave over the waiter. "What would you like to drink?"

"I'll have a water." Thea replied a little stunned at how Cleo had addressed her. She glanced to see if Rae was reacting in anyway. The technician didn't even flinch. "How was your meeting?"

"It was fine." Rae responded blankly.

"Fine." Cleo snapped in. "Thea should know that today your net worth just doubled!" She laughed and twirled her hand in Brittany's hair.

"Really?" Thea looked at Rae waiting for her lover to comment.

"Something like that." The brooding technician looked at her and smiled slightly.

"Would you like menu's now Miss. Eaton?" A young man in a tuxedo asked the question in a soft voice.

"Most definitely Henry." She waved her hand at him. "Can't have this hard working actress starving."

Thea moved a little closer to Rae and tried to get her attention as the interaction went on. Though she had to admit to being distracted by Cleo's frequent references to her. Rae moved to place the water on the table and turned to look at Thea. She noticed for the first time the tension and tiredness in the actress' shoulders.

"Are you hungry angel?" She asked softly concerned.

"A little." Thea was pleased to finally have Rae's attention. "Hug?" She added in a soft whisper, suddenly realising why she felt so cut off from Rae. Even though she knew that with Cleo there she was risking a bad reaction, she had to ask needing at least the briefest touch.

"Of course." Rae moved to turn in her chair and hugged her softly.

"Missed you." Thea whispered foolishly feeling a tear sting her eye. She controlled it and concentrated on the feel of her lover's arms.

"Missed you too." Rae whispered back, relaxing into the hug slightly.

"Are you okay?" She added in a hushed tone, holding on possibly longer than Rae might have wanted her to.

"Oh yeah I'm fine." Rae stiffened a bit.

Cleo watched the pair for a moment before turning to Brittany. She caught the woman's cheek in her hand kissed her deeply. Brittany though slightly surprised, kissed her back eagerly. Rae pulled back from her embrace to glance at the display and moved to take Thea's hand again. She had no intention of playing this little who can top game with Cleo. After a few moments Cleo broke the kiss and turned back in her seat.

"Menu?" She held one out to Rae, her face a beaming smile.

"Thank you." Rae took it and passed it to Thea. The actress watched the interaction silently and then looked at the menu somewhat absently.

"They have very good calamari." Rae pointed out the dish in question to her.

"You'll think that's all I eat." Thea laughed lightly.

"Order anything you want my little star." Cleo purred with a smile. "Lunch is on me. You too Raven." The taller woman turned to her partner. "Brit love, shall I order for you?" The question was accompanied by her hand slipping back onto Brittany's thigh

"Anything they serve is very good." Rae turned her attention back to Thea. "What do you think I should have?" She added purposely offering Thea the chance to make the choice. A move that tried to both break the wall she knew she'd put between them and to show Cleo that love wasn't about ordering for someone but was more about asking for suggestions.

"The lobster? Then I can steal some." Thea breathed easier, thrilled that Rae was being attentive to her.

"The lobster it is angel." The technician squeezed the hand still within her own. Cleo listened carefully to the pair's interaction and then motioned to the young man.



"And what are you having?" Rae asked ignoring Cleo's call for the young man.

"Not sure, I'm not that hungry." Thea replied honestly, glancing over the menu nothing caught her eye.

"You have a long night ahead of you angel." Rae lowered her voice concerned. "You should have something to eat."

"What do you think I should have love? We haven't got Toni to clear up after us here." Thea laughed lightly.

"Nope, no Toni this time." Rae laughed back before adding gently. "I think you might enjoy the stir fry, the chef makes a great sauce."

"Then I'll have that." Thea smiled at the thoughtful suggestion.

"Great, I can steal some then." Rae smiled back and squeezed her hand again. The motion of looking happy was becoming more and more easy as she actually began to feel that way.

"Everyone sorted?" Cleo questioned with a slight sigh. She found the display almost too much to bear.

"Yes, we've decided." Rae turned to smile at her, so surprised that Cleo hadn't asked who Toni was.

Henry appeared by the table and Cleo gave her the orders for her and Brittany.

"Raven?" She turned to the technician to let her order.

"The lobster and the stir fry." Rae spoke to him politely as she handed over the menu. "And two double baileys on the rocks." Henry nodded and moved away.

"So?" Cleo forced her voice to be bright as she demanded everyone's attention as they waited for her to continue. "Do I take it you have a new maid?" Her eyes fixed on Rae hardening slightly.

"No, Margaretta is still looking after the house." Rae looked at her confidently and then she turned to smile at Thea.

"And so Toni is?" Cleo picked up her glass and took a sip not breaking her stare.

"Oh you know Toni." Rae laughed at Cleo's question. "Or you know her as Marc Anthony. Thea calls her Toni and she loves it."

"Oh sorry, have I caused confusion?" Thea apologised looking at Cleo. Cleo's frown dissipated and she beamed at Thea.

"Oh no love." Rae squeezed her hand. "Just Cleo always calls her Marc Anthony."

"As Raven said, no problem." Cleo's response was soft as she tried to hold the edge out of her voice.

"You should see Mac." Rae switched to the name she called the dog out of habit. "She took to Thea like she's known her since puppy-hood."

"Well I bought her, she must have my impeccable taste." Cleo retorted.

"Could be." Rae's voice didn't match the smile on her face. Thea watched the interaction aware that though the words sounded light enough but there was friction behind them. Mostly from her lover it seemed.

"Just going to the bathroom." Brittany spoke for the first time. "All right?"

"Of course Brit." Cleo took Brittany's hand as she moved passed. "Hurry back." She added as the smaller woman moved away. Henry arrived back with the drinks and placed them before Rae and Thea. Rae immediately picked hers up and took a long swallow.

"Steady Raven, you are in charge of lighting this little star this evening!" Cleo admonished Rae with a light laugh.

"I think you, of all people, know I can handle a drink Cleo." Rae answered with an icy glare, annoyed by even the offhanded comment.

"Rae!" Thea felt herself jump into the situation still not understanding what was going on. "Cleo wasn't being serious."

"Yes, well." Rae mumbled trying to smile. "Sorry." She nodded softly at Cleo.

"Apology accepted Blackbird." The blonde smirked. "So now that we have the ice broken." She continued. "Do I get to know how the two of you got together?" She looked between Thea and Rae.

Rae looked to Thea hoping she'd field the question. She knew that if she recounted the story Cleo and her would be brawling by the end.

"Come on. How does a lighting technician date the star of the show?" Cleo pushed for an answer.

"Do you believe in fate Cleo?" Thea interjected, feeling Rae begin to bristle beside her.

"Fate?" The tall blonde looked at her sideways, an amused look on her face. "There is no fate other than that which we make." She recited an old adage.

"Oh no." Rae took another sip of her drink. "Sometimes it comes to help you along a bit." She turned to smile at Thea and couldn't resist kissing her hand. Thea let her forced smile turn into a genuine grin as she felt Rae's lips on her hand.

"Go on angel, you'll tell the story much better than I can." Rae encouraged her.

"I'll only tell if I can ask any question after I tell." Thea put the proposition forward.

"What do you say Raven?" Cleo asked her voice a deep, thick purr as she looked at Rae. It was the sort of deal she appreciated because she knew you never get anything good for nothing.

"I'm game." Rae smiled back, her voice low and serious.

"Looks like you have a deal Star." Cleo laughed and Thea nodded to them both.

Rae watched the actress, wondering just what Thea would ask at the end.

"So tell." Cleo moved her hand back to its given place when Brittany returned to the table.

"Well there are two versions." Thea took her glass and sipped the thick creamy liquid. "Version A and version B. One leans heavily on fate, the other is for the more sceptical. Which would you like?"

Rae looked at Thea curious. It had never dawned on her that the story of their meeting could have two versions.

"I've always been a sceptic, haven't I blackbird?" Cleo was watching Rae closely as she listened to the actress.

"Always." Rae raised her glass to Cleo showing that for once she really meant no malice by the comment. Cleo raised her wineglass in return. "I think Cleo would enjoy B." Rae smiled at Thea. "Though you can give her a few hints on how fate intervened."

"The sceptic version it is. Though you have to remember that this version, as I am telling it, may be a little biased!"

"Love your bias." Rae kissed her hand again. She got comfortable in her chair and looked at Thea attentive to the story.

Cleo drank some wine as she listened to Thea's story. Her attention split between the actress and Rae. Rae's attention on the other hand was focused on Thea as she lost herself in the sound of Thea's voice and the loving recollection of their first meeting. Thea finished her story and kissed Rae impulsively. Rae kissed her back happily.

"Do you two want some time alone?" Cleo asked her tone a little sharp.

"Humm?" Rae turned to look at Cleo and then back at Thea. "What do you think angel?"

"I think that Cleo and Brittany have been patient enough." Her soft voice came though a bright smirk.

"Very true." Rae smirked back her.

"And I have my question to ask." Thea added as Henry approached accompanied by two waitresses.

"Yes, you do angel." Rae smiled and moved her glass for the waiter to place her meal. After a few minutes of arranging the table and settling down the plates, the waitresses and Henry moved away.

"So your question love?" Rae moved closer and dropped her napkin in her lap. Thea followed suit and looked at Cleo and Rae.

"You have known Rae forever haven't you Cleo?" Thea asked looking across the table.

"More or less." Cleo replied. "Surely that's not the question."

"Oh it's not." Thea laughed lightly. "And you have to answer it honestly."

"Of course." Rae took a mouthful of the steamed lobster, which was already de-shelled and placed over rice.

"What is the craziest thing either of you have done? Rae you have to answer for Cleo, Cleo you have to answer for Rae."

Rae tried not to choke on the lobster. She'd been expecting any number of questions but nothing like this one. Cleo looked over her fork at the English actress.

"Who goes first Cleopatra?" Rae asked in a tone that she knew Cleo hadn't heard in ages. Cleo broke her stare and looked at Rae indeed surprised.

"Youngest first." Cleo paused from eating to drink some wine.

Thea rested back in her chair and began to pick at her food. She had deliberately avoiding anything too direct, wanting instead for the two old friends to think back fondly over their youthful frolics

"That would be me then." Rae smiled at her then looked thoughtfully off. "The craziest thing that Cleo has ever done..." She thought and raced through the memories.

For the first time Brittany seemed to take a visible amount of interest in the conversation.

"That's easy." She smiled to herself as she thought of something that wouldn't be too volatile. "She once took her father's sailboat out in a typhoon." Rae winked at Cleo to show that she wasn't playing hardball. The last thing Rae wanted was a repeat of the earlier animosity. Cleo watched the wink and drank slowly.

"What happened?" Thea asked looking at Rae for further details.

"Well the mast cracked off and it almost sank." Rae smiled. "But as always Cleo managed to get out of it without a scratch."

"Crazy." The actress whispered softly as she looked at Cleo.

"Cleo tamed the wind that night." Rae raised her glass to the tall blonde, Cleo nodded accepting the subtle compliment and raised her own glass.

"So Cleo, what about Rae? What's the craziest thing she's ever done." Thea pressed, so far happy that her question had cut some of the tension in the air.

Cleo smiled and took another sip of her drink. Rae just continued eating, wondering if Cleo would keep the barb out of her answer.

"The craziest thing Raven ever did..." Cleo replied without a moments hesitation. "Was follow me." The businesswoman locked eyes with Rae. The dark beauty gave a light laugh and held Cleo's eyes.

"Why?" Thea asked, noticing the new contact between the old friends. Cleo maintained the lock glare and Rae didn't waiver.

"Yes, why Cleopatra?" Rae repeated Thea's question curious as to what the tall blonde would say.

"Because I hurt you." Cleo's voice held a softness rarely seen in the blonde.

"Oh..." Rae's small word was inaudible as she was sent reeling again. This had been not an expected answer, not from Cleo and certainly not in mixed company. Thea sat silent for a moment, as did Cleo. All eyes were on Rae.

"I hurt myself Cleo." Rae tried to break everyone's trance as she continued to eat, only having been frozen for the briefest second.

"Of course." Cleo agreed taking a mouthful.

Thea watched the pair return to eating and took a little of her stir-fry on her fork.

"Maybe Brittany should get the chance to ask a question?" Rae turned the conversation from the silent road it threatened to go down.

"What a good idea!" Thea agreed.

"What do you think Brit?" Rae smiled across the table at the silent woman. "We've been monopolising the conversation on you."

"Could I?" Brittany asked looking at Cleo.

"Of course you can." Rae answered before Cleo could and the blonde nodded in agreement. Brittany looked at Rae with a smile. "The floor is yours Brittany."

The strawberry blonde thought for a moment or two.

"What is the biggest secret you have ever kept?" Brittany asked eventually.

"But if we tell..." Rae stepped in quickly to help everyone. "We aren't keeping it anymore are we?" She glanced at Thea noticing the actress had stopped eating suddenly.

"True, okay then what is the best thing you have ever found or been given?" The follow up question came much quicker.

"Who would you like to answer first?" Rae asked taking a sip of her drink. Thea took her glass of water and took a long sip before she put her fork down. Cleo watched the actress carefully. The subtle changes in the young woman were obvious and intrigued her.

"You." Brittany replied smiling at Rae.

"All right." Rae nodded. "That's easy. The best thing I've ever been given is unconditional love." She looked over at Thea smiling.

Thea wasn't even aware that Rae was looking at her, as she similarly hadn't actually heard her lover's reply. Rae noticed the distant look in Thea's eyes and the lack of any registered reaction to her comment

"Thea, are you all right?" She asked concerned. Again this query fell of deaf ears as Thea's mind turned in somersault after somersault. Rae instantly panicked thinking that it had been her own bold comment that had sent Thea into this state.

"I think I'll just nip to the bathroom." Thea stood up needing to move herself out of the suddenly crowded situation. "Excuse me won't you."

Rae watched her lover stunned, unsure if she should stay at the table or follow. Thea moved passed everyone and walked swiftly towards the restrooms.

"I'm just going to make sure she's okay." Rae made a sudden decision that she needed to make sure Thea was all right. She dropped her napkin on the table and hurried after the young actress.

"Raven!" Cleo called from the table only to be ignored. Rae was much more concerned with her lover and her reaction.

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"Thea?" Rae called as she entered the large restroom. "Are you okay angel?"

Thea leaned her head forward on the toilet bowl and raised her hand blindly above her. Her finger tips found the handle and she pulled it weakly. The sound of the main bathroom door closing and then the sound of her name made her groan quietly.

"Thea?" Rae called out blindly trying to pinpoint where the small woman could have disappeared to in such a confined space. "Thea, is that you?" She pinpointed the groan and moved to the door of what she thought was the stall which her lover was in. "Are you all right angel?" She asked her voice heavy with concern.

"Rae." Thea answered weakly, she pushed herself up from her knees and turned to unlock the door. Her hand stopped before she did so. "I'm okay." She called trying to be convincing.

"You sure?" Rae asked softly listening hard at the door for any sign that she should just barge in.

"Yeah." Thea leaned forward on the door.

'Convince me!' Rae thought to herself angrily as she stared at the closed door.

"Angel, do you want to go home?" Rae tried to find something to give her a clue as to what was wrong. "I can get one of the waiters to give Cleo our apologies."

Thea tried to focus and get things into a better perspective, but the very presence of Rae behind the door forced the reality into her face.

"No, No." Thea replied instantly, her mind cursed her sharply.

'If you don't want her to question what the hell is going on you better wise up, smarten yourself up and get your ass back out there.'

"I'm just a bit icky. Probably nerves." She bluffed flushing the toilet a second time.

"Thea, please open the door." Rae asked one last time. Her patience and tact had been already stretched and shredded today. Between the conversation with Cleo and then what seemed like the fact that Thea was keeping things from her she had very little composure left to fall back on. Thea slid the bolt back from the door and pulled it ajar. "Nerves?" She questioned not buying the flimsy excuse.

"Possibly." The actress pulled the door a little more open.

"Thea?" Rae put her hand flat on the door and moved it open, using the length of her long arms to keep her a fair distance from the door itself. "What would make your nerves go haywire at this moment?"

"Possibly the combination of the matinee and then this dinner. Who knows." Thea said with a gentle shrug as she took a small step out of the cubicle.

"Yeah." The mention of the dinner made Rae's mind reel a bit. "Who knows." She added absently trying to control her own desire to grill the small sick woman over why she hadn't mentioned talking to Cleo or this dinner.

"We should get back I guess." Thea moved with purpose to the sink. She ran some water and wet her face.

"If you're not well love we should get you home to rest." Rae's natural instinct to protect the small woman outweighed her own doubt again.

"No, no! My crazy nerves are no reason to spoil dinner." Thea argued.

"Cleo will understand if you're sick." Rae hung back to lean against the framework of the stall. Thea lifted her dripping face and looked at herself in the mirror. Rae tried to keep her eyes from the mirror so that she wouldn't be accused of staring. Though her concern wanted to watch every one of Thea's movements and expressions in detail.

"I don't want to be the cause of spoiling the meal. After all I'm curious to find out more about Cleo and your past." Thea turned to Rae with a bright smile.

"If that's what you want." Rae nodded. Thea closed the distance between the two of them. She reached out her hand and rested it on Rae's arm.

"If you want to go though love, that's okay too." She offered softly, realising that Rae might be finding this situation very hard.

"Oh no, I'm fine." Rae smiled at her, ignoring her screaming mind which just wanted to run. If Thea wanted to stay and find out stuff than that was just what they'd do.

"Let's get back then, after all the way she and Brittany were interacting earlier we'll be lucky if they still have their clothes on right now." Thea reached for Rae's hand laughing lightly.

"Got to love Cleo's tart!" Rae replied with a laugh, hesitating before taking the small hand offered to her.

"Where do you think she got her?" Thea asked beginning the slow walk to the door.

"With Cleo." Rae grinned. "Who knows, but she seems well trained so she might be from around the club or her office."



"I'm going to have to watch you two though." Thea said brightly. "The girl is positively hanging on your every word."

"Who Cleo?" Rae looked at her shocked.

"NO!" Thea said surprised. "Brittany!" She tried to keep the banter light though a small part of the actress' mind wondered why Rae had thought she had meant Cleo.

"Oh the tart." Rae laughed again. "I think she's just too much in love with you to want to look obvious." She squeezed the hand in her own.

"Nice try Miss. O'Keefe, but don't think I haven't noticed that Brittany has green eyes like the eyes of someone else not too far away from you right now." Thea winked at her as they emerged from the bathroom.

Thea and Rae walked side by side back through the restaurant towards the table.

"Well then I think it's actually Cleo that has the thing for you then." Rae whispered slyly to her as they approached the table. "And if she makes one pass at you I'll crack her in half." She added in an even lower whisper.

"You're terrible." Thea hissed as she looked up and smiled brightly at Cleo and Brittany who were actually eating in silence

"Miss us?" Rae asked with a smile as she moved Thea's chair out for her to sit. Thea sat down and immediately took a sip of water. Rae sat down at her place and replaced the napkin in her lap.

"Of course!" Cleo answered with a smile. "Is every thing all right?" "Do you want a tea or anything angel?" Rae asked still concerned about her lover's stomach. She ignored Cleo's question until she had asked hers.

"A lemon and ginger would be great." Thea replied softly.

"She's a trooper." Rae answered finally as she waved for the waiter. The young man promptly came over and ran off with the order. "But if she starts feeling any worse I'm afraid we'll have to cut dinner a bit short."

"I understand completely." Cleo looked at Thea. "It must be hard trying to keep all the pressure and things of being a star down."

Rae just stared at Cleo trying to decipher the barb in her comment as being blatant or by accident. Thea glanced up and looked at Cleo with a similar curiosity. Brittany looked between the two of them confused.

"Are you a star?" Brittany asked. "What are you in? Television? Films?"

Cleo looked at Rae and smiled slowly only to her, her eyes hard.

"Theatre." Thea drank more of her water.

"Oh you'll find out Brittany." Rae added holding Cleo's hard glare. "I'm sure Cleo is having you accompany her to the gala next Friday."

Cleo's eyes narrowed, before she turned to Brittany.

"Sorry, I hadn't got round to mentioning it Brit." The blonde patted the girl's thigh.

"It doesn't matter." Brittany replied.

"No, there is still tones of time for Brit to free up her calendar." Rae took a long sip of her drink. Laying the ice filled glass back on the table empty, she kept her eyes locked on Cleo. Thea watched the interaction for a while before deciding to intervene. Before she could speak it was Brittany that spoke to cut the tension.

"Won't you be going? Perhaps we could sit with you." Brittany asked Rae oblivious. Thea forced herself not to smile and took another sip of water.

"Oh I'll be there." Rae leaned back in her chair. "I'm the lighting director Brittany." She tried to keep from laughing at how little Cleo's tart knew. "The business with your darling Cleo is just on the side."

"Oh." Brittany looked away for a moment as the actress covered an escaped laugh with a cough.

"And I'm sure Miss. Eaton has arranged for much better seats than I have on the scaffold." Rae grinned at her taking a mouthful of dinner.

"So Cleo." Thea injected suddenly, and all eyes went to her to see what she was going to ask in order to change the conversation. "How did you and Rae meet?" She set down her water and took her cup of herbal tea from the waiter. The technician turned back to her dinner worried about the story itself but also about what slant Cleo was going to put on it. Cleo positively glowed when Thea asked her question.

"Go on Cleopatra." Rae encouraged trying to hide her concern. "We both know how you love to tell this story."

"Oh no, no, no, Blackbird. We should tell it together." Cleo said fixing her eyes on Rae.

"It's yours to start." Rae looked up to lock eyes with her.

"I suppose it is." Cleo replied. "I was at university here in the city." She shifted her focus to Thea.

"As was I." Rae added absently, trying to show she would go along with the together requirement.

"I was in my second year." Cleo pushed her plate forward a little and relaxed back into her chair.

"My first." Rae added again pushing the rice around her plate.

"When suddenly I became aware of this young, innocent stunning woman." Cleo's words were sweet and caused Thea to turn and look at Rae with a smile.

"Yes Samantha was stunning wasn't she?" Rae grinned at Cleo as she sat back. "Samantha was my room mate." She filled in the detail for Thea and Brittany.

"So I did a bit of research, finding out who she was, where she came from and what she was studying. That kind of thing." Cleo continued as Rae sipped at her water. "Well I quickly found out that she was the talk of the first year. She could drink with the boys and dance with the girls. And she did all this whilst still playing the university rules."

"What rules?" Rae questioned with a sly grin.

"When I found this out I knew she was out of my league." Cleo had heard Rae's question but chose to ignore it. "You see I was a shy leggy blonde, close to the end of her second year." Rae almost choked as Cleo said shy. "Hardly anyone knew who I was." She emphasised as sipped her wine.

"Shy!" Rae laughed hard. "Cleo was already the president of the student association and running half of the business school. On top of her very well known public event appearances."

"That was something I was almost forced into Thea darling." Cleo quickly brushed off her own importance. "Not my choice at all."

"No one, and I mean no one!" Rae added. "Was at U of T without knowing who Angelina Eaton was."

"Public event appearances?" Thea questioned Rae for clarification.

"If you had a party or a club event it was suicide not to at least invite Cleo." Rae answered with a laugh.

"This is all exaggeration Estell!" Cleo said suddenly using Thea's stage name.

"Thea is fine." She corrected taking a sip of her tea trying not to act too surprised at the sudden re-use of her stage name.

"Thea." Cleo gently raised her glass a little in the actress' direction. "It was at one of these tiresome parties, that I finally found the inner courage to talk to Raven here." She now spoke

directly at Thea. "Or Cassie as she was known then, or Cass." She scrunched up her nose. "How I hated both terms!"

"That was her opening line by the way." Rae shook her head at the memory.

"Really." Thea asked breaking her concentration on Cleo for a moment. She looked at Rae for more details.

"Oh yes." Rae smiled at Cleo remembering the moment in the smoky badly decorated frat house basement. "I'd been standing by the fire door getting some air, when up stalks Angelina. As she was known then of course." She smiled at Cleo. "She announces to me that Cassie and Cass are horrible names, and from now on no one shall refer to me as anything but Raven."

"Oh please do carry on tell her the rest. How you made me apologise and then turned me down when I asked you out for coffee." Cleo laughed lightly, her eyes sparkled in Rae's direction.

"True and true." Rae nodded back at Cleo. "I told her that I didn't give a damn who she was in regards to the university hierarchy and that my name was Cassie." She laughed remembering how it seemed that the whole room had stopped in shock. "To which Cleo apologised and then asked me to coffee to make up for her 'mistake'." She said the word heavy to show it's obvious planning. "I turned her down as I was already seeing someone at the time." She brushed off the importance of the refusal.

"Someone!" Cleo blurted out the word with a laugh. Thea looked at her and then at Rae.

"Oh you love this part, go on Cleo!" Rae waved the story back to Cleo who sat laughing.

"It was hardly just someone." Cleo explained to Thea. "She was dating the Dean's Son, Colin Waverly. Oh my, they were the pair to beat all others! Colin and Cassie! Everyone had them married off."

"Everyone else did but not Colin or I." Rae commented to clarify.

"Did you ask Colin about that? I think he would have married my Raven in a shot." Cleo spoke at Thea.

"You should be thankful for Colin." Rae grinned at Cleo slyly. "If it wasn't for him, I wouldn't have been at that faculty banquet and you'd never have gotten your second chance."

"I have always been thankful to him for more than that blackbird." The blonde raised an eyebrow as wicked thoughts ran through her mind.

"Like what?" Rae asked playing dumb.

"Well if he had been good in bed you would have never tried a girl!" Cleo laughed long and hard and the technician couldn't help but join in. Thea looked at Cleo and Rae a little shocked.

"Well that is one thing against him." Rae continued to laugh. "Though I think it was more his behaviour at the banquet that sealed his fate."

"Now that is your story to tell Raven." Cleo sat back. "Please share with us all." The smile on Cleo's lips was wide and honest.

"But you had such a better perspective." Rae laughed again remembering the evening.

"True, but you were the one experiencing it." Cleo laughed in response.

"True." Rae conceded. "Okay well..." She figured out where to start. "All Colin told me was his father was having some get together and that he wanted me to come. But I had to arrive late cause I had a class." Thea was listening but shifted her focus from listening to watching the way Rae and Cleo interacted. "So I pulled up to the dean's house on my very loud racing bike." She laughed. "And arrived to the door in leathers with a helmet slung in one hand, which Colin didn't appreciate."

"UNDERSTATEMENT!" Cleo exclaimed laughing loudly.

"Why don't you paint this part then, I'm told my entrance was classic." Rae laughed with her.

"Well there we were in our ball gowns and tuxedos." Cleo leaned forward. "And in walks the little hells angel!" Cleo patted the back of Rae's hand lovingly as the dark haired woman laughed at the memory. "Colin literally just staggered backwards, coughing. His father ushered everyone back into the hall, saying that she was the caterer's assistant. And then..." Cleo had to stop as she brought her laughter under control. "Raven here." Cleo wiped at her eye. "Says in the loudest voice I had ever heard..." Cleo looked at her old lover ready to recite the famous line in union.

"I thought the lace would crease, so I went with the leather!" Cleo and Rae spoke together laughing.

"I thought he was going to lose his mind." Rae choked out. "I guess he did really since he took a swipe at me."

"He did what!" Thea asked appalled.

"He was a bad shot so no worries love." Rae turned to Thea trying to head off any worry.

"Raven wasn't." Cleo interjected laughing even harder.

"He tried to backhand me." Rae explained, wishing this part of the story could have been downplayed. "So I blocked it and made sure he wasn't going to try again."

"Blocked? You spilt the guys lips open and broke his nose. He needed three stitches!"

Rae glared at Cleo knowing the details weren't necessary. Cleo fell back laughing. Thea looked at Rae aghast.

"I immobilised him." Rae repeated. "And that's when I looked at Angelina, who I noticed was watching it all with a grin, and said 'hey Cleopatra do you still want that coffee?'" She turned to address the line at Cleo again hoping to rush the story along and move them from the violence.

"I accepted as you would." Cleo stated calmly. "After all I was afraid if I didn't she'd break my nose too!" Brittany laughed as Cleo returned to hysterics.

"You liar!" Rae turned on her playfully thinking that Cleo was making a joke. "You sauntered over, took my helmet and announced to the rest of the room that you and the raven had to fly." Cleo breathed through her nose slowly and looked at Rae for a moment in silence.

"Someone had to get you out of there before the police were called." She met Rae's eyes. "You could have been locked away for what you did." She added quietly as Thea watched Rae intently.

"It wasn't that bad Cleo." Rae met her look. "He tried to hit me, no one does that. He was stupid to do it in the first place, he knew about my belts." She added trying to defend herself.

"So you left I take it?" Thea directed her question at Cleo, wanting to move on from the subject. It was obviously causing her lover discomfort.

"Indeed we did. Driving through the streets of Toronto on the back of a racing bike in a satin ball gown!" Cleo mused. "It was a great experience."

"Hey you had the helmet at least." Rae smiled again and laughed.

"So you became lovers?" Brittany asked suddenly out of the blue and the entire table swung instantly to look at her. Rae coughed as her throat constricted at the blunt question.

"We became everything." Cleo's answer came as her eyes switched focus back to Rae.

"We spent a lot of time together." Rae clarified absently almost wishing they'd go back to the part when she'd almost killed Colin now.

"We lived together, breathed together, slept together. We were each other." Cleo filled in the details slowly. Rae gave a tight short exhale. Brittany listened with a gentle frown, where as Thea became focused on the tall blonde.

"I don't get it." Brittany shook her head and gazed at Rae.

"Get what?" Rae asked finally figuring out the question was directed to her.

"Well here you both are, Cleo has the woman who she worshipped from afar and you have the person who was probably the best catch in the university and you split up?" Brittany explained

her confusion. "What happened did you lose your mind or something?" She laughed at her own joke. No one noticed but the words made something inside the Raven snap.

"Yes, Brittany my brother was killed and I lost my fucking mind!" Rae drove the cold hard words across the table to cut her laughter. Thea flashed a shocked look at Brittany and then turned to her lover. Cleo sighed heavily and stood up, her hands flat on the table as she stared down at Rae.

"You admit it at last." Cleo's words were sharp and pointed as her eyes bored into the technician. Thea watched in alarm, but for some reason was unable to move.

"You had me committed Cleo..." Rae rose to meet her in height. "I think me admitting that I lost my mind is a moot point isn't it?"

"No, you finally admit that's why it went to hell." She snarled back. "All the time you spent afterwards saying it wasn't that. Saying that it was life and 'things' and 'situations'." The intensity of Cleo's attack made Rae forget that the past they were discussing was not something Thea knew about as the actress stared on as the drama unfolded. "And now you finally admit, you gave up on the best thing that ever happened to you in your pathetic life!"

"Cleo, things were going bad between us long before Tommy died." Rae countered in a strong harsh voice. "Maybe it's time to admit that you'd been sleeping with everything that walked behind my back?"

"I needed something Raven!" Cleo spat at her coldly.

"My pathetic life!" Rae spat back her mind catching up to all the hateful words. "And the party scene left you so fulfilled did it? A prissy little Daddy's girl by day and a whore by night!"

"It gave me more than your back street life ever gave you. At least I knew who to screw and how to do it!" Cleo hissed.

From her front row seat, Thea watched and listened in horror. Her mind screamed for her to say something to stop this display. But as Brittany, she was fixed mesmerised in her seat as the two women ripped each other apart.

"You knew how to take Cleo." Rae hissed back. "You never knew how to give."

"How can you say that? I gave you everything. EVERYTHING!" Her voice boomed loudly through the restaurant.

Yes, Angelina." Rae used the most condescending voice she could produce. "You gave me everything, you were such the martyr."

"You wanted a better life, I gave you one. You wanted to know about the better things in life, I gave them to you. You wanted a home, I gave you one. You wanted someone to hold down and fuck whenever you wanted!" Cleo's eyes flashed in rage. "I even gave you that!"

"HOLD YOU DOWN!" Rae lost total control as the last insult registered in her head. "You always wished I would Cleo but that was the one thing I wouldn't give you." Her voice went low and viscous. "I wouldn't treat you like the dirt you felt like inside, like the whore you thought yourself to be."

"You treated me worse than any whore." Cleo met Rae's eyes her voice suddenly calm and quiet though the fire in her eyes blazed on.

"I didn't and you know it." Rae hissed back still wrapped in rage.

"Oh yes you did." Cleo retorted. "You pretended to care. You pretended to give a damn. Pretended that I mattered and then after the most stupid, senseless mistake, you threw me away." She sounded exhausted. "Just like the trash."

"Threw you away?" Rae's voice rose again. "Only one of us was thrown away."

Thea looked at the thin blonde. She could see that while Rae's rage blazed on, Cleo's was dissipating more into profound hurt.

"And you think it was you?" Cleo raised her eyes to meet icy blue again.

"Only one of us was taken away in a straight jacket." Rae snapped back. "You took what you wanted from me, drained me of everything and then when Tommy died and you might have to face something, you tossed the only reminder of it in an asylum." She slammed her fist into the table.

"And I was supposed to watch you inject yourself every day with poison?" The tall blonde questioned in a small firm voice. "I was supposed to watch you kill yourself?" Seeing Thea's gaze shift back to Rae, the actress' eyes wide with horror, Cleo edged on. "I didn't create a monster Raven, you did!" Her voice was like steel.

"You were supposed to love me Cleo." Rae's voice lost a bit of its edge. "You were never supposed to buy me the shit in the first place and then get mad when I liked it too much."

"I wanted to keep you. I saw you slipping away, you were my life what was I supposed to do?" Cleo asked tired of this pain.

"I don't know." Rae admitted exasperated. "But not what you did, not if you really loved me so much." Her voice went bitter by the end.

"I loved you too much. Is that to be my only crime Blackbird?" Cleo shook her head sadly.



"No, the real truth Cleo..." She added for the first time removing her hands from the table. "Is that you never loved me so much as you loved the idea of being in love with me."

"There are times when I think you lost more than your mind when I signed you away. I think you lost your memory too." The blonde's arms hung limp and heavy at her sides. "Who was the one who held you when you were so sick you couldn't stand up? Who was the one, who washed you down, dressed your arms, and your legs when you were too weak to pull out the needle?" A lone tear slid down Cleo's cheek as silence overtook the table.

"Who was it Rae?" The voice who broke the silence was Thea's. It was the quietest voice, the most frightened voice she had ever heard herself use. It was this small voice that made Rae realise just who had been sitting there during all of the ranting. Realise just who had heard all of this. Just who now knew all the skeletons in her closet in one quick hard blow of truth.

"It doesn't matter Thea." Cleo shook her head. Thea looked up at the blonde and then at her lover, waiting for her to say something.

"I'm sorry I hurt you, it was never my intention." Rae spoke the words in a small voice. "I need some air." She mumbled to Thea as she turned and left the table. She walked in quick long steps out of the restaurant. The room was getting very small suddenly and she needed desperately to be outside.

Cleo eyes watched Rae leave and she made a move to follow her.

"Cleo, no!" Thea said tenderly and was happy to see the blonde stop. "Sit down." She turned to Brittany. "Get her a drink and stay with her. Take her home when she is feeling better." She instructed. Brittany nodded dumbly as Cleo returned to her seat. Thea moved over and placed her hand on Cleo's arm.

"I am sorry Thea." Cleo looked at the hand and then up into sad green eyes. "It was my fault."

"Not from where I am standing it wasn't." Thea said honestly, as she shook her head. She took a step away her mind cart wheeling.

"She lost so much." Cleo commented absently.

"You both did." Thea broke away and moved from the table. "I'll ring you." She called as she hurried out.

"Yes." Cleo leaned forward keeping her head down until Thea disappeared. When the young actress had she sat up and took a sip of wine. "Ring me my little star."

Brittany returned to the table with another drink and some tissues. The strawberry blonde slipped her arm around Cleo and the blonde let herself be held smiling into Brittany's shoulder. More than happy with the way the day had panned out.

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Rae held the wood of the railing firmly in her hand. The truth being that if it wasn't a 4x4 pine it would have likely snapped off under the pressure. The sharp white crests of the waves came in towards her from the lake and the stiff breeze blew her hair back off her face. None of this phased her, nor did she notice for that matter. All she could think of was the words that had been spoken at the table. Somehow the vision of Thea's reaction came from out of the corner of her eye, as every horrible shortcoming she'd ever had was paraded out for the young actress to see and be horrified by. Her mind just kept spinning and whirling, as the memories that Cleo had painted came back into her head with their usual foggyiness.

Thea felt the stiff wind in her face as she looked for any sign as to where Rae had gone. She looked out a little and saw the tall figure by the railings. With the wind blowing strongly against her, she set out down the path to meet her.

Rae closed her eyes against the wind, happy to be outside at least so that she no longer felt trapped and restrained. Inside her head Cleo had instantly put her back to that time.

Thea silently approached her and stopped a few feet short of the inky haired woman.

"Rae." She started softly trying to fight the clashing waves of anger, sorrow, horror, surprise and disgust.

"Thea, please don't say anything." Rae responded in a broken voice as she tried to keep a reign on her emotions. "I'll resign from the show and I won't bother you again"

"If that's what you want." Thea's answer was controlled. She wasn't sure what she had been expecting but she wasn't surprised by Rae's statement.

"This is not about what I want." Rae felt herself shake. "This is about what I have been, what I have done."

"No, it's not." She made sure her voice was flat and controlled. "It's not about that at all."

"Then what is it about?" Rae turned and backed herself up against the rail as she asked.

"It's about where you are now. Who you are now and what you want for the future." Thea replied feeling her anger and shock fighting inside her for a voice. She wanted to shout and scream at Rae but at the same time she wanted to hold her close and never let her go.

"I'm a recovered junkie who spent three months at a mental institution trying to pretend like she's not either." Rae said the words in a lost voice as she slid down the railing to sit on the cold concrete of the dock with her legs bent up close to her chest.

"Surely the important word there is recovered Rae." Thea crouched down still a few feet away, her anger fading as she watched her broken lover.

"Cleo's right on one thing." Rae talked without looking at her. "I shouldn't have let it happen. That was my fault."

"You were hurting Rae." Thea offered condolence. "We all react to pain in different ways."

"We were broken long before Tommy died or I lost my mind." Rae looked off and spoke in a soft voice trying to plead in her own defence. "There are a lot of things I won't face but there is a lot she won't face either."

"I can guess that my love." She inched forward slightly. "But does she really deserve all that?" She couldn't stop the question as it slipped out.

"No." Rae's voice was childlike. "It's not her fault, but she just makes me so...." Her voice trailed off.

"So?" Thea pushed gently.

"So angry." She pulled her legs in tighter with her arms. "I want to tell her I'm sorry that I don't blame her but she never believes me."

"Have you ever tried?" Thea asked gently. Seeing Rae like this disturbed her a little. It was difficult to watch her strong lover so small and dejected.

"Yes... sorta." Rae's voice got smaller with each amendment. "No, I guess not. What you saw in there..." She took a big breath. "It's always like that, whenever any of it's talked about."

"Okay love." She spoke softly. "What happened in there is okay too."

"Oh yeah, perfect." Rae let her head rest on her knees and her hair fell forward to billow around it in the wind.

"Should I go?" Thea said suddenly standing up. She watched as the wind caught and tossed Rae's hair, wanted to reach out and save it from the tangles of the torrent.

"I have no right to ask you to stay." Rae looked up to her. "Though I wish I did."

"This is about love Rae, not rights." Thea took a step away. Dropping her head, she turned looking back at the yacht club entrance.

"I love you Thea." Rae made sure her voice was loud enough to not be lost in the wind.

Thea froze as she heard the words. She turned and looked at her lover.

"But?" She offered the chance for the technician to rethink her statement, to take it back or to amend it in any way.

"I always have and I always will." Rae added the only thing her heart thought necessary.

"We have jobs to do angel." Thea reminded her as she felt her heart burst. If she didn't reign this in now she wouldn't for a long time. She wanted to hold Rae, love her and soothe her. But her rational mind knew that they simply didn't have the time. "I have to go, but I would like you come with me."

"Oh God the show!" Rae looked at her watch shook her head. She packed all of what had happened away again in her mind to fester and rot. "I would like that." She looked back at Thea and smiled softly.

Thea hated time for beating them. This needed to be dealt with but they had no choice.

"Did you bring the jeep?" She asked not moving. She wanted Rae to make all the moves.

"Yes." Rae pulled the keys out of her pocket. "I can drive us."

"Don't you think I should?" Thea offered gently, afraid that her lover was in not fit to operate the vehicle.

"Yeah, okay." She swallowed hard and moved to hand her the keys. Thea took them and turned. Her eyes instantly seeing the black jeep in the parking lot. "We should go." She said somewhat awkwardly, looking back at the tall woman.

"We could hire a driver if you're still feeling ill?" Rae offered worried about the previous episode

Even though Thea's stomach was tied in painful knots she did not want to get a driver. She wanted to do this to show she could take care of Rae in times of need.

"I'll be fine." She began walking to the jeep, not meeting Rae's eyes.

"Okay love, you're in charge." Rae spoke in a quiet voice, not entirely knowing what she meant by her choice of words. She moved to catch up to Thea but walked with a distinct space between them as not to invade the woman's space.

Thea unlocked the jeep climbed in and adjusted the seat accordingly. She waited until Rae was in too before fastening her seat belt.

"Do you want me to take you home?" Thea asked as she started the vehicle and shifted the mirror for herself. "I can get the crew to cover."

"No, it's okay." Rae looked over at her briefly. "It'll be good to get my mind focused on something."

"The theatre it is then." Thea nodded, flicking on the indicator and with a quick turn of the wheel she pulled out of the parking spot and headed toward the freeway.

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Thea picked up the blue cushion and dropped it gently on the couch. She moved away from the large soft chair to the writing desk, running her hand over the edge of it. She placed one hand in the pocket of her grey cardigan and pulled out an envelope. She walked slowly round to the front of the couch and sat down.

Resting her head forward into her hands briefly she held the envelope tightly. Then she lifted her head looking straight forward, off into the distance.

"I have lived my strange life." She began with a slight waiver in her voice. "In a quiet way." She reached out and took a photograph off the table beside the couch.

"Wiping knees and noses, holding hands and school bags. I am just an ordinary woman, in my ordinary world. Did I deserve this?"

She looked down at the letter and the photograph. She put the photograph back in its place before standing up and walking forward a little.

"I love them all, in my funny way and I am repaid with this." She held the letter a little higher. "By loving you did I accept this position? By lying with you did I sign my consent? I find myself caught up in Tragedy's dance without a sense of rhythm. Without a note in my head. Without a partner to hold me close as I twirl." She dropped the envelope on the couch and paced the floor. Her footfalls were light, almost silent.

"You never think it will happen to you, you think that for some reason you are different. You hear the stories on the news, you see the sad victims in hospital and the preachers tell you they are paying for their sins. You see the junkies in their cardboard cities adding poison to their already tainted veins and you think that you are better than them." Thea paused and picked up the letter.

"With your home, your husband, your two children and your dog, you think you are immune somehow. As if this charade could keep you safe, as if this structure will be a safeguard."

Thea glanced around her looking around at the photographs and furniture.

"I love them with all my heart but I love him too. I want to hold him close when he breaths his last. I want to be the one to say goodbye." She looked back to the letter in her hand. "Maybe the preacher tells us true. That we will stand and pay for all we do. He was young and foolish, wild and free. Sex was fun, just a game for him and he had no thought of the future, no sense of the horror to come."

Thea stopped pacing and looked straight ahead.

"If I had know, if he had known, would it have happened? If I could have seen inside his body as I kissed it, recognising the twisted tainted cells. If I had been able to trace the poison as it flowed

from him into me, would we have shared the months of passion? Would I have run away, back to this, my sanctuary? Would I have left him alone? Would I not be here now, afraid, empty, infected?"

A tear sprang to Thea's eye and cascaded down her cheek. She looked up at the filled theatre, the faces blurred through her tears as her scripted words stuck in her throat. She looked down at the prop envelope in her hand and then she glanced at the sofa and the mantelpiece littered with props and ornaments from the set box. For the first time, the pain in her heart was real and a sick feeling crawled into her stomach.

She looked out to the audience and then up into the blue spotlight that lit her position on the stage. Her eyes imagining the woman behind the light as a dark sickly thought crept into her mind. If Rae had been an intravenous drug user, what eight years ago, that put her in the right category of people at the right time. Her stomach twisted sickeningly.

Tears spilled down her cheeks, as according to the script her trembling hands pulled open the envelope. Discarding it onto the stage floor, she just held up the letter tilted gently into the light. She spent a moment racing her eyes over the words before letting it slip to the floor. Wiping her eyes, she placed one hand on her hip and held the other aloft to hold the hand of an imaginary dance partner.

As the orchestra started up a slow waltz, Thea danced gracefully across the stage. Her body twisted and moved as if guided by a taller stronger partner. Real tears slipped from her eyes, as the blue light grew dim. Thea moved to the front of the stage in her dance as the back of the stage grew dark and the scenery was pulled off for the new set replacing it. The stage hands working silently and diligently.

Thea's spotlight faded completely as she slipped from the stage. The lighting was brought up to reveal the final scene of a graveside. An arrangement of red roses sat on one side of the brown-heaped earth, a brightly coloured bouquet the other and on top a yellow and white flowered creation spelling 'Mother'. The head stone in black marble read...

Dearest Tess

Each time the wind blows,

and the rain falls we shall remember.

As the lighting effect changed to simulate rain, with the odd flash and distant rumble of thunder, Thea stood in the wings her hands set on the small table that held the microphone that would project her voice over the scene. Tears still slipped from her eyes as she spoke in a trembling voice.

"Tragedy is always mocking me, and asking me if I want to dance. Allowing the trance of sadness and grief to ravage me, consuming me from the inside." She stopped, lowering her voice,

and letting it take on a sad melancholic timbre as she spoke the final words to draw the play to a close. "Play the last chord, silence the drum, it is time to pay, for the things I have done."

The orchestra fell silent as a last rumble of thunder echoed across the stage. As the lights went back and the heavy curtain fell. For a moment there was stunned silence from the audience, before the loud harsh sound of applause filled Thea's ears.

"I swear that gets more powerful every time you say it."

Thea heard someone call into her ear as she felt someone take her hand. Thea was pulled back onto the stage as the curtain rose again to full bright lights. The audience was on their feet clapping and cheering. Thea graciously curtsied a few times before the curtain fell again. She hurried off and then went through the individual curtain calls on automatic. Her stomach still tight and knotted as her mind raced and her heart ached. Her mind focused on the only thing it could.

'What if?'

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"For Christ's sake Simmons, I said change the lead wire to the fourth line." Rae leaned herself over the cross bar and barked down when her voltage meter still read zero.

"I hate this theatre." She leaned back and waited for him to make the reconnection. To her dismay half of the lighting had gone out during the cool down and now she had to find some way to rewire it before the matinee the next day.

"Go get Dave from backstage." She leaned back again. "Tell him I need another hundred feet of lead." She wiped her hand across her brow. "This is going to be a long night." She rolled her eyes to the dark ceiling.

"Hot work?" Thea asked looking up at Rae, straining to see her at the top of the high scaffold.

"Huh?" Rae looked down startled by the voice and smiled when she saw the actress. "Just a little. Give me one second to come down." She added as she made the quick climb.

"Hi, angel." Her voice was a little tight when she reached the ground as the heaviness of the afternoon came back to her.

"Are you okay?" Thea asked kindly.

"Yeah, you?" Rae asked wiping her hand on her pants.

"Tired." Thea admitted with a gentle shrug. "Do you have a lot to do?"

"I hope not." Rae gave her a little smile. "If I can run this lead then it'll only be a hour or two."

"Rae." She began her voice quiet as she leaned her hands on her aching back and sighed gently. "I'm really sorry, but I've had enough of being here." She admitted with a gentle yawn.

"Of course, you've had a long day." The technician nodded.

"How about I go back to the hotel?" Thea said gently, but Rae's heart fell with the words regardless. "Then you can get work done here, while I can pack a bag and then go over to the condo. You can meet me there when you are done."

"Oh, yeah!" Rae's face brightened. "That sounds like a perfect idea." She rummaged in her pocket and pulled out her keys.

"You sure?" Thea searched Rae's face for doubt.

"You'll beat me there so let me give you the key." She moved it off her ring. "Yes angel, sounds perfect I promise." She added brightly.

"Okay then." Thea took the keys.

"I'll try to be as quick as I can." The technician smiled.

"Okay. I'll see you there." Thea stood for a moment looking at Rae, trying to find a way to break the space between them.

"Okay, love." Rae stood there looking back at her positive the first move toward anything physical was not hers to make, though she wished it was.

"Don't work too hard." Thea turned and walked to the back of the theatre, her shoes padding softly on the deep carpet.

"I love you." Rae whispered as she watched her walk away.

"I love you too." She turned at the door and breathed as she pulled it open and slipped out.

Those three words gave Rae the most amazing hope. No matter what had been said or had been revealed, things hadn't been ruined beyond repair just yet. She was going to do her best to fix them even further.

Continued in Act X...



# ~ After the Curtain Falls ~

by Beth Dragon & Kathleen Wolf

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**Feedback:** All comments are greatly appreciated and can be sent to: [kathandbeth@hotmail.com](mailto:kathandbeth@hotmail.com)

**Thanks:** To Emma, for her never ending love, support and chocolate. To the Ex-Guards Village for all their feedback and expert advice.

## Act X

Thea pulled the zip on her medium sized luggage bag closed and put it up on the bed. She opened the second wardrobe and pulled out a grey jacket. This she threw over the bag and then stepped back from it. She glanced around, walked through to the bathroom and checked there for anything she might have missed. Deciding she had everything she needed for the moment, she went back to pick up her bag.

Just as she was about to do so, her eyes fell on the shirt she had been wearing when she and Rae had first met. Her mind flooded with memories. She smiled, picked it up and folding it carefully put it on the bed. As she did so she remembered something. That day there had been a message for her at reception. She still hadn't picked it up.

With a gentle sigh she sat down on the bed and picked up the phone asking for her messages to be brought to her room. Only moments later there was a knock on the door and the small slip of paper was delivered, along with four new ones.

Thea glanced at them all. The first a simple "call Raven" from that horrible night of the review party. One was confirmation that there were to be pictures to accompany the interview she had

had at the party. One was from Michael giving her a list of possible 'dates'. The third was from a paper requesting an interview. She frowned at that one, how had they managed to trace her?

A gentle smile spread across her face as she thought about the fact that she would no longer be here to trace.

The last one, the one that had come that fateful day was from her mother, wishing her the best, from all the family.

Thea glanced at her watch it was 12:30am. Rae was likely to still be bogged down with wiring and technical glitches, at least for another hour or so. Without thinking on the matter further, Thea picked up the phone and requested an outside line. Quickly she dialled a memorised number.

The phone rang for some minutes and when it was eventually answered, the response was incredibly sleepy, and yet distressed. With slight horror Thea remembered the time difference between Toronto and England. 5:30am was not a good time for a phone call.

"Hello, Wilcox residence." Came the concerned female voice.

"Tori?" Thea questioned somewhat apologetically.

"Thea!" The voice perked up immediately.

"Hello Blip, I'm so sorry the time slipped my mind completely." Thea continued her regrets.

"No bother, how are you?" Thea's little sister bubbled happily as the sound of blankets rustling in the background.

"I'm good." Thea thought about how good it felt to hear Victoria's voice. It had been too long, and she missed her kid sister a lot. "How are you doing?"

"Great, tired!" Tori added with a gentle laugh.

"The play is going well." Thea gave out the information simply.

"Of course, you're the star!" Tori's voice was full of pride for her sister.

"Did you look the reviews up on the web?" The young actress asked, knowing this was a likely thing for her sister to do.

"Yes, looks like you're going to be there for awhile." Tori wanted to show she had indeed been avidly following the play's progress.

"They may extend it." Thea informed. "Maybe go south!"

"Well, that's fantastic. I'm so happy for you Thea. Though obviously we all miss you here." A vague trace of sadness entered Victoria's voice.

"I've told you beg Daddy to buy you a ticket." Thea laughed gently.

"I've already tried." Tori sounded exasperated. "He won't budge."

"Do you want me to talk to him?" Thea asked seriously.

"Would you. I mean that's if you won't be too bothered having me visit. It's so boring here with you gone." The change in her sister's voice was vast.

"Having you here would be great." Thea said honestly. "I'd love you to come. You would love Canada."

"Is it beautiful? Are the people nice?" Tori tried not to ask too many questions.

"The people are great and yes the place is beautiful." Thea answered everything willingly. "I'll have a word with Father. Talking of Ma and Pa, did I wake them too?" She tried to not sound too nervous.

"They're not here." Tori's voice was a little quiet. "At Edward's for dinner and stop over." She added. Thea closed her eyes briefly and thought about what day it was.

"Oh." Thea made the small noise before going on. "How are they all?"

"The doctor put Father on a diet cause his cholesterol is a bit high, but it's nothing to worry about other than it's making him grumpier than usual." Tori chuckled. "Mother is good, though she misses you and Edward is Edward."

"Yes." Thea said distractedly.

"He asked me to fax him copies of your reviews." Tori admitted.

"Have you?" Thea's was quiet.

"No, not yet." Tori paused. "Do you want to do it yourself?"

"No, you go for it." Thea was more than happy to let her sister do this.

"Okay." Victoria agreed. "So are your co-stars handsome?" She questioned. "One of the reviews say's that they are gorgeous."

"Reporters exaggerate, it's their job!" Thea laughed, though in her mind she briefly thought about what her sister would think of Michael.

"You are so lucky Thea." Tori said genuinely.

"Lucky?" How did you work that out? Thea replied.

"You half way around the world Sis. Hanging out with all kinds of famous people." Tori's voice was quick. "I'm stuck here in boring land."

"Tori you are twenty three, beautiful and intelligent, the world is yours. And anyway..." Thea added. "I think you would be missed by the male population if you were to go anywhere!"

"Oh yeah, on that note, I forgot to tell you!" Tori squealed. "Guess who came round to ask if I could meet him at the club on Saturday?"

"Oh Tori it could be one of a hundred!" Thea said with an exaggerated sigh. "Who?"

"It was Craig!" She almost yelled she was so happy. "Him and Danielle broke up and he's coming running after me!"

"Craig? Goodness!" Thea was genuinely shocked. "Well Tori go careful. He had a reputation by the time he hit senior school!"

"Thea!" You could almost hear the girl roll her eyes. "As you said I am twenty three, I am not a kid anymore. And anyway, I have a reputation." She added trying to impress her sister.

"I know, I know and I must sound like Dad. Tori, you don't have a reputation like he did. Do you?" Thea asked pointedly.

"No, not like that Thea." She groaned.

"If Craig is who you want, then go for it. Everyone deserves to be happy." Thea laughed gently into the phone.

"Well I don't know if I want him permanently." Tori mused.

"What does he want?" She asked, trying to keep attentive but her mind was whirling. Mainly about Rae and about her, the recent revelations and the questions it raised.

"He doesn't want anything Thea. I said I don't know if I want him permanently." Tori spoke up wondering why her sister had suddenly become vague. "Do we have a bad connection?"

"Possibly." Thea shook herself, pulling her attention back into the conversation. "How are the horses?" She asked hurriedly.

"Beautiful." Tori changed topics with her just as quick. "Strawberry is in a show next weekend."

"Really? That's great news." Thea was happy for her sister and her horse. Victoria had overcome a lot to ride, the major one being a fear of horses. "And how about Ghost?"

"She misses you." Tori said honestly. "She won't take apples from anyone."

"Give her time." Thea laughed, her grey palomino could be stubborn at times.

"Everyone misses you Thea." Tori's voice softened. "Even Edward."

"I doubt that." Thea whispered her voice slightly bitter.

"I heard him telling Father." Tori retorted.

"Telling Father what exactly?" Thea asked suspiciously.

"That he missed you, and wished..." Her voice trailed off.

"Victoria, what?" She asked her voice firm, trying to keep the useless frown from her face.

"Well, he said he wished you all the best in the show but he really hoped you'd get over this little fantasy of yours and come back home to your real priorities." Victoria reluctantly relayed.

"Sounds like Edward." Thea sighed loudly. Why had she thought the news would be any different?

"I'm sorry Thea." Tori's voice was sad. "I wish he understood how much acting meant to you. He's like father that way."

"Yes, he and Father are very similar. That's why Daddy likes him so much." Thea mused quietly.

"Like the world needs another Daddy." Tori laughed. Thea forced herself to laugh along, though she didn't feel like doing so.

"Tori love." She started gently. "I should go, it's late here and ungodly with you. I am so sorry about the time." She apologised again. "The shows schedule is really heavy, but I promise I'll call again soon." She paused and her sister said nothing. "I'm thinking of possibly renting somewhere small in the city." She told her sister in an attempt to break the silence.

"Oooooo your own apartment. Now that is cool." Tori replied quickly.

"Yes, especially if the show runs on. The hotel just wastes money."

"Makes sense." The short reply came and brought with it another long silence. "Make sure you call me if any of those nice co-stars hit on you." Tori laughed suddenly. "I want to hear all the juicy details."

"Tori, are you encouraging me?" She said in mock seriousness as she laughed herself.

"Most definitely!" Tori laughed again. "Either that or line some up for me."

"I'll work on the latter and when I get my place, you have to come and stay!"

"Great!" Tori enthused. "Take care Thea." She added knowing their conversation was coming to an end. "Call soon."

"Okay Blip, I will." Thea lovingly used her sister's pet name.

"And remember you're not just there to work, go out and have some fun."

"I'll try." Thea pledged. "You too!"

"Oh, I will." Tori admitted.

"Give my love to everyone!" Thea reminded and Tori assured her she would. "I love you." She added softly before the familiar click sounded and the phone went dead.

With a heavy sigh Thea put the phone down. Her mind was a cluttered mess of unclear thoughts and broken ideas. Without really thinking Thea picked the phone and dialed automatically, waiting carefully.

"Hello?" A slightly suspicious voice answered.

"Hi, is Cassie O'Keefe still in the auditorium?" Thea asked trying to keep her voice calm.

"Who?" The voice asked confused.

"The chief lighting technician, she may be up the scaffold."

"Oh her..." The voice seemed to think. "Yeah I saw her cursing at some of the backstage guys a minute ago."

"Could you go and get her for me?" Thea asked politely.

"Yeah one minute." The phone was laid down with a thump. After a long silence it was picked up again. Absently Thea played with the folded shirt on the bed.

"Hello?" Thea said gently when she heard the difference.

"O'Keefe here." Rae used the standard intro having no idea who was waiting on the phone.

"Rae." Thea spoke her lover's name softly.

"Thea?" Her voice softened immediately.

"Rae, I... I..." Thea stumbled over her words, unsure of why she had phoned.

"What Thea?" Rae asked almost desperately having no idea why her young lover would have phoned her.

"I was thinking, perhaps I should stay at the hotel tonight after all." Thea blurted out the idea suddenly not even sure that was indeed what she wanted.

"Oh." All of Rae's hopes deflated as she heard the sentence. "Thea, please..." She started but didn't know what right she had to go on.

"Just tonight Rae. I just need a bit of, space I guess." Knowing how pitiful it sounded Thea hated herself but couldn't stop. "Do you need to come by the hotel and get your keys?"

"I understand Thea." Rae said trying to stay calm. "It's okay, thank you for being honest enough to tell me."

"Rae, you do understand I mean just for tonight?" Thea stressed weakly.

"No Thea, I understand that you mean it's over." Rae spoke softly, but honestly.

"No." Thea gasped. "Rae no, no!"

"It's okay..." Rae's voice was infinitely sad. "I understand."

"Rae, no! Listen." Thea's mind threatened to overload and began throbbing. "Yes, today raises things we need to talk about. But it's not over. Rae, don't say that! Don't even think it. I love you." She added somewhat desperately, she'd never in a million years thought Rae would get the idea that they were breaking up. "Nothing has changed that."

"I love you too Thea." Rae's voice was quiet.

"Come and pick up your keys, yeah?" Thea suggested.

"Okay." Rae agreed. "I'll be at least another hour though. Is that okay?"

"Of course. I'll let the desk know you are coming. Just tell them who you are, and bring some form of ID."

"All right." Rae's voice found a bit of volume.

"They'll bring you up." Thea added unnecessarily. "It's not over love, okay?" She pressed the issue gently.

"Not over angel." Rae repeated back, though she really wasn't sure she believed it.

"See you in about an hour." Thea underlined.

"Yeah, about an hour." Rae's answer was short but gentle.

"Take care." Thea said softly.

"You too." Rae's voice was just as soft.

Thea replaced the receiver, a thousand things unsaid but she couldn't figure out a way to say any of it.

Rae listened to the line hang up and then kept listening until the dull thud of the busy tone rang in her ear. With a heavy sigh she went back to her scaffold.

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Rae walked through the lobby up to the sleepy counter clerk and rang the bell that sat in front of him when he didn't immediately respond to her.

"I'm here to see Miss. Winters." She said calmly. "She's expecting me."

"And you are?" He said rubbing his eyes surreptitiously.

"Cassie O'Keefe." She flipped her driving license out of her pocket and put it on the table. The receptionist looked at the license, and then at Rae.

"What's the room number?" He asked.

"Six twenty one." Rae replied immediately.

"Okay wait a minute." He nodded to her and leaned down to press the intercom behind his desk. Rae gave him a tight smile as he talked quietly for a moment and then looked up again.

"If you would like to wait by the elevator someone will be here presently." He explained the procedure to her.

"Thank you." Rae picked up her licence and went to the elevator. A young man, pulling at his uniform, appeared quickly and joined her.

"Good evening." He said politely as he eyed her up and down, dismissing any threat from her before he pushed the up button.

'Oh Raven, Raven, Raven!' It was Cleo's voice that laughed in Rae's head. 'If he only knew what you could do to hurt him.'



"Hey." Rae nodded trying to ignore the voice. "You my escort?"

"Miss. O'Keefe yes?" He eyed the tall woman.

"Yes, that's me." She nodded again.

"Floor six, yes?" He looked up to the display to track the elevators progress.

"Yes."

The elevator door slid open and the young man held it open for Rae. She walked past him and went in.

"You taking me the whole way?" She questioned.

"Hotel policy Ma'am." He noted politely as he stepped in and pressed six.

"Well then can't argue with policy." She burrowed her hands in her pockets.

The young man shined his buttons and looked at the doors. Rae's mind reflected on how different this trip was from the last time she'd been in the elevator. Constantly reminding her that heartbreak and not her hearts fulfilment waited for her at the end of the hall.

The lift stopped and the doors slid open. Holding the door the young man gestured for Rae to exit. Rae stepped out before him and began walking towards Thea's room not really concerned if he followed or not. The valet followed a few steps behind, trying to catch up with Rae's long strides.

"Is it policy for you to knock?" Rae stopped by the door and stepped back.

"Yes Ma'am." He smoothed down his white glove before he rapped lightly on the door.

"Hello?" Thea's voice came from inside the door.

"Miss. O'Keefe, Miss. Winters." He said simply.

"Thank you." The sound of Thea unlocking the door could be heard and then the barrier was pulled open. She looked at the young man, not Rae. She handed him a tip for which he politely nodded before he turned and walked back to the lift. As Thea avoided looking at her, Rae's mind gave in to the reality of what was going to happen.

"Come in." Thea stepped back from the door. Rae nodded silent and followed her inside as Thea remained to close the door.

"Would you like a drink?" Thea asked walking over to the small fridge.

"No, thank you." Rae moved further into the room and stood uncomfortably. Thea reached into her pocket and pulled out Rae's keys. She held them out in a shaking hand.

"Thank you." Rae took them, letting them hang between them for a moment before pulling back to tuck them in her pocket.

"Are you okay?" Thea asked awkwardly and Rae shrugged. "Can't you even talk to me?" She asked in a hurt tone, unable to believe that things had gone so wrong.

"Yes, I can." She answered softly.

"Then are you okay?" Thea pressed. "What's going on in your head?"

"No, I'm not okay." Rae's voice came out strained. "My head is a mess." She added honestly.

"What do you need to help it get sorted?" Thea asked her voice emotional.

"Can it be sorted?" Rae asked her cynically.

"Surely it can be made better." Thea suggested.

"How about your head?" Rae asked in return. "Surely you have a million questions."

"I'm very, confused." Thea said carefully as she sat down on a chair, motioning for Rae to sit too. Rae sat where the actress had pointed. "I do have lots of questions."

"Maybe if you asked them it would help sort this out." Rae tried to find somewhere to start.

"Love." The actress started gently. "Do you really want to go here tonight?"

"Thea, I don't think this can wait." Her voice was soft. "Do you?"

"No." Thea admitted her mind focusing on the first thing it could find and that certainly couldn't wait.

"Please just start this." Rae leaned forward to rest her head in her hands.

"Okay." Thea tried to keep her voice calm and level. "You were a drug addict yes?" She looked up at Rae sadly.

"Heroin addict." Rae specified.

"Main lining?" She didn't know how she asked the question.

"Yes." Rae nodded as she spoke the soft word.

"How could you?" Thea let the question slip out her voice full of disbelief.

"The first time was about a month after Tommy was killed." Rae ran her hands into her hair as she began knowing she had the actress' complete attention. "I hadn't left the house in days, weeks even and Cleo came home and announced enough was enough we were going out. We were going to a party. I still don't know how she convinced me to go." She took a strained breath. "It was while we were there that a friend of Cleo's came over and said she'd heard about my little loss and that she and Cleo had arranged for something that would make it all go away."

"Cleo arranged it?" Thea interrupted disbelief in her voice. "Sorry go on." She apologised when she realised she'd interrupted.

"It's okay." Rae took a deep breath. "Ask anything that strikes you. So this friend of Cleo's shot the three of us up."

"Cleo too?" Thea interrupted again her vision of the tall blonde changing a little.

"Yeah, Cleo too. She said she was doing it for me, because if I tripped alone she wouldn't be there with me, there to support me." Rae tried to explain what Cleo had tried to do that night.

"She could have supported you without getting stoned." Thea couldn't help being judgemental.

"Yeah well, I've always sorta thought that myself." Rae said honestly with a crooked smile.

"Anyway, carry on." Thea encouraged wanting to understand.

"Well it's hard to admit this, but I was hooked from that first time. The minute it hit me and I looked around the room." Rae swallowed hard. "But not for the reasons you're going to think." She added quickly in her own defence.

"Then explain." She tried not to think anything.

"It made me feel dead inside, it made everything hurt so much." Rae whispered. "It was like I had found the perfect way to punish myself for Tommy. It never made me feel good Thea, not once." Rae laughed at the irony of it. "I was addicted to the pain."

"I think that makes it worse." Thea whispered sadly.

"It does, doesn't it." Rae agreed in a lost voice.

"So how long before Cleo got you dried out?" The actress asked quietly.

"Three months." Her reply was simple.

"How bad were you? On say a one to ten scale."

"Bad." Rae had to be honest. "Six on a good day, eleven on my worst ones."

"Do carry on." She encouraged somewhat emptily as she added the information to her already aching head.

"Cleo only did it the once." Rae tried to at least save the other woman's image. "She didn't like losing control like that. But for the first little while she didn't mind getting it for me. It was hurting inside so I didn't have to be shut down like I had been."

"If it made you into a better person, I guess I understand the fact she got it for you." Thea could for once understand that viewpoint. Though it was a stretch to say the least.

"No, Thea it didn't make me a better person, it just made me easier to be around."

"But that's the same thing sometimes." Thea replied feeling a shiver go down her spine.

"Yeah I guess it is. When she found out I was buying myself stuff on top of what she was getting me, things really went downhill between us."

"So Cleo got you help." Thea sat back in her chair, her eyes still on Rae.

"Thea, Cleo had me committed." Rae's voice was almost silent.

"Do you want to tell me about that?" Thea asked hearing the tone of Rae's voice and fearing that it was too much to talk about.

"Not much to tell." Rae shrugged slightly.

"There must be Rae." The actress encouraged gently. "What did they do? How did they do it? How long did it take? Lots of things."

"Well first they dried me out." Rae started in a monotone voice, trying not to relive the memories as she recounted them. "Only problem was when they took away the heroin they took away my artificial pain and I soon learned that my real pain was even worse." She paused as she thought. "Thea, did you know I have a third degree black belt?" She asked the question wondering how much she needed to explain.

"No, I didn't." Thea shook her head.

"I do." Rae bit her lip.

"Rae, if you don't want to do this now, we don't have to." She tried to offer an out.

"As I came down I got suicidal." Rae kept going. "The only way they could control me was to throw me in a straight jacket and sedate me. I spent over three weeks like that."

"Oh." The sound Thea made was barely audible. She raised her hand to her mouth and looked at Rae with wide eyes.

"Most of the Doctors were content to see me as a permanent resident but there was one Doctor." Rae smiled at the memory.

"One Doctor, yes?" Thea prompted desperate for any ray of light in this horrible tale.

"She was the Chief Administrator of the facility, but she was still out to save the world. Dr. Lillian Kwon." Rae said the name with a vague reverence. "She assigned herself to my case and the other Doctors were more than happy to pass me along. I remember for the first week she used to sit in the room with me just watching."

Thea let her hand drop away from her mouth, watching her lover intently.

"Then one day she had the sedation cut in half and she waited for me to come around a bit before she said anything." Rae looked off in memory for a moment. "She told me who she was." She continued finally. "And then she told me that she wanted to try to cut back on the sedation."

"She sounds brave." Thea remarked.

"Lillian had the heart of a tiger." Rae smiled.

"Tell me more." Thea encouraged gently.

"It was what she said that day that made me start thinking. Thinking that I couldn't let what was happening keep going." Rae took a deep breath. "She said that she would be back when it was time for the next needle but that between now and then she wanted me to think about something." Rae took a second deep breath.

"You want to stop?" The redhead asked, moving forward in her seat to place her hand on Rae's knee.

"She asked me if doing all of this to myself honoured or dishonoured my brother's memory." Rae continued not hearing Thea's offer to stop. "And then she ran her hand down my cheek and told me it was okay to be sad then she left. It was the first time anyone told me it was okay to be sad Thea." She looked at the actress finally her voice almost broken.

"And she cracked the shell." Thea confirmed.

"Yes." Rae nodded.

"Do you still keep in contact?" Thea asked, thinking about something in her own past.

"No." Rae shook her head lightly. "She was murdered a few years ago by a patient."

"Oh." The horror shocked the actress out of her own thought momentarily as she looked at her lover. "I... I'm sorry, it's such a risky job."

"Yes, she always used to joke that I was the most dangerous patient she'd ever faced." Rae laughed lightly. "Guess she was wrong. Her work goes on though, she always knew it would be her legacy."

"Such people are always remembered." Thea whispered.

"Yeah." Rae nodded though she didn't find a legacy comforting and instead as always wished that the woman herself was still alive. "Four months later she had me put back together." She found the thread of the original story.

"Did they give you lots of therapy or did they stick to a medication therapy mix?" Thea asked.

"Lillian took me off all the meds that first night." Rae smiled remembering the Doctor's fight.

"That's impressive." The actress smiled at the obvious esteem Rae had for the woman.

"She wasn't big on pharmaceuticals, she thought they were the same as the street drugs only better manufacturing."

"Good for her, all to do with the inner soul, and the mind. Yeah?" She questioned.

"Exactly." Rae smiled. "She was very big on focus."

"Now I know where you get it from." Thea smiled softly.

"Blame Lillian." Rae smiled back.

"I'd thank her!" Thea patted the technician's knee again softly.

"She was an amazing woman." Rae nodded to herself.

"She sounds it." Thea agreed.

"What do you want to know about now?" Rae asked in a whisper, not sure where to go in the story. Whether to tell Thea all the details of her treatment, or what happened when she went back into the world and clashed with Cleo. Or if now her young lover would finally question the circumstances of her occupation that lead to Tommy's death in the first place.

Thea sat back on her chair and looked at Rae, happy that she now had details, but saddened that it just reaffirmed the big question. The one she had to have answered before anything could be anywhere near okay. But how could she ask it? Thea crossed her legs in a very uncharacteristic move

"There's still something isn't there Thea." Rae sat up straight and looked to study the redhead.

"Rae." Thea tried to meet the eyes that held her but she couldn't. She looked away and fear burned her throat.

"Thea, it's okay to ask." Rae was somehow able to read the look. "I'm negative and I'm re-tested every three months just to be sure."

"Sorry." Thea whispered, looking down into the carpet the young actress burst into tears.

"Thea, there is nothing to be sorry for." She moved quickly to crouch in front of her. She'd known since the soliloquy and Thea's even more dramatic performance of it that this question was coming. "You have every right to ask that question."

Hearing the genuine acceptance in her lover's voice, Thea turned to Rae and caressed her face with wet warm hands.

"And if you want proof I'll get tested again tomorrow." The technician added the last words softly without any malice.

"I love you." Thea wept sweeping black hair back off the technician's face with each stroke.

"I love you so much Thea." She whispered the words from her heart.

"I had to ask." Thea sobbed as she leaned forward and closed her arms around her lover's neck. "I stood in front of those people tonight and all I could think of was you. I don't want to lose you." She barely stopped for breath as she held Rae very tightly.

"I know angel." Rae closed her arms around Thea's slim waist. "That question has to be asked and answered." She held tightly back. "And I'm going to get re-tested again tomorrow regardless. I don't want you to ever have to worry."

"No love." Thea objected gently. "You don't have to do that."

"I want to Thea." Rae whispered back.

"Sure?" She asked timidly.

"You deserve to hear the results yourself." Rae stressed.

"Shall I have one to?" Thea offered hoping Rae could understand why she had offered.

"If you want love." Rae smiled at her softly, touched by the offer.

"Just so we both know." She added softly back.

"But I know you're not in the risk category that I am. But both knowing would be a good thing to build on I think." Rae held onto the actress just as tight as the actress held onto her.

"Rae?" Thea suddenly broke her grip and leaned back in her chair. She fixed blue eyes with green.

"Yes angel?" Rae held her gaze.

"I want you to know something." Thea took a deep breath, her mind kicked her sharply with a 'what are you doing Thea?' question.

"You can tell me anything angel." Rae encouraged softly.

"It's about your treatment, when you were committed."

"Yes love, I can tell you all about it if you want me too." Rae looked at her questioning just what it was Thea was trying to get at.

"No, no, that is of course if you want to." She flustered. "What I wanted to say though was..." Rae looked at her open and ready for any thought or question "I kinda know how it must have felt." She admitted quietly looking at Rae for a reaction.

"What part of it angel?" Rae looked for clarification.

"Therapy." Thea said quietly.

"What did you get yours for?" Rae asked softly making the small leap in her mind.

Thea pulled her hands back to her lap and unclipped the bracelet she wore there. She held out her hand. Rae took the hand offered in her own softly only breaking eye contact then as she looked down. Thea turned her arm palm up, slowly. Rae's heart broke as she looked down at the scar that ran down Thea's wrist. Without any real thought she bent down and placed a soft brief kiss on the scar. A tear slipped down Thea's face.

"It doesn't deserve that." A broken voice protested.

"I'm so happy you didn't succeed." Rae whispered turning to look back at watery green eyes. "Why not angel?" She asked softly still holding her the small arm in her hands. "Am I supposed to be ashamed of you for it? Am I supposed to think less of you? Because I don't think either." She leaned down to kiss it again.

"You should." Thea whispered.

"It just hurts me to know that you ever felt that lost and alone Thea." She whispered when their eyes met again. "Why should I?"



Thea looked at Rae somewhat surprised as her heart had said the statement before her mind could intercede.

"Because..." She mumbled. "Because I was weak. I am weak."

"You are no such thing." Rae shook her head. "And whoever told you that lied to you."

Thea pulled gently for Rae to release her arm. Rae let it go without resistance. Thea clipped her bracelet back in place not even looking at the scar.

"You want to tell me about it?" Rae moved back to give her a little space but without seeming afraid of what was going on.

"There's not much to tell." Thea moved the silver band in circles around her arm.

"When?" Rae began. "Why? Where?"

"When I was seventeen. At a party, because I didn't know what else to do." Thea rattled off the facts.

"What had you backed into a corner?" Rae asked in a soft voice, somehow knowing that without asking she wasn't going to be told very much.

"My life, my parents, my future." Thea replied without a break.

"That doesn't make you weak Thea." Rae shook her head again.

"I did it with a screw driver, that's why it's not exactly neat." Thea's eyes were hard, but still damp as she looked at Rae.

"I wondered." Rae added honestly.

"My father paid for private treatment for my 'teenage angst'." The animosity in her voice was thick.

"What was the treatment?" Rae questioned now realising the motivation of Thea's question earlier.

"Stuck me on pills, gave me lots of tests and counselling." Her words were a touch bitter "After a while they asked if I would do it again. I smiled and said no, they told me I was cured."

"Well to quote Lillian." Rae gave her a sad smile. "That was a bunch of Cracker Jack psychology. You went through all that alone angel." She added softly. "That makes you anything but weak."

"Well it broke up the monotony of 'A' level." She gave a sarcastic laugh.

"Thea, you have nothing to be ashamed of." Rae moved a bit closer to her.

"I love you." Thea replied as she moved closer to Rae.

"I love you." Rae held her lover's eyes.

"Hold me?"

Rae didn't answer as she moved to wrap her arms around the actress and hold her close.

"Stay here." Thea whispered as she felt herself enclosed in strong arms.

"It would break my heart to leave." Rae whispered back holding her a bit closer.

"Ready for bed?" She asked as she rested her head on Rae.

"Yes angel." Rae kissed the top of her head. "Can I hold you all night?" She asked softly.

"Yes." Thea replied smiling warmly into Rae's embrace.

"Thank you." Rae whispered as she picked the actress up and began the short trip to bed.

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Thea opened her eyes and focused in on where she lay. Then as she remembered the events of the previous night, she briefly closed her eyes again and kissed Rae's shoulder. The still sleeping technician gave a happy mummer though she didn't stir. She opened her eyes again almost instantly and moved a little so that she wasn't leaning quite so heavily on her lover. She watched Rae's chest rise and fall evenly and for about the millionth time that week thanked the gods for giving her this despite everything that could have spoiled it. Here they were, together, wrapped in each other's arms.

'Well Thea?' Her mind and heart spoke to her in unison. 'Has she proved it yet? Proved to you that she means what she said? Proved to you that she loves you?' She knew that the answer was yes. 'Isn't it time you paid her a similar compliment?' Her mind asked her suddenly.

She looked at Rae and the slight smile the dark haired woman wore.

"Perhaps it is." She whispered almost silently. "I think it is time you knew or at least it soon will be." She snuggled a little closer making sure her movements were not obvious enough to wake Rae. A sleepy arm came round to hold her tight. "When this first spell is over and we have the fund raising gala all over and done with, you and I are going to have a little talk my darling Rae." She said as she manoeuvred her hand free to rest over the top of Rae's. "Then we will see if our love can survive the test of my past as it did yours." She added as she lifted her head and kissed the sleeping woman's jaw. As always, one kiss was not enough and she moved to plant several small kisses in the same area. "I love you." She whispered between each kiss.

"I must be in heaven." Rae whispered as she opened her eyes slowly. "I love you too angel."

"Good morning my love." Thea said gently.

"Good morning." Rae moved to capture the lips that had awakened her.

"What a nice way to start the day." Thea kept the contact loving but brief.

"The only way I ever want to start the day." Rae said honestly, holding the actress closer. She remembered just what was on their agenda for the morning and it caused her smile to waiver a bit.

"Do you want breakfast?" Thea asked reaching over towards the phone.

"That would be great." Rae commented with a yawn.

"What'll it be?" She asked as she picked up the phone and called room service.

"Whatever you're having is great." Rae yawned again. She couldn't remember ever sleeping so well. Not once had she woken up startled as she often did.

"I usually have a boiled egg and toast." Thea smiled as she placed her regular order.

"Make mine scrambled please." Rae smiled at her. "And the toast sounds great."

"Fruit juice?" She mouthed, after adding her lover's order to which Rae nodded vigorously. "Any kind?" She mouthed back. Thea added four fruit juices to the order and a pot of lemon and ginger herbal tea. "Anything hot?" Rae shook her head. Thea confirmed her order. "Thank you." She added brightly before hanging up the receiver.

"How are you feeling love?" The actress asked as she moved to sit a little more upright.

"I feel good, never slept so good." She smiled and stretched out.

"Good." Thea said honestly. "Love?" She added gently as she looked around the room her eyes on the pile of dirty clothes that the pair had discarded earlier.

"Yes angel?" Rae pushed her arms under the pillow beneath her head.

"I feel like a nice hot bath with breakfast. Do you think you could oblige?"

"I'll run it for you." Rae stretched again as she yawned.

"That's just what I wanted you to say. You are going to share it with me though, right?" Thea checked.

"I thought you'd never ask." The technician sat up and kissed her on the cheek.

"Of course I would ask." Thea smiled. "There are bubbles on the side."

"Bubbles?" Rae queried as she pushed the covers off herself. "Bubbles coming up."

"Kiss!" Thea demanded as she leaned forward.

"Please." Rae leaned forward to mesh their lips and the actress smiled behind the kiss.

"Nice and hot, but not too hot remember." Thea joked gently.

"Hot but not too hot!" Rae grinned. "Gotcha." She moved off the bed and padded off still grinning to the bathroom as she pulled out the tangles in her long hair.

Thea watched her leave and then picked up the phone a second time. She made her instructions brief, but concise and clear. Again she finished the conversation with a charming thank you before replacing the receiver.

"Angel?" Rae stuck her head out around the door. "You don't have an extra toothbrush do you?"

"Top draw of the make up unit!" Thea called to her happily.

"Thank you." Rae disappeared back into the bathroom.

Thea threw back the covers off and padded over to the sitting area of the room. She picked up all of their clothes and folded them carefully, putting them on a nearby chair. Flicking on the TV, she skipped through a few of the channels until she found the news.

"How's the bath coming?" Thea called loudly when she heard the water start to run.

"Going good." Rae called back, busying herself with arranging the bathroom. As the bath filled, she tried to find something to light all the candles she'd found around the room. A box of matches conveniently sat in the first drawer she opened

Thea smiled at the typical response. The news was its usual bad news and mayhem so she turned to a cartoon show. As the temperature of her waking body dropped, she felt chilly in just her underwear. Moving to the bed, she took her robe from the bottom and slipped it on.

"Almost ready angel." The tall T-shirt clad woman stuck her head out to call. "Does breakfast usually take long?"

"Should be here any...." She was cut off by a knock on the door. She grinned and got up to retrieve their meal. "Second." She added as she reached the door.

"Good, good." Rae called back as she turned off the taps and checked that the steamy water wasn't too hot. The soapy strawberry scented bubbles made her smile.

Thea took charge of the breakfast tray and the two plastic bags that the porter handed her. She tipped him generously and then wheeled the trolley in.

"Shall I bring it into the bathroom?" She called as she closed and locked the door.

"You need help love?" Rae called as she came out of the bathroom. "The bath is ready."

Seeing Rae she moved the bags behind her trying to obscure the other woman's view of them. She hoped the technician would focus instead on the breakfast trolley.

"Whatcha got?" Rae asked curious of the move.

"Breakfast." Thea replied pointing to the silver domed plates on the trolley.

"Oh good, I'm starved." Rae laughed knowing her lover was up to something. "Do you want to eat in the bath?"

"That would be great." She pushed the trolley forward a little to Rae. "Why don't you take it in?"

"You got it." Rae pulled the tray and headed off for the bathroom figuring whatever else Thea was up to it was the actress' place so she wouldn't push.

"I won't be a sec." She added still holding the bags behind her. She smiled as Rae pulled the trolley away. She turned from the bathroom and went back to the bed putting the bags down onto it. She pulled the messy comforter over them to temporarily hide them. Slipping off her robe, she padded through to the bathroom.

Rae took all the lids off their meals and set up the tray near the bath. She took a long sip of one of the juices, suddenly realising how thirsty she was.

"Thirsty?" Thea asked from the doorway. She smiled at the candles and the smell of strawberry bubbles.

"A little." Rae licked the juice from her lips. "I thought..." She motioned to the candles.

"They are beautiful." Thea said grinning. "Can I get in or would I spoil the ambience?"

"You are the ambience." Rae looked at her lovingly. "Come on, breakfast in bath!"

Thea blew her a kiss and stepped into the water watching Rae carefully. The technician grinned to herself and stepped into the other side of the tub. Thea stepped forward towards her lover.

"Is the water too hot?" Rae asked in a whisper.

"Doesn't feel it." Thea replied only when her body was pressed lightly against her lovers.

"Feels very nice." Rae's body gave an excited shiver as Thea slipped her hands round the tall woman's waist. She moved her arms around Thea's waist to show she enjoyed the move.

"Does it feel as nice as this?" She asked kissing Rae's neck.

"That is definitely nicer." Rae breathed out as the actress continued to kiss her way to Rae's ear.

"You sure?" She asked her voice low.

"Positive!" Rae shuddered excitedly under the kisses as her hands moved to caress the bare flesh of Thea's back.

"Are we going to be bathing partly clothed?" Thea breathed into Rae's ear heavily.

"I think we should lose the clothing." Rae's voice was husky as she moved her hands to the bottom of the tight elastic of Thea's bra.

"So do I." Thea nipped Rae's earlobe. "But I am kinda busy." She added moving her hands to Rae's ass.

"Can I help you with this?" Rae questioned sliding her fingers under the elastic and around the bottom of her breasts.

"Please do." Thea encouraged still kissing and nibbling Rae's ear as her hands massaging Rae's cheeks.

"My pleasure." Rae worked the material up, making sure to rub her hands against as much skin as possible. She continued moving the material up, hoping Thea would assist her in ridding her of the object. Reluctantly the actress released Rae and moved her arms to aid the removal of her top. The technician quickly pulled the bra up and over her head and tossed it aside, instantly moving her hands back down to the warm exposed flesh of her breasts.

"Better?" Rae asked in a low voice.

"Much." Thea hummed out the word in a happy tone.

"Anything else I can do to help?" She massaged the soft flesh under her hands.

"Help me down." Thea leaned against her tall lover heavily. Rae didn't answer as she moved them downwards into the bubble filled water. Thea loved the feel of the hot soapy water and Rae's hands on her body. She briefly closed her eyes in ecstasy. Rae dipped her head down to kiss the actress' neck, the movements of her hands kept steady and slow. She enjoyed the bolts of pleasure that Rae sent through her, but then remembered the duty list of the day.

"We should have breakfast." She injected lovingly. "Before it gets cold."

"Yes, breakfast." Rae kissed her neck once more and moved back slowly to sit. "We've got an appointment to get to." She added with a soft smile to show she understood and that it was okay. "Would it be okay if I get rid of this" She held up the edge of her soaked T-shirt. "I can keep it on if you want." She offered not wanted to add to the heat in the room.

"Get rid of it." The actress smiled. Rae nodded and pulled the soggy shirt up over her head and tossed it aside to join the actress' bra.

"Juice my angel?" Rae reached to the tray and picked up a glass.

"Please." Thea replied holding her hand out.

Rae handed her the glass smiling and took a glass for herself, leaning back in the hot water. She closed her eyes as she took another long sip of the juice, noting the unique contrast of the cool liquid going inside to the hot water that surrounded. Thea did likewise and then put the glass down on the ledge by the bath.

"Could I have my eggs?" She asked snuggling further into the water.

"Of course." Rae moved to gather her tray from the cart and handed it to her.

"Thanks."

"Cutlery?" Rae offered her a fork. "You know I was thinking." She looked at the actress through the bubbles around them.

"What?" Thea questioned meeting the gaze.

"This isn't the biggest tub in the world." The Raven grinned at her. "And with the two of us eating it could be a bit of a mess." Her grin got a little bigger. "Maybe we could avoid disaster if one of us ate and then the other." She held out her hand for Thea's plate, happy to see the actress' smile as she handed it back. "Thank you." She held out her other hand for the fork.

Thea handed it over grinning, she wondered if any one would believe that Rae could be so playful.

"Which would you like to eat first?" Rae questioned with a smile she slid herself over in the water. She snuggled her legs under Thea's in order to get close enough to feed her breakfast. Rae twirled the fork as she waited for her lover's choice.

"Toast." Thea replied with a grin knowing this would mean Rae had to move.

"Oh toast." Rae grinned and laid the fork on the suspended plate. Raising her hand into the air, she flicked off as much of the bubbles and soap as she could before reaching out to take a piece of toast. "Toast my angel." She moved it to Thea's lips.

"Now I'd like some egg please." She gently bit off a piece of the still warm toast and sat back.

"Egg it is." Rae balanced the toast on the plate and awkwardly moved to get some of the egg onto the fork. Thea grinned madly as Rae moved the forkful carefully towards her. She watched her lover's every move and leaned forward as necessary taking the offered forkful. "More?" She asked as she moved the fork away. When Thea nodded she carefully gathered another forkful and offered it to her.

"I think I could get used to this." She gently laughed as she took another mouthful.

"So could I." Rae winked at her and picked up the toast to offer her a bite. "Only for you my angel." She added softly as Thea took another bite and then moved back.

"I love you." She whispered contentedly.

"I love you." Rae whispered back completely happy. "More juice?" She nodded towards the juice on the rail of the tub.

"You should have some toast." Thea encouraged. "I can't have my slave dying of hunger!"

"Don't mind if I do." Rae took a mouthful of the toast and grinned at her as she chewed. "Though I would be dying in ecstasy." She winked at the actress slowly.

Thea grinned back. Happy thoughts ran through her head. She felt so content, so complete, like she didn't have a care in the world. She felt like a kid with her friend eating ice cream on a sunny hillside on a Saturday afternoon. She would fight anything for the moments with Rae that made her feel like this.

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Thea wrapped a towel round herself and stood by the door, watching as Rae climbed out of the bath.

"Hey, where's my towel?" Rae grinned when she noticed the second one was missing from the rack

"Oh no!" Thea raised her hand to her face in mock horror. "I don't know where it is! You'll have to share this one." One hand beckoned to Rae.

"I was hoping you'd share." She moved over as Thea loosened the towel and opened it to wrap it round both of them. "We are only ever having one towel in the house." .



"Sounds good to me." Thea moved her hands over Rae's sides, rubbing the towel gently to dry her. "Breakfast was great love."

"It was." Rae agreed softly and moved her hand over the towel and Thea to dry her as well.

"We should get dressed." Thea enjoyed the movements of Rae's hands. "We have a busy day."

"Dressed it is." She smiled down at the actress. "Think we'll be able to have lunch together before the matinee?"

"I'll go and get your things." Thea slipped out from the towel. "I should think so." She stepped into the main room.

"Good, good." Rae turned and moved to brush her teeth again after breakfast.

Thea returned to the bathroom in her robe seconds later carrying the two bags.

"You couldn't wear your work gear love." She held out the bags grinning. "So I got you alternatives."

"Alternatives?" Rae asked genuinely curious as she took the bags. "What kind of alternatives?"

"You have a look in the bags, and see if anything strikes you." Thea turned and then turned back. "I have a few things to do. When you have chosen, put them on and come and show me!"

"Okay love" The technician grinned from ear to ear at the idea that Thea had gone through all that trouble. The actress waved one last time and hurried back to bedroom.

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In the bathroom Rae laid the bags out on the counter, opening the first one she peered inside.

"What do we have here?" Rae questioned as she took the tissue paper wrapped smaller package off the top of the other items in the bag. "Well these could give a girl hope." She smiled at herself in the mirror as she unwrapped the gorgeous simple black bra and panties.

"What else is in here?" She put the undergarments aside and pulled out the next item. The thick cotton twill pants were a rich dark navy blue and the brushed texture of them made Rae smile. Examining the label she laughed as she realised that Thea had got them in even the proper leg length. Laying them over the towel rack she moved to open the second bag.

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Thea stretched out on the bed on her stomach and picked up the phone. Bringing it onto the bed, she took out a piece of paper from the drawer where'd she deposited it the day before and called

through to reception with the number. She waited for a moment for the ringing phone to be picked up, presently it was.

"Eaton here." Cleo's curt voice picked up after the second ring

"Cleo?" Thea's voice was suddenly unsure.

"Thea!" Cleo's tone changed instantly as she recognised who it was. "Little star, so glad to hear your voice.

"Hi, how are you?" Thea realised that her accent must have given her away, but the reception she was receiving was puzzling. "I was worried." She added genuinely.

"Swamped with work, sorry about the stuffy first hello." Cleo apologised.

"No, that's nothing. Don't worry about it." Thea brushed it aside, even more taken by how amenable this woman was.

"I'm doing okay." She let her voice waiver a little. "Yesterday was hard." Her voice fell.

"I know. Did Brittany take care of you?" Thea asked quickly, trying not to dwell on the dinner date.

"Oh Brit was a dear." Cleo brightened a little. "Though without your instruction I'm sure she wouldn't have had a clue how to help."

"I'm sorry I didn't stay myself." Thea apologised without thinking. "I had to go to Rae."

"Oh no apologies little star, of course you did." Cleo's voice was soft and understanding. "I only hope my Raven can forgive me for all those harsh words."

"I'm sure next time you meet up it will all have been forgotten." Thea stated honestly. "We had a great talk about it all."

"I hope so," Cleo added and then stopped. "You did?"

"Things get better when you talk to someone off centre, don't you think?" Thea continued happy it had been so easy to enter this conversation with Cleo.

"Oh I do, I do!" Cleo added her mind reeling a bit. "Though it's hard not to be dragged into the centre of these things." She mused at last.

"One of the reasons I called was to say thank you." Thea enthused.

"Thank me?" She asked trying to keep herself on the top of the conversation but failing.

"Yes, I knew Rae had this stuff in her past, that she was guarding. But with you here, it gives me a doorway to that past, a way in through her armour. I can't thank you enough for that."

"Well Thea, I always want to do my best to help Raven get over her affliction for cutting the world off. I know first hand how much it hurts when my little blackbird decides to amputate your heart."

"Oh Cleo I realise how much you must have been hurt too. I only hope I can repay you by working with Rae through this so she finds a place where she can feel better about it all, and maybe bring you too closer." Thea suddenly realised the other woman's pain.

"I would be in your debt Thea." Cleo tried not to clench her teeth. "I hope you might give me the chance one day to tell you it all from my side." She added. "I'm sure Rae doesn't paint me in the best light."

"You're wrong Cleo." Thea's voice was gentle. "It's true some things may be biased, but not everything. You were such an important person in Rae's past Cleo. Nothing could ever change that."

"I would never want it changed, even with all the hurt. Though I wish I could have spared my blackbird from that. I tried too Thea you must believe me." Cleo pleaded with her.

"It couldn't be stopped." Thea confirmed. "And I am sure you tried. I promise you Cleo, as an important part of Rae's future I will continue to spare her as much as I can."

"My blackbird must always be spared Thea and I know you will little star." Cleo jabbed the pen in her hand into the leather of her office's couch. "It broke my heart to take her to that hospital, but I really had no other choice." She tested the water to see just how much Thea knew

"It must have been dreadful." Thea admitted. "But you must have been overjoyed that such an innovative doctor took over her case, with such great results." She wanted to keep the whole conversation positive and light.

"Pardon?" Cleo tore the pen through the leather. "She told you about her?" The tall blonde couldn't keep the contempt out of her voice for the first moment but she quickly got it under control.

"Of course." Thea replied quickly noting the change in Cleo's voice.

"I'm glad." Cleo's voice went soft again. "Dr. Kwon had a big responsibility in the blackbird we have today." She dragged the pen further through the leather.

"I wish I could thank her personally." Thea's voice was tinged with sadness.

"Such a tragedy." Cleo voice cracked. "To be cut down so young, it was such a waste. She could have done great things."

"She did." Thea said brightly thinking of her raven-haired lover. "I hope you saw someone too Cleo." She suddenly interjected.

"Me?" Cleo snapped. "Oh I had me put back together too." She returned to her soft voice, seeing her assistant enter she made a grand gesture for a pad of paper to be brought to her

"I'm glad. It must have been a terrible time." Thea replied honestly.

"It was Thea, it was." She mumbled as she scribbled down instructions.

"Cleo?" Thea asked gently.

"Yes little star?" Cleo gave back her full attention and threw the pad at her assistant who scurried off to follow the instructions.

"I know that at the moment you and Rae have a turbulent relationship." Thea began somewhat hesitantly. "But I believe that because of what you were to each other, that things can improve. I want you to know Cleo..." She stopped waiting to make sure the other woman was still listening

"Yes Thea?" Cleo gave her the utmost of attention.

"That as Rae and I begin this new chapter of her, that is, our lives. You will be a part of it."

"That means so much to me." Cleo's tight leap off the couch did not match her soft appreciative voice. "I want to do everything I can to help you and my blackbird be happy. All I have ever wanted is for her to be happy."

"Perhaps after the gala, when things have calmed down. We can meet again, perhaps at the cabin? Have some time away together?" Thea suggested.

"Cabin?" Cleo asked confused. "I can arrange to have one rented that would be a grand idea. Time away would be lovely and I'll clean up my meetings in the hopes of it going through." Inside her mind raced. 'Cabin, cabin?' What the hell did Thea know that she didn't?

For the first time in the conversation Thea was a little confused. Didn't Cleo know that Rae owned a cabin?

"Okay." Thea answered. "After the gala, we'll make some arrangements. "Yes?"

"Sounds grand." Cleo smiled. "Little star I hate to run but I have a meeting that won't go anywhere without me, can we talk later?"

"So Thea, what do you think?" Rae came out of the bathroom and modelled the new outfit.

"Oh of course." Thea tried to answer but was distracted by her lover's voice. She looked up from the bed. "Oh my!"

"You'll get to see the bra and such later." Rae spoke in a husky tone.

"I had better." Thea laughed as the phone moved away from her face. "Give us a twirl then."

Cleo felt herself choke when she heard the sweet sound of Rae's voice come into the background suddenly.

"You like?" Rae moved around grinning and feeling silly but loving it anyway. The thin navy T-shirt fit her like a second skin, but was complimented by the thick oversized lumber jacket in a contrasting blue and white check.

The small sound in the phone made Thea remember that she was in the middle of a conversation. Though the lure of looking at her beloved was greater.

"Don't tell her it's me Thea." Cleo found herself suddenly.

"It's gorgeous love." Thea remained listening to Cleo with one ear but watching Rae with every ounce of her attention.

"You two have a good day, don't let me get her rage up."

"Thank you angel." Rae blew her a kiss.

"Oh, okay, thank you then." Thea made a move to catch the blown kiss whilst speaking into the phone. "Call me?" She added.

"Most definitely little star. You take care, of both of you." Cleo used the sweetest voice she could find.

"Bye." Thea absently put the phone down as she stared at her lover with eyes that sparkled of lust and desire.

"Bye." With the last word Cleo pushed the end key and promptly pitched the phone at the window in her office. She was very unhappy when the safety glass didn't break and the phone clunked uselessly to the ground.

"Help ME with My Blackbird!" She screamed at the phone. "No one helps Angelina Eaton do anything! Chantal!" Her voice rang out hard as she called her assistant back.

The timid looking young woman came into the room slowly. She had never seen her boss quite like this.

"Yes Miss. Eaton?" She stammered.

"Did you get him on the phone yet?" Cleo barked as she walked over to kick the phone across the room.

"Not yet Miss. Eaton." She stammered dreading the response.

"I want him on the phone now." Cleo sat down heavy in her leather chair and put her feet on the desk "I want to know everything about this little witch and Chantal get someone to fix the couch." She waved the young girl off.

"Right away Miss. Eaton. Shall I patch it through when I get him?" She asked nervously.

"NO CHANTAL, HANG UP ON HIM!" She glared across the room. "OF COURSE PATCH HIM THROUGH!"

"Sorry Miss. Eaton." The young girl lowered her head and hurried out.

"Calm, Calm." She took a deep breath. "One must take their time and focus with such things." She spoke to herself softly before letting one final kick send the crystal sculpture on her desk into the wall, shattering it into a million shards.

Continued in Act XI...

### The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

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## ~ After the Curtain Falls ~

by Beth Dragon & Kathleen Wolf

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**Feedback:** All comments are greatly appreciated and can be sent to: [kathandbeth@hotmail.com](mailto:kathandbeth@hotmail.com)

**Thanks:** To Emma, for her never ending love, support and chocolate. To the Ex-Guards Village for all their feedback and expert advice.

## **Act XI**

Rae used a heavy tired hand to drag the keys out of her pocket and fumbled to get the tiny key into the lock. Finally hearing it disengage she breathed a sigh of relief and then worried that the noise would have awoken Thea who she guessed would be long asleep as it was four am.

"Damn wiring." She cursed to herself again, thinking of the reams of line that she'd had to rewire that night alone.

Opening the door softly, the flickering firelight and candles told her the actress might still be up. Closing the door almost silently behind her, she watched the blonde beauty as she sat cross-legged before the fire feverishly writing in her leather bound journal. Thea only stopping to take small sips from a glass of wine near her knee.

Rae slipped off her jacket and hung it on the coat rack. She pulled off her boots dropping them with a quiet thud. She was surprised that her lover had yet to look up, but she enjoyed the chance to watch the woman so engrossed in her task. Rae crept further into the room and slipped around to fall into the large overstuffed leather chair.

"Any of that wine left?" She asked in a whisper finally when she saw the frantic pen pause.

"Of course." Thea purred, turning to look at her with a beautiful smile.

"You need a refill?" Rae smiled and moved to get up.

"Stay right there." Thea grinned and laid her pen down, closing the notebook and Rae froze in the spot.

"Keep writing love." Rae smiled softly. "I can get it, I didn't mean to interrupt you."

"Before you think about wine, or food or anything else. You have to say hello." Thea pushed herself up from the floor and Rae leaned back into the chair again. Thea sauntered over to the large leather chair and rested her hands on the arms

"Welcome home love." Thea said gently. "I missed you."

"Hello my love." She smiled up and moved her hand to hold Thea's waist. "Missed you too. Sorry I'm so late." She added softly.

"It's okay, everything has to be ready for tomorrow." Thea leant forward her lips tantalizingly close to Rae's.

"It is." Rae breathed out onto the luscious lips so close to hers. "Have to have it perfect for my beauty."

"If you have done it." She breathed back. "It will be perfect."

"Only you are perfect." Rae moved the small distance to press their lips together, pulling Thea closer to her gently with her hands. Thea let herself be pulled and met Rae's kiss, before pulling back moving her body to sit down on her lover's lap. Rae grinned at the move and let one hand drape over Thea's legs as the other caressed her back.

"How are you doing angel?" She asked softly.

"Good." Thea whispered, tracing patterns on Rae's arm. "You know Cassie O'Keefe?" She said dreamily.

"Vaguely know her." Rae smirked.

"Well I have a problem." The actress grinned like a schoolgirl.

"A problem, what?" Rae looked concerned and winked.

"Well the problem is." Thea smirked. "I think I am completely and utterly in love with her."

"Why is that a problem?" Rae smiled happily. "I happen to know she is utterly and completely in love with you."

"You think?" She danced her fingers up Rae's arm.

"I know." Rae grinned as she drew little hearts on Thea's back. Laughing to herself at how good it felt no matter how soppy it was.

"That's good." Thea whispered as her fingers danced down again.

"Does that solve your problem love?" Rae whispered back.

"I think so, but it doesn't solve my immediate hiccup." The actress shook her head lightly.

"What is your immediate hiccup?" Rae smiled.

"Well, it's Wednesday morning. Very early and I have lived in bliss for ten days."

"Ten days of absolute bliss." Rae whispered.

"And I keep waiting for that moment, you know the one I am talking about?" Thea asked moving her hand to Rae's cheek.



"Not sure." Rae shook her head lightly against the hand. "Why don't you describe it for me?"

"The moment to happen, when you walk in the door from work or you come into my dressing room at the theatre or I see a bouquet of orchids waiting for me. Or I come home to the smell of hot chocolate. I am waiting for the moment when..." She cupped Rae's face. "When that doesn't make me want to strip you naked and make love to you all night long." Rae grinned at her and blushed. "That's the moment, I'm waiting for." Thea explained grinning back at her.

"Well I don't think that's ever going to happen for me." Rae growled. "And what will you do when this moment happens?" She slipped her hand up under the light shirt and massaged the redhead's bare back.

"I'll strip you naked and just look at you, I am sure with that stimulation the moment will pass!" Thea laughed.

"Good, good." Rae laughed with her and kissed her arm. Thea leaned in and captured Rae's lips with her own. Rae kissed her back instantly enjoying the contact for a moment before gracefully pulling back. Thea moved back as well.

"You okay love?" The actress asked when the kiss broke off.

"Love..." Rae started to speak in a soft voice.

"Yes?" Thea tried not to frown.

"The results were ready today." Her voice was almost inaudible. "It's just." She started to babble when she saw Thea's face fall. "We've been so good about not, well you know, till we got the results and since there ready..." She stammered for a moment. "I just wanted to put this to rest completely."

"I understand love, but I doubt they'd appreciate a call at this hour." Thea said gently knowing the past little while had been hard for both of them.

"Twenty four hour clinic angel." Rae smiled slightly. "That's why I brought us there."

"Really?" Thea breathed her eyes sparkling and the technician nodded. "Let's call." She instantly reached into her pocket "I have the number." She brought out a slip of paper.

"Okay." Rae smiled at her. "You have them both right?"

"Yes." She brought out a second.

"How about you call in with mine and I'll call in with yours?" Rae asked softly. "You phone first love."

"You sure?" Thea asked the first trace of fear creeping into her voice.

"Yeah go on." Rae kept her smile, the vague fear that always came at this time crept into her. She tried to remind herself all of her tests had been clean it was highly unlikely this one would come back positive but there was always that chance her mind reminded. "Here." She reached to the small side table and handed her the cordless phone.

"Before I do." Thea looked deep into Rae's eyes taking the phone automatically but holding it to her chest. "Rae." She began, clutching the phone tightly with the hand that held the slips of paper she smoothed over Rae's hair.

"I know angel, it's okay." Rae said in a light tone trying to keep the frown off her face.

"No, it's not. I have to say this." Thea objected.

"Okay love." She whispered back.

"Whatever happens, whatever your results. I love you." She said softly. "Nothing will change that." Rae's hand unconsciously began rubbing back over the actress' knee nervously. "The last ten days have been like nothing else in the world. The highs and the lows, all of it has been amazing. I would never take them back, and I would never ever regret them."

"Neither would I."

"Angel, shush." Thea rested a finger on Rae's lips and stilled any thought the technician had of speaking again. "Rae, I love you so much. And I want to be with you tomorrow when I wake up, the next day and the next. I want to cook you supper on Wednesdays and get take-out on Saturdays. Drink wine by the fire while I wait for you to get in. I want to spend Sundays in the park, walking the dog and feeding the geese. I want your life to become our life. Your home to become our home. I guess what I am saying." She paused and smiled softly. "Is I love you Rae, positive or not." She stopped and looked down moving her finger off Rae's lips.

"As I love you Thea." Rae spoke lovingly.

"Rae." Thea said as she turned the phone over and opened the slip of paper.

"Yes angel?"

"If it's not the answer we want..." She memorized the number. "Can I still stay?"

"Of course you can angel." Rae moved to put her hand over the phone. "Thea, no matter what the answers are I do not want you to leave." Her voice lowered. "I don't know what I would do if you weren't here, in our home, forever. This is your home angel." She moved her hand to Thea's cheek. "The only reason you leave is because that is what you want."

"Shall we?" The actress pressed her cheek into the warm hand.

"Yes." Rae answered in the same tone. "Lets get this over with and get on with the rest of our lives together."

Thea pressed the series of buttons on the phone and held it lightly to her ear. She couldn't help the slight tremble in the hand that held the slip of paper.

"Downtown West clinic, how can I help you?" The slightly sleepy voice answered on the third ring.

"I was calling to pick up some results." Thea's words were hesitant. She looked at Rae, biting her lip slightly.

"Let me transfer you to the nurse." The phone clicked over and rang twice again before it was picked up.

"Serial number please." The woman's voice asked the question in a monotone voice. Thea lifted the piece of paper.

"655 244 98." She said instantly screwing up the piece of paper.

"Name?" The voice asked as typing registered in the background.

"Monroe."

"Congratulations Monroe, all the tests were negative." The voice was slightly happy. Thea grinned from ear to ear.

"Thank you." She remembered to speak.

"You have a good night." The nurse hung up the phone.

"So?" Rae grinned with her. Thea pressed the end call button and held Rae tight.

"I love you." She cooed.

"I love you too." Rae purred back.

"Your turn." She held the phone out.

"You haven't told me yet?" Rae smirked at her.

"You have to wait." Thea grinned moving her hands to the waist of Rae's jeans.

"Oh do I. " Rae smiled as she took the phone and hit redial just as Thea's fingers found her belt.

"Downtown west clinic, how can I help you?" The voice came on yawning and wondering how so many calls were coming this one night. Though it was indeed always like that. Periods without a soul coming in or phoning and some nights when things never stopped long enough to have a coffee.

"I'm phoning for some results."

"Hold on please." The phone rang three times before the nurse picked up.

Thea's fingers worked carefully and slipped the metal free.

"Serial number please?"

"Paper love?" Rae smiled at her and mouthed the words. Thea was moving to release the first button as she stopped and held up the slip of paper in her teeth. The move left her hands free to continue and she worked the first button free and then the second.

"876 546 99." Rae laughed as she read the slip.

"Name please?" The familiar sound of typing hummed in the background.

Slowly the actress moved to the third and forth button.

"Names Toto." Rae grinned and watched Thea's every move. With the buttons undone Thea slid her hands inside the jeans and grinned back at the technician. On the phone there was a second of silence. Rae raised an eyebrow as she took a deep breath.

"Congratulation Toto, all the tests were negative." The nurse repeated in a slightly happy tone.

"Thanks." Rae clicked off the phone and dropped in on the table. Her hands automatically went to Thea's sides and up under her top. Thea slipped her hands into Rae's black panties and grinned again.

"So?" Thea asked, holding her hand still against the heat she found there.

"Did I mention before how much I loved you?" Rae asked with a slight moan.

"I'm not sure, remind me." Thea said beginning to massage Rae's soft skin.

"I love you so much." Rae murmured as her hand came up to massage Thea's breasts and she moved forward to kiss the open skin at the collar of her shirt.

"Do I take it that it is bed time then?" Thea growled.

"Please let it be bedtime." Rae begged her hand struggling to get under the actress' bra and to the soft flesh she wanted so much to touch.

"It's bed time." Thea said definitely. "Think you can manage to carry me there?"

"Not a question." Rae slipped her hands out and moved to pick her up as she stood them up.

"I hope you have the stamina for seven days worth of abstinence." Thea laughed as she clung to Rae tightly.

"Oh I don't think that will be a problem." Rae growled as she all but raced over to the bed. "Have I mentioned that these seven days have been absolute torture?"

"Only every night, morning, shower, bath and meal time!" Thea exclaimed remembering the agony.

"You are so sexy when you're trying to be good." Rae kissed her lover's neck as they approached the bed. "I thought I might have mentioned it."

"Have you any idea how hard it is not to look sexy when you are working out in front of an open fire?" Thea laughed as Rae's breath tickled her neck.

"Hummm." Rae sucked on her neck. "Really hard I imagine."

"Hummm yesss." Thea drawled.

"What else was hard?" Rae questioned in a low tone as she turned and sat down on the bed, letting the actress rest in her lap again.

"To be honest." Thea played with Rae's shirt. "This is really hard. Being slow and sensuous."

"I know love." Rae looked her in the eye, her breathing already ragged just from the anticipation after so long. She replaced her hand under the actress' shirt and urged it upwards. Thea pulled off her top and unclipped her bra. Rae kept her eyes on Thea but moved to rid herself of the same articles.

"Did you want some of that wine?" Thea asked as she unfastened her pants.

"The only thing I want is you." Rae said in a passionate growl moving to rid herself of the already undone jeans. Thea slipped off Rae's lap and stripped herself of her pants and underwear. In the brief separation Rae did the same and moved to pull down the bedclothes.

"You are breathtaking." Rae whispered as she turned back to the now naked woman.

"No, that's you." Thea leaned forward.

"Oh no!" Rae reached out to grasp her hips and pull her closer. "That's definitely you." Thea felt a flash of pleasure as Rae touched her. "Come to bed angel." She whispered as she moved back on the bed pulling Thea down with her.

"Any time." Thea said moving with Rae willing onto the soft cotton sheets.

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Cleo checked her hair and make up in the mirror on her desk before reaching out and flicking on her intercom.

"Chantal?" She barked into the device.

"Yes, Miss. Eaton?" The girl's voice came instantaneously.

"When he arrives send him straight in and don't go anywhere. I want the entire catalogue double checked before you log off."

"Of course Miss. Eaton." Chantal agreed. "The staff is half way through. I am going over the vault content personally."

"Good." Cleo's reply was short.

"Is there anything I can bring you Miss. Eaton?" Chantal asked trying to keep on her boss' good side.

"A coffee." Cleo replied not wanting to talk.

"Yes, right away." Chantal heard the clipped tone of her voice and shut off the intercom rushing to get coffee. It was true that she shouldn't have to take this kind of hardship, but working for Angelina Eaton was one position that got perks beyond belief.

Cleo sighed and pulled open the top draw of her desk. In it was a framed photograph of herself and Rae. She pulled it out and stood it on the desk.

"I'm doing this for you blackbird." She ran her finger over the frame.

"Your coffee." Chantal opened the door slightly a short time later and announced herself. "And Mr. Augustus is here to see you."

Cleo looked up sharply and laid the photograph down out of the way of prying eyes.

"Thank you Chantal." She stood up. The girl moved into the room and deposited the coffee on her desk, while a small ferret like man in the trench coat came in after her. He looked around nervously.

"Mr. Augustus." Cleo motioned to the chair. "Won't you?"

"You know this place is eerie at night." He sat down scratching at his mustache as he laughed nervously. "But I got what you need."

"You have?" Cleo sat down her eyes piercing the little man. He pulled a thick manila envelope out of his jacket and held it in his hand.

"My only quirk is why this little chick?" He looked back at her, his eyes darting over the envelope in eager anticipation. "She ain't got no connection to anything you got your hand in."

"It's personal." A smile danced on Cleo's lips.

"I didn't even have to hack for the majority of this." He smiled back at her and laid the envelope on the desk slid it over to her. "Though some of her relations may interest you."

"Relations?" Cleo looked up, her fingers clutched the envelope.

"I got pics." He grinned at her. "Look at number one, pulled that from a London newspaper archive."

Cleo pulled open the envelope and pulled out the papers inside. She looked down at the first picture.

"Edward Jones?" Cleo looked at the private investigator.

"You betcha!" He grinned.

"Who is Edward Jones?" Cleo's eyes narrowed.

"He's one of the big wigs for a London stock firm." The PI scratched at his mustache.

"So? What has this got to do with Estell winters?" Cleo demanded, looking at the well-dressed man in the photograph.

"Look at pic two." He grinned again. "You'll see the connect pretty quick."

Cleo put the first picture down.

"Estell Winters don't go very far." He laughed. "It's a stage name."

Cleo flicked through and found the second photo sheet. A smile played across her face and then she laughed aloud.

"Oh well done." She flipped between the two photos to make sure what she was seeing was true. "This is so good. So very good."

"And don't bother looking for any evidence against that now." He winked at her. "I scrapped the bottom and there ain't even a petition. One hundred percent legal and intact."

"When was the happy day?" Cleo asked through her laughter.

"Quite awhile ago actually." He grinned. "The document is behind the picture."

"I'll read it later." Cleo smiled. "So why isn't he with her?"

"Dunno." He shrugged. "The gossip columns paint them happy and such. The real question is why isn't she with him. His class of people don't usually like their pretty women roaming."

"She's a professional actress." Cleo retorted. "Moving around is part of her job."

"Miss. Eaton, London ain't Toronto." His accent drew the o's out in the word. "Men of his blood so to speak don't usually put up with such occupations."

"So perhaps little Eddy isn't that happy with his wife's little distraction." Cleo suggested tapping the photo to her lips as she thought.

"I doubt it." He nodded.

"How long has she been out of England?" Cleo sat up very straight suddenly and took a gold pen out of her desk.

"Since August when she came into town to start pre-rehearsal and as far as I can tell she ain't been away this long before."

"So perhaps Eddy is missing his little woman." Cleo suggested as she scribbled something on a piece of paper.

"Could be." He shrugged again. "I didn't get a chance to ask him." He chuckled and scratched at his mustache.

"Do I have all his business details in here?" Cleo asked.

"Oh yeah." He nodded. "I figured her stuff was so easy I did some extra on him. Don't want you paying for nothing. He's got some interesting ties in the Baltics I think you'd like."

"Oh I would have paid double your fee for the information I have just got and nothing more." Cleo replied grinning. "As always you have done me proud."

"Well I would never turn down double." He winked at her. Cleo pulled out a checkbook from the draw. She wrote out and signed a check quickly.

"Don't push it." Cleo warned as she held out the slip of paper.

"Hey happy as a clam." He took the check and glancing at the figure stuffed it in his pocket. "Anything else you need or wait for a call."

"Wait for a call." Cleo did not look up from the papers in her hand.



"Pleasure doing business with you." He nodded at her and showed himself out of the room patting the pocket that held the check.

Cleo watched the door close and then sat back in her chair holding the bundle of papers. She laughed loud and long. She flicked through the photographs and articles laughing harder with each one.

"Oh my little star." She stood up and dropped the papers on the desk. Picking up a notepad she scribbled and walked to the door. "I think it is time my blackbird found out the black hole you really are." She pulled open the door "Chantal!" She called to the young woman.

"Yes, Miss. Eaton?" Chantal appeared out from behind one of the desks immediately.

"What time is it in England?"

"It's about ten am." She calculated the difference in her mind.

"Perfect time. See if you can reach Edward Jones for me." Cleo handed her the note she had made. "Patch it through when you manage it."

"Edward Jones?" Chantal asked happy when the note came at her. "Yes, Miss. Eaton." She scurried off towards the phone at her desk.

"Thank you Chantal." Cleo turned and walked back into her office sinking into her chair she took a mouthful of coffee. Enjoying the black liquid as she looked over the photos spread over her desk.

"Miss. Eaton, I have Mr. Jones waiting for you on line one." Chantal's voice called into the office.

"Thank you." Cleo called as she flicked the phone onto speaker whilst getting a pair of scissors out of the top drawer of her desk. "Mr. Jones?"

"Yes." A formal English voice answered. "How can I assist you Miss. Eaton?" He asked trying to hide his confusion. To get a call out of the blue from Angelina Eaton was unusual to say the least. Not that he knew her but in his circles you had to know of her and that she was calling direct herself threw him completely

"Mr. Jones, I have something to discuss with you." Cleo picked up a photograph of Thea in a white wedding dress, arm in arm with a tall finely dressed man. "You may know a little about me." She began.

"Only from your stellar reputation." He answered. "Your firm has an international presence."

"Thank you." Cleo put on her best business voice.

In the background Edward had all of his staff running trying to figure out any reason she could be calling.

"Mr. Jones, I have two things to discuss with you. One is of a business nature and the other is more." She hesitated. "Personal."

"Well Miss. Eaton you have my undivided attention for both topics." He encouraged her on.

Cleo smiled as she began to cut the photograph carefully cutting round the rim of Thea's dress.

"The first is I am thinking of extending feelers in Europe and I am needing reputable stock dealers. You have, shall we say, come to my attention."

"Without hesitation Miss. Eaton, I am confident that my firm could assist you in any European endeavor." He spoke full of confidence.

"And the second matter is that of your wife." Cleo's voice was sweet as she continued her cutting.

"Theandra?" He asked thrown off. "You know my wife." He recovered and moved his voice back to polite and friendly.

"Mr. Jones, I am aware that this may have come as a complete shock to you." Cleo spoke quickly and confidently. "But as you know I am always looking to extend my avenues. My interests for the good name and growth of my company."

"As any savvy business woman is." He complimented her.

"Yes well, the latest branch I am thinking of taking is into backing theatrical productions and today I discovered that your wife is in the very play I am thinking of backing. Is the star of it in fact?" Cleo continued her intricate cutting as she spoke.

"Yes, my Theandra's production is doing quite well." He smiled to himself thinking that Thea must have been the one who turned Cleo to him and it all made sense now. "And please call me Edward."

"Edward." Cleo repeated sweetly. "I was thinking, you must miss your wife terribly and I am due to see the play this Friday on Gala day when they have the fund raiser. Which is why I had this terrific idea."

"Gala day, yes." He nodded unaware of the event but trying to cover.

"Edward." She purred. "What would you say if I offered you a private flight, best seats and free accommodation for the weekend here?" She stopped her cutting as she had removed Thea completely from the photograph. She held the facsimile of the young woman in one hand and the scissors in the other.

"I would be hard pressed to refuse." He said happily into the phone.

"Feel free to bring any one with you." Cleo felt a wide grin cross her face, as she knew he'd be hung at his company if he refused her.

"Though please know Miss. Eaton there is no need to offer such things. I would personally jump at the chance to present to you all the things our firm can do for Royal and Free." He followed up his comment wanting to make the best of impressions.

"Mr. Jones, Edward." Cleo corrected herself with a honey filled voice. "I like to make business enjoyable, you get to see your wife after months. I get the opportunity to do some business. Everyone wins."

"Everyone wins." He repeated to her in a confident happy tone.

"Just one thing Edward." Cleo drawled.

"Anything Miss. Eaton." He hurried to answer her.

"Don't mention me to Thea. She is such a darling, and I want this to be a surprise. She has worked so hard and she deserves this little luxury to be anonymous." Cleo purred softly.

"Oh course." He smiled. "And Theandra would never want to appear that she's been dropping my name around. My little dear pours her heart out for these plays." He agreed.

"We understand each other perfectly Edward." Cleo answered him with a nod. "I'll transfer you through to my personal assistant to arrange details."

"If you just want to have some of the areas you like to feel out faxed over I'll have all the information ready for our Friday meeting."

"Chantal, can fill all of the little details like that in for you. She is one of my most treasured staff members."

"Chantal, I'm noting her name right now." He scurried to write it down.

"Edward, I would love to chat but I have papers to sign. You know how it is." Cleo was quickly tiring of this man. "I'll transfer you through and look forward to our meeting."

"Of course Miss. Eaton." He agreed. "I'm sure that Chantal can fill in all the arrangement details for me, and free up your valuable time."

"Thank you Edward. I look forward to doing business with you."

"As do I Miss. Eaton." He thanked her.

Cleo pressed the hold button on her speaker and flicked through to Chantal.

"Yes Miss. Eaton?" Chantal asked.

"Chantal, I need you to arrange a flight. Two theatre tickets, a hotel and a courtesy expenses card for Edward Jones arriving on Friday, possibly with a guest."

"Yes, right away." Chantal scribbled down the instructions.

"Sort out the details and give him the usual leads of our overseas transactions." Cleo snapped out her orders.

"Right away." She scribbled furiously.

"Use the personal Lear jet if you can't get a regular first class." Cleo added not wanting anything to stop her plans from working.

"Yes, champagne and flowers in the hotel?" She questioned when she heard the urgency.

"Oh and see if you can find out who he is intending to bring with him."

"Of course." She continued to scribble.

"Stress that it can be anyone." Cleo's voice was firm. "But let me know who it is as soon as you know."

"Of course, I will tell him I have to know for the flight roster." She figured out her plan of attack.

"Thank you Chantal." Cleo purred. "Get on it."

"My pleasure Miss. Eaton." She said happily back.

Cleo flicked off her phone and turned back to the photograph.

"You're history little star." She growled. "Bringing my blackbird home to roost will be easier than I ever imagined." With a simple action she snipped off Thea head and dropped the photograph back onto her desk laughing as she put the scissors down. It was all almost too easy.

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Thea moved the tall bouquet of red roses from the centre of the main dressing table further to the back, making way for the yellow orchids that had arrived that morning. She glanced around her dressing room. It was filled with flowers and clothes. Thea smiled, although matinees were hard she had got through another one and the wait until the next show wasn't too bad

'Especially not as this time tomorrow you'll be as nervous as hell.' Thea gently reminded herself.

A loud knock came at the door. Thea glanced up at the clock above the dresser. It was an odd time to have an interruption, which probably meant it was Michael. The knock came again. Thea walked to the door and sighed gently.

"What's the problem?" She spoke as she pulled on the handle and opened the door.

"No problem." Rae grinned at her when the door opened.

"Rae?" Thea blinked and pulled the door fully open.

"Just wanted to say hi." She brought the single daisy out from behind her back and handed it to Thea. The young actress gasped in surprise and the technician grinned happily. Taking the flower, Thea beamed widely.

"Come in." She stepped back to let the technician enter.

"Thank you." Rae moved into the room.

"I thought you were supposed to be shopping." Thea questioned as she slipped the daisy in with the orchids. Absently she rearranged them all a little.

"I was." Rae walked over to sit in one of the chairs by the makeup table. "A woman can only shop for so long and I missed you."

"But today is your free day, you're not even lighting the evening performance." Thea smiled at her. "I was dreading today as your shift doesn't even start till my day ends."

"I know." Rae smirked. "I didn't come to work to work, I came to visit my girl."

"Your girl huh?" Thea grinned as she moved over to Rae.

"Yeah, you seen her?" Rae grinned back looking around jokingly. "Cause I am so desperate for a kiss."

"Tell me a bit about her. I may be able to help." Thea smiled as she edged closer.

"Well she is about your height." Rae tapped her lip with her finger. "Gorgeous shoulder length strawberry blonde hair, sparkling green eyes that just captivate when you look in them, soft blush filled cheeks. Warm pink little cupid's bow lips."

"Hummmmm. Not sure I have seen her." Thea's eyes sparked. "But..."

"But?" Rae questioned.

"She and I sound fairly similar. So I could kiss you instead." She suggested.

"Nope can only kiss my girl." Rae reached out a hand to her. "Good thing you're her!" She winked as Thea sat herself down in Rae's lap.

"Very good thing." The actress whispered as she snuggled down.

"Best thing of all." Rae whispered back letting her hands settle around Thea's hips to hold her. Thea leaned herself into Rae's body and brought their lips together. Rae leaned into the kiss heavily, having been dreaming of this moment since they'd parted that morning.

Thea lost herself in the kiss she could hardly believe this was happening, it had been a day she had dreaded so much. They'd been finding it so hard to be out of each other's presence, especially after the results.

"Missed you." Rae whispered again as their lips briefly unmeshed.

"Thank you for coming." Thea breathed back.

"No thanks, I had too." Rae breathed back.

"Had to?" Thea questioned gently wondering if she had missed something.

"Couldn't bare not seeing you till tomorrow morning." She answered softly. "And with the gala I knew even that would be brief."

"It would have been dreadful." Thea admitted.

"Unbearable." Rae smiled. "There are presents waiting for you at home." She moved to kiss her again.

"Presents? Do tell." Thea said excitedly.

"Well..." Rae pulled back. "With the gala I know you have from Saturday afternoon off till Monday right?"

"Yes." Thea grinned unable to wait for the free time to start.

"Well I was thinking." Rae started timidly. "We could go up to the cabin and have a few days off, just you and me."

"Really?" Thea squealed. "That would be so good."

"Really!" Rae confirmed. "No interruptions, just you." She squeezed the hips under her hands. "And me."

"I want to go now!" Thea bubbled.

"I wish we could love, but the gala." The technician frowned.

"The gala." Thea agreed about to lose her smile, until she remembered just what the gala would do for the show. "Just think with the funds the gala raises. You can get new lights, new bulbs and lots of wires to play with!"

"Oh my!" Rae grinned and laughed. "You think Damien's even going to give me a penny?"

"Already dealt with love." Thea said smugly.

"Huh?" Rae raised an eyebrow to question her.

"One of the men coming tomorrow is from a big electronics firm. I've got Damien to make a deal." The actress beamed.

"What kind of deal?" Rae studied Thea's face.

"A deal that gets you." She kissed Rae's nose. "Top lighting, new wiring for the Theatre and an access budget with at least six digits! They have provisionally agreed already."

"Good lord!" Rae grinned at her astonished. "Somebody's been working hasn't she?"

"Hey I have to look after you. It's what I do." Thea smiled very proud of her accomplishment.

"Only one who I ever want doing that love." Rae kissed her cheek.

"Damien has even considered closing the play for a week." Thea added kissing the tall woman's nose again.

"Good lord, just to rewire?" Rae was more than surprised.

"Yes." Thea grinned happy to have made such an impact on her lover.

"You are amazing." She kissed her gently in appreciation.

"Well I don't like the idea that you could go up in a puff of smoke at any given moment. I need you safe and sound." The actress added seriously. The more she had seen of Rae's work, the less comfortable with the job she'd become.

"Hey I'm in the safest place I know." Rae held her tighter.

"So have you worn yourself out traipsing all over Toronto shopping?" She questioned snuggling closer.

"Just my feet." Rae laughed.

"Poor feet." Thea frowned at her sympathetically.

"How was the matinee angel?" Rae asked concerned. "Have you drank lots so you won't dehydrate?"

"Was about to." Thea knew this was her biggest failing. The lights made you sweat so much that there was a looming possibility of dehydration at any time. Despite that fact she had a habit of not drinking enough in between shows.

"You want me to get you something?" Rae asked softly.

"That would be great." Thea replied honestly. Mostly just wanting to have the pleasure of seeing her lover doing something so mundane for her, but knowing that Rae enjoyed the task regardless.

"What'll it be?"

"Water." Thea moved off Rae's lap.

"Cold water, coming up." The technician moved over to the small fridge in the corner of the room and pulled out two bottles. Thea pulled off her costume top and hung it carefully on a hanger. "I'll join you if you don't mind." She undid the top on both of them.

"Go for it." Thea glanced over her shoulder as she pulled the grips out of her hair.

"Here you go love." Rae placed one next to the actress on the table. Thea shook her hair vigorously trying to get it to fall out of style. "Do you need help?" The technician asked softly. "I could brush it out for you."

"That would be great." Thea smiled to herself. She doubted many people would believe Rae enjoyed such a task so much that they often did it while they were sitting by the fire talking. "Brush is over there."

"My pleasure." Rae smiled back, picking up the brush she moved back behind Thea. "Have a seat love."

"Oh wait." The actress stopped suddenly and rose again and unfastened the skirt to her costume. She let it fall off her hips. She scooped down to pick it up and draped it over the dresser. Only then did she sit back down. "Okay, better now." She happily leaned back in the chair.

"You know for the record..." Rae grinned at her in the mirror.

"What?" Thea asked innocently.

"Having you almost naked doesn't make hair brushing an easy task." She began to run the brush through her hair gently to first get the tight knots out.



"Sorry love, but you are in my dressing room." Thea put up one leg leaning it against the dresser as she massaged her calf muscle lightly.

"Oh I know." Rae's voice was deeper than she expected.

Thea dragged her hand up her leg and unhooked her left stocking from its suspender belt. She slid the sheer silk down her leg.

"Just do whatever you normally do." Rae coughed trying to keep her mind on the brushing, but failing instantly.

Thea similarly removed the right stocking. The silky smoothness with which the stockings went down the actress's legs threatened to make Rae's knees buckle. Thea moved her hands around her waist to remove the suspender belt itself. Having got the knots out, Rae abandoned the brush and began to run her fingers through the reddish blonde hair massaging Thea's head in the process. With a haphazard throw Thea tossed the belt towards the hangers while making appreciative sounds at Rae's massage.

"I could have hung that up for you." Rae managed to choke out letting her fingers linger at the women's temples for a minute, drawing little circles there.

"But you would have stopped what you are doing." Thea reasoned. The last thing she wanted was for the strong hands on her head to leave even for a moment.

"No, I would have come right back to it." Rae reversed the circles.

"You may want to close your eyes love." Thea warned with a broad smile as she reached back to unhook her bra.

"Do I have too?" Rae asked in a soft tone.

"Of course not." Thea drew her shoulders forward and removed the lacy garment completely. She pushed her shoulders back into Rae's massaging.

"Good, good." Rae commented as her hands moved down behind Thea's ears to her shoulders and massaging them gently. "You're tense love?"

"It's been a crazy two weeks." Thea replied closing her eyes.

"It has been." She agreed. "A good crazy though."

"Very good crazy." Thea agreed as she began to feel her body reacting to Rae's touch. It had become a semi-automatic response now. Just the feel of Rae's hands caused her to flush gently.

"Very, very good." Rae let her fingers dip forward a bit onto her collarbone.

"Do you want to get me my fleece top?" Thea asked trying to control herself. "It's on a hanger."

"No." Rae leaned down to whisper the word hotly into her ear.

"But I thought I was distracting you." Thea tried harder to remain calm. Rae's breath on her did not help.

"Did I say it was bad though?" Rae placed her lips behind Thea's ear and kissed the flesh slowly.

"Raeeeeee!" Thea growled.

"Yes love?" Rae questioned in a low growl of her own.

"Unless we are seriously about to do something more than massage, I suggest you stop right about now." She breathed deeply, hoping beyond hope that stopping was not in the script.

"I don't want to stop." Rae licked the lobe of her ear slowly. Thea tilted her head to the side, exposing more of her throat and neck.

"Then what do you want to do?" The actress asked.

"Humm." Rae licked her way down to the valley of her neck and then back again. "I want to make wild mad passionate love to you." The whisper came hotly into her ear again.

"You know just what to say don't you." Thea growled.

"Only the truth." Rae growled back.

Thea pulled her head away from Rae and stood up from the chair. She walked over to the door, swaying her hips in an exaggerated motion. With a grin she flicked the lock into place and slipped her panties off.

"Like that move." Rae watched her every motion and leaned back against desk.

"So what's stopping you from making the next one?" Thea asked in a sultry tone.

"Nothing." Rae moved in sure steps across the room and wrapped her arms around the now naked actress. Her mouth returned to its place on her neck sucking and licking passionately. Thea moaned deeply and ran her fingers straight into Rae hair. Rae let her hands wander down and cupped her ass, gripping tightly in rhythm to her lips.

"Take me." Thea breathed and the technician moaned at the instruction. She moved to guide them over to the couch in the corner.

"God I want you so much." Rae groaned as she guided them down.

"I know." Thea panted as she was pulled down on top of her tall lover. "I want you as much. Rae..." She breathed as her hands worked up under her lover's shirt.

"You are so beautiful." Rae cooed as she kissed her way down to the valley of Thea's breasts.

"Thank you for stopping by." She whispered as her hands found Rae's breasts beneath the top.

"Angel." Rae's eyes fluttered closed briefly as Thea's hands came to rest on her. "I really did have to see you." She looked up to lock their eyes. "It's so hard to be apart from you, even for a few hours."

"I know." She whispered as she began to massage the soft flesh and slipped one hand lower.

Rae kissed her way wetly across Thea's right breast. Thea's body was alive and any trace of tiredness that had been there was now gone. Rae drew Thea's firm nipple into her mouth and sucked hard. The actress gasped in appreciation.

Inside her head Rae laughed at herself. She had no real concern if she ever got undressed. Her only want and focus was to ravage the gorgeous woman she loved into fits of pleasure.

"Tell me what you want?" Rae raised her lips from her task only briefly.

"ESTELL, DAMIEN NEEDS TO SEE US!" The loud call came from the door suddenly.

Thea looked at Rae, her eyes wild, her breathing only short needy gasps.

"ESTELL, NOW!"

Thea recognized that it was Ken's voice. No doubt Damien had called a pre-gala meeting. A pained expression flashed across her face.

"I have to..." Thea began, hating that she had to do this now.

"I know love, let me fade in the background." Rae reluctantly lay back against the couch.

"No." Thea argued briefly as she drew herself off Rae. She reached up and pulled a dressing gown from the hangers and slipped it on. Quickly drawing around the tie to close it over herself.

Rae moved off to stand out of any possible view of the door. The last thing she wanted was to force the issue of 'them' around the Theatre and make Thea the brunt of every cast members inquisitions. Thea then bent down and picked up a blanket that was folded neatly under the hangers.

"ESTELL!"

"I'M COMING!" Thea called back agitated. "You!" She said in hushed tone to Rae, her eyes smiling despite her annoyance. Rae looked at her confused when Thea held out the blanket to her. "Get your clothes off, and be on that couch, under that blanket ready for me." Rae laughed and nodded at her. "Naked, ready and waiting for when I get back." She released the blanket and walked to the door.

"You better hurry." Rae grinned. "If someone wanders in here they may get the wrong idea." She whispered.

"I love you." Thea breathed as she undid the lock on the door.

"I love you." Rae returned the heartfelt truth.

"Naked remember." She added with a grin before slipping out.

"As you can see Ken I was naked..." She walked away from the room down the hall. She didn't want anyone near her room, not with what was to be waiting for her when this meeting was over. She swore her mouth watered with the mere idea.

"Sorry Estell." He grinned. "But Damien wants us ASAP!"

"Humm I nearly didn't put the robe on." Thea forced herself not to sound too sarcastic.

"Hey you can get back to rest and relax as soon as Damien stops ranting." He kept smiling at her. "He's really worked up about the gala."

"If this is going to be a 'be nice to the money men chat' I am going to be so pissed!" Thea growled angrily.

"I'm sure your girlfriend will still be waiting for you." He added softly without any malice.

Thea stopped her march and looked at her co-star.

"Just what is it you think you know Ken?" She asked carefully.

"Estell, what I know or do not know is irrelevant. The truth is the only thing I care about is the play and if you're happy then the show does better." He smiled at her warmly.

"Ken, please." Thea placed a gentle hand on his arm. "I don't doubt that for a second, but what do you know?" Her voice became serious. "Ken, it's important."

"I know a little bit more than the majority cause I don't do so much talking as I do watching." He winked at her. "I know about you and Cassie. Mostly cause I noticed her going into your dressing room a little while ago."

"Who else knows?" She breathed as she closed her eyes briefly.

"No one else knows Estell." He reassured her. "Just rumors and such, I don't feed them it's not my interest. If you want to know, the word is you're just amusing yourself with the tall, dark and dangerous girl and that as soon as the play is over." He made a little gesture across his throat.

"Ken I..." Thea stopped in mid-sentence.

"Estell, I can tell it's more than that." He smiled again. "You've never looked so happy."

"Thank you for coming to get me, if Michael had it would have been terrible." Thea was honest. "And Ken, I am happy but..." Again she stopped unsure of what she was about to say or admit. Eventually she managed to look him in the eye. "Ken." She whispered her voice incredibly low. "I need you to do something for me."

"Yes Estell?" Ken asked genuinely.

"Please what ever you do." Her voice sincere. "Don't tell Damien."

"Wouldn't dream of it Estell." He shook his head. "Damien doesn't need to know anything other than what goes on in the play and as far as I'm concerned your personal life is just that."

"Thank you Ken." She paused and managed a weak smile. "Really, thank you."

"You're welcome." He nodded sincerely. "Let's go and let Damien rant on so you can get back to her." He smiled his voice soft.

"The sooner the better!" She agreed.

"I agree." He laughed. "And all I have waiting for me is a good book."

"But that's better than a Damien rant!" Thea laughed looping her arm through her stage husband's.

"Much better." He took her arm happily. "Let's get this over with!"

"You should find yourself a nice man Ken...." She jabbered happily as they continued down the corridor.

"Who me?" He looked at her and blushed. "Looks like we both do a bit of watching." He squeezed her arm and smiled as they walked off.

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Rae sat down on the couch and dropped the blanket beside her. Sure Thea had told her naked and under the blanket when she got back but a lot of questions remained. Like how long before she got back? Who the hell might come to the door or to her horror even come in before that? Who

might come back to the room with Thea? And if someone did how in god's name was she going to explain being butt naked on the actress' couch.

The vague memory of the moment that Cleo had walked in on them flashed into her mind making her realize that the actress hadn't been worried about such things. Not even after Cleo's barging in.

"Okay angel." Rae pulled the top up over her head. "What Thea wants, Thea gets." She moved to undo her boots and slip them off.

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"You'll understand if I don't say come in." Thea looked at Ken with a smile.

Rae stiffened under the blanket when she heard Thea make reference to someone else. She hoped to crawl completely beneath it if possible. The actress put one hand on the door handle.

"I understand." He blew her a kiss. "Got my book waiting patiently for me." He smiled and walked off.

"Oh, hi Sylvia!" Thea grinned madly to herself as she looked down the empty corridor. "You want to chat?" She added hardly managing to prevent herself laughing.

"Oh shit!" Rae cursed to herself then listened carefully, surprised when she heard no response from the normally loud woman. She came out from under the blanket a little as her worry eased.

"Well, if you don't want to say anything out here." Thea went on. "Come inside. We can sit on the couch and talk about whatever it is." She couldn't help but laugh when she said the word couch.

The couch reference made Rae realize she was being had. Thea opened the door and slipped inside making sure to lock it behind her. The technician moved to stretch out letting the blanket only cover a minimum area of her body.

"You are evil!" Rae grinned at her from her spot.

"How many seconds did I have you worried for?" Thea giggled.

"All of them." Rae shook her head. "Did you enjoy that?" The actress nodded eagerly.

"God you look good." Her voice went deeper as Thea unfastened her robe and let it slip from her shoulders. She walked slowly across the room.

"So do you." Rae's voice came back huskily as the robe slipped off. "Missed you." She lifted the blanket up to invite her lover under it.

"Still want to make wild passionate love to me?" Thea asked as she came to the sofa.

"Always!" Rae growled as the actress took hold of the other end of the blanket and tugged it hard and sharp. It snapped out of the tall woman's grip leaving her naked. "Don't like the blanket?" She asked playfully.

"Don't need it." Thea replied and she tossed it on the floor. Nimbly she climbed on top of Rae where the blanket had been.

"Just need you and me." Rae agreed in a deep tone as Thea took its place.

"Would you rather have it than me?" She asked kissing Rae's collarbone.

"I rather you than anything on earth." Rae added wrapping her arms around to spread her hands on Thea's back.

"We have twenty minuets before I have to start getting ready." Thea moved down to kiss Rae's breasts a little less than gently. "What can you do for me in twenty minutes?"

"Whatever you want." Rae moved her hands down to Thea's ass and pulled her closer. "Whatever you need."

"I want and I need you." Thea replied changing breasts.

"You have me." Rae moaned bringing her hand around Thea's hips caressing them roughly before they both came to rest in damp curls and caressed with an urgent softness.

"I want you to make love to me as if this were the first and last time you could ever do it." Thea breathed against Rae's skin pressing herself down into Rae's hands.

"As you wish." Rae moaned as she used one hand to open Thea up to the fingers of the other. Rae raised her knees at the same time to force Thea's legs apart and took the actress' weight onto her.

Thea continued to ravage Rae's upper body with kisses and licks, sucking and teasing roughly. She let Rae move her, her mind completely focused on pleasure and passion. Rae slid her fingers through the length of Thea's wetness pressing down hard to increase the friction despite the incredible slickness she found there.

Thea gripped onto her lover as hard as she could. She continued to kiss her body, though her intentions slowed as the ripples of pleasure inside her increased and she was distracted from her task.

Rae moved her free hand under the other, concentrating the movements of its fingers on Thea's centre. Her other hand continued its hard rough motion and periodically drove her swirling fingers hard against the woman's throbbing clit.

Thea moaned into Rae's chest, her own actions abandoned as she began moving herself against Rae's hand. Rotating her hips, pushing down she could feel her full body flush as her heart pounded in her ears.

Rae let the motion of her hand carry her fingers inside Thea only slightly, swirling them against the motion of her hips and driving her other fingers down hard as they tried to rub in their own independent frenzy. She had closed her eyes, doing all of this by feel alone. The feel of Thea's wetness running down her hand and legs combined with the driving motion of the woman's hips into her own drove her mad and she heard herself start panting for breath.

Thea breathed heavily against Rae's flesh, her hips thrusting forward hard as her body began aching for release. Her mind lost all coherence settling into the pleasure. She hoped the flutters of her muscles around the technician's fingers would urge Rae to move them inside completely.

"Yesss!" Thea gasped when Rae finally entered her. The technician braced her wrist in the tight confined area against her legs as the motion of the actress' hips drove her fingers in and out without effort. Thea accidentally bit down on the soft flesh at the swell of Rae's breast. Rae let out a brief yelp of pain. It quickly turned into a pleased moan as Thea instantly kissed the area and licked it better.

Rae's eyes snapped open and she growled as she watched her lover tend to the area. In response she moved her hand further into the actress each time her hips retracted back.

With a semi-controlled smile Thea began to trail her tongue up Rae's skin, brushing her breasts lightly over the other woman's skin. Thea licked up Rae's body to her neck, straightening out her own body and allowing Rae's hand to enter her further. She flattened her hips out against Rae's stomach. When she reached Rae's neck, she kissed it passionately. Rae gave a sultry smile as she felt Thea repositioning.

"Thank you." Rae growled as she stretched her arm out and was able to take the bend out of her wrist and drive her fingers and palm up further into Thea, setting a new faster pace.

Thea wasn't able to respond as she continued to flex her hips leaving damp trails were she brushed against the technician's stomach. Rae rocked her hips upwards against Thea trying to satiate the burning there but still keep her concentration on what her hands were doing.

Thea knew that her arms weren't very long but she also worked out that her lover was some what crunched up on the couch. With effort she slid her arm down Rae's body and underneath her own seeking the heat between her lover's long legs.

Rae increased the speed of the both her hands, somewhat registering the movement of Thea's arm down between them. Bringing her body down a little, Thea pushed herself down harder onto Rae's hands. Doubly rewarded when her own fingertips found Rae's damp curls. She let her fingers play there for a while, happy to hear her lover groan as her fingers inched deeper.



With her fingers at full stretch, she realized there that was no way in this position she could do what she really wanted. Lifting up her hips a little to encourage Rae to do like wise, she hoped to maneuver her hand down further.

The shift caused Rae to slightly alter the path of her moving hand, her palm ricocheting off the bone of her hip and drove fingers deeper into Thea still.

Thea had no choice but to pull back as Rae pushed further inside her. She gasped and called out as her lover's fingers pressed against her deep and high. They reached into a place that Thea had never experienced touch before.

"I love you." Rae whispered hoarsely, watching and memorizing every feeling as it flashed over Thea's face. The actress nodded wordlessly and with a sudden action she pulled both hands up to Rae's shoulders and grabbed them tightly as she pushed down even harder. Tipping her head back, she cried out as the hard climax rocked her.

Rae braced to meet her movement, staying still inside for a heartbeat before forcing her hand out and then in deep again. She repeated the motion in a slow rhythm against Thea's contracting muscles. Using the leverage she had in her new position the woman's hips lifted up and down easily to meet her, panting as orgasm merged into orgasm.

Rae heard her own ragged breathing mixing with that of her lover's. She dug her head back heavy into the couch as the build within herself shot flares of pleasure up her back as they rocked in unison on the couch.

"Rae please!" Thea gripped Rae's shoulders harder, her inner muscles clenching as she felt the couch rock. "We need to..." She could not stop the motion of her hips or the bolts of pleasure that took her thought away.

"What angel?" Rae questioned in a thick voice, licking her lips. She shifted the position of her hand, turning her wrist around as her fingers were inside. She rocked up against Thea's motion without thought. Braced up on her feet, they both arched off the couch slightly. The full weight of the woman resting on her helped her focus.

"Oh Godddddd!" Thea groaned as more hot fluid flowed from her over Rae's hand.

"What Thea?" Rae asked again, not wanting to let any desire her lover had left unfulfilled.

"Harder!" She pleased without conscious thought. "Deeper!"

Rae moved quickly to do as she was asked, pushing herself down a bit further to gain leverage with her hand. She shifted her leg to use its movement to drive her hand hard and deeply into her lover.

"Yes." Thea breathed in ecstasy. "Yes, yes!" She panted, pushing herself further upright and down harder still.

Rae focused on each individual thrust. The pleasure on Thea's face waved off any fear that she was hurting the small woman with her force. Thea responded to each move with a moan or a word of pleasure. The technician worked her foot down against the frame of the couch and used this brace to drive harder and even deeper than before.

Thea lost herself in blinding white light as an explosion of pleasure flashed in through her body and mind. She hoped Rae had picked up on it before it had hit and had been prepared for the flood that undoubtedly accompanied her release. Thea's arms became suddenly weak and they buckled sending Thea toppling onto Rae's chest. Panting and gasping for each and every breath her insides shook and spasmed.

Rae growled at the flood of her lover's release, lost in the intensity of it. The shudder of the small woman falling on her drove her back down into the couch and with that her fight for control ended. Her insides locked tight before releasing in an endless wave of spasms. She groaned loud and hard though her hand never lost its rhythm. Thea registered Rae's groan as the first thing in the outside world that she was aware of after her explosion.

"Please Rae stop." She managed too breathe and the hand within her ceased instantly though its owner struggled to come back out of the haze of her own orgasm. Thea's muscles grasped at Rae's hand even though she had stopped. The actress tried desperately to calm herself or at least stop the desire flowing through her from being so overwhelming.

Rae's breath was nothing but thick choked pants as she closed her eyes trying to still her breathing and not concentrate on the intoxicating feeling of Thea around her fingers. She knew her own release hadn't been complete and she was left in that desperate holding pattern as her body hit a plateau in its response.

"I want more." Thea said before she could stop herself. Rae swallowed and opened her eyes, her hand starting a slow deep soft rhythm, moving easily in its soaked surroundings. The actress' hips moved slowly in an automatic response, but she shook her head.

"Not up here." She managed to control her hip movements.

"Where love?" Rae asked too confused by the growing sparkling numbness up the back of her head.

"Come out." Thea drawled her words out, the fire inside her flaring as Rae slowly removed her hand to follow every instruction without thought. She used every ounce of her strength to move off Rae and onto the floor. She rolled onto her back and her hips rose off the cold tile slightly in a slow necessary rhythm.

"Here." She whispered, watching her lover take a deep breath and crawl towards her. Rae growled though a wide toothy smile as she crawled up over the actress and dragged her knee up between Thea's legs to replace where her hand had been.

"But Rae..." Thea used every inch of her self-control to fight the pleasure she felt as Rae's knee pushed against her heated centre.

"Yes angel?" Rae questioned halting her motion.

"This time it's my treat." She spoke slowly, pleased with the inquisitive eyebrow that rose on her partner's face. "Turn round." She instructed knowing Rae would without question. "One knee either side my head." She breathed hard unsure she would be able to keep control. Rae moved quickly to where she was asked to be.

"Now brace yourself up on you hands and knees." Thea growled her last instruction.

The noise from Thea's lips made Rae tremble as her movement to the new position made a twinge of pain flare through the bite on her chest. She managed to brace herself as Thea asked but felt the strain of recent moments in her arms and hands.

With her own inside's fluttering Thea leaned up a little and drew her tongue in a long wet line down the full length of Rae's slick heated centre. The kneeling woman tried to take a deep breath but for a long moment the attempt locked in her throat frozen only to be melted by the pure shot of heat that raced up through ever muscle and nerve in her. Thea reached up with her hands, round the back of Rae's thighs and gently pulling her lover's hot mound closer to repeat the long wet lick.

Rae was led down before she even registered the request and with the repeat of the motion she threw her head back looking up toward the ceiling. Thea moved her tongue quickly and specifically, moving deeply first and then shallowly, licking and tasting.

The braced woman's shoulders locked as her back arched up causing her hips to angle down further. As Rae pushed down Thea pushed up sucking this time, driving her tongue higher.

"Oh God Thea!" The high almost scared voice came as the numbness in Rae's back and head exploded back again to pure raw pleasure.

Mini waves began between her own legs as Thea continued her oral exploration. She worked up a rhythm of deep long strokes. Sucking and nuzzling, she lost herself in the feel and taste of Rae's body.

"Thea, I..." She tried to warn her lover as she felt the build get too much to ever hope to be contained. The actress pressed on harder when she heard the plea, wanting so much for her partner to have the same hard wonderful release that she had.

The first flair of pleasure seemed to split Rae open as her knees widened and a deep husky groan escaped her as she threw back her head again. Thea gripped Rae's legs tighter and forced her tongue higher. The technician felt her elbows almost give out but caught them before she fell. Thea could feel the body she pleased building hard and fast as she worked her tongue and

mouth. She pulled back just a little and then with a slow deliberate move she blew a constant stream of cool air across the full length of Rae's heated centre.

Again Rae's breath caught as the contrasting temp of the air sent a stiff contraction through every one of her muscles. Thea repeated the action as she drew one hand up between Rae's legs and carefully opening Rae's outer lips, she blew a third time. A shudder rocked through Rae's entire body.

"Thea?" Her voice begged though it asked no question.

"Again?" Thea breathed not moving her mouth in the slightest her words spoken into her lover's centre. A wordless mumble tried to give agreement and voice her body's want. Thea spread her fingers a little more revealing Rae's deep pink rose and she blew on it lightly. Another deep long shudder ran through Rae from the breath. Then in a swift easy motion, Thea pressed the two fingers she wasn't using inside Rae's body.

"Oh Thea!" She groaned as her insides clamped around the fingers instantly, already contracting in spasms though the build within her refused to break.

Thea moved her hand, twisting it so that her thumb rubbed on the outside as she moved the two fingers inside. Thea maintained the gentle blowing as she increased the pace and depth of her fingers. She found herself having to push quite hard against Rae's strong muscles.

"Come on my love." Thea coaxed in between breaths.

The gentle encouragement seemed to be the last ingredient needed as the solid foundation of pleasure within Rae broke open suddenly in waves of liquid, spasms, shudders and groans. She rocked back and forth against the movement of Thea's hand.

"God Theeeeeaaaaa!" Rae moaned as shudder after shudder when through her.

"THIRTY MINUTES TO STAGE CALL MISS. WINTERS!" The yell came from behind the locked door, accompanied by a light rap on the wood. "THIRTY MINUTES!"

Thea instantly stopped her hand and moved her head back down to the floor. A feeling of panic flooded her eyes as her nerves momentarily forgot that she'd locked the door. She pulled her hand completely free and held her breath. Rae groaned and fell off to one side on the floor. Trying to calm the fury inside her Rae turned onto her side.

"Looks like we ran out of time, we have to get you ready for the show angel." Rae panted out the words. They came a bit easier as her spent body shivered and she moved onto her back taking deep ragged heaves. Thea let go of her held breath and propped herself up on one elbow. She looked at her flushed lover with a smile spreading across her face before it turned into a grin and then was joined by a light chuckle.

"What's so funny?" Rae asked with a smile as she shifted her weight and slid up to be face to face with her lover.

"Nothing." She looked at her partner lovingly. "Everything." She whispered laughing again a little.

Rae nodded her agreement as she leaned in and brushed their lips together.

"Stay." She whispered into the kiss, as a serious look came to her eye. "Watch me." She raised a hand to Rae's cheek.

"Nowhere I'd rather be." Rae smiled at her softly and moved her hand over Thea's to press it gently into her cheek.

"No, I mean it Rae." Thea said seriously. "I mean watch ME. Don't watch the play, don't look at the lights, don't think about the shadows and the staging. Watch me. Watch me be a star. A star that shines for you and for you alone."

"I will watch only you." She spoke gently. "Nothing else my love. Only my little star." She whispered the words in the most loving tone.

"I love you." Thea whispered.

"I love you my star." Rae whispered back.

"On with the show." Thea said bravely as she moved up to stand.

"Anything I can do to help you get ready?" Rae asked trying to be helpful. "Or would it be easier if I slip out and let you prepare?"

"I think the latter love." Thea admitted honestly, hoping her lover wouldn't be hurt.

"I don't want to go, but I know you have to focus." She smiled. "And I have to get to my seat in time for your entrance."

"Put them on and slip out would you." She asked sweetly as she handed Rae her clothes. The tall woman moved over and kissed her quickly and brashly. Taking the clothes, she moved to the couch and quickly redressed. Smiling wide as the tendrils of pleasure still raced through her electrified body.

"I'll be looking for you." Thea said as she put on her costume.

"Middle tunnel entrance to the orchestra seating." Rae gave her a clue. "I won't be in the shadow so you can see me. Come see me before you head home?" She asked as she finished with her boots and swayed over to where Thea was dressing.

"I want an honest review afterwards." Thea grinned.

"Always honest angel." Rae grinned back.

"I know." Thea smiled. "Now get out!" She laughed lightly.

"Outing Miss. Winter's." Rae kissed her on the cheek and went to the door laughing. "Break a leg." She turned to whisper as she unlocked the door.

"Thank you." Thea waved at her.

"Remember I love you." She let the words hang after she slipped out and pulled the door closed behind her.

Continued in Act XII...

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### The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

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## ~ After the Curtain Falls ~

by Beth Dragon & Kathleen Wolf

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**Feedback:** All comments are greatly appreciated and can be sent to: [kathandbeth@hotmail.com](mailto:kathandbeth@hotmail.com)

**Thanks:** To Emma, for her never ending love, support and chocolate. To the Ex-Guards Village for all their feedback and expert advice.

## Act XII

From the white silk-laced banisters of the large central entrance staircase to the fully stocked bar and white tuxedo jackets of the attendants, the reception area at the front of the Theatre was formality from top to tail. Champagne flowed free and heavy as the post-show crowd smoozed and chatted. Damien alone worked his happy jubilant way through the crowd pointing out the more important guests and making sure that their glasses were never empty. Everyone in the crowd impatiently awaited the arrivals of the stars, not caring that after a two and a half hour show that they might need a minute to collect themselves.

It was into this situation that Thea confidently stepped. Wearing a navy blue silk dress that was long and figure hugging. Her hair was swept up off her face and securely fixed back. Her make-up was flawless, and even her mood was fairly light.

"TTTTTHHHHEEEEEAAAAA!"

Thea's head snapped round from doing a general scan of the crowd. She knew that voice anywhere.

"Tori?" She looked around trying to see where on earth it had come from. Her calm light mood shattered instantly and she felt a sweat break out across her top lip. She dabbed it lightly with her navy-gloved hand.

"Thea, Thea, Thea!" The small light brown haired girl in the long simple black dress wadded though the stunned crowd waving her hand in the air.

"Tori, baby." She managed to force a smile and batten down her whirling emotions.

"You were amazing!" The girl squealed as she hugged her.

"Thank you." Thea hugged her back lightly. "What are you doing here?" She kissed her sister's cheek.

"Edward brought me!" Tori turned to point at the dark haired man moving slowly towards them in the crowd. "It was a surprise!"

"Edward?" Thea couldn't help breathe the name as her eyes found him instantly.

"Theandra, you were magnificent!" He came toward her with his arms open and the actress made herself move into his embrace.

"Thank you." She was slightly faltered he would mention the play at all. "I can't believe you are here."

"So much talent." He hugged her again briefly before pulling back. "Though one must expect it from MY wife." His chest puffed up with pride. "We couldn't let your achievement go unnoticed, could we?" He smiled at her. "And it worked out with a meeting I had this morning."

"A meeting here?" She tried not to frown and managed to instead maintain her smile. "In Canada?"

"Yes, the company is courting some advising clients." He laughed. "None of your concern angel."

Thea fought the shiver that threatened to take a hold as her mind registered Edward's patronising tone.

"I can't believe you didn't tell me." She whispered glancing around the room, she desperately tried to place people she knew. Most importantly, she tried to see if Rae had made it to the party yet.

"Edward brought me along so I could see the play." Her sister piped in.

"I wanted to surprise you." He looked at her sadly. "You don't like your surprise. I flew over 5000 miles just to see your smile. I brought your sister with me as well." He shook his head. "Nothing is ever enough for you, is it?"

"On no Edward, of course it's lovely to see you and Tori!" She added catching her sister in another hug.

"That's better Theandra." He nodded approvingly at her.

"Where are you staying?" Thea asked, she stopped looking around, pretty sure that Rae was not yet in the room.

"At the Harbour Castle." He laughed. "Huge place."

"I never been in that one." Thea admitted, her mind calming down a bit. If Edward had arranged his own hotel room she'd at least be spared having to explain why she no longer had a room at the Royal York.

"Well you can see it tonight." He kissed her on the cheek. "Once you've finished your little entertaining duties. Speaking of which, there are very important people here Theandra, you must make your presence known."

"Yes, I must." Thea added hastily, though she was pleased he'd given her a reason to move away.

Edward smiled confidently as he surveyed the room. His gaze found Cleo in the crowd and he smiled slyly as the deal they had struck that morning came to mind again.



"Tori, have you looked around the place yet?" Thea asked wanting to give her sister some attention.

"No, Thea." She smiled looking around wide-eyed. "I wanted to see you first, I miss you." She hugged her again.

"Oh baby, I missed you too. This is going to be a little boring I fear, why don't you take this?" Thea took her pass out of her small purse and passed it to her sister.

"What's this for?" Tori asked looking at it.

"It will give you access to anywhere. Back stage, my dressing room, even the orchestra pit. Anywhere." Thea explained to her. "All the hunky stage crew are still busy at work. If you want a good look at some hot sweaty men."

"Very cool." Tori bubbled. "Hunky stage crew!" She blushed at the idea. "I'll find you in awhile then." She winked and tore off into the crowd. Thea watched her sister go with a smile.

"She is such a handful." Edward grumbled. "Your father spared the rod with her."

"Daddy did just fine." Thea defended slightly harshly as she looked up into the eyes of her husband.

"Your father is a fine man." Edward took a sip of champagne. "You don't need to defend him to me."

"Yes." Thea agreed. She looked back into the crowd and her eyes locked with deep brown. She waved back to the tall blond who waved at her.

"I married one of his daughters remember." He looked her up and down.

"Yes." She answered him distracted. "Edward, I have to mingle. Do you mind having to share me? I mean." She looked up at him. "You could always go back to the hotel. I could join you there later, bring Tori home."

"Not at all." He laughed at her suggestion. "You have your Theatre people now, I enjoy watching you captivate the room. We'll have our time later." He added in a low tone. "Are you sure?" Thea tried once more, desperate to find a way to mend this. She needed Edward out of here and then she needed to find Rae. She had to get all of this out in the open before the two ran into each other.

"Of course. I might be able to work the room a bit as well." He looked around, grinning greedily. "There must be people with money in here who need a good investor for overseas."

"Perhaps." Thea felt her heart fall.

"Give me a kiss then on be on your way." Edward turned to her. She's already taken half step away. "Theandra!" He called her to a halt. "Kiss please, then off you go." The actress went up on her tiptoes and kissed his cheek softly. "I hope you'll be doing better later." He nodded to her.

Thea said nothing as she moved back off the balls of her feet and turned back to throw herself into the throng and find at least one friendly face.

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Victoria slipped into the huge auditorium and could hardly believe the difference. Before it had been so bustling and busy but now the large area was empty. The seats were now abandoned and instead of actor's voices, the sounds of hammering, drills and swearing were the only distractions from silence. The light was brutally harsh but she supposed it had to be. She could hardly believe her luck as she began to wander right down towards the front. Right now was definitely the time to get a real backstage look and if she was lucky run into a few of those hunks her sister had talked about.

"Excuse me." Rae walked down the aisle to intercept her. "The party's back out that way."

"Oh." Tori looked up at her. "It's okay, I'm allowed to be here."

"How so?" Rae smiled at her, the girl's soft exuberance reminded her of Thea. In fact a lot about this girl reminded her of Thea.

"I have a pass." Tori blinked up at the tall Canadian in front of her before looking away briefly and holding up the pass that Thea had given her.

"So you do." Rae smiled. "Can I show you up to the backstage." The tall technician turned to look at the two looming scaffolds. "It's a little dangerous in here and I wouldn't want you to get hurt."

"I don't want to be in the way." Tori enthused, hoping that the tall woman would indeed show her around. Tours were always so much better with a guide.

"It's no trouble." Rae motioned down the side aisle. "Just this way."

"What do you do? In relation to the play?" Tori gabbled as she walked. For the life of her she didn't remember seeing the black haired woman in the cast.

"I am the lighting director." Rae opened the door for her. "And chief electrician or light monkey as the Theatre terms me." She laughed as Tori ducked under her arm and through the door. "I hang out on the big scaffold you saw back there."

"What's it like?" Tori asked, waiting for Rae to enter the backstage with her. "Is it hard work?"

"Its not too bad, just takes time. I'm responsible for everyone seeing the play."

Tori had to admit to herself that she was very struck with this tall woman. She was so very, something.

"Do you go all the way to the top?" Tori asked her eyes wide.

"Yes, do most of my stuff at the top." Rae smiled to herself that the young woman seemed so very impressed by what she did.

"There are some great lighting effects in the play, do I get to see the secrets?" Tori quizzed eagerly.

"No secrets I'm afraid, just me." Rae laughed.

"My sister, she's in the play. She says people like you can make or break a show. Is that true?" Tori asked as Rae led her around pointing out various things.

"Well we are important." Rae couldn't help but agree with her. "Who's your sister?"

"The star!" Tori grinned proudly.

Rae choked on her breath for a moment. Suddenly seeing the shocking similarities between the woman she led through the backstage and the woman she loved.

"Thea's your sister?" She blurted out.

"I thought Thea used a stage name. Estell or something." Tori looked at her and frowned. "Does she not do that here?" Her frown deepened.

"She does." Rae caught her slip. "Sorry, Estell. I've just talked to her a lot and she told me her real name was Thea."

"She must like you a lot then." Tori returned and she stuck out her hand. "I'm Victoria. Tori to most people."

"Nice to meet you Tori." Rae shook the hand offered. " My name is Ra... Cassie."

"It's great to meet you too." Tori gushed.

"You came in from England for the gala then?" Rae questioned leading her past the costume racks.

"Yeah." Tori looked at the costumes, not really paying attention to her tall guide's questions.

"Long trip." Rae noted. "How did you like the show? Was it worth it?"

"Of course. Thea is great, don't you think?" Tori asked absently running her finger over a satin shirt.

"Thea is an amazing actress, she makes the play." Rae added the last bit trying to lower her enthusiasm. "Was she expecting you for the gala?" She tried not to make the enquiry too obvious.

"Not at all, you should have seen her face!" Tori giggled.

"I bet she was very surprised." Rae smiled, knowing now why Thea hadn't mentioned this to her. "That is the shirt that Michael wears in the opening scene." She explained trying to show her interest wasn't totally focused on Tori's sister.

"So do you have any nice chaps on your crew?" Tori asked turning back to look her in the eye.

"Nice chaps?" Rae laughed, realising Tori was just as Thea had described. "A few, but they are busy at work for the next few hours. Can't have you distracting my crew with your beauty."

"I asked Thea but she hasn't mentioned any. Sometimes I think she is blind!" Tori laughed with her.

"Well there are some lovely fellows in the chorus." Rae tried to cover for them both. "She is focused on other things."

"Do you think I am pretty?" She asked suddenly, flicking her hair back with an exaggerated smile.

"You are gorgeous Tori." Rae tried not to laugh at the loaded question. The young woman screwed her nose up in an action that could have come from Thea.

"I am not too sure Victoria Wilcox will ever be a household name!" Tori laughed again.

"Why do you want to be an actress as well?" Rae questioned as the reference to Wilcox registered in her mind.

"No way." Tori shook her head. "Not in my life plan."

"What is in your life plan then?" Rae tried to keep the frown from her face her stomach sank. The name Wilcox repeated over and over in her head

"Lots of money, lots of fun. No ties!" The young woman exclaimed.

"So no husband for you?" Rae saw the opening to ask the question.

"Husband?" Tori blurted out as she laughed.

"Yes, significant life partner?" Rae countered laughing back.

"No, I meant husband as in singular!" Tori kept laughing. "Put a 's' on it and you might have me interested!"

"Oh!" Rae's smile returned as the question of the last name was answered. "Well, sometimes you have to kiss a lot of frogs before you find your prince." It still struck her as odd that in their long conversations, Thea didn't mention her sister had been married before.

"So far I've only tried out a few tadpoles!" Tori giggled.

"Well keep looking, you'll find your prince one day." Rae winked at her. "Just have to have faith."

"Am I keeping you from a job?" Tori asked suddenly.

"Oh no." Rae waved off her concern. "Actually I have to head into the party for a bit, have to suck up to some of the financiers." She pulled at the silk blouse she wore thankful she'd not had too huge a blow up with Damien when she didn't wear a dress and opted for the slightly dressy velvet business suit.

"Well I didn't like to say that that didn't look like work gear." Tori commented looking her up and down.

"Oh no that would be jeans and a T-shirt." Rae laughed, picturing how hard it would be to get grease and dirt out of velvet.

"Do you mind if I hang around back here?" Tori asked looking around.

"Not a problem." Rae pointed to a small corridor to their left. "Your sister's dressing room is over there if you want to take a look."

"Oh great, bet it's full of flowers from a thousand admirers huh?" Tori took a few steps off towards the corridor. "That's about the only plus I could think of to being an actress."

"I think there's a few flowers." Rae's mind went to the large arrangement of orchids with her very uncryptic message on the card. She also remembered suddenly how prominently Thea had displayed the bouquet. "Actually Tori." Rae tried to intervene in her lover's sister prematurely finding out about their relationship. "Maybe you'd want to come back to the party with me."

"The 'party' is about as much fun as having my teeth checked!" Tori exaggerated painfully.

"I know a gorgeous chorus guy I could introduce you too." Rae baited her to return.

"How gorgeous?" The young woman fell for the bait.

"Blonde hair, blue eyes." Rae thought of details. "Big muscles, wash board abs." She grinned and Tori grinned back. "I thought that might interest a princess like you." Thea's sister jogged back to Rae and slipped her arm through the tall technician's. "We can go around to the main exit." She smiled at the move.

"Are you this nice to everyone?" Tori's question caused Rae to laugh again.

"Just special people." She winked at her and opened the door. The clamour of the party hit them immediately.

"I warn you now." Tori spoke very quietly. "If this gets deadly boring, I am going to hunt you down and make your life hell!" Her giggling ruined her attempt at intimidation.

"Duly warned." Rae laughed as she guided the young woman through the door. "Let's find Marcus now for you." She scanned the crowd.

"Okay." Tori felt happy to let Rae work for her.

"He's right over there." She pointed him out for Tori's appraisal as she scanned the crowd for Thea. "What do you think?"

"Very nice." Tori breathed as she tucked her hair behind her ears. "How do I look?"

"You look gorgeous Tori, Marcus is a lucky man to get your attention." She replied still searching for Thea. "Now, do you want to know a secret?"

"Yeah, I love secrets." Tori whispered.

"Canadian guys love when girls come up out of nowhere and pick them up." Rae whispered back. "They have this whole ego thing."

"They do? Can I ask you a question now?" Tori asked as she fixed Marcus firmly in her sights.

"Yes?"

"Who are you looking for?" Tori asked with a smirk in her eye.

"Me?" Rae was taken off guard.

"Yes, you." Tori kept her voice low.

"I have someone very special already, no more looking for me." Rae answered knowingly.

"I know that." Tori nodded. "What I meant was who is it? They are obviously here. You've done nothing but scan since we stepped through the door."

"Caught me eh?" Rae tried to stay relaxed. She was quite sure that telling Tori it was her sister was not the way for the girl to find out Thea's preference.

"So who?" Tori pressed pleased to have been right.

"Let's just say, I'm sure you'll get the chance to talk to my special someone before the night is over." Rae tried to side step answering. "Deal?"

"Okay, next question." She prodded cheekily. "Can I take some one else back stage with this pass?" She raised an eyebrow.

"Of course." Rae winked at her. "You have the run of the place and if anyone does hassle you say you're with me."

"Cool." She grinned. "Gotta go kiss a tadpole." Impulsively Tori kissed Rae's cheek and darted off into the crowd.

"Go get them girl!" Rae laughed and turned to scan the room again.

She took a few steps further into the crowd and grabbed a flute of champagne from a passing waiter. Taking a sip she finally found who she was looking for.

Thea sat perched on a stool by the bar with a large entourage hanging on her every word. Rae made her way over, hanging at the back for a moment she waited for an appropriate break in the conversation. Once the crowd had momentarily dwindled she stepped forward.

"Miss. Winters." She smiled warmly. "Could I talk shop with you for a moment?" She hoped the comment would drive the last few onlookers away. When Thea glanced at her, she couldn't help but smile a bit brighter.

"Of course." She turned to the rest of the crowd. "I'm sorry, I have just one or too business things to cover." The few nodded and dispersed.

"First thing is." Rae leaned on the bar and moved as close as publicly acceptable.

"Yes?" She breathed as she put her glass down.

"I so want to just grab you and kiss you as you look so gorgeous." Rae's words came in a soft growl that no one but Thea could hear.

"Consider that comment returned to you." Thea's voice was only slightly louder.

"This old thing." Rae smiled. "I thought you'd like the velvet."

"Is fabulous." Thea purred though her eyes were not settled on Rae, they flickered around the room trying to keep an eye on where Edward was.

"Should I wear it to the cabin then?" Rae turned to look at the crowd as well though her eyes scanned aimless.

"You could, though love it might be a little formal?" Her mind sparked on an idea. "Do you want to nip back to the condo to get changed?"

"I don't think so, the jeep is all packed and ready to go." Rae spoke softly. "All it needs is you and me."

"You sure? If you need to go and change it's okay." Thea tried again, desperate to separate her lover and her husband.

"Well we do have to swing by for Mac but that's on the way." Rae took a sip of champagne before abandoning the glass on the bar.

"Are you sure? Wouldn't it be better to get her now?" Thea asked hopeful that the situation could be remedied.

"She'd be crazy if we left her in the car that long." Rae looked at her funny. "You know how she gets when she's in the jeep."

"Oh yes." Thea apologised.

"Theandra, darling!" Edward came up in Thea's blind spot suddenly and the sound of his voice made her heart sink into her stomach

"Edward." She breathed. Rae looked at the newcomer ready to put him in his place when she saw Thea's face whiten. The actress looked up at Rae scared what her lover's response would be to his intrusion.

"Just wanted to check up on you." He smiled at her and motioned to the bartender for another drink. Thea's vision began to darken at the edges.

"Edward Jones." He stuck his hand out towards Rae suddenly smiling.

'The name. The name.' It ran through Rae's mind a thousand times as she first looked at his hand and then at Thea's closed eyes. 'Edward Jones!' Repeating in Rae's head next.

"Cassie O'Keefe." She took his hand and spoke though her mind had long shut down.

Thea felt herself paling even further, she felt sick and she swore her heart had stopped.

"The lighting director?" Edward remembered the name on playbill. "You do amazing work, I have never seen my Theandra lit so beautifully."



The pale actress looked at Rae and then Edward. The single word 'my' caught in Rae's head and caused her to swallow hard.

"Edward." Thea finally found a voice. "Miss. O'Keefe and I were just talking theatre things."

"Well Theandra one must compliment her." He winked at his wife. "She has obvious talent."

"I am sure you are having too much fun to be bored by our conversation." She pushed, trying to get him to leave them.

"Without you my love? Never." He moved closer to her. "I need you by my side to have any fun." He bent and kissed her cheek. Thea felt the lips on her cheek sting as if she had been slapped.

Rae exhaled the slight breath she'd been holding as for the first time she moved her eyes so that Thea was in her vision permanently. Thea looked up, her eyes filling with tears as they met with blue.

"You should invite her back to the hotel." Edward hung for a second and whispered in her ear. "She's got more than obvious talent!" Thea could feel her lungs tighten as the darkness crept further into her vision.

"I think we're about finished." Rae whispered trying to find some volume in her voice. "With the shop talk." She looked to meet Edward's eyes again her voice going back to normal.

"Are you sure you understand the situation?" Thea pleaded looking at Rae, desperately wording her question in the only way she could. Her eyes begged the technician to stay.

"I'm sure you have a lot to catch up on with your husband." Rae looked at her and answered in a empty voice. "And I think the situation has been properly brought into the light now."

Thea could not find a voice to reply, just as she could not stop a tear from slipping onto her cheek.

"I wish I'd realised before how the shadows were hindering your acting." Rae added shaking her head, desperately trying to keep the overwhelming hurt inside her from bubbling over.

"Cassie." Thea blurted suddenly, the name stinging her lips.

"Yes Estell?" Rae kept herself from turning away just yet.

"I tried to tell you." She forced a little power into her voice.

"Not hard enough." Rae shook her head.

"I could come in tomorrow and we could talk through it." The actress tried to find a way to get them alone.

"Now Theandra, no Theatre tomorrow." Edward laughed. "You have a day off and a date with me. This little situation will wait till Monday."

"No need." Rae took a deep breath and found her strength. "This clears up the situation completely Edward. You two have a nice weekend." She turned on her heel and pushed her way through the crowd away from the bar.

"Cass..." Thea began standing up from her stool, but it was too late. The crowd had already swallowed her lover.

"Fiery one she is." Edward moved to take her place. "You sure you can't persuade her to come back to the hotel for a nightcap?"

"Stop it." Thea hissed at him sharply. "You know nothing about anything."

"Theandra, what has gotten into you?" He questioned back in a harsh voice. "You are making a scene. Sit down and calm down before you ruin your makeup." He chastised her as a child.

"Sorry." Thea heard her self apologise and sat down automatically as her learned behaviour kicked in.

"Much better." He took a drink as he spoke down to her. "One must always remember the public Theandra, and the public is always watching."

"Of course." She dabbed at her eye with a tissue from her purse.

"No matter what is going on with that woman at work, you can't let it interfere with the play's public image."

"No Edward." Thea agreed her voice dull and empty.

"Or mine, I have made some very important contacts at this party." He added pompously. "And I do not care to have your theatrics ruin them. Are we calm now?"

"Yes dear." She heard herself say she was, though she knew for a fact nothing was further from the truth. Her life had left with Rae and what was left was just a shell. A shell left to exist on automatic pilot, one that had one role and one role alone.

"Good." He nodded at her, his voice lifting. "Much better. Now put on that stellar smile of yours and let's work this crowd."

"Yes dear." She responded blankly.

"Good girl." He moved his hand behind her and patted her butt out of view. "Come, introduce me to your director." He offered his hand to help her off the stool. Thea's 'stellar' smile returned as she let Edward help her to stand and then she led him through the crowd to Damien.

"With all of this success I think your contract needs to be re-negotiated." Edward commented as they walked. Thea didn't hear a word, she just continued to lead the way. Her mind curled up tight in her head crying and the pieces of her broken heart cutting through her chest like glass.

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The jeep jumped the curb and went onto the crowded street without hesitation. Behind the wheel Rae could barely see the road in front of her. Various emotions paraded past her eyes in turn all at a blazing intensity. The slow blocked traffic made her escape difficult and she made a blind turn into an alley. She travelled some distance down the dark, garbage filled alley before in a sudden move the jeep skipped to a quick stop on the wet pavement. Her foot down hard on the brake, she slammed her palm into the steering wheel again and again.

"Why Thea why!" She screamed loudly, the muffled sound of it enough to send the cats in the alley running for cover. "I loved you, God I loved you with everything I was." The strength of her voice dropped as she bent forward slowly and let her forehead rest on the steering wheel.

"You could have told me, explained this." She slammed her hand into the wheel again as her mind replayed her memory of that first day.

Crouched beside the car, she'd asked the actress. Asked her flat out if there was anyone. She'd even joked that there could be many. Thea had said no to both questions.

"She'd lied to me." Rae whispered to herself as the realisation hit her and the first of her tears fell. "Right from the beginning she lied to me." She pulled herself up to sit straight again and wiped her cheeks. Annoyed by the formal velvet coat she pulled it off roughly and threw it into the crowded back seat. The sight of all their camping gear waiting ready made her cringe.

"You'll never know what I got you." She thought of the presents hidden amongst the gear. "You never deserved them in the first place." She turned and threw the jeep into gear. A loud long squeal coming out of the vehicles thick tires as she made her way through the tight back streets.

"Oh it all makes sense now." She mumbled to herself angrily as she made her way back onto a main road. No longer seeing the thick traffic that moved around her as a hindrance. Her mind was going fast enough to compensate. "No wonder she had no real problem dealing with all of your past. She was just in it for a good time and she just said whatever she needed to in order to string you along."

Her hand slammed into the wheel again as she undid the collar of the silk shirt. Opening it so it hung open and loose to just above her chest.

"So understanding, so committed, so loving." She barked the qualities she'd once loved in Thea but now believed were fabricated. "All a fucking act!" She slammed her hand again. "I had a Goddamn test for that girl. Went around feeling like I was the bad person for what I'd done, while the entire time she was lying and pretending."

"I want to spend my life with you Rae." She mocked the remembered words in a high voice. "I want to have a home with you, Rae. I love you Rae." She wiped at a new lot of angry tears. "Fucking lies, that's all it was. You must have been so happy when you found out I had money."

A sudden quick left through traffic and the jeep emerged on another darker street. The city's surroundings slowly became less lit and the walls of the looming buildings were littered in graffiti.

"Then you didn't have to feel like you were slumming I bet, best of both worlds. Girl who gets her hands dirty but can buy you anything in the world. I was so stupid!" She stopped at the red light, tempted to run it but her ranting kept her in place. She pushed the button to roll down her window. The cold night air struck her hard and reminded her that all of this was indeed real.

"So fucking stupid." She mumbled to herself again as the light turned and she raced through it. Just missing a slow car that had turned onto the road in front of her. In a quick move she was up on the sidewalk, garbage flying in all directions in her wake as she passed the car. Her strung nerves didn't even register the close call as the vehicle came back on the pavement of the road and tore off.

The stunned passenger of the small car slowed down even more as he watched the shiny black jeep's dangerous manoeuvre.

"How could I fall for this?" She questioned herself. "She's a world class fucking actress for sure." She laughed sadly. "Had the mighty Cassie O'Keefe jumping through Goddamned hoops for her. That's it!" She slowed the car down as her mind slowed. "We're through."

The words of her own decision registered in her head and she stopped the jeep on a dime.

"You are such a loser!" She snapped at herself. "You don't have this choice, Thea already made it. This was never to last, there was no future, no home, no permanent you and her." The reality slapped her hard. "You were being strung along till whenever she was finished with you. Only problem was her hubby decided to show up early and she didn't get to use you up as she'd wanted."

She stared at the road in front of her blankly. It wasn't until the loud horn sounded behind her that she came back to the here and now. With shaking hands she pulled the jeep out of the road and turned it off.

"I shouldn't be driving." Some soft voice in her head begged for attention. "Take a walk, clear your head."

Stepping out into the dark street, she locked the jeep and just began walking. She had no destination, as she knew, the one thing she wanted to leave behind couldn't be and the one thing she wanted to run too wasn't there anymore.

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Cleo wandered around the party with a hidden purpose. She kept close to the play's lead but not too close as to arouse suspicion. Her only annoyance to her task was the play's director, who insisted on checking up on her every few minutes. Yes, she was well aware she was by far the richest possible backer at the party but still.

"Do you want more champagne?" Damien came into her line of sight holding up a freshly filled crystal flute.

"Thank you." She laughed and handed him the one in her hand even though it was over half full. "Damien, if I didn't know better I'd say you're expecting some sort of commitment from me this evening."

"Well Miss. Eaton." Damien put on his best charm. The checkbooks of several of the other possible backers rested on this one woman signing onto the deal even in a small way. "I would never expect, but I am hoping beyond belief." He tried the honest approach with her. He knew from previous dealings with the woman that any other approach failed immediately.

"I am impressed." She looked around, spotting Thea doing press with one of the local papers. "But I have a few questions before I could even think of committing."

"Like?" He discarded her glass with a nearby waiter and moved closer.

"Well first off, are you able to guarantee this cast for at least an eight month run?" She took a sip of her drink.

"Most definitely!" Damien nodded adamantly.

"Good, good." She looked off thinking. "Have you signed on any other backers yet?" She turned back to fix him with sharp brown eyes.

"Only New Technologies." He swallowed hard. "They've come on to rewire the building and supply the tech budget. I'm sure their involvement could only sweeten the involvement of The Royal and Free Corporation."

"Fabulous!" Cleo's eyes lit up. Having the tech budget be separate from her investment would make life tremendously easy. "I have an offer for you Damien." She lowered her voice and moved close.

"Yes, Miss. Eaton?" He tried to keep himself calm. This moment could make or break the show.

"I will invest, but only..." She let the words hang for a moment.

"Only?" He prompted when the silence began to hurt.

"Only if I get 100% rights." She filled in the gap finally with a sly grin. "Other than New Technologies portion of course."

"R and F will be the sole backer?" Damien couldn't believe what he'd heard.

"No, not R and F." She shook her head. "I want to run this through a subsidiary I've set up and I want to keep my personal involvement on a low key basis for a bit."

"I have to ask Miss. Eaton, how much is this subsidiary willing to go in for?" He salivated at the idea. No more galas, no more bringing drinks to snotty people he didn't like.

"Let's say my vision is to run this to a frenzy here in Toronto and then move to New York in time for the 2001 Tony cut offs." She lowered her voice to show her seriousness. "My lawyers will draw up all the necessary paperwork for our end."

"You have yourself a deal." Damien held out his hand and smiled as she shook it lightly.

"Fabulous!" Cleo grinned. "Absolutely Fabulous!"

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Her arms folded across her chest, Rae walked down the relatively empty streets without destination or purpose. Passing an elderly man walking his dog, she held her tongue. The monologue continuing on in her head unimpeded.

'So she tried to tell you.' The idea stung at her insides like acid. 'How dare she imply that not knowing was your fault? She had a million chances to tell you, she just chose not to take them. Were you that unapproachable?' Her thoughts went back to blaming herself as she couldn't hold her anger for the actress very long. It just hurt too much to blame Thea, hurt too much to admit that the small strawberry blonde had meant this all to turn out so maliciously. 'Why Thea Why?' She asked the question again and again.

"What did you expect O'Keefe?" She asked herself in a harsh voice as she came to a fenced walkway that ran between the buildings and turned down it. The poorly lit corridor emerged a short time later in a small downtown park. "She's class, you're trash, it could never work. Way to live in denial."

She laughed lightly as she boots scratched against the frozen winter grass.

"I'm carrying the cure for those blues pretty lady." A small wiry man in a leather jacket stepped out from behind one of the trees.

"Pardon?" Having been too caught up in her own words Rae hadn't realised that he was there let alone heard his words.

"Whatever it is that's bringing you down, I got the cure if you got the cash." He hovered in the shadows. "I got the fine stuff for a fine lady like you."

Rae did a slow three sixty as she turned to take in her surroundings. The familiarity of the looming buildings, the tall chain fences and even this park suddenly came to her. How had she gotten here? This was old territory, this was drug territory and this was not where she wanted to be.

"Look lady, it's okay I won't tell anybody." He laughed lightly and sparked up a cigarette. "And if you don't have the cash we might be able to reach a mutually satisfying deal." He mistook her confusion as junkie desperation.

"No, I'm not looking for anything just walking." She mumbled as she turned on her heel and walked back the way she had come.

"Suit yourself baby." He sneered at her. "But if you come back looking later the price doubles."

Rae's rational mind screamed. She couldn't stay here, couldn't be here. She didn't want any of his poison, she really didn't. Even if her subconscious had led her here this was not what she wanted. But as Lillian would ask her, if you came then part of you must want to be here? That is what you must figure out and address.

"I have enough pain already." She whispered to herself as she retraced her steps through the walkway. "She's not worth losing my mind over." She made the vow to herself as she emerged back onto the main street.

"Oh God I wish you were here Lillian." She wrapped her arms around herself tighter. "You could make sense of this." Her mind raced. Getting to this part of town wasn't the easiest endeavour from the theatre. She looked at the silver watch on her wrist, surprised by the late hour that the glowing hands pointed to. "What have I been doing all this time?" She questioned herself quietly. The hours of tears, screaming and walking registered in her mind suddenly.

"I came here out of habit." She took a deep breath and tried to focus. "But it is an old habit and not one that I am going to indulge." She took another breath trying to centre herself. Whether she centred on the angry, the jealousy or the hurt she had to focus on something.

"I let you in and I let you hurt me Thea." She whispered the soft pained words into the night sky. "You hid the truth even when you knew it would hurt me and I had the right to hear it. For that I don't think I can ever forgive you."

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"Estell, you were magnificent!" Cleo announced with a slight clap as she moved into the busy crowd that had converged around the actress. Everyone parted at her arrival, her reputation sending them all whispering into the background as she took centre stage.

"Thank you." Thea smiled brightly though her stomach turned. The sight of the tall blonde reminded her of one person who wasn't at the party. The one person who she desperately needed to explain things too, if things could be explained. "I'm glad you enjoyed the show."

"Kiss, kiss now." Cleo laughed and kissed both her cheeks as the camera's snapped off pictures. "Must give them all what they want to see." She whispered in the actress' ear.

"Of course." Thea nodded her agreement. "You enjoyed the show then?" She asked the question without thinking as they both stood to allow the photographers the most optimal shots of them together.

"Enjoyed, oh my no!" Cleo laughed and snatched a glass of champagne from a nearby waiter. "I was completely enthralled. Especially the beginning of the last act."

"The last act?" Thea choked out the words, frantically searching the tall woman's face for any hint she'd talked to Rae.

"Oh yes!" She took a sip of her drink. "That scene when your lover comes in on you and your husband. It was so believable, moved me to tears." She wiped a stray-gloved hand by her eye.

"Is Brittany with you?" The actress' voice was tight as she tried to move the subject away from the play. Too many blaring parallel's loomed to rip her soul to shreds.

"Oh yes Brit is here somewhere." Cleo looked around absently. "She's been good and let me do the business thing while she makes friends."

"Business?" She questioned. "I thought you were here for pleasure alone tonight Angelina."

"Oh well you know how it is." The tall woman laughed. "In my circles you're always mixing both." She waited for the actress to ask the obvious question, disappointed when the silence hung between them. "Your director is hopeful I'm here for business. Though as Raven has probably told you, she hates me meddling in the Theatre scene. Her territory so to speak."

"No..." Thea swallowed hard as she tried to find the strength to say her lover's name. A bright, hard flash of pain split through her heart. "Rae never mentioned that."

"Oh yes. Raven is always afraid her hidden interest in the corporation would come out and then she'd be thrust from the background into the middle of one of these." Cleo waved around at the party. "She prefers her secret only be known by a very special few." She winked at Thea. "Where is my little Blackbird anyway?" She looked around with more intent.

"You haven't seen her?" The actress strained to say the words.



"No, not yet." Cleo turned back to the actress. "I'm sure she's around here somewhere. She'll make at least a brief appearance as she is the lighting director." She smiled. "Well Estell I won't take up any more of your time, but I'll find you before I leave."

"Yes, please do." Thea smiled at her, happy when Cleo turned away. The actress threw herself into the questions of the hounding press.

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It wasn't long before Rae arrived back at the jeep. Huddled in the cold vehicle, she started the engine and waited for it to warm up. As the dry heat began to pour out of the vents, she held her chilled hands in the air. Turning on the radio, she tried to calm her nerves before she attempted driving again. Her main goal now was getting herself out of this part of town.

"I've got no where to go." She whispered desperately. She couldn't go to the condo, as she knew it was littered with Thea's things. She couldn't go back to the townhouse, as it was the same. Being in the jeep with all this stuff was hard enough. The light scent of the actress' perfume hanging off of her overnight bag was already filling the car with nothing but Thea. Everything in her life had been altered in the short time they'd spent together. Everything had been labelled with bold 'ours' and was no longer just the technician's alone. She knew that was mostly her fault. She'd opened her heart, her houses to the actress. She's insisted on everything in her life being shared between them. She knew now what a farce all of that had been.

The soft love song playing in the background grated on her nerves instead of calming them and she turned the radio off again. The soft hum of the motor filled her ears.

"I don't have a friend in the world." She ran her hands through her hair and brushed at her wet cheeks.

The flashing memory of a tall blonde came into her mind suddenly. No, she didn't even have Cleo to turn to anymore. Did she?

Strapping on her seat belt, she pulled the jeep slowly away from the curb. Right now it really didn't matter where she went as long as she got far away from here.

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Edward's comments about the hotel had been accurate. It was indeed huge. By the time they'd emerged from the limo and Edward had led Thea through the lobby and up to his room, the actress was truly shattered.

The room itself was very large and clearly set out into three areas. The bedroom off to the left held a large fireplace while the main door entered into a large entertainment area. Off to the right was a office room to cater to the hotel's business clientele. A door led off to the bedroom and off of it was the bathroom. Both were neatly decorated in green and cream with co-ordinated furnishings. Edward closed the door and locked it behind them. Pulling off his shoes he padded

across the thick carpet and slipped off his jacket. Thea walked numbly over to an armchair and sat down in it placing her purse on the coffee table.

"So Theandra what do you think?" Edward motioned around as he loosened his tie and walked over towards her.

"Very nice." She glanced around. The honest truth was that she didn't find it nice and it was definitely not the place she wanted to be. She wanted to be at the condo waiting for Rae. She had so much to explain and so much to apologise for.

"A very productive gala." He pulled the tie off and tossed it aside onto the large couch.

"Yes." Thea agreed not sure where to look. She settled at looking to the carpet, anything to avoid her husband's soulless eyes.

"I noticed you were talking to that tall blonde woman." He eyed her up and down as he braced his hands to lean against the back of the couch across from her. "Who was she?"

"Tall blonde?" Thea looked at him unsure what he was talking about. She hadn't expected questions from him.

"Tall blonde, thin black dress, she looked like big money." He stared into her. "Don't tell me you didn't get her name?"

"Oh, That's Angelina." She brushed it off remembering the brief moments she'd managed to spend talking to Cleo.

"Angelina who?" He asked his voice slightly stern, as he rounded the couch and sat down on it.

"Edward is this important?" She massaged her forehead as she squinted up at him her head was thumping.

"Theandra!" His hand shot out and grabbed her wrist. "I am attempting to make pleasant conversation, why are you trying me so since I arrived?" He pulled her slightly forward in the chair with a jolt. Thea gasped and tried to twist her wrist away. "Has being away stripped you of your manners?" He held her wrist firmly, his fingers biting into her arm.

"Edward!" Thea hissed through the pain. "That hurts!"

"Does it?" He held her for a second longer before he let go. "Well Theandra, I bet having your wife talk back to you hurts even more." He stood up and walked away to the cabinet, opening it to reveal a fully stocked bar.

"I'm sorry." She called quietly as she heard him pouring himself a drink. She pulled her wrist close to her and rubbed it gently.

"Of course you are." He moved back with the drink and kissed her on top of the head. "Now tell me about Angelina."

"She's thinking of sponsoring the play. She's a very big name here and all over the world." Thea babbled as she stared at the large scotch he carried back with him.

"Last name?" He fell into the couch across from her downing his drink. He held the empty glass out to her. Thea took the glass and walked to the cabinet refilling it automatically. She returned to Edward and held it out for him to take.

"Last name? Angelina?" He took a healthy sip as he paused to wait for a response. When one didn't come right away he sighed. "Well apparently you aren't in the mood for chatting." He took the rest of the drink in one large swallow. "You must be in the mood for other things." He watched her with a sly grin.

"Eaton." Thea blurted out as she cowered under his stare. "Her surname is Eaton."

"Oh you are in the mood to chat." Edward's voice was heavy with sarcasm.

"I was just thinking, you know me." Thea tried to bluff her way through the pause. Anything was better than what Edward obviously had in mind.

"And who is Angelina Eaton's husband?" He questioned. "She hasn't got one." Thea replied quickly and honestly.

"Humm." He dropped his glass on the table. "What were you and her chatting about?"

"The play, she wanted to know if I was interested in moving it South." Thea leaned forward to take the glass again, maybe if she got him drunk enough.

"To New York?" He questioned. "No more." He waved off her move and Thea sat back defeated. "Though it is a fine scotch."

"Yes, New York was mentioned." Thea looked off.

"Interesting." He ran his hand through his hair and unbuttoned his tuxedo shirt.

"You must have had an exhausting day. Shall I run you a bath?" Her mind was in overdrive trying to think of ways of distracting him.

"No bath." He shook his head. "You haven't seen me for months and your trying to get rid of me Theandra." He raised a hand out towards her. "Come sit by me."

"No, no." Thea stood up and walked slowly forward. "I was just thinking of you! You must be tired."

"No, not tired." He shook his head, motioning with his fingers for her too keep coming closer. "I miss my wife." His words came in a low thick tone.

"How is Daddy?" She asked as she inched a little closer nearly reaching his hand.

"Your father is good, he finally beat Adams' at darts the other night at the club." He moved his fingers again more forcefully, tiring of her hesitation. "He's concerned I'm giving you too much freedom traipsing all over the world and such. He thinks maybe you've forgotten your station in life."

"My station?" She stopped and looked at him confused as some part of her mind rebelled and she couldn't stop it.

"As my wife Theandra!" He snapped up to grab her hand and dragged her towards him. "MY WIFE! Or did you forget your vows as you forget to wear your ring?" He slammed her down next to him on the couch and held her hand in a vice like grip. Thea made a small sound of protest when she found herself moving without consent.

"I... I..." She stammered. "I wouldn't want to lose it." She frowned and tried not to show how much the grip hurt.

"I think you don't want to wear it." He threw her hand back at her. "After all I give you, all I do for you." He moved his hand up to her face holding her chin firmly.

"I... I am grateful." She mumbled.

"Grateful? And you repay me by not even having the decency to wear my ring?" His voice was loud and forceful.

"It's only a symbol." A brave voice argued while the rest of her cowered away.

"A SYMBOL!" He boomed at her releasing her face and moving his hand down to her throat. He didn't squeeze but held his hand there firmly just enough to scare her. "Well then..." He loosened his hand and dragged it down the front of her dress as the actress sat immobilised. "Maybe I'd like a little symbolic show of what it means to you to be my wife." He snarled at her.

"Edward I..." Thea put her hand out in front of her resting it on Edward's chest, desperate to keep some distance between them.

"What Theandra?" He wrapped his fingers in the material of the neckline.

"I have a headache and the play is quite exhausting." She mumbled in a feeble voice.

"You have a headache!" His voice boomed again as he pulled at the front of the material dragging her too him. The move caused the material to tear slightly at the seams. Thea's mind raced as she tried to think of ways to damage control.

"Edward." She kept her voice even. "Edward." She repeated this time her voice softer as she moved her hand on his chest gently in a small motion.

"Theandra, I have flown over half the world to see my wife." He calmed a bit with the motion of her hand. "I just want to know that I haven't been forgotten. That I am still important to her."

"I know." She tried to soothe him with her voice.

"That I am still her world, her one and only." Edward rambled.

"Look why don't you get out of those things and get into bed." She calmed trying to keep her voice even, though inside her stomach churned. "I am sure I can think of ways to bring you release, to calm and pamper you." She hoped she might be lucky enough to get away with just touching and kissing.

"Bed, now there is suggestion." He moved against her hand, leaning in to kiss her. Thea leaned in and brushed her lips onto Edward's cheek fighting the jolt of revulsion that well up in her. "Oh no Theandra!" He chastised her in a stern voice. "No side stepping tonight." His hand pulled downwards on the dress straining it at her shoulders and at the seams further.

"Sssside stepping?" Thea stammered she pulled back a little.

"You are my wife and I will have what is rightfully mine." He looked at her with icy eyes, hearing as well as feeling the silk tear. "Don't make this harder than it has to be Theandra."

One of Thea's legs kicked forward as she pulled back out of his grasp and caught on the table, knocking the glass to the floor. It made a dull thud as it landed. Falling off the couch, she landed heavily on her backside and lower back, her dress tearing more as she fell. Edward followed her downwards.

"Wait!" He stopped and leaned back. "You don't want this to happen this way do you?"

"No." Thea breathed heavily. "I don't want it to happen Edward." She looked at him and pulled at the ruined silk trying to fix it back in place.

"Then how about a compromise." He leaned back in his seat. "Finish taking the dress off yourself for me." He sneered at her as he settled into his seat.

Thea looked at him aware that she had seen this look many times before. With a swift movement she slipped the zipper at the back of the blue silk dress down. Getting to her feet somewhat unsteadily, she took the dress off completely.

"Now was that so hard?" He questioned as he watched her hungrily.

"No." She swallowed hard forcing the bile and tears back. Her wrist stung, as did her back.

"How about you get me that drink now?" He motioned to the glass on the floor.

She could only nod, as she bent down to retrieve the glass from the floor. She felt so exposed in the black lace bra and panties that she'd worn especially for... the thought of the name stuck in her throat... especially for Rae.

"Very nice." He watched her go down for the glass, studying her as she stood up again and walked over to the cabinet. "A double and make it neat." He ordered her with a grin.

She poured the double scotch, walked back and held it out to him. Her hand shook slightly.

"Come here." He patted his lap. "Please." The last word slid off his tongue in a hiss.

Thea lowered herself gingerly onto his lap trying to place herself somewhere else. Trying to make her mind lose itself. It stubbornly refused to do so and she found herself firmly rooted in the horrible moment.

"So Theandra." He drank a large swallow of the drink. "When did we get this little ensemble?" He ran his free hand roughly over the lace over her chest.

"A few weeks ago." Thea brushed the material aside, trying to ignore how horrible it felt to have Edward touch her.

"For who?" His voice was acid as his hand went over her again and he kept drinking.

"For me." Her voice was quiet as she lied to him. "You know how I like pretty things."

"Humm." He took a swallow and moved his hand under the material coarsely. "You didn't buy these for me?"

"Well obviously you would see them when I came home..." Thea's mind whirled as she tried to figure out what she should do. Should she fight him, which might result in her getting hurt or should she give in, like she had a thousand times. It wasn't as if the only person in the world she wanted to care even wanted to know she existed right now.

No matter how she tried she could not commit her mind to giving into him this time. She couldn't willingly commit to taking this further and having him touch her and kiss her. Perhaps if she resisted just enough maybe he would back down. It had been a long flight and an even longer night at the theatre.

"For who Thea?" He pawed at her without care finishing the last of his drink.

"For you." She replied wondering if that was what he wanted to hear.

"For me?" He looked up and let the glass drop out of his hand. "Lying bitch!" He backhanded her and sent her flying out of his lap.

She knew nothing until she hit the ground and even then she wasn't sure what had happened.

"I... I..." Thea stammered in shock, her hand going to her face wondering how much damage he'd done.

"You don't..." He stood up and moved to hover over her. "Lie to your husband..." He moved to take off his shirt. "And tell him that you bought lacy little things for him..." She couldn't move as she watched him undo his belt. "When he knows damn well you didn't!"

"I'm sorry." Thea tried to appease him.

"Now Theandra." He stood over her his voice booming. "I think you have a few things to make up for. Get up." He backed away from her.

She blinked up at him as he stepped back and waved at her to move. She stayed still on the floor, too shocked to move.

"Get up!" He barked at her with more force. Something inside her stirred at his order and propelled her to her feet. "Good girl." He moved back to sit on the couch and patted his lap again. "Come here." Silently she moved back over to sit in his lap. "You've missed your Edward while you have been away haven't you?" He held her firmly around the waist and kissed her neck messily.

She nodded, still mute and stunned by pain.

"You want to show your Edward how much you missed him don't you?" He pushed one hand under her bra again. A tear escaped from her eye and she nodded again.

"You haven't been cheating on your husband have you?" He grabbed her in a brutal grip and hissed the question in her ear. "Giving away what is mine to some pitiful slack jawed Canadian?"

"What?" Thea heard her voice question him but did not seem to control it.

"YOU DON'T BUY LACY BRA'S THEANDRA!" He barked at her again as the hand at her waist dug into her side.

"I..." She began to protest but instead burst into hysterical sobs as she felt the increase of pressure at her waist.

"Tell me who it is?" He let it go a bit pulling the bra down off her breasts to sit uncomfortably beneath them.

"No one." She whimpered afraid to admit that there was someone.

"You're going to prove that too me." He pulled his fingers into her hair and grabbing a handful held her face to meet his.

"How?" Her voice was small as she forced herself to look at him.

"How do you think Theandra?" He growled at her. "I want to make sure no ones been touching my property."

Swallowing hard a part of her clicked in and she moved her hands to rest on the button of Edward's trousers. Moving one hand slightly lower than the waistband she pressed gently.

"They haven't." She tried to control the waiver in her voice. No matter how much Rae hated her right now, she couldn't risk him running off in a rage to find her lover.

"I have to be sure of that." He kissed her roughly, driving his tongue into her mouth without invitation. She tried hard to block out the screaming in her head.

"You are my wife Theandra, I will not share you!" He pulled back relaxing into her hand.

"Of course not." She pressed harder and tried to focus on something, anything. But all the good things, all the light had gone from her life the second that Rae had walked away from her.

"So how have you been filling your nights?" He asked absently moving his hands over her breasts at his leisure, digging them into her ribs with his motion.

"Sleeping." She tried to ignore the pain that his hands were causing. She hoped the bruising would be light enough to cover with makeup.

"What else?" He opened his eyes and stared at her.

"Rehearsing." She met his eyes trying not to waiver in her fabrication.

"What else?" He leaned back up to her. Thea increased the pressure of her rubbing action as his hands moved around her ribcage, pressing the breath out of her when she exhaled

"Thinking of you." She choked out. She knew that this was true though not in the way Edward would have wanted it to be.

"About me how?" He relaxed a little, letting her ribs expand again.

"Wondering how you were." She continued as Edward watched her through half closed eyes. She worked her hand under his pants but still remained over his shorts. "What you were doing." She forced her voice down a notch. 'Act Thea!' She told herself. 'You do this for a living, how hard can it be?'

"Why didn't you call me Theandra?" He asked in a low dark tone. "Fax, write, email. Not one communication."

"I was so very busy." She kept her voice soothing



"Too busy for your husband!" His voice went steely again as he opened his eyes.

"Too busy for anything." She kept her timbre constant as she leaned forward to brush her lips on his neck.

"Not too busy now are you?" He leaned back and let her kiss him.

"No." She kissed around his jaw line, trying to lower the bile that rose in her throat.

"Good, I want to go to bed now." He growled at her in an order. Thea's hand maintained its rhythm lower for a moment before stopping.

"Okay." She pulled back moving her hand free and slipped off her husband's knee. She breathed a momentary sigh of relief.

"Come with me." He stood up and offered his hand to her. She just looked at him and then the chair.

"I wondered if I could sit for a while." She asked before she could stop herself. Some part of her brain made a last attempt to get out of the inevitable.

"SIT!" He barked as he moved his hand back ready to hit her again.

"Edward." She knew she was failing at keeping the fear out of her voice. She raised a hand to protect her face, when his hand struck out it ricocheted off her forearms and sent her sprawling again to the ground.

"So we don't go to bed." He moved down next to her on his knees. "I'm just as happy here."

Thea was slightly dazed by the abruptness of her landing. She had narrowly missed the chair and the table. Her mind still hadn't cleared as Edward pinned her legs down with one of his knees and moved his hands to her hips.

"Need to get rid of these." He mumbled gruffly as he worked to yank the panties off of her.

"Edward..." She gasped but her voice had no volume as she realised what he was doing. She moved her hips into the ground in an attempt to hinder him. Any moment of pause might make this stop, might make him realise just what he was doing.

"Theandra, stop fighting me." His voice was condescending as he pulled the panties off of her, ripping the side in the movement.

Working one hand free, Thea mustered all the strength she could and before she could stop herself she raised her hand and slapped him hard across the face. His head snapped sideways from the unexpected blow.

Turning back to her, he licked his lips as a small trickle of blood spilled down his chin. His teeth had ripped across his lip and her hand. He didn't speak and Thea froze without lowering her arm.

Edward met Thea's eyes as he pulled his fist back and hit her hard in the centre of the stomach. A small sound came out of the actress as she pulled herself into a ball trying to nurse the pain.

"You shouldn't have done that Theandra!" He spoke to her softly as he used her stunned state to part her knees and pull her closer to him. Pushing her down with one hand on her shoulder, he rested his hovering weight on her to lever her down.

Thea registered her back hitting the floor for the forth time. She raised her other hand and tried to vainly push at Edward's chest to get him off of her, but she hadn't the energy or the position to even think about fighting.

"Don't make this any harder than it has to be Theandra." He cooed at her as he moved to brace her arms in one of his hands over her head.

As soon as she felt Edward find a secure grip on both her wrists and pin them above her head she knew that she had been beaten. This was now all just about damage control and praying for him to finish fast.

"After all." He smiled down at her as he pulled the bra off her. "You might enjoy it if you give me a chance." He kissed her roughly and moved his hand to push his pants further down.

Continued in Act XIII...

### The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

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## ~ After the Curtain Falls ~

by Beth Dragon & Kathleen Wolf

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**Feedback:** All comments are greatly appreciated and can be sent to: [kathandbeth@hotmail.com](mailto:kathandbeth@hotmail.com)

**Thanks:** To Emma, for her never ending love, support and chocolate. To the Ex-Guards Village for all their feedback and expert advice.

## **Act XIII**

Rae turned the corner at a breakneck speed as she picked up the cell phone and punched the auto dial. She listened to it ring and ring as she glanced at the time on the radio display.

"Yes?" Cleo's voice breathed heavily into the other end.

"Cleo, It's Rae!" She announced herself simply. "Get rid of the tart, I'm on my way. I need to talk to you."

"Blackbird...." Cleo tried to clear her head as she questioned. Picking up the clock on the nightstand next to the bed she couldn't believe the time.

"Brittany, is there right? Get rid of her." Rae talked on as she turned again. "Get her out by the time I get there or I keep going."

"All right Raven, consider her gone." Cleo hurried to abide by the woman's instructions as her mind woke up.

"Good, ETA is five minutes." She almost moved to switch off the phone, but figured she'd see what Cleo would come back with. It was three am and she knew Cleo would be a little surprised by the call.

"Five minutes?" Cleo tried to keep the happiness out of her voice.

"Five minutes." Rae repeated. "I'm just on Eglinton now."

"The door will be open." Cleo assured her. "You know the gate passcode."

"Good." Rae made another fast turn, happy the city streets were deserted this late. "I don't have my key with me."

"I'll get Brittany home." Cleo confirmed her compliance as she gently shook the strawberry blonde resting next to her awake.

"Send her in a car. If you're not there I'm not waiting." Her voice was firm.

"Okay, okay Blackbird." The tall blonde purred. "I'll be here."

"Good, see you then." Rae hit the end button and tossed the phone on the floor.

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Rae ran a stray hand through her hair as she took the steps up to the front door two by two. She pushed the sleeves of the silk top up her arms and tried the doorknob, not surprised when it opened right up. She went inside without hesitation.

The darkly lit front entrance was enormous and her footsteps echoed through the space as she walked across the marble floor.

"Cleo?" She called out, not sure where in the enormous house the blonde might be.

"Raven?" The tall blonde walked into the hall from the drawing room. Dressed in a light blue silk robe, closed by a loose knot at the waist.

"Is she gone?" She wanted the point clear immediately.

"Yes." Cleo studied her, trying to assess her Raven's mood.

"Good." Rae nodded, suddenly not so sure why she was here. As she breathed in the familiar scent of the Eaton estate, old money she knew it was a smell that could never be recreated. She'd never smelt anything quite like it.

"What's going on Raven?" The blonde ran a hand through her hair as she moved forward.

"You were right." She shook her head as the memory of the night flooded over her again.

"Right?" Cleo stopped her approach, at a loss for what was going on.

"Yes, right." She wandered back towards the central staircase and moved up to sit on one of the heavily carpeted stairs.

"Right about what blackbird?" Cleo followed her move but stood on the floor looking up at her slightly elevated position. "Thea." She struggled to say the actress' name.

"Your little star?" Cleo gasped, smiling inside but on the outside her face was a mask of concern.

"She's not mine." Rae whispered shaking her head. "She's married." Her hand went up to massage the thick pain in her forehead.

"Married?" Cleo gasped in well-timed shock.

"He was at the fucking gala!" The intensity of her voice came back as she held her taunt hand in the air for a minute.

"Blackbird, I don't know what to say."

"It was all a lie Cleo, all of it." She lowered her hand defeated again.

"Are you sure?" Cleo questioned gently as she moved up the few steps and reached out her hand to touch the seated woman's shoulder.

"What do you think? She's married, she never told me." She shook her head again. "Can I believe one word she said to me? She said she tried to tell me." Her voice pleaded for Cleo to see the horror in those words. "Like it was my fault I didn't know."

"It wasn't your fault Raven." The blonde lightly massaged the tension under her hand.

"It was. I was such a fucking idiot!" Rae's voice was low and her self-hatred thick. "How could I believe she'd accept me with all of my past? I'm a fucking idiot!" She slammed her hand into the staircase next to her leg.

"Raven. This had nothing to do with your past." Cleo watched her strike out and had to fight harder to control the smile that haunted her face.

"Then what?" The technician looked to her lost.

"It was Thea that kept things from you." Deep brown eyes oozing sympathy held the stare.

"She could have told me anything." Rae wrapped her arms around her middle.

"You opened your heart to her and this is how she treats you. This is her sin Raven, not yours." The blonde moved closer and ran a hand over the top of her dark hair.

"She didn't even warn me." Rae mumbled on. "I found her at the bar having a drink and she didn't even warn me he could just walk up. Which is exactly what he did!"

"Tell me." She purred enjoying the feel of her old lover's pain.

"He just sauntered up." Rae went on closing her eyes as she relived it all again. "Calling her his wife, his Theandra and I'm stood there looking like a fucking idiot." The words came harshly but without any action.

"Feel the pain my little bird, don't try to filter it." Cleo encouraged as she ran her hand through silky black.

"Cleo, I loved her." Rae said softly her heart breaking again. "I really loved her."

"Did you Raven? Do you love her still?" Cleo moved her hand over the raven locks again and again. "Even now?"

"I do." Her voice wavered. "I do, but how can I after what she did?"

"You can't." Cleo whispered, bending down on her knees to bring herself face to face with the broken woman.

"Do you think she was acting all this time?" The technician asked her trying to find perspective. "It hurts Cleo." She whispered back. "It hurts like losing Tommy."

"Raven, I know you might not believe this but I didn't want to be right about this." Cleo reached out her hand and touched Rae's cheek.

"You didn't?" She questioned taken off guard.

"Of course I didn't Raven. All I ever wanted is for you to be happy." Cleo drew her fingers down Rae's cheek slowly.

"I know, I know." Rae closed her eyes trying to even momentarily erase the scene at the gala from her head. "You've never lied to me Cleopatra, even when you knew I didn't want to hear the truth."

"That's because..." Cleo breathed and leaned in closer. The technician opened her eyes, hanging on her every word. She cupped the side of Rae's face gently. "I love you." She held blue eyes.

"Why?" Rae asked holding the loving brown that looked at her.

"You are my blackbird, Raven." The blonde stated the facts simply.

"How do you know?"

Cleo did not answer verbally, instead she reached down to Rae's left ankle. She rolled up the material there and moved the sock down.

"This is how I know Raven." She moved Rae's leg so that the technician could see the tattoo that marked her own body. Cleo let her finger trace the black snake that coiled around woman's ankle.

"It's just a tattoo." Rae countered.

"Is it?" Cleo purred as she moved away and unfastened the tie at her waist letting her robe fall open.

"How does it make you know?" Rae's asked her eyes falling to the almost identical snake that curled its way around Cleo's hips and lower stomach. The serpents open-mouthed head overlapping its tail.

"Is this just a tattoo too?" Cleo questioned her body tingling as she watched blue eyes stare at her. Rae shook her head, her mind miles behind her body's reaction to the Cleo's naked form after all this time apart. It was an age old automatic response and she pushed it away from the forefront as she continued to listen to the blonde. "Raven, I would like to believe that this." She traced her hand across her own stomach caressing the snake. "Makes you think of the same thing as this." She crouched down, letting the robe fall completely open as she traced the smaller tattoo on Rae's ankle again. "It does for me." She leaned down and kissed the top of the asp's head.

"You and I drunk in a tattoo parlour?" Rae smiled down at her.

"No." Cleo breathed moving her head up the technician's body until her face was near Rae's. "You and I forever. United. One heart in two bodies." She breathed deeply holding her body only millimetres from Rae's.

"You were the only one I had to turn too." Rae whispered.

"Is that all it was Raven?" She asked moving her hand to cup Rae's cheek again and bringing her mouth closer still.

"Cleo, on the roof of the Asp?" Rae questioned waiting to see if she remembered. Somewhere her mind screamed for a moment of contemplation. She'd come here to the estate, come back to Cleo for a shoulder to cry on, for a sympathetic ear. The sudden realization of just how close the blonde's body was before her was startling. But here it was, the opportunity to reach out and touch anything she wanted. It was all being offered, a way to forget the pain and the betrayal. It was just so much easier than thinking, so much easier than hurting.

"Yes?" The other woman stood before her old lover slowly twisting the cord of her silk robe between her fingers. Rae's eyes glanced up briefly, momentarily lost in the intricate dance of Cleo's fingers with the silk.

"When..." Rae's voice dropped away her voice forgetting the point she was about to make.

"I'm not good at losing Raven, at that moment I don't know what I was thinking. I don't think either of us did." Cleo let her voice waiver.

"You were my first Cleo." Slowly Rae reached out her hand drawn by the slight rise and fall of Cleo's stomach from her shallow breathing. She placed her shaking fingers on the head of the black serpent. The heat on the tall blonde's skin seared into to numb her arm.

"You are my blackbird." Cleo whispered her possession as she released the silk cord and cupped Rae's face fully.

"I was your blackbird, as you were my Cleopatra." She whispered back.

Cleo brought her mouth closer slowly before finally taking Rae's mouth deeply. Holding her face firm, she kissed her hard. Momentarily Rae fought back any response, something in her mind screamed that this was wrong. But then as facts and timing lost their clarity to cravings and desire, she moved hard into the kiss. She didn't want to think anymore. All she knew was that her body wanted the familiar one waiting before it. With every touch, every motion came more and more numbness. It was better than anything she could ever shoot into her arm.

"Come on Raven." She said softly as she broke the kiss and moved her body back out of the technician's reach.

"Where are we going?" Rae asked dumbly.

"We're going back." Cleo roughly lead her to her feet and dragged her through to the lobby.

"Back where?" She let herself be pulled without any real effort.

Cleo let go of Rae's hand briefly to grab the leather trousers and shirt she had stripped off earlier in the front sitting room. She dressed in lightening speed and then re-took Rae's hand to pull her back through the lobby.

"Back where Cleo?" Her questioned again.

"Come on." Cleo increased the pressure of her pull.

As they reached the kitchen, she released Rae again. Strutting to the back of the enormous open plan kitchen, she grabbed two helmets from the ledge. She marched back over and thrust one into Rae's hands.

"You want to go riding?" She asked as she examined the familiar helmet.

"Ready?" Cleo met the Raven's intrigued eyes as she pulled on the royal blue helmet with a black snake curled around its crown.

Rae merely pulled on the shiny black helmet painted to look like the back of a bird. Cleo pulled open a drawer and pulled out a pair of thick leather riding gloves. She held them out to Rae and started off towards the back door. A metal coat rack held two thick leather jackets.

She donned the gloves and moved to follow her. As she turned into the alcove that held the door, Cleo thrust one of the jackets out and she shrugged it on quickly.

"The keys are in the pocket." Cleo breathed. Her insides full with anticipation as she moved towards the garage door.

"Cleo, you kept all this stuff?" Rae put her hand in and pulled out the keys.



"I make sure it's taken out every week, so she should purr like a lion." The tall blonde avoided the question. She could see the glint in her blackbird's eye. She had won this round at least.

Cleo pushed open the door to reveal a large bike sitting in the centre of the almost barren room.

"The heritage." Rae raced over to bike and bent down to inspect it. It had been the first thing Cleo had ever bought her so long ago. The blonde had dragged her into the bike shop and told her to pick. Rae had been drawn to the black, heavily chromed bike immediately.

Cleo stood framed in the door just watching, her mind revelling in victory.

"I thought you sold her?" She turned as she stood, her hand going into the familiar groove on the left hand grip.

"I never would." Cleo replied honestly.

"I'm glad you didn't." Rae swung her leg over and sat down.

"Shall we?" Cleo drew the door closed behind her.

"Come on!" Rae smacked her leg to beckon the blonde to take her place. In a quick motion she released the kick pedal and slammed the engine into life.

On her way Cleo pressed the garage door open button on the wall, pocketing the remote control. Climbing behind Rae, her hands instantly encircled the technician's waist.

"She sounds great." Rae revved the engine, giddy with the thick vibration of the large iron horse underneath her.

"I've been taking care of her." Cleo rested her head on the shoulder in front of her.

"Where to?" She questioned above the noisy engine that barked as only a vintage Harley could. The door lifted and opened to reveal a still dark sky.

"The beginning." Cleo pointed outwards.

"The beginning." Rae repeated as she rose up her foot and the bike tore out of the garage.

As they reached the main road, she reached inside her open jacket not surprised to find her sunglasses still there. She slid them on. Cleo laughed and clung on tightly as they raced off, her heart and mind soaring free.

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The city flashed by in a whirl as Rae pulled off the main street and passed the familiar little empty house of the parking officer. She entered the main circle and took a shortcut to arrive in front of the Dean's house as she had so many years ago.

"We going in?" Rae laughed as she turned around to look at her passenger.

"Of course." Cleo's eyes sparkled.

"Lead on." Rae smiled and offered her hand to help Cleo dismount as she shut off the bike. Leaning the bike over on its kickstand, she followed the tall blonde under the buildings front arch.

"How brave are you?" She stopped and turned looking Rae in the eye.

"You daring me to do something?" Rae raised an eyebrow as she removed her sunglasses, tucking them away in one sure movement. Cleo reached into her own jacket and drew out a small pair of metal cutters.

"The chain needs to go." She nodded towards the large padlocked gate in front of them.

"Give me those." Rae laughed as Cleo handed them over. She popped the lock off in one quick snap, the sound gone before the echo had a chance to bounce off the walls around them.

"After you." She swung the now open gate for her.

Cleo slipped inside and waited for Rae who followed right behind drawing the gate closed and placing the chain back around so to anyone not looking to close they'd think all was fine. Shadowed by the technician, she led the way past the tall buildings now shrouded in darkness.

Through the back alleys of the campus, they soon reached the student centre. Rae's eyes fixed on the blonde before her as Cleo looked up at the tall building.

"My old office." She whispered.

"Via the roof?" Rae laughed. "Or you want to take the easy way through the halls?"

Cleo looked around her eyes resting on the drainpipe and the easy window ledges.

"Which do you think?" She asked grinning, looking back at the technician.

"Come on, you lead." Rae moved over by the pipe and offered her hands to give Cleo a boost. Cleo took it and was boosted a few feet up to her first handhold.

Nimble and gracefully, she clambered up the pipe. Using firm hand holds and steady foot placements she was soon pulling herself up onto the flat roof of the building.

Rae watched for a second before leaping up to the first handhold and gracefully pulling herself up. She matched the blonde's every expert move, pulling up on the roof just a second after her. Cleo peered over watching the technician complete the climb and held out her hand.

"This always was an easy climb wasn't it?" Rae laughed but she refused to take the offered hand.

"Always." Cleo laughed and moved to the centre of the roof. The sky was cloudy and dark above them and framed the blonde as she pulled off her helmet and shook her hair out. She placed it on the top of a small chimney nearby.

"And these were just too convenient." The Raven followed suit.

"Completely." Cleo paid no attention to their surroundings. She thrust her eager hands under Rae's leather jacket as she pressed their lips together.

"You ready for the last of the climb or are you trying to distract me?" Rae pulled back.

"We never miss this kiss." Cleo snarled back kissing her again before breaking away fully. "Your lead." She added.

Laughing, Rae took a running start at the connecting building and leaped up to the handhold of the first window ledge. She reached it easily and hoisted herself up to sit on it. The wind between the building's blew her hair around her head.

"You coming?" She ribbed Cleo from her high perch. The blonde watched mesmerised for a second, before running and jumping after her.

"You're getting slower!" Cleo laughed into the wind as she scampered past to go higher.

"Me slow?" Rae laughed back at her. "First one to the window wins." She turned and scurried up the side of the building finding handholds and places to leverage her feet that were invisible to most.

Their goal was four floors above them. Cleo laughed as she rose to the issued challenge and with a touch more grace she raced up the building trailing behind Rae slightly.

Rae stopped just short of the window, hanging off a nearby ledge by one arm.

"Who's slow now?" She laughed loudly into the stiff wind.

Cleo looked carefully at the distance left to the window ledge with a gleam in her eyes. She pushed herself from her handhold, up and out towards the winning ledge. It was a risky move and she knew it. They were very high and there was no guarantee she would make it.

"CLEO!" Rae saw the glint in the blonde's eyes and the release in her arms as the woman made her dive and grab for the window. She let herself fall sharply to land on her feet on a lower ledge. She jumped her way underneath to where Cleo could be falling.

By some miracle the blonde's left hand found the window ledge and gripped it tightly. She laughed victoriously as she levered herself up onto the ledge

"You're a mad woman!" Rae yelled into the air as she looked up.

"Yeah, but I won!" Cleo called down before turning to the window. She reached into her pocket to pull out a small black case.

"You cheated!" Rae worked her way up to join the winner on the ledge.

Within seconds Cleo had the window open, laughing still as she slipped inside the dark office. Rae was soon perched on the window and followed her in. The technician closed the window behind them.

Cleo turned as she raised a finger to her lips. One hand aloft told Rae to stop where she was. Rae froze solid, her ears straining. The blonde made a careful path across the room to the door. Opening up the clear plastic cover on a small white box mounted on the wall, she quickly tapped in a series of numbers. Then with a smile she flicked on the main light.

"They still have the same override?" Rae laughed as she let herself move into the room further.

"It was worth a shot!" Cleo laughed admitting she hadn't been sure. She stripped off her jacket and threw it onto of the cluttered desk.

"I'm sure you could have cracked it if not." Rae grinned as she took her jacket off and threw it on the desk as well. "They probably still have the two minute repeat window."

"Probably." Cleo agreed as she took in the atmosphere of her old office.

"I don't remember this place being so messy." The Raven moved an empty pizza box off the old broken leather couch against one wall and sat down.

"At least not before we had our 'meetings' in it." Cleo laughed, dropping down to curl into a chair near the couch.

"Oh yeah." Rae laughed briefly remembering their meetings. "I wonder if the new tenants are aware of how many meetings you and I had?" She swung to face Cleo and rested one leg up on the low arms of the sofa.

"Probably not. After all we didn't leave the kind of evidence around that they do these days." Cleo picked up an empty box of condoms and dropped it into the garbage with a loud laugh.

"Well we did have discretion." Rae closed her eyes for a minute. "Remember that guy on the council?"

"Which guy?" Cleo asked looking up at the dirty badly painted walls.

"The short one, dark hair looked sorta like a weasel?" She leaned back and watched Cleo move towards to examine one of them further.

"Geoffrey!" Cleo called over her shoulder as she examined in detail the picture she had seen from her chair.

"Yeah him." Rae laughed at the name. "Remember how he seemed to come a knocking with some council problem every time you and I were having a meeting. What are you looking at?" She asked absently as she watched Cleo move.

"Blackbird..." Cleo turned as she pointed at the photograph. "Look!"

"What is it?" The technician rose and came to see what she was looking at.

"Council photo 1992." Cleo said her fingertip resting on the glass.

"Wow!" Rae looked at the picture. "You have always taken a great photo." She added softly.

"As have you." Cleo whispered as she turned and slipped her hand around Rae's waist. "Geoffrey lives in Scarborough now." Her voice was low.

"Does he?" She laughed. "What's he up too?"

"Small building firm."

"About his speed." She was surprised when she felt Cleo reach up and kiss her neck.

"No chance of him interrupting." Cleo's hand pulled Rae's shirt out of her waistband. "I enjoyed our meetings Blackbird." She nipped slightly as she freed the shirt.

"Yes." Rae moved her hands up the blonde's sides pulling at the shirt she wore.

"Do you like this shirt?" Cleo growled as she pulled her head back and fingering the silk.

"It's itchy." Rae answered honestly. With a huge grin, Cleo took a side in each hand and pulled her hands apart sharply and quickly. Those buttons that did not fly off broke enough to open up.

"You didn't like it either I see?" Rae's voice was thick with arousal, her craving fuelled by the aggressive move. That Cleo took that moment to lean in and press her lips onto the rise of Rae's breasts made her arousal spark higher.

"Not if it made you uncomfortable." She lifted her hands and stripped the shirt off the dark haired woman's shoulders. Cleo hands moved up pull the cotton bra from the technician's breasts. She pressed her full hands onto the soft flesh beneath.

"Cleo." She moaned the name giving into the pleasure the woman was giving her. Cleo smiled into the kisses she bestowed as she unhooked the bra and pulled it off of her.

"Fly with me Raven." Cleo whispered as she kissed lower still, pulling open Rae's pants as she sunk to her knees.

"Yes." Rae whispered through a hard swallow as the blonde's face pressed between her legs and moved to kiss her hard.

"Soaring free." She breathed deeply before lowering her head back to its task. Rae breathed back as her legs and hips shifted into Cleo's exploration.

Cleo manhandled Rae's pants and panties down, eager to press her lips back where they had come from, only this time she wanted to taste Rae's soft warm flesh. She held the tall woman's waist firmly and drove her tongue aggressively into Rae's want.

"Oh God!" Rae reached out to brace one hand against the wall near the photo. The grip on her hips tightened as her hip thrust forward. "GOD!" The word came out strained and thick, as her knees bent slightly downwards.

In response the blonde held her tighter and the nipped at her lover's inner lips. Holding her firmly in place Cleo licked and thrust her tongue deeply. The taste of her Raven's juices drove her on.

"Don't make this slow." Her voice was desperate as the fire raged in her fuelled on by the day and the heated familiarity of what was happening to her.

Cleo swirled her tongue around inside the warm flesh before her as Rae's free hand moved to bury itself in Cleo's hair just holding there. The blonde shifted slightly, changing the grip she had on the other woman's hips. Moving her face and mouth slightly, she pressed her nose deep. Using her long tongue with an age-old control, Cleo drove inside to reach her 'g' spot directly and precisely. She played with it briefly before pulling back.

Rae moaned through her clenched teeth at the unbearably pleasurable reaction that was gone before she could draw the breath to groan.

"Don't tease!" She growled as her hips rocked on their own from the increased desire.

Cleo reaffirmed her grip on the technician's hips and laughed low. With sudden force she drove her tongue back in straight to where it was needed most. Once there she licked and teased voraciously. Pulling down on the hips she held slightly to reach higher and deeper then ever before.

"Oh yes!" Rae moaned as she moved downwards.

"Go lower." She managed to manoeuvre herself so that she was low on the floor while still maintaining the pressure and build up. Rae followed her down desperate not to stop the contact. "On your knees." She instructed once she was lying down.

"Yes." Rae whispered as she let her legs buckle beneath her and slid onto her knees

Cleo guided the body above down onto her face, pushing up with her nose, tongue and chin. A strong shiver went right up to fill the technician's head and back again. She reached out her free hand to push into the chair at the desk nearby. Braced between it and the wall her arms strained to hold herself upright.

Cleo worked feverishly, driven on by her own mad desire. She drank eagerly before moving her head back to rest on the floor. Leaving Rae's wet opening aching, she panted as she laid back.

"God!" Rae dragged out the two short words as the pressure decreased and melted away.

"It has been a long time since I have bathed in your milk." Cleo purred softly from below.

"Yes." Rae agreed absently as the build between her legs didn't increase but stayed aching and throbbing. "Please don't stop."

"You want more?" Cleo was delighted to hear the tone in the other woman's voice. She leaned up and drew her tongue across Rae's centre before lying down again.

"Yes." Rae answered instantly her hips shivering from the brief move.

Unseen, the blonde reached into the pocket of her pants and drew out a pair of white cotton gloves.

"Tongue?" Cleo licked again as she slipped on one glove before stroking a finger across Rae's hole. "Or fingers?" She asked, her voice a throaty hiss.

"Both." Rae whimpered as her body instantly remembering the feeling of soft cotton.

"You never fail me blackbird." Cleo purred enjoying the sound of Raven's wanting voice.

"Please!" Rae's voice pleaded on its own, her body aching for the more.

Cleo parted wet lips with the gloved hand and drove her tongue in, hard and deep. A cotton wrapped finger was added with each thrust. She built up a hard, fast and heavy rhythm.

Shots of pure fiery pleasure flared up Rae's back into her head with each movement as Cleo thrust deep and hard. With each thrust she rocked down on her knees to drive the fingers deeper into her still. Cleo panted and breathed heavily into the swollen clit above her.

"Are you ready Raven?" She drawled as she drew out her fingers and tongue, quickly shedding the gloves.

"Yes." The answer came automatically, her body anticipating the slow down but its need building regardless. "Please!"

Cleo smiled at the pleading as she drew her hand together touching her thumb to her little finger. The kneeling woman closed her eyes to the first shots of her impending orgasm.

"Are you sure?" Cleo positioned her hand carefully as she questioned.

"Yes." She panted back, the tension in her arms slacked as the drug like sensation ran in and out leaving them weak.

"Then push down." Cleo ordered holding her hand firm as she moved back to lie on the floor.

Rae took a deep breath before thrusting herself down onto the waiting hand. The blonde pushed up as she felt flesh cover flesh, thrusting high deep and hard. She felt Rae's walls shudder and spasm. Far off in the distance the Raven heard her own voice scream in pleasure.

'Your little star never did this to you, did she!' Cleo smiled to herself.

Rae's arms went out to the side to brace herself again as she drove herself down harder. Her insides went crazy in jerky moments of tension and then spasms of contractions. Cleo thrust higher pushing against the woman's tight muscles

"Fly my Raven, fly!" Cleo panted as she thrust and pulled. Rae threw her head back as the hardest of it hit her, the spasms going up into her stomach and through her back. Her breath was short and desperate as her chest struggled to breathe through the panic. With great effort Cleo made a final high thrust, and then held still high up inside of her.

Rae's hips rose slightly before they settled back down onto the unmoving hand. She moaned long and low as the last strong ripples of pleasure racked the wet fiery flesh between her legs. Her head dropped forward as it ended.

Cleo remained motionless for some moments before gently tapping Rae's leg.

"Lift up." She instructed gently and the technician did so without thought. As Rae lifted she pulled her hand free. In a careful movement the tall woman swung off of the blonde causing little firecrackers to go off inside her. "Lie down." She was happy to see Rae doing as she was told. "You still have wings my Raven." She moved to lay her head on Rae's chest.

"I do." Rae whispered as she moved her arms around the woman resting on her. "You knew just how to touch me, from the very first time."

"Pleasure me." Cleo instructed in a low tone as she drew circles around Rae's erect nipples.



"Is that an order?" Rae asked in an equally low tone as she opened her eyes.

"Of course." Cleo purred back.

"An order or a request?" She moved Cleo's hand away from her breast and leaned over as she moved to place the arm out away from reaching her. "Cause you know I don't take orders." She let the blonde's arm go and moved her hand to the bottom of Cleo's shirt.

"But you know how I punish." Cleo growled back.

"Punish me!" Rae laughed tightly as her hand pushed up under the material and then turning her hand she wiggled her fingers under the waist of the leather pants.

"Raven, you know you want to." Her voice purred again.

"I do?" Rae dipped her head down and kissed Cleo's stomach. Her stiff tongue ran over the soft flesh as she dragged the fabric upwards with her other hand.

"Yes, pleasure me." Cleo chuckled as she arched up.

"I still don't take orders." Her hand moved to undo the closure of the woman's leather pants. She kissed the washboard stomach again before using the strength in her arms to pull Cleo off the ground slightly and drag the pants down her thighs.

"Do you still have it in you?" Cleo closed her eyes as she felt her clothes being removed, her mind still very sharp.

"Yes." Rae looked up at her. She leaned back to pull the leather pants completely off of the tall blonde.

"You sound sure." Cleo retorted instantly with a smile. "Show me."

"If you ask nicely." Rae kissed her stomach again before moving upwards and grazing her teeth at the swell of her breast.

"Ask?" Cleo laughed as her hips rose just a little.

"Ask." She licked over the material that hid Cleo's erect nipple. "You have to ask for everything from now on."

"Careful Blackbird." Cleo's voice iced with the gentle warning.

"Ask for one thing." Rae licked over the material again.

"I want you to fuck me." Cleo snarled.

"Quite!" The word was the one that the dark side, the only side of Rae's mind to register the answer, wanted to hear.

"Now Raven." Cleo pushed at Rae's hesitation.

"Yes. Yes." She pressed her hand harder as her fingers curled into the material that separated their flesh.

The technician worked on the object of her lust filled desire for a moment before looking up and stilling her hand. She didn't know what was happening. Where was she? Who was she with? Why was she doing this?"

"Come on Raven." Cleo growled her impatient warning.

Rae looked down at the semi naked woman so close to her blinking as if blinded by the identity of her lover. The dark haired woman moved her hand away from the other woman's body.

"For Christ-sake Raven." Cleo snarled as the hand pulled away from where she wanted it.

Rae looked at her dumbly. Her view on the situation obscured, rather like she watched the scene through a thick lens.

"What did you want from me?" The blonde demanded while her mind twisted violently in enjoyment of the position that Rae had taken over her. "Oh wait." She caught her dark lover's eyes. "I get it. Your little English whore, she used to beg for it did she? Ask you to touch her, to kiss her? Is that what you want?"

"No." The puppet in the play Rae watched shook her head in anger and moved away from the naked blonde on the floor.

Another player entered her vision, this one small and slim, dressed in white overalls.

"What are you doing here?" The new arrival asked softly. "You should have gone home. Slept. Focused." The vision urged.

Cleo watched the movements of her 'pet' and snarled. She pushed herself up to sit and sorted her shirt out. She stared at Rae with a blazing fire in her eyes.

"Look at you." Cleo growled trying to draw the silent woman out of her thoughts.

The woman in Rae's mind disappeared with Cleo's words. The technician empty, feeling nothing drew heavy eyes back to look at Cleo.

"I'm...I'm sor..." Rae let herself stumble over her words.

"Grow up Raven." The blonde hissed back. "You got screwed by some nothing actress." She pulled on her pants and grabbed her jacket. "She treated you like a fool. Get over it."

Motionless Rae listened to Cleo rant, though her words did not truly penetrate into her heart or mind.

"I gave you the chance." Cleo shook her head. "You blew it."

"Wait!" Once more it was the 'other' Rae that called out to the blonde. Rae felt herself slipping away once more as she felt and embraced the numbness that flowed into her once more.

"Why? Now you want to screw me?" Cleo shook her head. Her anger burnt her throat and body.

"I'm going to have you." Rae snarled in return.

"Who Raven?" Cleo fixed Rae with her eyes and walked forward. "Who are you going to take?" Her anger making her hand tremble as she rested it on Rae's cheek her nails pressing roughly into Rae's skin.

"You." Rae replied firmly. "If you want it."

Suddenly it was Cleo who questioned. Did she want this? Did she really want Rae to take her like this?

"I... sorry." Cleo uttered the word in a voice that sounded alien to even her. "No Raven." She leaned forward and did something she couldn't remember doing for a long, long time. She lent her cheek against Rae's surprised to find the skin wet. The shock of finding the 'Queen' of her old realm shedding cool tears on her lust heated skin threw Rae's consciousness back into her raging body. "Cleo, are you crying?" Rae asked the question ever so softly as she wrapped her arms around the woman leaned against her.

"I love you Raven, all I have ever done is love you." The blonde pulled back slowly horrified by her own admission.

"I know." Rae answered tenderly, wiping a gentle hand over the woman's cheek wanting to capture the rare tears somehow. Rae moved forward and pressed her lips softly to Cleo's, kissing her closed mouthed for a few moments tenderly. Only after a time did she run her tongue over Cleo's bottom lip in request. Cleo opened her mouth a little and turned her head slightly as Rae began a soft exploration

Though she had kissed Cleo too many times to count, they had never kissed like this. It was a first kiss of sorts, timid and filled with compassion.

Cleo closed her eyes and for the first time, willingly putting herself completely into Rae's hands.

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Victoria glanced at the digital read out on the alarm clock that she had brought in from the bedroom and placed on the coffee table. When Marcus had brought her home she had planned to go straight to bed, but that was before the noises had started next door in Edward and Thea's room. Now she couldn't leave the sitting area, at least not until it went quiet.

She had heard Edward's raised voice a lot, and there had been muffled sounds of things falling or being knocked over. Now, at a quarter after five it seemed quieter, but Tori was sure she could hear her sister crying.

Unsure what she should or indeed could do about anything, Tori curled herself up on the sofa where she sat and decided to stay where she was. In the morning she would go to Thea and ask her what had happened.

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Cleo watched the stray rays of dawn light filter through the dirty blind up at the grubby office window with an odd feeling inside her. She glanced beside her and saw a long naked back, marked with a bold proud tattoo of a Raven in mid soar. Unable to stop herself Cleo reached out a hand and touched the skin gently.

If someone where to have asked what had happened in the last few hours she was not sure she could have answered them. From the moment Rae had wiped the tears Cleo had lost track of so many things.

The first thing she realised she was missing was the anger. The anger that was always there, ever present in her heart and mind was no longer so obvious. It wasn't so controlling or important.

With careful moves the blonde moved from beside Rae and pulled on her pants and shirt. She slipped her boots as she stood up.

"It's time we were going." Cleo turned and smiled down at Rae. "We've are helmets and things to get." She continued.

"Yeah right." Rae agreed somewhat distantly as she got up and redressed.

"Come on we'd better go." Cleo threw the Raven her jacket from the chair.

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The journey back to the estate wasn't at the breakneck speed than the one from it had been. With Rae obviously in her own world of thoughts and Cleo similarly occupied, the bike meandered slowly through the city without comment from driver or rider.

With the bike back where it belonged in the garage, Cleo entered the kitchen and stretched out her back. It was still very early and one glance at Rae told her how tired they both still were.

"Bed?" She suggested gently. "Your old room is ready."

"Yes." Rae replied watching the blonde walk through the kitchen.

"Good night." Cleo spoke as she reached the doorway. "Sleep well."

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With a slight moan of pain Thea pushed herself up from living room floor. She glanced at Edward who was asleep beside her. Her husband was neither clothed nor naked, with his pants at his knees and his shirt only clinging loosely to his shoulders. The sight of him made her weak stomach turn again and she looked away.

Rising uncomfortably, she moved gingerly to the bed. On automatic pilot she took a pillow and a blanket from it and made her way back to the sleeping form on the floor. She arranged the blanket over him and gently eased his head onto the pillow. He moaned lightly in his deep sleep and turned over, nestling into the pillow a little.

She moved into the bathroom on shaking legs and glanced at the shaving mirror by the washbasin. The pain in her face kept her from having any reaction to the dried blood and rising bruises that looked back at her. Taking some tissue, she ran it under cold water for a moment before dabbing at her split lip. With a slight grimace she decided it was time to take stock and looked down hesitantly at her wrists and body. Long hand-shaped welts were already prominent on her abdomen and around her wrists.

With a shudder she glanced lower. The deep red hand-shaped mark on the inside of her right thigh made all of it real. There was only one thing that would follow such a mark and her mind just didn't want to think of what that had been now. With a chilled shiver Thea gave up the self-examination and inched her way back into the main room.

Edward was snoring lightly as she walked past him and climbed into the unused bed. Taking one of the spare pillows in her arms, she curled herself round it as best she could without agony and began to sob.

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Victoria looked at the closed looming door before her. She'd waited until she'd heard Edward go down the hall laden with papers and folders before she'd moved out of her own room. She swallowed hard as her hand came up to knock on the door lightly. She hoped whatever she had heard the night before was nothing but something inside told her that was impossible.

"Who is it?" Thea asked weakly from behind the barrier.

"Thea, it's me." She called back softly.

The sound of her sister's voice made the actress freeze. Frantically looking around the room Thea saw a pair of sweat pants and a T-shirt and hurriedly she pulled them on. Walking to the door as best as her battered form would allow, she stopping to pick up her panties and the scotch glass from the floor as she passed. She abandoned the glass on the table and pushed the underwear into the pocket of the pants. Only then did she unlock the door.

"Morning sis." She pulled the door open trying to keep her voice happy though each word pulled at the open slice in her lip.

"Oh God Thea!" Tori's breath caught as the door opened and she saw her sister. The thick bright bruise that spread up across the actress's right cheek up toward the bruising around her eye caught the young woman off guard.

"Tori, come in quickly." Thea breathed and took her by the arm gently pulling her inside the room. There could be no damage control now, all hope that she could pass off her face was ruined by the horrified reaction.

"Thea, he did that didn't he?" Tori asked horrified, pulled into the room by her sister's power alone.

"Victoria, calm down." She spoke softly as she pulled the door closed. "It's okay."

"You can't tell me that is okay." Tori reached a shaking hand out towards her. Her eyes locked on the bloody split in her sister's lip. "We have to get you to a doctor."

"It's not that bad I am sure." Thea raised her hand to her lip, gently wincing at the pain even the lightest touch caused.

"Thea, come with me." Tori took her arm softly, feeling bad for the move when she saw the bruising on her sister's arms as well.

"Tori, no!" Thea made a gentle move to pull her arm back, her body frozen by the pain the minute the young woman's fingers closed around her arm. "It's all right. It was nothing major."

"I heard it all." Her eyes welled up. "This was not nothing!"

"Oh God Tori..." Thea was struck by a sudden sadness. It had never occurred to her for a moment that her sister could have heard. "I am sorry baby." She reached up to Victoria's face.

"Why did he do it?" Tori asked unable to understand.

"He had been drinking love and I was tired. It was as much me as him baby." She used a gentle soft voice. Of all the people to have heard, her sister was the worst. Despite all her grand statements and attitude, her little sister was still so beautifully naïve.

"But, but..." The young woman looked away confused for a moment. "Why did he hit you?"

"To remind me of something angel." Thea reaching over and gently pushed Tori's hair behind her ear. "We have to phone Daddy." She blurted suddenly. "He can fix this."

"No Tori." The actress let a firm edge enter her voice. "Daddy can't help. It's all right." She restated the small comfort trying to convince her sister it was true.

"But..." Tori's little mind reeled. First because this had happened at all, second that her father couldn't fix it and third because no matter how she tried to believe it, she knew this was not all right.

"I'm sorry that this affected you angel." Thea spoke honestly. This had always been something she had hidden from her younger sibling.

"It must hurt." Tori forced herself to study her sister's bruised and battered face.

"It's okay." She tried to ignore the fact that it hurt like hell and turn the attention away from herself. "Did you manage to sleep at all baby?"

"Not really." Tori shook her head. "I was worried about you."

"Hey that makes two sleepy eyed sisters then." Thea's attempt at a smile only caused her lip to open up again.

"Oh Thea!" Tori frowned. "Let me get some ice." She stopped in mid-motion. "That's what you put on stuff like that right?"

Thea nodded as she younger sister moved off towards the still open bar cabinet. Tori pulled some ice out of the freezer and after a minute of contemplation wrapped it in a small towel she found there.

"Stupid lip." She cursed slightly as she felt the blood begin to reach her chin.

"Not stupid." Tori came back and held up the makeshift cold pack to her face. "It looks so sore." She absently bit her own lip. Thea let her sister hold her first aid compress there for a moment as her mind tried to think of how to draw the woman's focus away from all this horror.

"Tori..." She began, gently moving the ice pack away from her lip.

"Yes Thea?" Her sister asked eagerly.

"Why don't you and I snuggle down on..." She stopped, glancing at the bed and then changed her sentence. "Why don't we go to your room?" She corrected. "We could curl up together, watch some TV?"

"We could." Tori nodded and yawned. "They have a great movie channel."

"And we could order room service." Thea dropped in the line she knew her sister would respond to.

"Oh room service!" Tori's eyes lit up.

"And get some rest. " She nodded. "Do we have a deal?"

"That does sound good." Tori smiled softly. "Then I can look after you and get you stuff if you need it." She liked the idea of being able to care for her sister.

"Okay, you go and set things up. I'll just drag a brush through my hair and come through in a second." Thea looked at her sister confirming this would plan was a good one.

"All right." Tori moved to the door reluctantly not really wanting to be apart from her for even a small period of time. "I'll start going through the menu for us."

Tori forced a smile as she opened the door and went out into the hall. It faded as she raced towards her room.

'This is not okay, this is not all right!' Her mind screamed.

As she reached her room, Victoria pushed the door closed and grabbed her clutch purse off the table. Fumbling through it she pulled out the playbill and ran her eyes over it. Her spirits rising when she found the theatre's telephone number was on the back.

She hurried to the phone and dialled in the number. She only knew two Canadian's, and she knew that Marcus wouldn't be much help here and now. That left the other one and since that Canadian was a friend of Thea's she hoped maybe she'd know what do to. If Daddy couldn't fix this she was lost. Tori listened to the phone ringing

"Good morning Pantages Theatre." A clipped professional reply came onto the phone.

"Good morning can I speak too..." She panicked realising she couldn't remember the tall woman's name. "Can I speak too..." She flipped to the credit's page happy to see the bold name by the title lighting director "Cassie O'Keefe please, it's urgent"

"Ma'am very few of the cast and crew are here today." The voice replied patiently hoping to get out of any major work.

"Please check if she is." Tori's heart fell. "It's an emergency."

"I'll have to have your name please."

"Victoria Wilcox." She rambled it off.

"Please hold." The phone went quiet.



She closed her eyes hoping desperately that Cassie would be there and remember who she was.

"Miss. Wilcox?" The voice said suddenly.

"Yes?" Tori replied quickly with her hopes high. She opened her eyes and fixed them on the door in case Thea came while she was talking.

"Sorry Miss. Wilcox, Miss. O'Keefe isn't in."

"Do you have any idea when she will be?" Tori asked with a desperate edge to her voice.

"Probably tomorrow morning." A tired tone came into the voice.

"Oh!" The deflated word came from her softly. "Could I have a message left in case she comes in before that?"

"Have you tried her contact numbers?" The person on the other end suggested trying to get off of the phone as quickly as possible.

"Contact numbers?" Tori asked confused.

"All cast and crew have contact numbers on the staff information sheet." An edge entered the assistant's voice, assuming this was one of the lighting chief's dumb crew.

"Oh, the information sheet." She tried to sound like she knew this. Her mind raced, where was she supposed to find one of those.

"I suggest you try them." The voice was condescendingly.

"I misplaced mine, could you give me the numbers please?" She put the charm on thick as a thought came to her.

"This is highly irregular. Do you have a pass code I could check?"

"Oh pass code." Tori's mind raced. She turned with the phone in her hand and her purse dropping off the table as she knocked it with her elbow. Thea's backstage pass fell out at her feet. "Oh wait, I have my pass from last night gala." She picked it up. "I'm at a hotel so I don't have all my stuff." She tried to get a good story going.

There came a slight sigh as the assistant decided this was definitely a techie who had got themselves drunk and laid and was panicking about whether or not she was supposed to be working.

"Just the first three digits will do." He yawned slightly.

"First three are 577." She smiled impressed with herself, though panic crept into her as a long silence loomed.

"Okay. It was O'Keefe you wanted? Yeah?"

"Yes." Tori fumbled in the desk for the hotel pen and stationary. "Thank you for being so very helpful."

"There are two numbers, a cell phone, and a home contact. Do you want both?"

"Yes please both, I really need to get her as soon as possible." Her pen was poised ready for the numbers.

The assistant gave another sigh, he had heard that O'Keefe ran a tight ship and by the sounds of it, it was obviously true.

"Okay Cell 905-443-7282." He left large pauses between each set of digits.

"905..." She repeated so she'd get it right. "443-7282."

"Yes."

"And the home one?" Tori scribbled the word home before getting ready to write the next number.

"416-567- 4211."

"416-567..." She repeated again. "4211. Thank you very, very much." She spoke quickly and hung up the phone. Hurriedly she punched the number to the woman's cell phone.

"Knock, knock. Tori?" Thea rapped on the door lightly.

Tori took in a deep breath and hung up the ringing phone and stuffed the paper in her pocket quickly as she hung up the receiver.

"Come in!" She called happily trying not to sound guilty as the door opened.

"What were you up to? Ordering already?" Thea smiled at her as she slowly entered. Favouring her upper body with her right arm hugged to herself.

"No!" She smiled tightly. "I was checking if I had any messages." She realised the excuse was lame but hoped it would fly.

"Oh right, meet someone nice did you?" Thea smiled gently.

"A few." She grinned back. "Your friend directed me to all the hot ones." She tried the small reference to try and judge how much Cassie could help.

"My friend?"

"The tall woman." Tori looked like she was trying to remember her name. "Cassie?"

"Oh Cassie." Thea's smile was sad, but she spoke in a loving tone. "She'd steer you right."

"She's really nice." Tori smiled happy with her sister's response, phoning this woman would definitely be a good move.

"She is." Thea agreed fighting the tears that threatened to spring in her sadness.

"So what do you want for brunch?" Tori asked moving over to the unmade bed, grabbing the menu from the stand.

"Anything." Thea smiled moving to the bed with her. "Anything at all."

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"Lorraine." Cleo smiled gently as she called for the attention of the young girl who was busy in the kitchen.

"Yes Miss. Eaton?" The small dark haired woman turned with a smile, though she was somewhat surprised to see her employer dressed in a silk robe at three thirty in the afternoon.

"Could you fix up a tray with toast and juice, and take it up to Raven's room?" She asked softly.

"Of course." The maid nodded.

"As soon as you can." She added as she picked up the pile of mail and walked through into the lobby. Cleo looked down at the pile and put most of them on the side table near her study before moving back to climb back up the stairs. She walked down the long hall and pulled open the door to her Raven's bedroom suite.

Fitted out in dark blue silk the walls as well as at the windows were the picture of decadence. Cleo smiled at the sight of Raven in the bed, her long black hair such a contrast to the white silk of the bed sheets.

"Raven..." She quietly called as she approached the bed.

Rae mumbled as her arm stretched out from her position on her back. The sound of Cleo's voice pulled her awake. For a moment she didn't know where she was or even when this was. The world felt so mixed up to her.

"I didn't mean to wake you." Cleo padded across the thick pile carpet and sat on the bed.

"That's okay." She blinked her eyes a few times realising where she was. " Good morning." She offered as she sat up.

"It's afternoon Blackbird." Cleo smiled at her.

"Well then." She laughed. "Good afternoon."

"I forgot how soundly you could sleep." Cleo's voice was tender. "Any plans for the day?"

"Not a one." Rae looked in her internal calendar sorrowfully erasing the large 'go to cabin with Thea' that had been stamped over these free days from the Theatre. "You?" She added softly.

Cleo looked at Rae and then thought for a moment. She had a hundred and one things booked for her day.

"I have to dash out for a minute." The blonde reasoned. "But no more than that."

"I understand." Rae smiled at her. "Have that little company to run."

"I could do it all by phone." Cleo offered. "Or on the computer." She reasoned, then remembered she was seeing Edward to finalise the details on their deal. There was no way she could do that here or miss it.

"I could tour around the vault or do something while you're working." Rae offered.

"Raven, I have a better idea." Cleo almost choked knowing that scenario was the worse possible. "Why don't you take your Harley out? Give her a good long ride?"

"I could do that." Rae's eyes lit up. She hadn't been riding in ages and a good long run would be so relaxing.

"Why don't you? I shouldn't be more than an hour."

"Which means I have three." She laughed lightly in jest.

"Two." Cleo replied laughing herself.

"Okay." Rae nodded. "Then perhaps we could go out for dinner?" She asked trying to cut out a plan that eased her minds scream for order.

"Of course. You chose where, and book it up."

"Sounds good." Rae nodded.

"Do you mind if I dash now?" Cleo made a small move to stand up.

"No, go on." Rae yawned.

"Be safe my Raven." Cleo whispered blowing her a kiss from the door.

"You to Cleo." Rae whispered back.

"Make it somewhere nice." Cleo leaned back, not accustomed to the feelings of tenderness and warmth she was feeling.

"The best of course." Rae grinned.

"I'll leave you in peace." She whispered as she moved off the bed.

"Cleo?" Rae called as the blonde reached the doorway. "Thank you for..." She didn't finish, she wasn't sure what to say.

"I have to go." Cleo made it easier to end this awkward scene.

"Conquer the world Cleopatra." Rae used the old line without thought.

"Do you want me to move the jeep into the garage?" She asked faltering when she heard Rae's words.

"Yeah if you don't mind." Rae smiled at her, trying to pinpoint the change in the tall blonde she thought she knew so well.

Cleo slipped out and closed the door.

"I conquer with you as my standard." She whispered the old reply before moving down the stairs.

Continued in Act XIV...

### The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

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## ~ After the Curtain Falls ~

by Beth Dragon & Kathleen Wolf

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**Feedback:** All comments are greatly appreciated and can be sent to: [kathandbeth@hotmail.com](mailto:kathandbeth@hotmail.com)

**Thanks:** To Emma, for her never ending love, support and chocolate. To the Ex-Guards Village for all their feedback and expert advice.

## **Act XIV**

Rae reluctantly slid the lock to the condo open and let the door swing open. The faint smell of scented candles hung in the air from the day before. Stepping inside she closed the door behind her quietly as she always did, even though she knew Thea wouldn't be here. The actress wouldn't be coming home now as she had her husband to be with. The acidic thought stuck in Rae's throat.

"Just get the clothes and get the hell out of here O'Keefe." Rae spoke to herself as she moved toward the dresser.

The light flashing on the phone caught her attention. Her hand went out automatically, but then hesitated.

"Could be work." Her mind reasoned as she picked up the receiver dialling in the code for the machine.

"You have one new message." The automated voice called back to her and Rae punched in the code to retrieve it.

"Cassie?" The voice was hesitant but clear. "It's Victoria, Thea's sister. I hope you get this." An edge developed in the young English woman's voice. "I need to see you. It's important, really important. I..." She began another sentence but then the phone cut off and the message ended.

Rae listened to the words without breathing.

"Shit!" She swore when the message cut off, her mind reeling. It wasn't Thea calling, it was Thea's sister which had to mean things had gotten crazy. She punched in the caller ID code and waited for the response.

"The last number to call..." A standard computer voice piped back at her. "Was 416-291-2222." She memorised the number and took the phone book out of the drawer.

'You have to be at hotel Victoria now which one?' Rae thought to herself as she found the proper pages and scanned the numbers.

"Harbour Castle!" She muttered as she pulled back on her jacket. "This better be good." She growled as she pulled open the door and raced out.

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Rae parked the loud bike in the front entrance and hopped off. She sauntered through the door, held open by the slightly stunned attendant and walked straight up to the counter as she took off her helmet.

"Which room is Victoria Wilcox in?" She barked at the attendant felling very edgy about this. The call had upset her. 'No information and no answers.' The distressing thought went through her head again and again.

"I'm afraid." He looked her up and down. "I cannot give that information out."

"Well how about you phone her room then and get her to come down?" She sighed and put her helmet on the counter, looking him up and down in return.

"Who shall I say is here?" He sighed back and picked up a pen.

"Cassie O'Keefe." Rae said shortly, running her hand through her hair to fix it after the long ride. The attendant patched through to Tori's room and after a moment he turned back to her.

"If you would like to find a seat in the bar, Miss. Wilcox will be down shortly." He motioned to the hotel lounge across the mezzanine.

"Fine, thank you." She took the helmet in one hand and headed for the bar. She found a seat easily in the empty room and impatiently waited.

"Cassie?" Tori spotted the tall Canadian as soon as she stepped out of the elevator and hurried across the lobby to the bar.

"Victoria, what's wrong?" Rae asked right off too wound up for small talk.

"Thea..." Tori suddenly burst into tears unable to stop the emotion that had been building since she had listened to the violence and horror the night before.

"Victoria what?" Rae asked near frantic as she tried to comfort the small woman she barely knew. "What's happened?"

"We have to get her out of here." Tori babbled knowing she was not making sense.

"Tori, I need to know what's going on first." She tried to find clarity.

"I didn't know who to call or what to do. I only know you." Tori sobbed, clinging tightly to the tall woman.

"It's okay Victoria." Rae smiled softly at her realising that she had to be the controlled one. "I'm glad you called me. Now what's going on?"

It was becoming obvious to Rae that this wasn't about her and Thea as she had suspected, but rather something else. That fact hit her quite hard and caused her even more worry.

"Do you think she'll listen to you? If you tell her she has to go?" Victoria asked suddenly.

"Why does she have to go?" Rae pushed not understanding.

"Come and talk to her." The young woman turned and stepped towards the lobby.

"Victoria..." Rae's mind froze.

"Please." The young woman sobbed. Rae nodded her throat dry as she followed the young woman. She had no choice but to follow and find out what was going on. "At least get her to see a doctor." Tori said as she moved through the lobby.

"A doctor?" Rae blurted taken aback as she raced with Tori. "Why does she need to see a doctor?"

Tori slipped into the elevator as the doors were opening she pressed the button before Rae stepped inside just as the door closed.

"Tori, why does she need to see a doctor?" Rae's mind spun violently. What the hell was going on?

"Just to make sure. She says she's okay." Tori brushed at her eyes and ran her hands over her jeans. "But you never really know do you."

"What happened?" The panicked edge in Rae's voice was obvious.

The elevator sounded and the doors opened, Tori slipped out and hurried down the corridor. The technician followed dumbly.

"Cassie, please hurry. He'll be back... I have no idea when." Tori called back.



"I'm coming." Rae moved swiftly with her. "Who's coming back?" The fear in Tori's voice confused her. Who could be coming that she'd be this afraid of?

"Edward." She stopped at a door.

"Why are you afraid of him coming back?" Rae's heart broke again.

"Thea, only me. Can I come in?" She knocked lightly on the door.

"It's open." The strained voice came from inside.

Tori turned to Cassie, just in time to see the soft look on Rae's face as her heart melted at the sound of the actress' voice. She had thought she would never hear it again.

"A doctor that's all. Just try?" She begged in a hushed tone, her eyes watery. "Yes?"

"I'll do my best." Rae confirmed her mind reeled as she tried to narrow down what was going on. Tori turned back to the door pulled the handle and pushed it open.

"Where have you been sis?" Thea looked up to the door as Tori closed it behind Rae.

Rae's whole world fell apart as her eyes registered the bruises and blood that looked back at her. Her hands clenched at her sides without thought, her bottom lip locked as rage welled up inside her.

"Rae?" Thea breathed tears springing to her eyes.

'Who is Rae?' Tori thought as she frowned and looked at her sister but answered herself as she looked at the tall Canadian. 'Just what was going on here?' With a slight shiver Tori reminded herself that this wasn't the issue and nor was it very important as she moved to the bed.

"I had to get someone." She apologised softly.

Rae just stood fixed in her spot and just stared. She didn't know what to say or what to do. Thea glanced at her silent sister before turning her eyes back to Rae.

"Did Edward do this?" Rae's voice was broken.

"Yes." Tori answered quickly.

"I'm going to pull his arms off!" A stronger angry voice answered her question not really needing Tori's answer.

"Rae, No!" Thea spoke finally, her voice soft and pained. "I'm okay." She shook her head gently, the movement sending flares of ache up into her brain.

"We have to get you to a doctor." Rae winced at the pain on her face. "No, you're not okay." She spoke firmly. "It appears that your husband tried to knock your head off last night."

"Tori." Thea turned to her sister. "Could you go down to reception to see when Edward will be back? He will have left a return time."

Tori looked at her sister then the Canadian and moved to the door.

"Tori, pack up your things." Rae put up a hand. "I'm getting you both out of here."

"Okay." Tori took the handle in her hand as Rae walked to the phone sitting on the table she picked it up,

"Tori, no." Thea called to her. "Go to reception."

"Tori pack!" Rae instructed in an authoritative voice as she turned to bark instructions into the phone. Victoria stopped unsure what to do. "I want a limo downstairs in five minutes. Authorisation 12A14 for The Royal and Free Corporation."

"Tori, go to reception." Thea instructed again trying to overrule Rae.

"Victoria, pack." Rae fixed the small young light brown hair woman in a stare as she hung up the phone. "Now." Tori pulled the door open and slipped out, closing it behind her.

"I'm going to take you and Tori to the condo." The technician spoke in a detached voice. "I'll arrange for a doctor to come there for you."

"Rae, I'm all right." The actress tried to reason with her.

"Thea..." Her voice wavered as she spoke the name. "Angel, you are not all right."

"I'm sorry love." She suddenly started to sob again feeling her lip split as she cried.

"You have nothing to be sorry for." Rae spoke softly wanting to move to comfort her but finding herself unable to move no matter how hard she tried. "This is his fault not yours."

"I meant." She gasped as a pain flared through her abdomen. "For everything."

"That's not important right now." Rae words came blankly. "We have to make sure you're okay." She watched a small blood drop cascade down Thea's chin. "He's going to pay for this Thea." She vowed to her.

"It was my fault." Thea brushed at her lip.

"How?" Rae countered back. "There is nothing in the world that you could do to make this your fault."

"I didn't..." Thea stopped.

"You didn't what?" Rae pushed. "There is nothing you could say, do or think that would make him hitting you your fault." Her voice was adamant. "The bastard did this cause he's got a death wish." She growled at the end.

"No." Thea shook her head. "He did this, because I wouldn't..." She stopped and looked at Rae, pain shadowed her usually bright eyes. She swallowed hard she added the next words in a whisper. "You know what I wouldn't."

"Thea..." The words came out the technician slowly. "Are you telling me he raped you?"

"Can a man rape his wife?" She asked pulling her knees up to her chest causing the pain inside her to increase and she sobbed hard.

"Yes, they can." Rae's answer came instantly. "If you didn't want too and he made you, that is rape."

"Oh." Thea breathed.

"I'm going to fucking kill him!" Rae turned and her hands shook in rage.

"No Rae." Thea snapped in worried tone. "He might hurt you."

"Thea, you don't know me." Rae shook her head, laughing in a low sinister tone. "I can feed him his teeth and he won't even have seen me hit him."

Thea closed her eyes. She had a fair idea of what Rae was capable of and she didn't want to think about what her lover could do any more than she wanted to think about her own predicament.

"Rae." She spoke quietly, relieved when the technician turned back to look at her. "It hurts." Her voice was childlike.

"Where Thea?" Rae moved over to the bed for the first time, very concerned for her injuries.

"Everywhere." She replied honestly. Not sure when her whirling mind had decided it no longer cared about damage control and only wanted the woman she loved to make everything right again.

"We'll make it better Thea." Rae spoke softly as she moved to sit down on the bed.

"How?" Thea asked looking up into Rae's blue eyes.

"I'm going to get you out of here to someplace safe and get a doctor." Her mind raced with plans. "He won't hurt you anymore."

"Rae please..." Thea reached up a hand towards Rae. She wanted only one thing right now and that was to be held. Though this small action seemed to be lost on the technician.

"All packed." Tori came back into the room with her suitcase in such a hurry that she didn't bother to knock. She stared a bit thrown by the two of them on the bed. Rae held Thea's eyes for a second before moving away.

"Let's go, the limo should be downstairs. Tori help Thea, I'll take the luggage." She instructed in a gentle authoritative tone.

"Okay." Tori said hurrying to her sister's side eager to be somewhere safe.

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Rae closed the door behind the doctor as he left and went straight back to sit down in the leather armchair. Tori sat patiently and quiet on the couch. In the distance the soft strained sound of Thea's breathing was a disturbing reminder of what had happened.

"Is she going to be okay?" Tori asked in a whisper as Rae sat down.

"Yes, the doctor says the bruising should fade in a week or so. Nothing was broken." Her voice was tight. "The cut on her lip should heal fairly quickly with the stitches he put in and her ribs are only bruised. The sedation he gave her should keep her out till the morning."

"Why did he do it?" Tori asked her voice thick as she shook her head.

"I don't know Tori." Rae shook her head back. "Has he done this before?"

"I don't know." The young woman replied honestly.

"He probably has." Rae added blankly.

"She's always been accident prone." Tori continued as she put some thought into it.

"Did her accidents get worse and more damaging after she was with Edward?" It pained Rae to say his name. She rubbed her forehead at the rage and tension that had firmly rooted itself there.

"Sort of." Tori replied as she stood up and looked down at the technician. "Can I get a drink? Do you want one?"

"Help yourself." Rae spoke softly. "This is home." She said the reference without thinking. "A water would be great." She tried to make her words not sound too odd.

"Do you have coffee?" Tori pulled open the fridge when she reached it and took a bottle of water.

"Yeah." Rae stood up. "Let me get it for you."

Rae got up and moved to the high kitchen cupboard. Moving the boxes of Thea's herbal tea she got the coffee. Leaning against the counter, the young English woman watched the tall Canadian's every move. Rae paid no attention to how she was being watched as she set up the coffee maker.

"It'll only take a few minutes." She mumbled as she flipped it on.

"You drink that stuff?" Tori pointed to the tea in the still open cupboard.

"Nope." Rae laughed as she followed to look where the hand pointed.

"I thought Thea was..." Tori stopped as she looked at Rae whose laughter stopped as the other woman words did. The technician looked away, busying herself with getting a cup for the young woman. "Rae?" She tried out the name to see if she got a reaction.

"Yeah Tori?" She turned and questioned without thought. The long silence having dulled her mind as she again thought of what was going on around her.

"What's going on?" Tori asked quietly as she reached out and put her hand on Rae's, which was turning the coffee mug round absently in the air.

"What do you mean?" She questioned taken off guard by the direct and yet open question.

"The tea." Tori listed the points. "That you answer to Rae. That this place smells of Jasmine candles. The fact that the jacket I bought Thea for her birthday last year was hung up on the back of the door when we got here." Tori motioned to the door where her sister's denim jacket hung. "What am I missing out on?"

'What am I supposed to say?' Rae's mind questioned itself as she looked at her a bit dumbfounded.

"She left her jacket last time she came over to watch a movie." The tall woman babbled in an attempt to cover the truth. "And the tea..."

"Shall I tell you what I think?" Tori shook her head, not interested in a list of reasons or excuses.

"What do you think?" Rae stopped and asked her holding the cup tightly in her hand.

"I think my sister lives here." She spoke slowly as the facts cleared in her minds and the technician swallowed hard. "With you." She added fixing Rae with hazel eyes. Rae released the breath she was holding.

"Our schedules at the Theatre are opposite and your sister was sick of the hotel." She tried to salvage some damage control. This was not hers to be telling, this was Thea's and besides, with all that had happened there didn't seem much to tell.

"With one bed?" Tori asked, smiling when she heard Rae laugh lightly. She leaned back against the counter and folded her arms over her chest.

"You're not going to buy that another one is on its way are you?" Rae smiled softly at her.

"No." She shook her head. Her heart slightly saddened that Thea hadn't told her so many things it seemed. A suddenly sickening thought suddenly gripped Tori by the throat. "Is that why?" She glanced to where her sister slept. "Why he raped her?"

"I don't know Tori." Rae shook her head, suddenly very horrified by that idea. "I didn't know she was married, I don't imagine Edward had a clue about me."

"Oh." Tori breathed quietly, realising she wasn't the only person who had been in the dark about aspects of her sister's life.

"Why he did it doesn't really matter Victoria." Rae frowned. "Whatever the reason he had no right, and now we have to concentrate on helping her though this."

"What about Edward? What are we doing to do about him?" The young woman asked worried.

"I'm going to take care of him Tori." Rae tried to keep the rage out of her voice. "You concentrate on your sister. Deal?"

"But we go back to England tomorrow." Tori looked at Rae in a panic. "Edward and I."

"I was hoping you'd stay." Rae smiled at her.

"I can't." Tori's voice wavered. "The ticket isn't flexible."

"Victoria, the ticket is not a worry." Rae laughed at the simplicity of her worry.

"It is, I haven't got the money to buy another." Tori argued, not appreciating her laughter.

"I'll buy you a new one whenever you need to go home." She clarified the dilemma easily.

"You can't do that." Tori began to argue. "It's expensive to fly to England."

"Victoria, you don't need any money." Rae repeated and shook her head. "Thea didn't tell you at all about me did she?" She questioned. Tori sadly shook her head, again reminded about how much her sister hadn't said. "Let's just say I'm very well off." She smiled softly at her. "I could buy you a plane to go back on if you wanted."

"Oh." The noise came out of her quietly.

"Tori..." Rae looked at the time. "I have to go meet someone."

"What?" Tori's voice was tiny.

"Order yourself in dinner and such." Rae dropped a stack of bills on the counter.

"You're going to leave?" Tori looked at her, panic again flooding her eyes. "But Thea needs you." She glanced at her sister.

"Tori, Thea needs you more than me right now." The technician backed away hurt.

"Don't be silly." Tori replied. "It's you that lives with her. Do you love her?" She looked at the Canadian trying to figure out what else was going on that she didn't get.

"Victoria it's not that simple." Rae shook her head.

"Why?" She questioned not understanding until her mind started to do some calculations and creative thinking. "Oh no, wait a minute." Tori looked at Rae with eyes tinged with anger. "I get it." She took a step away from Rae.

"Whoa!" Rae questioned seeing the look. "What do you get? I'm not sure you have the right idea."

"Thea's not your problem, didn't expect this complication did you? It was great to be involved with the star, great for your ego, but this!" She moved her hand to her face where her sister's bruises would be. "This is trouble."

"No Tori!" Rae shook her head adamantly though her voice was almost non-existent. "That is not it."

"It's okay, I understand perfectly." Tori backed out of the kitchen area, looking to the door. "Perhaps you should go." She glared at the other woman.

"Fine." Rae shrugged in defeat. "I'll phone in an hour to make sure everything is okay." She moved heavily towards the door.

"Why bother?" Tori growled.

"Victoria, there is a hell of a lot going on here that you don't understand!" Rae snapped.

"Then make me." Tori snapped back. "Because all I can see is my sister. Beaten, raped and sedated, and her lover leaving to go and meet someone else. You have to admit Rae, that doesn't look great."

Rae rubbed at her face, Tori's words making sense.

"No, it doesn't." Rae said softly. "Your sister broke my heart last night." She didn't know how she was saying this. "We were supposed to be building a life together and then suddenly I'm being introduced to her husband." Tori stopped glaring and her gaze turned softer. "It came as a bit more than a shock."

"That makes it okay for her to be beaten and raped?" Tori's voice held no malice just disillusionment. "She broke your heart so she can be broken too?"

"God NO!" Rae's voice was adamant and firm. "Tori, no matter how mad I was last night, how hurt I am..." Her voice was sad and hurt. "I never wanted this to happen. I wish I could erase it. I wish I could have stopped it."

"Then why are you leaving? Rae, what is more important than this?" Tori knew she may be being unreasonable, but she was thousands of miles from anything familiar and her world was in tatters. Rae was the only thing she had that was anything like stable.

"Okay, okay." Rae conceded defeated. "I'm not going anywhere". She couldn't bear to say she was going to Cleo. The horror of it threaten to close in her vision as she tried to stay focused and not let Tori catch on.

"Cassie, are you okay?" Tori took a step forward a little concerned at the other woman's expression. Had she pushed too hard in her desperation?

"Yeah I'm fine." Rae shook off her thoughts.

"I'm sorry." Tori added. "What I said then, it wasn't fair."

"No need to be sorry Victoria, you've been in the dark about this."

"Rae. If you need to go, of course you should go." The young girl backed away.

Rae's heart crumpled again as Tori apologised to her.

"It'll only be for a short time I'll come right back." Rae didn't want to sound like she was pleading but she needed to get away for this if just for a moment and make sense of what was going on.. "It's partially to take care of Edward."

"Whatever." Tori's voice was soft and yet so sad.

The word broke Rae's reserve. She couldn't leave them, either of them.

"No Tori, I'm not going anywhere." The resolution stuck in Rae's head. "I need to be here in case either of you needs anything."



"Sure?" Tori asked quietly.

"Positive." Rae walked over and picked up the phone. "What would you like for dinner? The skies the limit." She smiled at her remembering just how hard all of this must be on the young woman.

"Pizza?" Tori replied watching Rae's every move.

"Pizza it is." Rae laughed at her choice. "What do you like on it?"

"Pepperoni." She smiled again.

"Pepperoni and cheese it is." Rae moved off toward the bathroom. "I'll order it while I make my other calls, won't be a minute."

"Okay." Tori nodded and re-took her seat on the couch. Rae nodded back and closed the bathroom door silently.

Rae leant against the hard wood for a second trying to get her bearings, trying to get control back. In less than twenty-four hours her world had done a three sixty degree twist and then another three sixty in a whole different direction. What the hell was she going to do about all this?

She had Cleo waiting to go to dinner, Thea sedated and Tori badgering her for answers and guidance. She knew whatever was going on she had to get hold of Cleo as soon as possible. She punched the numbers into the phone and waited.

"Eaton." Cleo answered briefly.

"Cleo, it's Rae." She spoke in a strained voice.

"Blackbird!" Cleo was both excited and surprised to hear Rae's voice.

"Cleo..." Rae didn't know where to start.

"What is it Blackbird?" Cleo asked her voice falling a notch. She knew Raven's tones well enough to know instantly that something was wrong.

"Something horrible has happened Cleo." She began softly.

"My God, what?" Cleo's mind whirled. The bike, was her Raven injured? "Are you all right?"

"Yeah I'm fine." Rae shrugged. "Cleo, I got a call from Thea's sister." She just blurted it out not knowing what else to say. "Thea's husband, he raped her and beat the crap out of her last night."

"What?" Cleo's voice was horrified her mind flared and everything lost its place. "Where is she? How is she?"

"The Doctor has her sedated. I took them both out of the hotel and back to the condo." Her voice was small, she waited for the woman's anger to flare.

"Blackbird, take them to the estate." Cleo spoke without thinking, unable to even remotely believe what she was being told.

"Are you sure?" Rae questioned the move.

"There is help there and security. Where is he?" She asked trying to get her bearings.

"I don't know Cleo." Rae's voice gained an edge. "I'm going to fucking kill him! You don't do this, not to anyone." The line in her head blared bright and screamed for vengeance, this was one act that could not go unpunished.

"You're right of course Blackbird but our first thought must be getting Thea and her sister somewhere safe." Cleo's mind raced to catch up with the situation. Edward Jones had left her office about five minutes earlier. She knew he'd be long out of the building so she had no hope it intercepting him and taking care of this herself right now.

"There's only the doorman here." Rae's mind suddenly came aware of the security issue. "Though I'm sure one on one I can take him without even breaking a sweat."

"Raven, get a limo, take them to the estate. I'll leave the office now." She piled up papers on her desk getting ready to leave.

"Okay." Rae conceded. "I'm sorry Cleo, it's just..." She didn't know how to explain this.

"Blackbird, don't be sorry. Did you get Potterly to check her out? Or did you use another doctor?"

"No, I couldn't reach Potterly." Rae's voice was raw. "I tracked someone down through the hospital."

"Shall I contact Potterly anyway?" Cleo picked up her coat from her chair and put it on.

"Maybe, her lips split, the other Doctor thinks her ribs are bruised. Her face should probably be x-rayed at some point." Rae listed the grim facts in a numb voice. "This guy sorta just took care of the worse stuff."

"Forgive me Blackbird I was thinking about other things." Cleo admitted wondering if Rae had even thought about that portion of the trauma.

"Oh Christ." The weight of it came down on her. "She wouldn't let the Doctor examine her for that. I have no idea how bad it is."

"I'll get Potterly." Cleo stated taking the choice away.

"Thank you Cleo." She spoke softly.

"Blackbird." The blonde's voice went soft and tender. "Are you all right?" She stressed the word 'you'.

"I don't know what I am." Rae strained to answer. "I can't believe this has happened, I feel responsible. I hate myself for thinking about how much she hurt me."

"Come home." Cleo cooed softly. "We'll sort this together. It's all right blackbird, just get everyone back to the estate."

"Okay, I'll call for a limo." Rae felt a bit more in control.

"I'll go now and I will get Potterly. Raven..." Cleo reluctantly readied herself to hang up.

"Yes?"

"This is not your fault." Cleo spoke slowly and forcefully.

"I know." Rae knew deep down it wasn't her fault. Edward had done this. He had made the choice but she couldn't help thinking how she'd had some role in all of this.

"Hurry home." Cleo placed down the office phone as her mind spun. "Fucking idiot!" She hissed throwing the agreement that Edward Jones had just signed sealing their business across the room. She grabbed her cell phone and stalked to the door as the papers settled behind her.

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Cleo wrapped an arm around her waist as she watched the long black car pull through the security at the far end of the drive. The electronic gates swung shut and Cleo turned to the young woman stood next to her. The woman waited on her every instruction

"Go and see if you can find Graham. We may need help getting Miss. Winters inside."

"Yes ma'am." The young maid moved back into the house to look for the head of security.

Cleo watched with a slight shiver as the car drew to a halt a few feet from her. The driver raced around to get the door. Tori climbed out first, slightly wide eyed at the house and the tall well-dressed woman on the stairs. It was Rae who came out next, as Cleo walked down the stairs to her.

"She's still out cold." Rae frowned at Cleo as she approached. "I'm going to have to carry her in."

"I've called for Graham." The blonde spoke softly.

"I should take her." Rae spoke softly back. "She's not heavy."

"Of course." Cleo kept her voice controlled as she watched Rae turn back to the car and gently lift Thea into her arms. The sight of the limp woman made her weak.

"What room?" Rae questioned as she turned back, Thea draped lifeless in her arms.

"The blue." Cleo moved over to collect Tori as Rae began to slowly climb the stairs. "You must be Victoria."

"Yes, hello." Tori smiled at her. "Thank you Miss. Eaton."

"No need Victoria." Cleo replied waving off the thanks. "I have put you in the green room. It is beside your sister's with a connecting door." Tori smiled again happy she wouldn't be segregated from her sister in this strange house. "This way." She motioned to the young woman to follow Rae.

"Take the limousine and get it cleaned. Upholstery and paint work." Cleo turned once everyone had entered the house and spoke to the driver in a low voice. She didn't want any residual of this barbarians horror left within the car.

"Yes Miss." He nodded to her taken aback by the strange request, but more than willing to fulfil it for his employer.

"Well go." Cleo snapped stepping in the house and closing the door behind her.

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Rae took the unconscious actress straight to the blue room, putting her under the covers and tucking her in. Only then did she come back into the hall to find the others.

"I'm in the green room." Tori looked at her a little lost.

"That door right there." Rae smiled at her and pointed. "Why don't you go in and settle in, you look tired. I'll make sure that pizza you wanted is ordered."

"Thank you Rae." She tried to swallow a gentle yawn as she moved passed the tall women and slipped into her room.

"No worries Tori." Rae looked to see Cleo hovering in the front hall. She jogged down the stairs toward the blonde.

"Is everything all right?" Rae questioned worried as the estate's security chief walked away with her departure.

"Yes, I have changed the code on the front gate." Cleo handed Rae a slip of paper. "That's the new one." The technician memorised the number and slipped it in her pocket. "And I have asked Graham to keep four men here at all times rather than two."

"I doubt there will be trouble, he shouldn't have any idea to look here." Rae massaged her forehead. "But Tori's supposed to be going home with him tomorrow so God knows what he's going to do."

"I know blackbird, but I want us all to rest easy." Cleo reached forward and touched Rae's arm.

"Four is good." She agreed.

"Do you want me to put a man on him?" Cleo asked her voice tight.

"Cleo, I so want to say yes." Her voice was low. "I also want to say no I'll do this myself." She tried to relax. "But I think we need time for this to settle and ultimately Thea has to decide right?" She looked for confirmation that this was the right thought. It was so hard for her to fight the instinct to find him and kill him.

"I am just talking following, nothing heavy, just so we are informed. After all..." She paused. "He may report her missing." She tried to meet Rae's gaze.

"Oh shit!" Rae cursed. "I never thought of that. Followed is a must I think." She finally met Cleo's eyes.

"Thank you." The blonde stroked the technician's arm. "Potterly is due within the hour."

"Thank you for what?" Rae questioned.

"For trusting me enough to involve me." Cleo explained softly.

"Of course I trust you." Rae looked at her. "I'm the one who should be thanking you."

"Why?" She asked confused..

"For understanding this isn't about me and Thea, it's about helping her cause of what he did." Rae whispered hurt.

"It would have been inhuman of me not to help my blackbird." She closed her eyes letting the words echo in her head.

"I know you would always help." Rae tried to clarify.

"Of course Raven." Cleo replied stepping away from her. "Now you must need rest yourself. Why not sit in the living room? At least until Potterly gets here."

"I don't think I can sit, I'm too edgy." She conceded. "And I promised Tori I'd order her pizza."

"Rae, we don't order in here. I'll get cook to make one." Cleo laughed lightly at the idea of a delivery car pulling up to the house. It was a surreal idea really. "Why not go out to the gym? I could come with you."

"That's good." She smiled at the idea of burning off some of her excess anger.

"Let me get changed." Cleo moved towards the stairs. "You'll find your sweat gear in are old wardrobe."

"I should eh?" Rae looked down at her jeans and moved to follow Cleo to the blonde's bedroom.

As they entered she moved off to the left to the large mahogany wardrobe. Opening it was almost eerie to see her things sat in little neatly folded stacks and on hangers just like she'd left them.

Cleo unfastened her tight skirt and let it fall to the floor as she pulled out a short pair of sweat shorts from the drawer. She pulled them on and then removed her blouse and pulled on a grey v-neck.

Rae paid little attention to the oddity as she peeled off her jeans and top, replacing them with shorts and a tight T-shirt.

"I'm sorry that the plans I kinda suggested earlier didn't work out." Rae smiled awkwardly.

"It is of no matter." The woman finished with her hair.

"It is Cleo." Rae moved across the room to stand near her. "I can't even believe I rang you about this."

"I assure you that under the circumstances I understand. Any plans would seem a little farcical now at any rate, even two friends having dinner. Thank you for calling me Raven. Thank you for letting me help." She leaned forward and placed a controlled kissed on Rae's cheek.

Rae moved impulsively to hug her suddenly overwhelmed at how easy Cleo was making this.

"When everything calms down, perhaps even tonight after Potterly has been. We can share part of Tori's pizza."

"Yes..." Cleo answered trying to figure her reaction to the embrace. A part of her wanted to melt into Rae's arms, the other fought hard against it.

"That is if she will share." Rae released the other woman.

"Come Raven." She pulled away. "I wonder if I can still beat you on the cycles."

"Hummm." Rae laughed. "Are we having a race?"

"If you are up to it." The blonde moved to the door.

"Most definitely." Rae followed her out into the hall.

"Rae?" Tori stood in the hallway waiting for them.

"Yes Tori?" She asked as she closed the bedroom door. "What's wrong?"

"Would it be all right to call my mother?" The young woman looked at her nervous to ask the simple question.

"Of course, you should tell her you're staying with Thea for awhile." Rae looked to Cleo as her mind stuck on whether to instruct the girl about what not to mention or mention regarding Thea.

"Oh, I hadn't thought what I might say." The young woman began to cry.

Cleo watched for an uncomfortable moment, before nodding at Tori slightly and slipping down the stairs.

"Ssssh Victoria." The technician moved to hug her awkwardly and tried to guide her back towards her room.

"Oh Rae I... am... sorry." Tori's voice was broken through her sobs.

"No need to be sorry." Rae reassured her. "It's been hard go the last day."

"It's just..." Tori sobbed again.

"Just what?" Holding onto her tightly, the tall woman led her into the bedroom. "You need to talk about this." She pushed her in a soft voice.

"I've just realised." Her voice broke.

"Realised what Tori?" Rae kept prompting her to go on.

"Really realised what he did." She admitted, sobbing again even heavier.

"I know it's hard to get your head around." Rae whispered softly, doubting at this moment if any of them could ever really understand, really realise what Thea had gone through.

"Rae." Tori sat down on the bed. She reached behind her and took hold of her stuffed bear. The tattered black bear was one of the few things she'd brought from the hotel.

"What Tori?" The technician watched her sadly. "Do you need something?"

"I could have stopped it." Tori gripped her bear tightly and sobbed harder.

"No Victoria." Rae sat on the bed and put a gentle arm around her. "This wasn't in your control."

"I could have, I could have." She sobbed rocking gently in her grief.

"How Tori?" Rae questioned not understanding the girl's guilt.

"Last night. I heard. I heard everything that happened. Thea was crying, all night." Tori's voice was punctuated by deep sobs. Rae's heart stopped as she realised what the girl had gone through.

"Victoria..." She regained herself quickly. "You couldn't have stopped this."

"I should have called security. I should have helped her. She's my sister." Tori held her stomach tightly and gripped the bear desperately.

"You did help her." She whispered. "You called me remember. We got her out of there and we got her somewhere safe now. It was a very brave thing you did Victoria."

"It's not enough." The short broken words were whispered back.

"Tori, your sister wouldn't have wanted you charging in there last night. Edward is a dangerous man, she'd never forgive herself if he hurt you too."

"I should have stayed with her." Tori continued her crying now causing her pain.

"You couldn't have known what he planned to do." Rae rocked her slightly. "Edward is the only one to blame here Victoria. Not you or Thea, only him."

"He's always made her unhappy." Tori wailed.

"Has he?" She questioned before she realised.

"Forgive me, I shouldn't have said that." Tori stopped weeping suddenly as she realised what she had said. She brushed at her cheeks and put down the bear.

"There is nothing to forgive." Rae hugged her tight for a second. "I'm sure more than anyone you know when your sister is happy or not."

"Yes." The answer came quietly.

"And if he's always made her unhappy its okay for you to say so." Rae added in a gentle tone.



"But we are not supposed to speak of it. Any of it." She looked down and picked her bear up once more to fiddle with his ear.

"Why not?" The technician asked surprised. "Tori, you can talk about anything."

"My Father says we should not." The answer was almost inaudible.

"Victoria, do you agree with that? Not talking about how sad he makes her?" Rae asked quietly trying not to sound like she was questioning the man's authority. Though in her heart she staunchly disagreed with it.

"I never understood it." Tori admitted softly.

"Tori, it's okay to talk about these things with certain people." Rae tried to find some common ground. "Not to the whole world sometimes but to some people it's okay to talk. You can't keep it all bottled up."

"One must keep it secret." She said quietly, not really believing her own words.

"You can't keep all of this in Victoria, you are allowed to talk about it to me okay?" The technician spoke in a low authoritative voice, hoping it would sway the young woman a little.

"When Thea was seventeen..." Tori began looking at Rae for reassurance that this was really okay, happy to see a nod that it was. "We had a big party, I was thirteen. It was an amazing affair." A soft smile gave her the strength to continue, as she played with the tartan bow tied around her teddy's neck.

"What happened at the party Tori?" She spoke only after some silence.

"Daddy announced that Thea and Edward were engaged." The young woman looked at Rae.

"You sound surprised by that?" Rae questioned the look she was getting. "Nobody mentioned it to you?"

"Rae..." She took a breath as she tried to figure out how to explain. "Edward Jones was twenty seven when Thea was seventeen. No body knew about it. Nobody!"

"Did Thea?" Rae asked struck by the age difference between them and Tori's body language.

"No." She whispered holding the bear in a tighter grip.

"But..." Rae was at a loss. "Your father arranged the marriage without her knowing?"

"It was a family thing." The short answer came in a clipped voice.

"Tori, I'm not familiar with that, what is a family thing?" She asked suddenly very lost.

"The Jones' family and the Wilcox's have been associated for years." Tori explained briefly. "Daddy only had girls, Thea and I. So he needed a man to keep the estate. Edward was the ideal husband."

"This was all about money and title?" She questioned horrified by the idea.

"Thea was always going to go into Theatre." Tori hurried to qualify. "If she became a big star she would never have to be at home."

"And never have to be with Edward?" Rae's throat was dry.

"Not if she didn't want to. Mother said she should be a good girl and try it. I remembering hearing her say that to Thea in the library after Daddy announced it."

"So Thea never wanted this?" The question came slowly.

"Thea said she hated the idea and hated Edward. She ran out crying." Tori looked up at Rae with tears in her eyes, her mind clouded by the memory.

"Tori..." She hesitated to ask but she had to know. "Is this when..." She couldn't find the words.

"Three hours later." Tori answered without really hearing Rae's question. "They took her away in an ambulance."

"Oh Christ!" Rae gasped and whispered to herself. "That's what she calls teen angst." Tori gripped the teddy close and rocked again slightly. "It's okay Victoria." The motion of the rocking called her back. "Thea had already told me that she tried, she just never told me why."

"I didn't see her for a month." Victoria's voice was small.

"They made her marry him even after that?" She asked the hard question having to know.

"There was never a question of them not marrying." Tori whispered. "Thea was the perfect business wife."

"Huh?" Rae found herself lost again. "Why perfect?"

"I shouldn't talk about this." Tori was suddenly unsure of what she was doing and she brushed at the tears on her cheeks.

"Victoria, it's okay to talk about it." Rae moved a hand to sit on the bear's head and spoke confidently. "You can't keep this all in. From now on I'm going to take care of you and Thea, so no one can hurt you like this again."

"What?" She looked up at her in disbelief. "Why would you do that?"

"Because I want to..." She gave the simple answer softly. "No strings attached." She added afraid the young women would think this was another business deal.

"But what do you get out of it?" Tori asked slightly confused.

"I get to know you and her are happy." She smiled. "And safe and doing what you want in life. I don't believe in forcing anyone to do anything they don't want Victoria."

"TORI!" Thea's petrified scream broke through the moment's silence that fell between them.

Rae was up and running before she knew what she was doing. She beat Tori to the door that connected their rooms.

"Thea, it's okay." She said softly as she entered expecting the young woman to be right behind.

"Where's Tori?" The actress looked wild eyed around the room.

"Right here." Rae moved out of the door to let the young woman through. Tori dropped the bear and ran to the door after Rae, squeezing past the tall Canadian to hurry to her sister's bedside.

"Tori." Thea sobbed holding out her arms.

"It's okay Thea." She hopped on the bed and moved to hold her. "Rae took us somewhere safe."

"Where?" Thea looked around unable to see anything familiar. She'd thought they'd gone to the condo.

"The Eaton Estate." Rae clarified quietly. "It's got better security than the condo."

"Where?" Thea looked at Rae, not quite understanding.

"Cleo's house." She clarified.

"Cleo's?" Thea gasped horrified as she let go of her sister. "I have to go back to the hotel." She brushed her hair back from her face, ignoring the dull pain that invaded her body and mind.

"No Thea, you can't!" Tori begged her. "He'll hurt you again."

"I can't stay here." She looked at her sister lovingly. "It's okay Tori. He didn't mean this."

"Miss. Eaton says we can stay as long as we need too and Rae says she's going to take care of us from now on." Victoria tried to reason with her.

"Thea, don't be naïve." Rae couldn't help the comment, though she kept her voice soft. "He did it, he meant it."

"Can you give Rae and I a minute?" Thea looked at her sister hoping she had enough strength to do this. "Please."

"Okay, I'm just in there. It's my room." Tori smiled softly and moved reluctantly away. She pulled the door closed as she exited.

"Thea, you can't go back to him." Rae went right too it. "Next time he's likely to kill you."

"I would be obliged if you did take care of Tori." Thea used all her effort to control her voice.

"Of course I will." She replied honestly. There was no question to whether or not she would take care of the young woman. "But Thea, be reasonable. You can't go back to him."

"But I have to get back." Her voice wavered. "I especially can't stay here."

"Why? So he can smack you some more?" Rae came a bit closer, unable to believe what she was hearing. "Thea, I know this is not ideal but the estate has tight security. If he tries something stupid you'll be safe here."

"You don't understand." The actress shook her head.

"Then make me understand!" Rae pleaded with her as she watched the injured woman struggle to move back the bedclothes. "Thea you need to rest and heal."

"Cleo is a very important business women. Edward is here making business contacts." Her breathing became hard as she struggled to get up.

"What does that have to do with this?" Rae shot back.

"What if by some crazy chance he tried to contact her and she knew about this? His chances of a deal would be ruined." Thea finished moving the heavy duvet aside.

"What?" Rae was shocked. "That's what you're worried about? His fucking business! You're kidding me, you have to be kidding." She paced back and forth.

"Business is his life." Thea managed to move the sheets back. "As his wife I am supposed to assist that not mess it up."

"Thea, R&F is not just Cleo's it is my corporation too." She stood firm and tall in her commitment. "It will not do business now or for the rest of time with any company the bastard ever even talked to."

Thea half listened to Rae's rant and half concentrated on pushing herself to the edge of the bed. She wondered why her vision was dipping as she struggled to move.

"And trust me Cleo agrees. He's done in Toronto." She stated finally.

Thea barely heard her words as her head swam.

"Thea, be careful." She moved when she saw the actress' eyes roll, her voice dropping away from its once angry tone. "You need to rest angel, you're injured."

"If I don't go back..." Thea tried to stand but toppled forward towards the floor. Rae moved quickly to catch her in mid fall. Thankful when it was her hand and not Thea's head that struck the post of the bed.

"Back to bed angel." Rae lifted her and moved the actress back to lie down.

"He'll look for me." Thea whispered letting her head loll back on the pillow.

"Cleo's arranged to have him watched." Rae whispered as she arranged the blankets. "We'll know his every move before he makes it." She watched Thea's eyes flutter closed before she could speak again. "Rest love." She brushed the hair back off the woman's face. "You don't have to worry, let me do that for now."

"I love you Rae." Thea breathed the words out slowly before she let the pain swallow her again.

"Rest Thea, rest." Rae kissed her softly on the forehead, as the words cut into her like the sharpness knife. No matter how her heart screamed, she couldn't say them back.

'I'll take care of you and Tori forever.' Her thoughts ran fast as she watched the unconscious woman for a moment. 'Hell, I'll even take care of your parents and every other member of your family if need be but I can't say the words Thea. Not after last night, because no matter how I try to justify it angel. You still lied to me.'

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Rae leaned against the doorway to the gym and watched the tall blonde with an element of wonder. The heavy bag before her bounced back and forth from her stinging punches and kicks. The leather of the bag had long been beaten soft from Cleo's expert hand.

"You're dropping your elbow." Rae smiled trying to be funny, as they would both know Cleo was doing no such thing.

"Left or right?" She took one last swing before stepping away from the bag. Her breathing heavy she forced a smile.

"Right." Rae walked into the gym.

"It's usually my left." Cleo stepped further back and began to undo her hand wraps.

"Well I didn't want to say both." Rae grinned at her. "You want to skip the bag and work on your hook?"

"Is everything all right?" Cleo deliberately didn't answer. "With Thea and her sister?"

"No, not really." She shook her head. "Thea woke up for a bit. She's got some silly notion that you can't find out about Edward cause he'd loose business. I explained our corporation doesn't do business with rapists." She frowned as she stretched out her arms. "Tori is taking it hard."

"How old is Tori?" Cleo turned from Rae and walked over to the pull down bar, her mind thinking quickly about the business situation she'd be forced into.

"Um." Rae tried to remember what Thea had told her. "Twenty three. Why?"

"Young." Cleo said thoughtfully as she appraised the situation.

"Yeah." Rae agreed starting some leg stretches.

"To have found Thea in that state must have thrown her." Cleo reasoned crouching down checking the weight settings.

"Very much." Rae agreed. "She told me she heard most of it through the walls. She didn't realise what it was though."

"She'll need to talk about it." The blonde suggested as she began the exercise.

"I think so." Rae thought about it as she began a series of karate motions. "Anyone you can suggest? Lillian would have been perfect." She added the last part softly.

"Potterly may have some suggestions." Cleo offered helpfully, while snarling to the floor at the mention of Lillian's name.

"I'll have to ask." Her words finished a heartbeat before she executed a complicated back flip.

"Didn't you say earlier that Victoria was due to go back to England tomorrow?" Cleo asked as she finished her set.

"Yes, but she's not going now." Rae was adamant as she continued with the complicated series of flips.

"Of course not Blackbird. I was just thinking." Cleo moved over to sit on one of the benches.

"What?" Rae stopped the tone the blonde has used demanded her full attention.

"Do you think Tori would be up to talking to him, Edward I mean?" Cleo leaned against the mirrored wall behind the bench thinking.

"Why would she do that?" Rae questioned trying not to react to adversely just yet.

"I am trying to think of a way to keep Edward's suspicions down about where his wife is. If this were the last time Thea and her sister were to be together for some time, it would be logical to think that they would want to spend time together." She spoke softly. "They are very close as far as sisters go."

"He's got to be suspicious by now. They're there both missing and Tori's stuff is gone." The technician cringed. "And knowing his kind he'd want Thea back tonight."

"And it would rely on Tori being up to talking." Cleo shook her head. "Which by the sounds of it, she isn't."

"I don't think so." Rae shrugged feeling very trapped and very out of control. "Unless it was really important. Then maybe we could coach her, but I don't want to pressure her."

Cleo moved to run through another set of weights, the silence looming between them.

"We might have to let her go back Raven." She stopped her actions and spoke slowly.

"What?" Rae stopped her series again abruptly. "You're kidding right? How can we let her go back to that?"

"One night, we're only talking one night." Cleo stressed the point. "And we'll have the place watched. I am thinking damage control Blackbird."

"You mean tonight?" She tried to keep herself controlled. "Cleo, she tried to stand up and she passed out!"

"Raven, listen to me." The blonde moved slowly closer. "The last thing we want is Edward hanging around here in Toronto. Think about it Raven. Is he going to pack up and go home if his wife has gone missing?"

"He will when I get done with him." Rae jumped suddenly and hit the heavy bag with a shocking kick. "He's going to be happy to get out alive!" She punched the bag again and again frantically. "Raven, no one can condone what he has done. But as you said this has got to be dealt with Thea's way." Cleo moved towards her but held far enough back. She knew when her Blackbird needed to vent and this was one of those times. "I can get Potterly to give her something to help her through and even some high sedatives she can take as soon as she gets there." She revealed her reasoning slow and logically.

"Fine, we do it Thea's way." Rae locked her jaw and went full out at the bag. "But I can't suggest this to her, I can't!" Her attack grew vicious and the bag bounced on its chains.

"Raven!" Cleo shouted at her to stop her assault.

"Yes?" Her breathing was low and deep.

"What choice is there?" Cleo breathed the question slow and controlled.

"I don't know." She smacked the bag one last time. "This is all so fucked up!"

"Miss. Eaton, Miss O'Keefe?" Loraine stood by the door to the gym. "Dr. Potterly is here."

"Cleo, I can't ask her to see him again." Rae's voice was broken.

"I know. I'll do it." Cleo walked calmly past her and brushed a hand over Rae's arm.

"We should go see the Doctor and explain." She nodded her defeat.

"Yes, we should." Cleo agreed as she reached the doorway. "Come on. Thank you Loraine." She dismissed the young woman who still lurked there. Rae sighed and moved to follow upstairs.

"Raven?" Cleo called her attention in a soft voice. "Perhaps you should talk to Dr Potterly too."

"Why?" The technician questioned.

"Just to get something to calm you down a little maybe." She made the suggestion gently.

"Something to help you sleep even."

"Maybe." Rae shrugged not really interested. "We'll see."

"Okay." Cleo let the issue drop and went to find the Doctor.

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"Miss. Winters, Miss. Winters?" Dr. Potterly kept his voice soft as he tried to coax Thea awake. He didn't like starting an examination if she might wake up mid way and be terrified.

Thea forced her eyes open. The details were blurring and things moved in her field of vision.

"What?" She slurred the question, blinking hard a few times.

"Miss. Winters, my name is Dr. Potterly." He explained gently. "I need to ask you a few questions."

"Dr. Potter?" She managed to focus her eyes and mind though both stayed a little hazy.

"Potterly." He smiled at her. "How about we make this simple and you call me James."

"James." Thea chose the easier option.

"Yes." He nodded. "Is it okay if I do a bit of an examination? I want to make sure you don't need x-rays."



"I... I'm all right." She raised her hand and gently rubbed her eye.

"You're sleepy from the sedative the other physician gave you." His soothing fatherly tone was kind. "I'm afraid you've been hurt fairly badly Miss. Winters."

"Just a little fall." She added without thought, years of training bred into her.

"Miss. Winters, I am your physician now so you can be honest with me. I am bound by confidentiality not to say anything to anyone. Not even if they take me to court." He spoke honestly as he examined her head.

"Oh." Thea's head cleared enough for her to know this man wasn't going to need flimsy excuses from her.

"Was it just with his hand or did he use any objects?" He questioned softly.

"Hand, on my head." Thea replied.

"How many times?" He asked assessing the spreading of the bruise.

"Two. No, three." She tried to remember.

"The stitches on your lip will need to be redone." He smiled at her softly. "I'm told you're a stage actress."

"Yes." Thea felt her bottom lip tremble as her mind flooded with thoughts of the play.

"I have a good man at my office. I'll get him to come by tomorrow and redo them so there won't be a scar." He went from injury to injury in an orderly professional manner. "What play are you in?" He tried to make small talk as he finished up with her face and turned his attention to her arms and wrists. After checking them carefully he moved back from her a little.

"Tragedy's Dance." Thea's very quiet reply came after some hesitation.

"May I?" He motioned to the blankets. "I need to look at your ribs." She nodded her consent and he moved back the blanket. "Oh really." He smiled at her. "I have tickets for that next month. It has fine reviews." He moved the blanket only enough to examine her ribs.

"Nothing broke but they are badly bruised." He assessed. "Miss. Winters..." His voice went soft. "Under the circumstance I don't think it's best for me to continue the rest of the examination. A colleague of mine, Dr. Leslie Montaro came with me." He waited to see her response to the idea.

"It's all right, I'm fine." Thea made a grab for the blankets.

"Please Miss. Winters." He kept his voice soft. "It would be dangerous if you are injured internally. Leslie's examine will be as short and painless as possible."

"Okay." Thea began protesting but gave up before she really started.

"Good." He confirmed as he stood up. "I'm going to call to get some prescriptions delivered for you, just some painkillers and something to help you sleep. Nothing too strong." He smiled softly at her. "I'll tell Leslie to come in."

"James. My sister, Victoria, have you seen her?" Thea called as he reached the door.

"Only briefly in the hall, I was going to have a look in on her. Is that all right?"

"Please do." Thea nodded gratefully.

"I will, I'll have something ordered to help her sleep as well."

Thea tried to smile as he moved his hand to the door handle.

"This might not mean much Miss. Winters." He spoke sadly to her. "But as a man I'm sorry your husband did this, he had no right."

"Thank you." Thea responded though her words were empty. "Dr Potterly?"

"Yes?" He stopped again halfway out the door.

"If I said I had to go back, to him, to the man who did this. What would you say?" She knew this was possibly an unreasonable question but she had to try and sort out her own mind.

"I'd say that would be a very dangerous choice Miss. Winters." His voice was sad. "Men like him do not stop and they usually only get more violent. That is my medical opinion as I have seen a lot in my years of practice I'm afraid."

"Could you get me in a fit state to go back?" She asked directly understanding his answer, but needing ones of her own.

"Miss. Winters, I can bandage you up and re-stitch now if you like." He shook his head at the idea. "The ribs can't take another blow, and your right eye is liable to close by the morning."

"I need twenty four hours James. That's all I need." She outlined it for him.

"We'll have to walk the line with the painkillers to get you mobile." He came back in the room.

"Miss. Winters why do you need this time?" He asked knowing it was outside of protocol but something about this woman's plight moved him.

"Because if I give him that time he'll be gone again for a while." She gave him the honest answer. "Sounds like a fair trade doesn't it?"

"We can do it, but you're going to have to be very careful. Of course, we'll need to see what Dr. Montaro finds as well."

"Of course." She agreed having no other choice.

"Okay, let me order in the things I need while Dr. Montaro does her examine and we'll see."

"Thank you." Thea whispered trying to express just how important this was to her.

The doctor shook his head gently as he walked out and closed the door behind him. He didn't want thanks, not for what he had agreed to do.

Continued in Act XV...

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### The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

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## ~ After the Curtain Falls ~

by Beth Dragon & Kathleen Wolf

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**Feedback:** All comments are greatly appreciated and can be sent to: [kathandbeth@hotmail.com](mailto:kathandbeth@hotmail.com)

**Thanks:** To Emma, for her never ending love, support and chocolate. To the Ex-Guards Village for all their feedback and expert advice.

### Act XV

Rae put her hand to the chilly window as she looked out over the sprawling tree orchard to the west end of the Eaton estate. She could hear Cleo scribbling and shuffling papers behind her as she ran her finger down the wet pane of glass slowly. They both were only passing time, waiting for the Doctor to give them the news.

"Did the Monet deal go through all right?" Rae asked absently trying to find something to keep her mind occupied. Running her finger down the glass again, she watched a small bead of water pool underneath it and streak down further.

"Yes, with no problems." Cleo pulled the cabinet by her desk open. "Do you want to see the final paperwork?"

"No need." Rae shook her head without turning around, listening to the drawer slide shut again. "I just wondered." She added absently as she turned and leaned against the windowsill.

"I'm sure everything will be fine." Cleo offered though she knew it was a stupid thing to say. She opened her mouth to take it back but didn't know how.

Rae pushed herself off the sill and went to sit in one of the ornate chairs across from the blonde at the desk.

"Cleo..." Rae almost questioned the words but stopped. It was a tense time and no one's mind was on quite right.

"Drink?" Cleo asked as she pushed herself up from her place and turned round to open the liquor cabinet.

"Yeah." Rae nodded. "Please" She added softly. "Were you able to arrange someone to shadow him?" She questioned leaning into the soft leather chair trying to relax.

"All done Raven. Someone's been on it since your phone call. If you had of said no when I talked to you I would have just pulled him off, no questions asked." Cleo informed her pouring two large Jack Daniel's. She turned around and held out a glass to the technician.

"Thank you." Rae's voice was quiet as she reached out and took the drink.

"Do you want to take Victoria's pizza up?"

"I want to hear what the doctors say." She shook her head.

"Of course." Cleo took a sip of her drink. Almost as if cued, a sharp knock came to the partially opened door.

"Miss. Eaton?" Dr. Potterly inquired through the door. "I finished the exam on Miss. Winters. There are a few things that need to be discussed."

"Come in." Cleo coughed slightly. The doctor stepped in and closed the door behind him.

"Although she's suffered some severe contusions, there should be no long term impairment." He started right in. Cleo turned her attention to Rae as the doctor continued.

"No ribs are broken?" Rae stood and turned to face him.

"No." He shook his head. "Only bruised, they'll be quite sore and it will take a week or two before they heal. I've got a colleague on his way over to re-stitch her lip so that the scar will be minimal and blend into the existing creasing in the tissue."

Cleo listened to the doctor with growing anger.

"I don't think she has a concussion, but I fear by the morning her right eye will swell closed." He spoke in a professional voice. "It will have to be looked after carefully though. Most of the bruising is deep into the sub tissue, so it's going to be darkening considerably before it gets better." He took a breath for a moment.

"Will you be calling back tomorrow?" Cleo asked in the pause.

"Of course." He turned to her and nodded adamantly. "Especially as it is the results of the internal exam that cause greatest alarm." He stated slowly looking up at Cleo and Rae.

"The internal?" Rae breathed the words out of clenched teeth.

"Well..." The doctor faltered under the woman's stare for a moment. "Due to the nature of the assault, Miss. Winters has suffered a considerable amount of internal injury." He frowned deeply. "I am most concerned that her current persistence to return to the environment that precipitated the rape could lead to a repeat assault which could risk a life threatening haemorrhage."

Cleo stood up and slipped round to the same side of the desk as Rae, though she stayed a little ways back.

"Okay Doc!" Rae put her hand on the desk, driving her knuckles down into the wood. "So in common english, first your telling me she wants to go back to the hotel and second if he does it again to her she's likely to die?" Her voice was icy.

"Basically, yes." He looked at her and then Cleo. "She is adamant that she needs to return. She's asked that I do all I can to make her capable."

"James, in your medical opinion, would you advise that?" Cleo spoke quickly. For Rae the office faded into a red haze as Cleo spoke behind her.

"Angelina." He took a breath. "She has explained to me the circumstance of getting him out of the country." He took another breath. "But as a doctor I can hardly advise this, it is far to risky to her."

"She won't need to go." The Raven's voice came in an eerie calm tone. "He's going to be dead soon."

'This is going to end right now and I'm going to end it.' Plans raced through her head.

"Perhaps we could talk outside a moment James." She looked at Rae as she spoke.

"Of course." He nodded and moved out to the hallway.

"Raven." She called the occupied woman's attention in a slow voice as she moved to follow him to the door.

"Yes, Cleo." Rae turned to her, her mind still moving in calm circles.

"Stay here." She made the instruction clear. Rae nodded absently as Cleo pushed the door open and stepped out closing it softly behind her.

"James..." She began as soon as she stepped away from the door. "Is the situation really that serious?" She looked at the old family physician for clarity.

"These things aren't givens." He shook his head. "The possibility is there. See that as worse case scenario."

"You said something about fixing her up to get through this evening. What exactly would that entail?" She glanced back at the door. If Rae was not going to be reasonable about this then she was left with no choice to take charge.

"Yes." His brow furrowed. "We'd have to walk a fine line with painkillers. But it might be possible to get her somewhat mobile and if I put a local into the rib area it would ease her breathing. I can't do anything about the swelling and bruising. That just has to take its course."

"No, of course not." Cleo plotted out their options.

"Angelina...." He hesitated. "Patching her together to send her back tot his man is not the most ethical thing I can do as her doctor."

"It is her wish James." Cleo replied almost too quickly.

"Yes. She is quite adamant." He shrugged knowing he was being roped into something he didn't agree with.

"No matter what we think we have to help her." The tall woman stopped and dropped her voice. "James could I ask you a personal favour?"

"Of course Angelina." He smiled softly at her.

"It's Cassie." Cleo breathed the name like acid to her lips.

"To be honest I'm quite concerned." He read her thoughts. "With her history, she is not responding well to this trauma."

"Do you think you could sedate her? She just needs to get through tonight." Cleo nodded at his appraisal. "If we can get the husband out of the way. She can't dwell on the thoughts she has at the moment."

"Of course not." He took a sharp breath.

"I don't want you to discuss this with her. You understand that, don't you James?" Cleo fixed him with brown eyes.

"I understand." He nodded under the glare as he fumbled through his pocket. "I had these ordered to help Victoria sleep." He took four of the caplets out of the pill bottle. "Slip the contents into Cassie's drink."

"Will they be strong enough? With her drug tolerance level?" Cleo needed to be sure.

"Try the four at first." He spoke softly. "If not try another two, but no more than that. The four should put her asleep for at least twelve hours." He tried to find some semblance of medicine in this. Cleo nodded as he took another two pills and handed the six to her.

"Thank you James. I realise this is a terrible situation to bring you into." Cleo closed her fingers around the pills. "How is Victoria?" She added almost absently.

"She is just very shook up." He smiled softly. "She should have one of these before bed, it will put her out for awhile. She needs a good night sleep. It has all been quite a shock for the young woman. She seems a bit sheltered."

"I'll make sure she gets all she needs. Thank you James." Cleo smiled at him.

"I'll attend to Miss. Winters." He swallowed as he set on his task. "We should have her ready in an hour or so." He shook his head. "And no thanks, if it wasn't for men like her husband then this night wouldn't be necessary."

"I'll have a car ready for her when you're done." She nodded and walked back to the study door as James left to do his dirty deed.

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Thea stood at the top of the long stairway looking down at the ground in front of her. Her body felt numb and her head thick. She was more than aware that it was the medication not her own inner power that kept her upright. As she steadied herself before tackling the stairs she became aware of raised voices. The argument was coming from below her and she took the stairs slowly one at a time wobbling just a little trying to listen to the voices.

"Cleo, I don't want another fucking drink!" Rae bellowed as she entered the front hall. "Enough talk, she's not going back." She stamped across the marble. "I am and I'm going to fucking kill him! Where the hell are my keys?"

"Raven, please." Cleo marched after the tall woman. "I have them." She slowly reached in her pocket she drew out the keys.

"Keys!" She turned on her heel and held on her hand. Her body waved a little from the sudden stop. She brushed her hair out of her face.

"No Raven." Cleo replied shortly.

"Cleo, keys!" She snapped her fingers, the first few times not producing any noise.

Thea made it half way down when she saw the arguing pair. She watched semi-stunned as they continued.

"No." The blonde stared at Rae and put the keys back in her pocket.

"Cleo, please." Rae pulled her hand back, for a minute her voice went soft. "May I have my keys now?" She reached her hand back out slowly.

"What will you do if I give you them?" Cleo moved her hand back towards her pocket though she had no intention of handing the keys over.

"I'm going to get in my jeep..." Her voice returned to a growl. "I'm driving down to the Harbour Castle."

"I already have a man at the Castle." Cleo informed her in a short voice. "Your place is here."

"Yes but I'm going to have a little meeting with Mr. Jones." Rae barked back at her, one hand still held out for the keys.

Out of breath and slightly dizzy, Thea stopped five steps from the bottom of the long flight. She watched as Rae pulled at her shirt, opening the collar slightly as she started to feel hotter.

"A meeting?" Cleo raised her eyebrow.

'Hot is good, need rage to kill the bastard!' Rae's mind thought about the change in her body but brushed it away.



"Yes a meeting." The technician snarled her eyes on fire. "My fist and his fucking face!" She barked again. "GIVE ME THE KEYS CLEO!"

"Rae?" Thea called from the stairs her voice weak.

"Thea?" Rae turned in a sharp quick motion to the source of the voice. Her eyes closed briefly as her head swam from the motion. Thea focused hard ready to repeat her words if she hadn't heard. "Love you should be in bed. You need to rest angel." The technician's voice was instantly soft.

"No Rae, I need to leave. What are you doing?" Thea forced herself down another step.

"I'm going in your place." She turned to glared at Cleo with her hand still hovering in the air. Cleo took the keys out of her pocket slowly, but held them close to her. "You are not going anywhere near that bastard." She spoke with a slur that didn't register in her ears. Blinking hard she turned back, trying to focus on the small, bruised woman before her on the stairs.

Thea frowned as she heard Rae's voice. Something was wrong, something was very wrong with Rae. She slowly stepped down the last stairs.

"I'm gonna..." Rae turned her head toward the sound of the keys coming out of Cleo's pocket, slow to pick up the blonde's movement to retrieve them again. "I'm going to teach him a lesson. Keys!" She stumbled sideways as she stepped toward the keys.

"Rae, love?" Thea stepped forward a little more. "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine angel." Her head slowly turned back and she smiled at the actress with a lopsided expression. "I'm just going to kill him for what he did, no biggie!"

"No, no you're not all right." Thea looked at Cleo in alarm, as she noticed Rae see the keys in again in the woman's hand.

Cleo smiled back at the young actress, not even needing to look, as Rae tried to snatch them in what was to be a quick movement. In reality her attempt was slow and telegraphed. As Rae moved she lifted the keys upwards and released them over her shoulder. The metal fell onto the marble floor with a clatter.

"I'm..." Rae turned to look into her empty hand. "Fine." She blinked hard trying to straighten up.

"Rae?" Thea reached out a hand, becoming much more alarmed. She couldn't understand why Cleo was doing nothing. In fact the blonde seemed to be baiting this on if anything.

"Angel?" Rae eyes looked at Thea unfocused for a heartbeat before rolling back in her head. As the strength went out of the tall woman and she sunk down on the cold marble.

Without a thought the actress rushed to follow her down, pain lacing through her stomach and ribs as she knelt on the floor. Cleo stepped forward and knelt on the other side.

"What the hell is going on?" Thea looked to Cleo with angry eyes, her thin pale hand on Rae's forehead.

"It was Dr. Potterly's idea." Cleo's voice was small and frightened.

"What was?" Thea demanded as she placed the back of her hand against Rae's cheek. The hot feeling was disturbing.

"It's just a mild sedative." Cleo's lip quivered. "She was ranting and raving Thea, we were all so afraid of what she'd do."

"Would she have done it?" The actress asked her voice slow and serious.

"She's got the training." Cleo nodded her head softly. "We couldn't chance that she'd...."

"No." Thea interrupted, saving her from having to say the words. "Of course you couldn't. She will be all right though. Won't she?"

"Oh yes." Cleo reassured her. "Dr. Potterly gave her a very exact dose. Just long enough for you to do what you need to do."

"Look after her." Thea pushed herself up on unsteady feet, stopping when upright to look at Cleo with damp green eyes. "Please."

"Of course." Cleo nodded and stood up as well. "I promise. Thea, I have a man watching ever move. If trouble starts don't worry it won't escalate." She spoke in a confident tone. "Though Raven wouldn't see, there is more than one way to protect you. One that doesn't involve..." She looked to the unconscious figure on the floor.

"Thank you Cleo. For everything." The actress whispered the words.

"No need little star." She brushed it off. "I wish I could do more. Come back here as soon as possible."

"You have done so much." Thea paused. "Can I have the address of the house for the cab? To get back I mean."

"No cab Thea." Cleo shook her head. "The driver who takes you will be waiting. Say he's with the play. He'll get you back here."

"I don't want to be any trouble."

"No trouble little star." Cleo moved her hand softly down the actress' uninjured cheek. "We just want to get you through this."

Thea closed her eyes to the touch even though it was not Rae the hand was soft and gentle and most importantly not Edward's.

"I will get through it Cleo." Thea vowed. "I have done it before. I can again."

"Shine bright my star." Cleo smiled at her warmly. "After tonight you'll have a long rest and we'll make sure you never have to do this again."

Thea did not reply she merely moved to the door eager to get this over with.

"Thea?" Cleo called to her following her up to the mahogany entrance. Thea stopped and turned to her. "Please don't blame Raven for this." She moved close to stand in front of her. "It's just her breeding." She spoke in a soft whisper. "In her world when someone hits you, you just hit them back, no thought for consequence. She's not from the circles that you and I have lived our lives in. She doesn't understand what you have to do tonight, but I do."

Cleo again moved her hand to the actress' cheek. Thea looked at her unable to pinpoint just what about the blonde's words made her uneasy. This time the hand on her cheek brought her less comfort.

"I... I should go." She stammered.

"Be strong Thea." Cleo spoke firmly.

"I will." Thea replied desperate to get out the door.

"I'll take good care of Raven while your gone." She removed her hand finally. "And when you get back tomorrow morning, I'll take good care of you too."

"Thank you." Thea took a final glance at Rae. With one last deep breath she mentally prepared herself for that which was to come.

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"Thank you so much for the game." Edward smiled again to the other gentleman who he'd met in the hotel fitness facility. "I'll be in touch about the deal."

'This trip has been more profitable than I'd ever dreamed.' He smiled smugly to himself. Resting the racket on his shoulder he happily sauntered through the lobby.

"Theandra!" He called to the young actress as he noticed her come into the lobby slowly through the main doors into the large room. He stayed in his spot waiting for her to come to him.

Thea looked up slightly surprised to hear Edward's voice. With a strained breath she walked forwards. Her husband beamed at her as he took a cautious glance around to see who was about. It would be damaging for someone important to be around while she looked like this.

"Have you had a good day?" Thea asked her voice soft and controlled.

"Fabulous!" He beamed. "Did you and Tori get off shopping or something? Where is she?" He questioned her when he didn't see Victoria following. "She knows we have an early flight."

"Actually you won't believe this but Tori hooked up with a chorus guy." Thea pushed herself into character. "Marcus, actually he is a lovely guy."

"Good Christ." Edward rolled his eyes. "Is your sister constantly in heat or something?" He laughed at his own joke. "Is she staying then?"

"It would seem so." Thea forced herself to laugh with him.

"Well at least I'll have peace on the plane. Does your father know?" He asked shortly. "If I walk into him, I won't be pleased to be the news bearer." He reached out to her face.

"I was going to call him but I forgot the time. Perhaps you could explain?" She smiled at him lightly trying not to pull her stitches.

"Did you see someone discreet?" He asked in a low tone moving his finger lightly down the bruise.

"Of course." She answered in an equally low voice. She had been here so many times.

"Good girl." He leaned to kiss her cheek softly.

"What time is your flight?" Thea asked as she leaned into him.

"An ungodly four am." He replied with a laugh.

"That is ungodly." Thea slipped her arm through Edward's intending for them to head up to his room.

"Oh well we all must suffer." He smiled at her slightly. "Actually Theandra." He pulled his arm away from hers and stepped back.

"Yes?" She looked at him not quite sure what his next move would be.

"As I have such a early call and you need rest my love. Why don't you toddle off now, while I get a good nights sleep?" Thea looked at him, her heart skipped a beat. "I don't want you fighting the pills to see me off." He added in an even tone.

"Are you sure?" She could barely find the strength to question, afraid the offer would disappear.

"Of course Theandra." He took her hand and kissed it. "Anything for my princess."

"You don't want me to come to the airport?" Thea needed to be confident of his choice.

"No." He shook his head. The early flight might have too many of his colleagues at the airport. "You need your rest. I'm a big boy and I'm sure I can make a plane." He tapped her nose lightly.

"That being the case, would you mind if I go to the apartment the theatre got for me?" Thea asked suddenly realising she may be able to get out of this.

"Of course I don't mind Theandra." He smiled at her again. "Though I'm disappointed I didn't get to see it." He shook his head.

"Next time." She whispered.

"Next time I expect a full tour, my little independent woman." He laughed lightly.

"You can have one." She patted his arm.

"And I'll even be the martyr that tells your Father that Victoria is on another quest." He laughed. "Least I can do." He added the last words smugly.

"Thank you Edward." The words burnt her like acid, but she kept up her role.

"You are quite welcome." He moved closer. "Give us a kiss and let's not make this messy."

"Gently." She whispered as she felt her lips sting at the thought of kissing him.

"Would I ruin you?" He whispered as he kissed her lightly pulling back immediately. "Do you need money for a cab?" He reached into his pocket.

"No, no. It's fine." Thea smiled. "I'm a working actress." She made the light joke hoping to appease him.

"Well buy yourself some flowers." He pulled a few bills from his money clip and handed them too her. "And try to call a bit more often."

"Give my love to everyone. I will." She felt her strength failing away.

"I'm at the club on Thursdays for lunch that would be a good time. Off you go." He patted her gently on the backside as he moved away. "I'll give everyone your love."

He waved the comment to her as he turned his back and moved off toward the elevator. Thea stepped backwards to lean against a pillar. She took a deep breath thankful again that it was over.

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Cleo put her feet up on the bed, leaning into the chair she'd pulled over to it. Dressed now in a pair of silk pj's, she studied the technician in the dim light. Rae was under the covers unconscious and oblivious.

"Whose bed are you in dear Raven?" She spoke openly to her. "Oh that would be mine wouldn't it!" She laughed lightly. "I wish you'd gone down sooner blackbird." She licked her lips. "Though I did enjoy your little show in the lobby. Seems I have two little stars." She laughed again.

"Thea?" The thick lisped whisper came out of the woman on the bed. Cleo pulled her feet back to the floor as her eyebrows arched up.

"I'm right here." Cleo kept her voice a whisper as she moved closer to the bed.

"Thea, my head." Rae raised a hand up without opening her eyes.

"You've had a lot to drink my love." She sat on the edge and put her hand up to the woman's forehead.

"I'm sorry." Rae struggled finally getting her eyes open. "I don't usually feel like this angel." She reached out her hand to the blonde's cheek.

"No need for sorry." Cleo breathed. "Close your eyes."

"You are so beautiful." Rae whispered following the soft instruction closed her heavy eyes easily.

"So are you." Cleo feed the lines she thought Thea would be likely to say.

"No, you are beautiful angel." Rae slurred a heavy hand coming to rest on Cleo's leg nearby. "I love you."

"Oh love. You shouldn't do that." She breathed controlling her temper, though her face curled up into a snarl.

"Do what?" Rae questioned drawn back from oblivion by the voice.

"Love me." Cleo breathed back.

"I do." She mumbled. "I always have." Cleo had to breath hard to control her growing temper. "I always will." The words were thick and heavy as her head lulled off to one side.

"But you hardly know me." Cleo seethed, an edge entering her voice.

"I know your heart." One eye briefly tried to open but closed again strained.

"But what about Cleo?" The blonde whispered her face set and her voice hard.

"Cleopatra." The word rolled off Rae's lips in the same loving tone as her breathing evened again.

"What about her? Do you love her too?" She pushed for an answer.

"With the Queen's standard." Rae tossed her head and spoke suddenly. Cleo blinked and stared at her in wonderment. It was hard to tell if she'd stirred really. "Fly with the Queen's standard." The words repeated in a soft laboured voice.

"And that makes you feel?" Cleo asked her heart beating fast.

"I like to fly." Her voice laboured as the sedative worked to take even her illusion away.

"Could you ever fly with me?" Cleo pushed.

"I fly with the Queen's standard." She slurred again as she curled her legs up around where Cleo sat.

'It would be so easy, so easy to take you.' The blonde thought with a smile as she watched the unconscious form.

"Cleo?" Rae's eyes opened as she stretched her arm out, her voice was a bit clearer. Cleo blinked trying to catch her mind up to the reality that broke into her fantasy. "Where have you been?" She reached over to place her hand on the blonde's thigh again.

"Raven." She kept her voice soft.

"I waited at that fucking restaurant for an hour." Rae rubbed at her face with her other hand.

"Restaurant?" Cleo queried completely lost.

"I knew your secretary was wrong." She snuggled back around the blonde.

"Wrong?" Cleo tried to put this conversation into a context.

"I knew you wouldn't just pick up for Monaco and leave me."

"I wouldn't leave you my Blackbird." Cleo laid a hand over the one on her leg.

"I don't want to fight baby." Rae pulled on her leg. "Come to bed."

"Is that what you want?" Cleo asked a broad smile across her face.

"I'm sorry I blew up at you." The words were forced as she sank into a bit of a slur. "I'll make it up to you baby."

"That would be nice." Cleo draped herself over Rae.

"You smell good." She gave her a sleepy grin. "I guess all the girls at the spa know I'm an evil bitch again." She laughed and Cleo couldn't help laugh softly.

"I think you should settle Blackbird." She purred.

"Naw." The sleeping figure mumbled. "Too busy fighting for you to settle." She lazily put her arms around the body draped over her.

"No need to fight Raven." Cleo softly kissed Rae's arm.

"You starting something Queeny?" A lumbering laugh came out of Rae.

"Maybe." She purred relaxing a little.

"Maybe?" Rae slipped into the hallucination a bit more. "Well guess I'll go back to sleep then until you make up your mind." She smiled and snuggled back down the pills drawing her one way then the other.

"Sleep is good." Cleo instructed having grown tired of this it reminded her of the days that Rae had spent stoned.

"We have to meet Tommy tomorrow at the train." Rae held onto her tightly and forced Cleo to pull at the arms that held her beginning for the first time to feel uncomfortable. "Sweet dreams baby and no matter what you say..." Rae held her tight a second longer. "I do love you." With that the arms dropped away and Rae sunk completely into unconsciousness again.

"Yes." Cleo moved the limp hands from off her body and pushed herself off the bed. She shook her head as she stared at the unconscious figure. This was supposed to be everything she wanted so why didn't it feel like heaven?

A stark ray of light streaked across the bedroom wall to catch her attention and draw her to the window. The soft sound of a motor moved through the room with the light. She moved the blinds aside a little and saw the dark shape of the limo pull into the drive

"What do we have here?" She whispered to herself as she watched. "Maybe heaven just needs an angel." She knew the limo could only hold one person. Flicking the blind into place she moved swiftly down to the main door.

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"Bartholomew get the door for her!" Cleo barked at the lumbering driver.



Thea delicately stepped out of the limo as the door was opened for her. Never believing she'd ever be this happy to be back at the Eaton estate.

"Thea, are you all right?" Cleo moved down the steps to help her. The actress looked up at her, her small body almost defeated. "What happened?"

"Nothing." Thea responded weakly.

"Thank God!" Cleo breathed through her teeth. "Come inside before you get a chill." She offered the actress her arm and Thea took it for fear of falling over. She let herself be led inside.

"Let's get you into bed." Cleo spoke in a soothing concerned purr.

"Do you mind if I sit for a second first?" Thea asked glancing at the study door.

"Of course." Cleo followed her gaze to the study and led them that way.

"He told me to go home and get lots of rest." Thea's voice had a hint of venom. Though it was good to talk about it, she was unsure why she was telling Cleo this.

"How delightfully proper." Cleo's seethed back her anger at him.

"Yeah." Thea agreed.

"Let me help you sit." Cleo offered when they reached inside.

"He took the news about Tori without question." Thea filled the blonde in as she was helped into one of the leather chairs.

"Good." Cleo smiled as she pulled the other closer to sit as well.

"Shouldn't you be in bed?" Thea asked working out the time in her head.

"I couldn't sleep." She shook her head softly.

"How is Rae?" Thea asked the scene of her lover's collapse forefront in her mind.

"She's sleeping like a baby. It's you I was worried about you." She laid her hand gently on Thea's. "I'm afraid I know how his kind are."

"You do?" Thea's mind caught on the words.

"I'm afraid it's a legacy of the Eaton men." She shook her head softly in shame.

"Really?" Thea concentrated on her every word, her face going sad. She rested her hand over Cleo's and frowned.

"Oh little star." Her frowned deepened. "They are a brutish bunch."

"Your father?" Thea hardly dare ask for clarification. Cleo looked away pained and nodded. This new information was hard for Thea to process through her growing medicinal haze.

"Little star, I myself have not faced your particular horror." She spoke softly. "But I have seen it and how his type of man treats it."

"You have had to deal with a lot Cleo." Thea was suddenly overwhelmed with sadness and compassion for this relative stranger.

"You have such a heart little star." She swallowed the venom in the words as she remembered Rae's little rant.

"So you think I could trouble you for a drink?" Thea asked gently.

"What would you like?" Cleo moved back toward the cabinet without thought.

"Fruit juice?" Thea suggested.

"Orange okay?" Cleo opened the small fridge in the cabinet. "I think a drink would do us all good." She turned back to the desk where two crystal tumblers sat. The blonde hesitated as she stared at them. Trying to remember which one was Rae's and which had been hers, it gave Thea time to move forward and offer them to Cleo.

"Oh little star don't hurt yourself." Cleo tried to get her to stay still as she attempted to retrieve them before her without looking odd.

"It's okay." Thea wrapped a hand around her aching ribs as her hand closed round one glass.

"I'll get the juice then." Cleo reluctantly backed off forcefully pulling the juice container out of the fridge. Thea collected the two glasses and struggled to her feet glancing down at the tumblers.

"No, no." Cleo dropped the juice and moved over to Thea. "Don't get up. No need." She held her hands out for the glasses.

With a smile Thea held them out taking a second glance at one of them, which seemed to be lined in white.

"Isabella should have cleared these away by now." Cleo's voice was tight as she took them away and dropped them onto the cabinet. With a gentle shake of her head Thea cast the observation aside and sat back.

"Do you want ice?" Cleo asked over her shoulder.

"Please." Thea nodded.

"I think I'll join you." Cleo laughed as she returned with two tall ice filled glasses of juice. She sat down and held the glass out for Thea, who nodded her thanks. "Victoria's sleeping soundly too by the way."

"Did James put her out too?" Thea was a little worried.

"Just something light." Cleo tried to reassure her. "Nothing like Rae. That was only because of her history. James is a fantastic physician." She tried to turn Thea's doubts away.

"I am sure he is and as you say with Rae's history it can't be easy." The actress said trying to hide her concern.

"No." Cleo let the small word come out pained, as the recent episode in the bedroom was enough of a reminder of the Raven's history.

"Sorry." Thea looked at Cleo the look on the blonde's face had been enough to tell Thea to stop.

"It's just the past." Cleo looked off. "Always has this odd way of coming up behind you when you least expect it doesn't it?"

"The past is over." She leaned forward a little painfully and placed her hand on Cleo's.

"Yes, I guess it is." Cleo turned her head against the chair back to look at the actress. "Thea..."

"Yes, Cleo?" Thea met the woman's brown gaze.

"I'm sorry, it's not my place." She used the term purposely as she abandoned the question.

"Place?" Thea asked picking up on the word.

"To ask questions little star." Cleo sighed softly. "We should get you to bed. Angels need their rest."

"Please Cleo." Thea squeezed the hand beneath her own. "Please ask."

"Thea..." She hesitated before seeming to gain the strength to continue. "I understand your husbands cut so to speak and how horrible what life you do have with him is. Why didn't you explain it to Raven?"

"You wouldn't believe how many times I tried to tell her." Thea smiled sadly.

"I can imagine." Cleo smiled back, but her face fell a bit as she thought. "She has no concept of it little star."

"I know and she is right to say I didn't try hard enough." The actress conceded softly.

"No Thea." Cleo shook her head. "She has no right to say that when she has no idea about what it is. Everything is so black and white to her." She sighed. "She has no idea of grey."

"Yes but I suppose the black is that I didn't tell her. But I never once lied to her Cleo. I swear to you I never did. It's just..." Thea stopped.

"Little star, little star." Cleo moved a bit closer putting the glass on the desk and then moving her other hand over Thea's. "You couldn't lie to Rae if you tried."

"How could I tell her?" Thea suddenly felt tears prick her eyes and heard her voice tremble.

"The real question is how could you get her to listen?" Cleo spoke softly. "Oh little star let it out." The blonde moved to brush the strawberry locks behind the actress' ears.

"How could I tell a person who treated me like a princess, made me feel like a beautiful person, that I was married to a man who beat me, raped me and treat me like dirt? Just because he could." She couldn't stop the sobs.

"Oh little star, little star." Cleo moved gently to hold her settling down in the large chair beside the actress.

"How could I tell her as she held me and made love to me, that he haunted my sleep? Threatened to destroy all we had?" She continued to sob.

"You couldn't Thea, you couldn't." Cleo cooed softly. "His reign stops tonight." She whispered.

"No, it doesn't." She sobbed. "He won. I've lost her and now I only have him."

"No, my star. No." Cleo shook her head. "You can win her back."

"I can't." Thea shook her head.

"You must!" Her voice was firm as she moved to look the actress in the eye.

"How?" Thea blinked her eyes.

"Tomorrow morning." Cleo instructed softly. "Try to wake up early, she'll be out till at least nine. She's resting in the room at the end of the hall. Go to her, tell her everything."

"You think I should?" She asked her head growing fuzzier.

"You have to my star." Cleo brushed her hair again. "You can't let the raven fly alone. She is lost without you to guide her."

"I don't know Cleo." Thea hesitated. "I think I need to go to bed."

"Of course." The blonde pulled back. "But at least try." She added softly standing and offering her arm. "We'll get you tucked up all safe and sound."

Thea willing took the offered support. She was too tired, confused and in too much pain to argue.

"Tomorrow will dawn a much better day." Cleo mused as she led the disoriented woman up to bed. "I guarantee it."

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Cleo closed the door to Victoria's room laughing to herself. The squeals of excitement that followed her out actually brought a smile to her face.

'Hell, could a day of shopping and at the club with her be that bad?' She rolled her eyes and laughed again. 'We'll definitely need a driver 'cause I'm going to need wine and lots of it.' She planned out her agenda. 'The good thing is that it will leave Thea and Rae alone. The rest doesn't matter.'

Cleo stepped up to the actress' door. She knocked softly, but not expecting the knock to get a response she opened the door after a time and let her self in. Softly padding across the room to the large bed. Thea was splayed in the middle of it asleep though looking very uncomfortable. Cleo sat on the edge and watched the young actress for a few minutes studying her.

"I can see what you saw Raven." She laughed to herself. "But lets see if you can give it up. Thea...Thea." She called softly at first gently rubbing her hand down the actress arm that was out of the blankets. "Thea, wake up honey." A soft moan came back to her. "Thea, Thea." She repeated the word smiling as the woman struggled out of sleep and against all the pills.

'She'd have made a much more complacent drug addict then Rae.' The evil thought chuckled through her mind.

"Yes?" Thea opened her eyes with a blink. She blinked again to bring the figure sitting on the bed next to her into focus.

"Darling it's just me." Cleo smiled down at her. "Wake up slow, the pills are a bit of a bear."

"Cleo?" She questioned softly.

"Yes Thea, just Cleo. Nothing to fear." She rubbed her arm gently again.

"Morning." Thea smiled slighted.

"Good morning darling. How are you feeling?" She asked in a bright tone.

"Fuzzy." Thea replied honestly knowing her body hadn't woken up enough to register pain at least not in the full technicolour she expected.

"That's the medication, don't worry about it." Cleo shook her head. "You have nothing to do and all the servants at your beckon call so just give into it."

"How are you?" Thea asked with a gentle nod as she made a move to sit up in the bed.

"Me?" Cleo was a little taken by the question it wasn't often that people asked how she was.

"Yes Cleo, how are you?" She repeated.

"I'm fine little star. Just worried about my little clan." She shook off the question. "That is why I wanted to get your approval on taking Tori for a little shopping trip and lunch at the club." She spoke quickly. "I figured it would give you time to rest and her a bit of a distraction."

"You don't have to do that." Thea shook her head a little.

"Thea, darling." Her voice went low. "I don't have to 'do' anything. I want to." Her tone lightened again. "She's an adorable young woman and besides she's here for while. She needs more than what she brought."

"Have you asked her then?" Thea asked managing finally to sit upright as she looked at the tall blonde.

"Well I mentioned it, I hope that was okay." Cleo looked worried. "I didn't mean to overstep my bounds."

"Oh not at all. Though I am surprised you got the suggestion out before she agreed." Thea gave her a warm look.

"Oh I didn't." She laughed. "She almost crushed little me with the biggest hug."

"She would." Thea nodded happily.

"I also figured..." The blonde paused. "Well in case you decided to talk to Rae it would give you two privacy with her and I out of the house."

"Oh!" Thea looked down at her hands on the sheets.

"Just in case." Cleo spoke quickly. "No pressure and really I'm excited about having a day with your sister. I never had a little sister"

"Well don't let her roller coaster you into anything." Thea looked up with a smile as Cleo laughed.

"Me? Thea, unless she asks me to buy her a small country I can put in on credit and have it paid off by morning." The blonde kept laughing.

"Are you an only child?" Thea asked generally.

"Yes, only me." Cleo straightened out the sleeve of her blouse.

"That must have been hard." Thea mused quietly.

"Didn't matter in this house." She tried to keep calm.

"But you must have been lonely." Thea kept on. "Such a big house and only you."

"Here?" Cleo laughed tightly. "There are at least a dozen servants milling about at any given time. So anything your sister is partial too?" She tried to steer the topic away.

"Did your Mother spend a lot of time at home?" The actress asked, her curiosity steering easily with the influence of the painkillers.

"No." She spoke quietly and pained. Cleo's her mind screamed to shut this woman up, talk of mother was not allowed.

"A business woman too huh?" Thea smiled knowingly.

"No, she is deceased." Cleo spoke in a short voice that caused Thea to instantly lose her smile.

"I'm sorry." Thea punctuated her short sentence with a long pause.

"Not your fault little star." Cleo laughed it off. "These things happen. Now Tori, who is her favourite designer? Or shall we be finding her one today?"

"Oh you will find all about Victoria if you take her dress shopping." Thea laughed her focus switching to the easier topic.

"How so?" Cleo asked intrigued.

"If you come back with anything other than jeans. I will shake your hand."

"Oh no, not another Blackbird." She laughed openly. "Get that hand ready then as I have managed to get even the mighty Raven in a dress on..." She thought for a moment. "Three... no four occasions." A wide smile broke on her face.

"Tori is more of a sparrow than a raven but..." Thea laughed lightly at Cleo's victory list. "Good luck with her. As a tip, she hates her legs!"

"I love a challenge." Cleo winked at her. "Hates legs eh... humm... we'll work on that." She thought of the younger woman in the other room. Well they weren't the best legs but they weren't something to hate. No, she could find a few moments of like for them. "Anything you need while we are about? I'll get Tori to pick you out some things to rest in."

"I was about to place an order for a loose pair of cotton pants and a few baggy shirts." She conceded with a smile.

"Easily done." Cleo nodded.

"And don't let her near a shoe shop." Thea warned amazed at the geniality of Cleo.

"Why?" Cleo studied her.

"Because she'll only look at the boots! The chunkiest, bulkiest ones there." She laughed loudly.

"I think I can afford a few pairs of boots darling." The woman laughed motioning to their surroundings.

"Oh please Cleo." Thea laughed lightly. "Buy her a pair of shoes, with a pretty heel!"

"How about I make a deal with her?" Cleo grinned.

"A deal, why not." Thea looked at the blonde ready for details.

"No boots till we get one pair of heels and a nice formal outfit?" She gave them easily.

"If she goes for it, then the next time we dine out is on me." Thea pledged.

"Good show little star." The blonde smiled. "So anything else for you but pants and shirts?" She questioned. "Anything special I can get to cheer you up?"

Thea looked at Cleo and began to say something but she stopped herself. Her heart painfully reminding herself just who she was talking too and that she had been going to react to the question as if Rae had asked her.

"Come on there must be something." Cleo pushed lightly. "The sky is the limit little star."

"I can't ask for what I was going to." Thea gave her a little smile and then she laughed at her own mind.

"Why not?" The tall blonde questioned softly.

"Because you will think I am mad!" Thea laughed again.

"Never!" Cleo was adamant. "Can't hurt to ask, right?"



"A teddy bear." Thea looked away from the tall smart blonde.

"What kind of teddy?" Cleo leaned in, trying to keep the actress' eye. Thea looked at Cleo to see if she was smirking, happy when there was nothing but a genuine smile. "Fluffy, big, brown?" This was too precious to mock. Her little actress wanted a teddy bear.

"Any kind." She breathed.

"I will get you the most precious bear little star." Cleo reached out to lightly take her hand. "And he'll always remind you that today and forever, you fly under the Queen's standard and no one can ever hurt you again." She whispered softly.

'Well no one but the queen herself.' Cleo's mind hissed the fact for recognition.

"Cleopatra?" She whispered back. "The Queen of the Nile."

"The Queen of the world." Cleo purred.

Thea smiled at the blonde but her smile was not as assured as it once had been. There was something about Cleo's response that threw her.

"Now I am going to collect that darling sister of yours and we will be back laden with a fashion show before dinner." The blonde announced as she moved to stand.

"Cleo?" Thea watched the woman stand and tracked her movement to the door. "Enjoy her. She is lovely, no matter what she says." She added the last part softly.

"I will Thea, I will." Cleo's pearly white teeth flashed momentarily. "And no boots till we got heels!" She laughed openly and the actress laughed back.

"Remember the legs!" She interjected as Cleo reached the door.

"Legs!" Cleo winked. "Consider it noted." She tapped her temple. "And little star." Her voice went soft. "Think about talking to Raven. Please." She let the word hang long as she stepped out and left.

Continued in Act XVI...

**The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive**

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~ After the Curtain Falls ~

by Beth Dragon & Kathleen Wolf

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**Thanks:** To Emma, for her never ending love, support and chocolate. To the Ex-Guards Village for all their feedback and expert advice.

## **Act XVI**

Thea was relieved when she completed her trek down the flight of stairs. She hurt in places she had forgotten could hurt. Finding Rae still completely asleep had come as a bit of a blow.

'But maybe that's for the best, this way she has to come find you.' She thought as she meandered across the front lobby. 'And if she doesn't then that's just how it should be.'

The only thing she wanted to do now was curl up somewhere and heal. After her brief talk with the second doctor she knew the score and knew what she needed to do.

The thought that she had to deal with the play soon hit her as she made her way into the lounge. She walked through the ornate double doors into the spacious room.

'Worry about that later.' She tried to calm her mind. 'For today at least I just want to heal without worrying.'

A fire burned brightly in the double sized fireplace and several leather couches were strategically placed to capture the heat. Rugs littered the floor and the two double bay windows were draped in heavy burgundy velvet. By the window sill a small display cabinet filled with crystal statues was being dusted by a short dark haired woman. Thea couldn't judge her age from this back view.

"Oh I am sorry Miss. Winters." The short woman turned to her and apologised, pulling a nervous hand through her greying hair.

"It's all right." Thea gave her a reassuring smile wondering if she should know this maid. Had she been introduced yesterday when she was out of it?

"Would you like me to get you some tea or something for brunch? My name is Isabella." The woman curtsied a little. "Miss. Eaton has advised all of the staff of you're staying with her." She read the look of slight confusion on the woman's face.

"Thank you Isabella." Thea smiled warmly again. "I see." She nodded, having expected no less.

"Please lie down and relax." The worried woman motioned to the couch. "Let me get you a blanket." She hurriedly moved to a large cabinet off to one end of the room pulling a thick quilt out of the bottom drawer.

"I will thank you." She moved to the couch slowly happy to sink into the soft leather.

"Are you sure there is nothing at all I can get you?" The maid asked as she draped the blanket over the actress.

"Do you have tea?" Thea asked feeling a little foolish.

"Of course." Isabella smiled. "What kind would you like?"

"Earl Grey?"

Isabella nodded and moved away to retreat out of the room's back exit.

Thea leaned back a little pushing her aching back into the soft material. With some discomfort she moved her legs up on to the couch as her body reminded her of the meaning of the word pain.

In record time, the maid returned carrying an enormous tray bearing a complete tea set ready with the lone cup.

'Just like being at my parents.' She thought as she watched the woman arrange the service.

"I took the liberty of bringing lemon, honey and such." The woman smiled softly. "As I am unaware of how you take your tea."

"With lemon." Thea offered nodding gently.

"Lemon." Isabella nodded back and poured out the tea leaving it on the table closet to Thea. "Is there anything else Miss. Winters?"

"Just one thing." She turned to the maid.

"Of course." The maid stood waiting for her orders.

"How bad does my eye look?" The actress asked with a smile. She could barely see out of it now and she knew it was getting worse by the minute.

"Oh." The small pained word came out of the elderly woman. "I'm afraid it's almost closed." She shook her head sadly. "Would you like some ice for it?"

"Know any good old Canadian remedies?" Thea asked with a light laugh to show the maid that she was aware how it must look and that she was all right about it.

"Well my husband, God rest his soul." Isabella blessed herself quickly. "He always said that raw steak took the swelling out." She laughed lightly. "But I think it's just the cold that's good for it."

"Well I am not a vegetarian or anything but I don't think I could cope with that!" She joined in laughing as much as her ribs would allow.

"Ice then?" The maid asked smiling.

"Probably for the best." Thea nodded.

"I could have doctor Potterly called if you'd like?" She questioned before going to get the ice.

"No, I am sure he will turn up in his own time any way." The actress spoke softly.

"We are to expect him at eleven." The maid retreated to go and get ice for her.

"Ah." Thea leaned her head back and closed her eyes trying to take stock on the recent events. As she tried to make some reason of things she realised that the pain made it impossible. Opening her eyes, she looked around at the room.

"There aren't any pictures." She spoke to herself softly. In her parents house there wasn't a room in the house without a photograph of her, or Tori or both of her parents. More often there was one of each of them. "Not a one here." Painfully she twisted round. Not finding any behind her she turned back. The walls were hung with fine paintings but no photographs. "Not even on the mantel." She noted the odd occurrence as Isabella slipped back in with a terry wrapped ice pack

"Miss. Eaton has impeccable taste for art." The woman spoke absently as she moved to present the pack to the actress.

"Yes she does." Thea agreed. "But not for photographs." She added absently not really meaning the maid to hear her.

"Mr. Eaton has not allowed photographs since her passing." The maid blessed herself again, stiffening when she realised that this was a guest and not another servant she was talking too. She really was losing her touch in her old age. "I'm sorry, I'll leave you now. Call if you require anything as one of us is always nearby."

"His wife?" Thea questioned for clarity to stop the maid's retreat. The woman nodded slightly. "When was that?" She asked figuring this might be the best way to find answers to some of the questions burning in her mind.

"It'll be twenty five years this Christmas." The woman blessed herself again.

"She died at Christmas time?" She asked a little disturbed.

"Yes, it was Christmas." The maid shook her head sadly.

"How terrible." Thea's voice was honest. "And how old was Angelina?"

"A mere seven." The maid frowned.

"How did it happen?" Thea asked boldly, her mind reeling at how young Cleo had been.

"It was not the right way for a beautiful woman like her to pass." The maid shook her head after a short hesitation.

"I'm sorry." She offered seeing the hesitation. "It isn't my business."

"Oh no Miss. Winters." The maid apologised. "It is just such a tragedy."

"An accident?" Thea offered thinking on the maid's words.

"That was the official account." She uneasily sat down without thinking. "But those of us who were here know that is a lie." Thea's mind stopped its logical arguments of explanation as she looked at the maid. "She didn't slip that day, she'd walked the balcony a hundred times."

"It happened here?" She breathed as the woman's words registering in her head.

"On the third floor." The maid whispered. "It's barred up now. Her private rooms were up there."

"Private rooms?" Thea asked thinking of her own family home. There wouldn't be any chance of her mother having private rooms. Especially not with her and Tori roaming everywhere.

"Yes, Mrs. Eaton had her own private rooms up there." The woman smiled. "She was a painter. It was her sanctuary." She added in a soft whisper.

"I had no idea." Thea was suddenly intrigued.

"Not many do." Isabella shook her head. "Most every bit of her has been wiped from the house."

"Are any of her paintings in the house?" She asked desperate to see this allusive hidden woman.

"There is one, it in Angelina's study."

"Do you think could I see it?" Thea moved the blanket back and pushed herself off the couch.

"Of course." The maid smiled. "Miss. Eaton said you are to have free reign." She grinned to herself knowing the order was to be followed regardless of request. The older woman got up slowly. "Let me help you Miss. Winters." She offered her arm.

Thea took it letting the older woman guide her. Isabella led her slowly to the study.

"Did she paint a lot?" Thea asked as they walked.

"Oh yes!" Isabella looked off happily. "She was a wonderful artist."

Thea looked around the study walls her ears registering the maid's reply but her focus intent on looking for the painting. Isabella knew that Thea would be surprised when she didn't see the painting straight off.

"Miss. Amanda was most talented especially with portraits. Let me show you." Isabella smiled.

"Please do." Thea nodded a bit confused as to where the painting was.

"This is all a bit much but Miss. Eaton thinks it necessary." The maid moved towards the wall that held a large seascape. She punched the hidden switch in the table underneath watching as a large piece of the wall sunk in and slid over revealing the medium sized painting held in a golden frame. Thea watched intrigued as her eyes registered the sight of a young girl sat on top of a brown horse her blonde hair flowing in the wind. Her smile captured perfectly.

'Oh my!' Thea's lips moved silently to form the words as she took a slow step forward.

"It is beautiful, isn't it?" The woman moved back to let the actress see.

"It's Angelina." She breathed, her voice still nearly silent.

"Yes." Isabella whispered. "Miss. Amanda worshipped her daughter."

Thea stared at the image of the young girl. The large doe brown eyes and blond hair so perfectly captured. Yet there was a stark difference between the young girl in the painting and the woman she knew but she just couldn't work out what it was exactly.

"This is the last painting Miss. Amanda completed." The woman added softly. "It was her Christmas present to Angelina. I think that is why Miss. Eaton keeps it hidden as it is the last token she has of happiness."

"Was the horse Angelina's too?" Thea managed to ask after some moments of silence.

"Yes, Chocolate muffin." The maid laughed at the name. "Miss. Amanda let her name it."

"It's beautiful." Thea's voice was full of awe as she reached out her fingers to touch the gold frame lightly.

"The rest were taken from the house and none have laid eyes on them since." Isabella looked at the painting sadly. "Except for the unfinished ones I imagine are barred in her chambers, but those shall never be seen either."

"Are there any pictures of her, any where?" Thea asked still unable to look away from the painting.

"I have one actually." The maid smiled. "You see I have been with Miss. Amanda since she was a young woman."

"Really?" This made Thea finally look away from the picture.

"Yes, let me bring it here." The older woman moved off slowly.

Thea smiled warmly watching the maid walk away, her eyes going back to the painting. She studied the young girl in riding clothes who smiled back at her still unable to place what it was that reached out from the piece and haunted her.

"Here we go." The maid came back in and handed the small frame to the actress.

"Thank you." She whispered softly as she looked down at the black and white photograph in the silver frame.

"She was the most beautiful creature." The maid took a step away. "In both body and soul."

'Indeed she was.' Thea thought as she found herself amazed by the tall elegant woman that looked back at her. The young woman was dressed in a typically expensive gown that was both simple and elegant.

"The money was all hers." Isabella added suddenly not really knowing why she wanted to tell this. "That's why Angelina controls it all now."

"They look so similar." She suddenly realised only accidentally that she was saying her thoughts out loud.

"Yes, it is almost eerie to look at Miss. Eaton. I often have to remind myself it is not Miss. Amanda."

"The same eyes, cheek bones..." Thea listed the similarities that struck her. "Same mouth..." The maid nodded. "And hair." Even though the photograph held no colour it was obvious that Amanda Eaton had white blond hair just like her daughter. It was even a similar length to the style that Cleo wore.

"I say they would have been almost the same woman." Isabella spoke softly. "If not for losing her."

"Why did she do it then?" Thea asked her voice very low as she held out the frame to return it to the older woman.

"It's hard to understand, they'd fought so many times." She took the frame and slipped it into the large pocket in her apron. "Especially over Angelina."

"Over Angelina? She was just a child. What was there to fight over?" A streak of pain raged inside of Thea.

"A child's life must be planned." The maid shrugged. "The woman you see today is her father's doing, not Miss. Amanda's. Mr. Eaton wanted a son not a daughter, but when Miss. Amanda couldn't have any more children he decided a daughter would have to be moulded."

"Couldn't?" Thea breathed in slowly, remembering her conversation with Cleo that morning. She felt her stomach sink slightly. She'd no idea of the hornet's nest behind all this and there she had been with all her pushy questions.

"It nearly killed her to have Angelina." The maid continued. "Such a slight woman, she wasn't built for birthing. Mr. Eaton had decided that if he could have no son, then his daughter would be all that a son could have been." She shook her head softly.

"Boarding school and private at home tutoring during the summer months?" Thea suggested what the man's solution would have been in a bitter voice.

"No quite worse I'm afraid." The woman shook her head.

"Worse?" Thea frowned, unable to think of a worse.

"He was to teach her himself." Isabella looked away. "Miss. Amanda wanted none of that." The actress could only listen astounded. "Business meetings is not a place for a seven year old. Horseback riding, painting, some school... play was for a seven year old, not stock meetings and club luncheons."

Thea shook her head it had been hard for her and Tori but nothing like what Isabella was describing.



"Miss. Amanda got her way somewhat I imagine." The maid blessed herself again. "His plans didn't quite work either as when the estate went to Angelina he was left with near to nothing in comparison and over time as she grew Timothy couldn't bare to look at his daughter." She whispered the last words.

"He moved away?" Thea asked very aware suddenly that Mr. Eaton was just as non-existence as Mrs. Eaton.

"No, not formally." She shook her head. "But he is rarely in the country."

"But surely he was the executive of the estate, until Angelina was old enough?" Thea questioned trying to understand.

"No." The maid shook her head. "You see Miss. Amanda was a Philips originally and it was from her mother that her estate came. The money was put in trust for Angelina and the estate is so large it was to be run like a company. It had a board of directors until Angelina was old enough to take control of it herself."

"I see." Thea whispered hardly able to understand how such a weight could be left on the shoulders of a child.

"He was given a sum to make any legal claim to the estate nullified, on top of a prenuptial he had to sign when he married Miss. Amanda. All of this is Angelina's." She motioned to the house. "Mr. Eaton is very rich indeed, but it is Angelina who is Queen. That was her mother's legacy, a daughter who would never want for anything but who could never have the one thing she wanted." The woman spoke softer. "Her mother's suicide both made her and ruined her."

Thea looked at the painting again suddenly realising what the difference was. She lost herself in the child's brown eyes.

"The sparkle!" The difference became clear in her mind. There was no sparkle in Cleo's smile not like there was in this child's. She tore herself from the painting and looked back at Isabella.

"You should probably sort that." She motioned to the painting. "And I need to sit down. Not to mention the fact I have a lovely cup of tea waiting for me." She smiled lightly.

"Of course." The woman moved to close up the wall again. "Such a tragedy." She blessed herself again. "Let me help you back." Isabella offered when she saw the young actress begin a struggled walk out of the study.

"No, no. You get back to what ever you need to do." Thea rested a heavy hand on the doorframe.

"Thank you Miss. Winters." The maid bowed slightly. "You let me know if you need anything at all and may I say..." Thea smiled and waited for the older woman's words. "It's nice to see this house filled with people again."

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Rae held her hands to her head as she slowly and gingerly walked down the stairs. The firelight flickered out across the marble in the foyer had set her path towards the sitting room.

"Isabella, is there any aspirin in the house I feel like a truck hit me?" She asked without looking expecting to see the maid. "Oh Thea!" The small acknowledgement escaped her as her eyes focused on the actress snuggled up on the couch.

"Rae?" Thea sat up a little turning uncomfortably to look at the tall woman. The pain in her lover's voice distressed her immediately.

"How are you doing?" She asked trying to quell the torrent in her head.

"I'm okay." The actress replied softly.

"I didn't mean to disturb you..." Rae lowered her hands to her sides. "I'll just go find Isabella and let you rest." She took a step backwards. "Do you need anything?"

"Rae, please..." She was glad her worlds stopped the technician's retreat. "You aren't disturbing me and here..." She took a small packet of tablets from the tray. "Aspirin."

"Oh thanks." Rae moved forward taking the small packet quickly and sitting on one of the other couches. "I have no idea where this headache came from." She studied her own mind trying to remember but there was only a big gapping hole staring back at her. "Okay, why can't I remember anything since yesterday?" She asked closing her eyes confused.

"You don't remember last night?" Thea asked gently looking at her beloved.

"Last night?" Rae opened one eye to look at her.

"What do you remember?" Thea asked a little more directly, very concerned.

"Last thing I remember Potterly came down..." She stopped as that reality cleared in her head. "Oh God, are you all right? Christ, you didn't go did you?" She snapped back to angry in a flash, though it was tempered by a massive concern for the actress.

"Rae, it's okay." Thea tried to soothe her.

"No, Thea it's not." She shook her head as adamantly as she could. "I'm going to teach that son of a bitch a lesson."

"Rae, love, he's half way around the world by now." The actress made another attempt to calm her.

"What?" The wind was pulled from Rae's sails immediately. "Christ, how did I lose twelve hours?" She looked to Thea for answers.

"You don't know?" Thea returned the confused look.

"No!" Rae's response was sharp.

"But I thought you and Potterly agreed..." She frowned.

"What?" Rae leaned forward on her knees. "Agreed on what? The last thing I agreed too was waiting in the study while Cleo talked to him and then I was going to go have a word with the bastard."

"Rae, you were sedated." She spoke the words slowly.

"Whoa!" The technician put her hands up in protest as she stood up. "I was what?"

"Cleo said it was Potterly's suggestion that you were to be sedated." Thea's voice was slow and unsteady.

"With a fucking truck?" She pulled at the pain in her forehead pacing back and forth before the fire.

"I have no idea what with." Thea watched her pace. "Something major. It took you out like a light."

"Okay let me get this straight." Rae turned taking a deep breath. "Everyone decided I should be taken out so that what shouldn't have went on could go on?"

"No, not everyone. There was only you, Cleo and the doctor around. Don't you remember?" Thea's frowned deepened.

"No, Thea! I do not remember consenting to being put down!" She barked angrily turning to look at the fire.

"By the time I managed to get downstairs you and Cleo were arguing in the hall. You went out there. I was scared you'd hurt yourself on the marble. I thought you knew." The weak actress kept talking desperate to make Rae understand the sedative hadn't been her idea.

"In the hall?" The technician's mind caught up. "If I'd agree to be sedated why would I go down in the hall?" Thea's own head began to spin as she realised how odd the story sounded. "Then there is the small fact that sedatives give me the biggest fucking headache in the world, so why would I agree to taking them?"

"I'm sorry." Thea spoke almost silently as she looked past Rae to the dancing flames.

"Why Thea?" She questioned losing her anger. "If you didn't know, you have nothing to be sorry for." She walked back and slumped down in her former place on the couch.

"I should have questioned Cleo more." Thea berated herself gently.

"You had enough on your mind." She shook it off.

"I had nothing on my mind that matters as much as you do." The actress made the sad honest comment in a strong voice.

"Yes, you did Thea." Rae turned away her voice even.

"No, I didn't!" She stressed again.

"You had to protect him." The technician shook her head turning back. "Why I don't know but apparently you had too."

"I wasn't protecting him, I was protecting everything else." Thea kept her eyes on the flames.

"Who? Thea, everyone was safe here?" She asked the question that had been eating at her.

"Do you believe that?" She looked at Rae as she asked.

"Yes." The technician nodded. "And if I thought your parents were in danger I'd send people over for their security."

"Oh please Rae!" She snapped angrily. "This isn't about security that you can buy, or pay for or hire someone to achieve."

"Then what is it?" Rae snapped back instantly.

"It's about mental security. It's about Tori being able to wake up this morning knowing that she can go out with Cleo. Go shopping have fun, be twenty-three without the thought that he is still here. It's about me knowing you can't do anything dumb and get yourself hurt or locked up." She listed out the facts that Rae seemed to be missing.

"Yeah well maybe I think some things are worth getting locked up over." The tall woman stood again. "Mainly when someone crosses the line he did. That he's walking around thinking he's done nothing wrong and will never pay for it is not part of my idea of mental security."

"So he crossed the line Rae, so what?" The actress threw the blanket covering her body back.

"So what?" Rae looked at the actress astonished. "Christ, Thea!" She sunk back down onto the couch.

"You think that was the first time?" She snapped her eyes blazing and her heart pumping. "You think that this was a one off because he'd been missing me?"

"He should have been killed every time." The technician's voice seethed back.

"Rae, I am his wife. He has rights." Thea spoke the sad words harshly.

"No, don't give me that tired line." She looked up. "Not from you. You're better than that."

"That's how it works." Thea found her anger gone.

"A ring does not give anyone that right. Marriage doesn't work like that Thea." She shook her head.

"And how does it work? Love? Is that what turns matrimonial wheels?" A slight bitterness crept into the actress' voice.

"Yes!" Rae snapped back.

"He doesn't love me any more than I love him." Thea replied shaking her head. "That never had anything to do with it."

"Then why on God's earth are you married?" The technician asked lost suddenly.

"I was a pretty, useful rich girl. I look good and that'll help to bring in business." She stated the reality of her arrangement.

"What?" Rae's jaw dropped.

"I was a necessary tool." Thea's voice was more lost than angry.

"You're his wife Thea, you're not a tool." Her jaw dropped further.

"Rae." She looked at the raven-haired woman. "I was more like a badly paid whore." She didn't break their gaze as she spoke.

Rae swore she'd been slapped across the face though she didn't know whose hand it was as the air drained out of her slowly.

"But..." The technician stammered. "Why?" She tried to find one thought to hang onto.

Thea watched Rae's face and regretted her words immediately. It was even more obvious now that Cleo was right. Rae had no concept of the lifestyle she was being described. This was not part of the technician's black or white world.

"Why?" She breathed softly needing Rae to ask more clearly.

"Why didn't anyone stop this?" Rae asked finally in a tiny voice. "They had to see."

"See?" Thea remarked softly. "Rae..." She wasn't sure how to say this. "My father chose this for me."

"I mean my father would have killed any guy who dared slap me let alone..." The technician's voice trailed off as Thea's words registered in her ears. "He chose this?" She looked up the actress, her rage bright. Her words shook from the force of it and her breathing was thick and deliberate.

"I was little use to him as a girl." Thea explained.

"For money?" Rae asked trying to settle this in her mind.

"The only assets I had were that I looked good and knew how to behave." The actress felt herself grow weaker as she watched Rae's anger building.

"God, what good could you be?" She stood quickly and circled the couch. "Hell a world class talented actress was nothing of use. Son of a bitch!" She slammed her hand into the wall.

"That didn't carry on the family estate or keep us in the high society." Thea tried to explain.

"Women can carry estates, look at Angelina." Rae motioned around, the blood seeping off her knuckles. "And pardon me but my opinion of such a high society is not much at the moment." She growled. "As it sits by excepting the rape and torture of its women and how a father can sit by and watch that done to his daughter, arrange it to be done no less." She shook her head. "I will never understand, as it is not comprehensible!"

Rae grew silent the next moment as she backed up against the wall, sliding down it to sit on the floor. Her eyes unfocused and wild as her mind raced and turned.

'He has to die!' The thought was more solid than ever. 'After all, he'd...' The thought of it pushed a tear down her cheek. 'And it wasn't the first time... OH GOD NOT THE FIRST TIME!' The pained scream sliced into her. 'Nobody gets away with hurting my angel. Not now, not then, not ever!'

"Rae?" Thea got off the couch and moved towards her lover slowly. "Love?" She reached out a hand towards Rae's arm. The dissociated state that had taken over the technician made her insides go cold.

'I'll get the Lear.' The plans rambled in the technician's head. 'I'll find out where he is in England that shouldn't be too hard since Cleo's got a man on him. He's going to feel pain, oh yeah lots of pain.' The thoughts rambled in her head. 'Maybe I'll get him picked up first and taken somewhere secluded. Real pain takes time!'

"Angel?" Thea tried to keep the pain out of her voice as she squatted down.

"I'm sorry." Rae broke from her thoughts, looking at the actress to whimper the regret. "I should have..."

"Should have?" She asked her hand completing the journey to rest on Rae's arm.

"He'll pay for it all Thea, every moment. I swear he'll know he was wrong." Her usually strong voice came again broken and small.

"And what will that do to you?" Thea breathed a tear slipping from her swollen eye.

"That doesn't matter." Rae breathed back.

"It matters to me." The actress stated honestly.

"He has to pay for what he's done." Rae fell silent. "Why didn't you tell me?" She asked blankly when she found her voice.

"How could I?" Thea voice was soft.

"You knew I could stop him, could make him go away." Rae tried to figure out where she stood. How could she believe she mattered if she couldn't figure out why the actress had kept her in the dark?

"Do you remember?" Thea had to sit back the pain in her stomach too much to stay in the squatting position.

"Remember?" The technician asked confused.

"At the restaurant. You asked if there was anyone who would mind that we were there. Anyone who would care, who would be jealous?"

"Yes, you said no." Rae spoke in a hurt whisper.

"And I told you the truth." Thea was adamant. "Edward doesn't care what I do as long as when I am with him he can screw me as much as he wants." She couldn't make the facts sound nice. Rae's head snapped down again at the answer. "Rae." She looked at her lover. "For the first time, ever in my life, when I was with you I felt loved." Many more tears spilled down her face. "I felt important and I thought maybe, just maybe I had a chance."

"A chance?" Rae asked hanging on every word trying as she tried to figure this out. None of it went with the lines in her head, the set pattern of the world.

"A chance to be free, a chance to be happy and a chance to be loved. I was seventeen when I was engaged to Edward. I was just a child. A child with dreams of what tomorrow would be. Dreams that turned into the nightmare of his reality." Her voice lost a bit of its strength. "The nights of hell, the hours in private clinics. A puppet on the strings of a life I never even chose." Rae

listened silently as each new word tore her up even more. "So I just studied hard and with all of the spirit in me that would fight against my life I did fight. Determined I would get away and I did Rae." She looked at Rae needing to see the blue eyes that stared back at her. "Have you got any idea how our first night together felt?"

"It was wonderful." Rae answered softly.

"It was more than that, knowing that he couldn't get me, knowing I was completely safe. That you were there, that you loved me and that you would keep me safe."

"But Thea..." The flaw came to Rae bright again. "If you didn't tell me the danger how was I supposed to keep you safe?"

"Love, wrong kind of safe again." Thea tried to clarify. "Safe up here." She patted the side of her head gently.

"But I couldn't keep you any safer." She tried to dampen the loathing in her voice as it was against herself and she didn't want the actress to misunderstand. "He waltzed in and I let him do this. While he was..." She swallowed hard. "All I was worried about was myself and..." The reality of the time frames that night hit her hard.

"No love, please don't go there." Thea reached back out to rest her hand on the technician's arms.

"No please." She moved away from the hand. "I have to think."

Thea pulled back her hand. She sat back and watched Rae move away.

"I need to think." Rae paced toward the door and then backed into the room a bit. "I..." Thea just watched her drained and scared. "I'm sorry." The tall woman stammered pacing closer and closer to the doorway and the foyer. "I just don't understand. How could he? How could I?" She paused and rubbed her forehead. "And this, this different safe. I have to think."

The final words came harshly as she finally moved out of the room. Thea was about to push herself up to follow her, when she stopped and just watched the Raven go. She was helpless in the face of such adversity.

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Rae walked through to the back of the house out the rear door and barefoot onto the stone slabs of the garden path. She kept walking, cursing to herself as she went.

"Christ what is going on here?" She walked into the tree line at the back of the yard knowing now she was far enough from the house for her words and actions to be hidden.

"What kind of a fucked up country is England?" She barked the words at the trees as she flicked her hand and sent trails of clotting blood across the underbrush.



"Don't be so naive Cassie." It was Lillian's voice that came out of nowhere in her head and made her stop. "So it takes a new form, but the abuse and subjection of women is ingrained in all societies." The woman's soft voice of reason came to her again, a conversation from long before welling up in her mind.

"God I wish you were here Lillian." She admitted weakly as she sunk down against a tree, the cold frost on the ground soaking into the pj's she still wore. "How do I make sense of this? Okay she didn't tell me, that hurt's more than anything. I don't care about this different

safe." She shook her head as the first tear fell. "I could have kept her from this at least." She wiped at her face with her uninjured hand.

"Stupid, Rae stupid." Her mind went again to that night, losing herself in Cleo, for what? "Cause you didn't want to admit it'd gone to hell." She shook her head. "Well looks like you fucked it right good O'Keefe." She barked at herself.

"Hey Thea, by the way." She mocked herself. "While you were being raped and having the crap beat out of you I'd decided I'd get back at you and I went and fucked Cleo for a few hours. Just perfect." She pulled her knees up to her chest and started sobbing when there were no more words. She didn't know what to think or what to feel or even if she was capable of either.

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Rae stepped back into the house at full steam. That was it, this all had to be settled and it had to be settled now, one way or the other. She couldn't go on like this, she felt like she was losing her mind. She entered the living room still at full gate, standing full in the doorway when she saw the actress on the couch.

"Okay that's it we need to talk please." She figured why start with polite introduction's though her steam softened as she saw the small battered woman.

"Okay." Thea turned uncomfortably. "Let's talk." She added.

"Okay." Rae moved in closer, still in constant motion. "So I'm the naive sorta sheltered type apparently." She snatched the napkin off the tea tray and wrapped it around her hand.

"I didn't say that." Thea corrected watching Rae carefully.

"No, no." Rae shook her head. "It's not a said it's a fact, as I have no concept at all of how things have worked. You see the only relative I have ever had that hit his wife didn't do so cause he thought she was property but because he drank too much and he was an asshole. Then again my mother, I'm told, almost killed him so you can see my standing ground." She turned to make sure she was making some sense. "So this is not a given concept to me... Rae meet Thea's husband. Now he's not a real husband, just some bastard she had to marry and everyone allows him to abuse her like a slave." She refrained from using Thea's choice of words.

"But as I said Rae, he was not my husband in the sense you mean and know." The actress repeated.

"Okay so we agree on that point." Rae nodded still moving in long paces around the room.

"I can understand that this concept is hard." She offered trying to show the technician that she understood how alien the idea was for the technician.

"Good, cause Thea this is all coming out of left field at me." Rae stopped and turned to look at her.

"Oh come on, I am sure even in Canada people do things to climb ladders." Thea's voice was vaguely condescending. She could understand Rae having a hard time with the concept but surely the technician didn't have her head buried in the sand completely.

"Well there's our other problem then." Rae went back to her pacing. "I am not a ladder climber. I don't come from ladder climbers. I come from men and women who came home with their hands dirty every night. You didn't sell your wife for business and if you happened to entertain the boss to dinner. That's all it fucking was... food!" Her voice boomed off the walls of the living room.

"Guess I should have been born here." Thea laughed trying humour.

"Well it's a damn good thing I wasn't borne there." Rae didn't find this funny. "Okay Thea..." She tried to find her main point wherever it had gone. "I don't get this different safe thing... safe is safe in my books, but for the sake of argument... let's say different safes exist." Thea nodded, deciding it was best to stay quiet for a second and let the tall woman talk. "Didn't you think that if you explained him to me I would have understood that you hated him, didn't want to be with him? I'm naive Thea, but I'm not brain dead. "

"Why should I give him air time? Why should I let him encroach on the only good thing I had?" Thea asked pained.

"Because Thea at some point he would have had it." She stopped in a wide stance looking down at the smaller woman on the couch. "He would have become an issue. At some point he would have had to been dealt with, you and I building a life... at some point your bastard so called husband would have been an issue."

"And I would have told you but when he couldn't hurt us." Thea tried to defend herself. "I could have divorced him quickly and quietly."

"Thea, up until that night he couldn't have hurt us." Rae shook her head, her voice a little louder that she wanted.

"He could always hurt us." The actress snapped back.

"How?" Rae demanded.

"Just like he has done." Thea growled at her.

"No Thea, he didn't do this. You did this part of it by not telling me."

"Even if I had told you about him from day one." She said back angrily. "He could have hurt us."

"Okay maybe not day one." Rae began walking again. "But as I'm spilling out all my long lost dark secrets it never struck you to think hey I can tell this now or maybe no."

"Me telling you, not telling you doesn't change his power." Thea stressed the real point.

"Hey maybe with the two of us fighting him he won't have any more power. Maybe if we built our life together on honesty then he can't hurt us ever. The only power he has is what you give him Thea." Rae barked angrily.

"He has money and he has power." She snapped back at the same intensity.

"Fuck Thea, I am a tech monkey but I thought you saw I am not just that. I have money and power." Rae threw her hands up in defeat.

"I don't care what you have, what you don't have. I almost wanted you to be a poor hard up techie. I didn't care what you were. He has my parents. He has my families' status. He has me." Thea shouted back loudly.

"That's it isn't it, he has you." Rae screamed back. "That's why I couldn't do a damn thing."

"You did everything." Thea dropped her voice from its raised pitch.

"Apparently not." Rae's hands dropped down to her sides.

"For God's sake Rae, stop it!" Thea snapped sharply at the display.

"Stop what?" Rae asked looking back at her.

"Stop punishing yourself, me, us. Stop it." Her voice was steely. "Yes, I kept it from you. Yes, you might think I lied. Yes, I am a glorified whore."

"No, don't ever say that." Rae's voice came in a thick confident tone.

"Why not? I am possibly the weakest person on this tiresome world." Thea leaned back into the couch feeling small and defeated.

"Because it's not true." Rae shook her head.

"It's how I feel, why shouldn't I say it." Thea's voice was angry.

"Did you say no Thea?" Rae asked calmly.

"Of course I said no. I always say no. I fight. I kick. I scream but what difference does that make?" She asked in a clipped tone. Talking about none of this made any difference.

"You saying no made all the difference. You are not a glorified whore." Rae moved away and sat on the far couch.

"Do you know the difference it makes?" The actress' anger reached a raw state and she glared at the technician with hard eyes.

"What? I'm sure our differences are not the same. I am convinced that the definition is clear. In my world no makes you a rape victim and not a whore." Rae turned back into the glare.

"Shall I tell you the difference no makes to me? To Edward?" Thea growled leaning forward on the couch.

"What Thea? Enlighten me to the British high society definition." She barked back, not angry but meeting the harsh words cast at her.

"This has nothing to do with Britain. It has nothing to do with social class. This had nothing to do with any of that. This has to do with me." The actress got up from the couch and walked closer to Rae. "From the time I married him onwards." She began as she walked. "Edward had a clear idea of what rights being my husband gave him and I started by fighting, arguing and defying. That got me carted off to clinic after clinic being patched up here and there." She stopped in front of the technician. "And so I stopped saying no. I stopped fighting and defying and arguing. You want to know what difference saying no makes?" She pulled her shirt loose and lifted it slightly, revealing her bruised torso and wrists. "This is the difference." She snarled, her voice not sad just bitter and angry.

"And that's why I'm going to fucking kill him!" Rae barked back the nasty truthful response. "Cause you said no and he should have stopped, cause he thought he had rights no man has. I'm going to kill him for the first time and every time since!"

"Oh yeah that makes such sense. For fucksake Rae! Wake up!" Thea shouted at her.

"In my mind it does. He started this Thea he started the violence. I'm just going to end it cause that's what we do where I come from."

"For fucksake Rae, wake up!" She repeated the angry words again as she tucked in her shirt and turned away. "Yeah go on, go and kill him. Slit his throat. Pay him back. Get yourself locked up for the rest of your life. Let him have the greatest victory he could ever have."

"He'll be dead Thea how has he won?" Rae asked in a harsh tone.

"Because he gets you." The actress' voice came softer. "He takes you away from me just like I feared he would, just like I tried to stop him doing."

"Thea, look at the marks yourself." Rae stood up to follow her.

"Why?" She turned back.

"All of that." The technician pointed with an unsteady hand. "All that's he's done that only you really know about and you're worried about me?"

"I LOVE YOU!" Thea shouted suddenly. "If I had to let him do this to me every day for the rest of my life, but I had you, I would agree and I wouldn't even think about it."

"No! No Thea." Rae backed up toward the fireplace, the small shreds of stability she had left tore apart. "I'm not worth that. I'm not worth that night."

"You are to me. I said no that night because I love you." Thea didn't follow the technician's retreat.

"Oh Christ Thea, not for me, say no for you not me." Rae shook her head against the terror in her body. "I've done horrible things."

"Rae, I know all about what you have done what you were." The actress brushed off all of the dark haired woman's past away in an instant.

"No Thea, I have done things since then. That night when I left the party..." Her voice came in a panic.

"The past doesn't matter..." Thea stopped as she heard the present tense being used in the Raven's words.

"I was so fucking angry." Rae punched her hand into the fireplace and Thea's knees weakened a little. "All I knew was that he was your husband." The actress put her hand back and eased herself back into the couch. "Which meant jokes on you Rae."

Thea wanted to set the record straight on this point again but decided Rae need to talk now.

"I got in the jeep and I drove and when I couldn't see the road I started to walk and do you know where I ended up? Do you have any idea?" Her voice was low and pained..

"Where?" Thea whispered the question knowing all the anger now was directed at the technician and not her.

"Fucking Shorbourne park with some two bit dealer offering me the cure to all my blues." Rae laughed at herself. "But I didn't do it, I got the hell out of there..." Her voice tapered off. "But I

did something worse." Thea let the breath she had held go as Rae moved down to sit on the large lower ledge of the fireplace resting her head in her hands. "I came here."

"Here?" She asked coming to stand a little way away from Rae.

"I ran to Cleo." Rae was barely able to say the words.

"To get drugs?" Thea asked her mind filled with worry and horror.

"No." Rae shook her head and looked down. "Worse."

"What then?" Thea asked her mind reeling.

"Her and I..." She couldn't say it. Thea's cartwheeling mind stopped resting on the one thought. "I wanted to prove it wasn't me... I could love without it being made up, without it being torn apart. But it wasn't the same, it wasn't even close, it was just..." She struggled with the word. "Sex."

"Oh baby!" Thea sunk to her knees and grabbed Rae into a tight embrace. "Thank God." She felt hot tears sting her swollen eyes but didn't care as she cried. These were happy tears and she'd endure any pain to be crying them now.

"Huh?" The hug surprised the technician. Thea was supposed to be screaming again. "Thea, did you hear me?" She questioned with more strength. "I ran into bed with Cleo."

"If you had injected yourself or anything like that I couldn't have ever forgiven myself." Thea wept softly and held her even tighter.

"No, I did worse." Rae tried to make her see.

"Sex isn't worse love." Thea shook her head, pulling back to look the Raven in the eye.

"But?" Rae tried to get her head around this, her heart distracted by the woman's tears that apparently were out of relief for the first time but still bothered her.

Thea suddenly realised Rae might be feeling overwhelmed and uncomfortable with the hug and she forced herself to let go though she didn't want to. She rocked back on the balls of her feet to put some distance between them.

"But look what I did do?" Rae missed the feel of the arms around her but was unable to ask them to remain cause too much was too raw.

"What do you think you did?" Thea asked brushing tears off her cheeks.

"I betrayed you." Rae spoke quietly as she looked down at the ground again unable to keep the actress' eyes.

"No, you didn't." Thea reached out a slightly trembling hand to raise Rae's chin. Rae let the small hand lead her gaze up easily. The actress studied Rae for a long moment in the silence. "I love you." She whispered, moving a little closer.

"I love you too angel." Rae whispered back almost silently.

"Hold me?" Thea asked her voice tiny.

"Oh God angel, that's what I've wanted to do from the first second." Rae softly wrapped her arms around the small woman. They clung to each other, and the hot tears soaking through Rae's top made her hold on even tighter.

"I am so sorry I hurt you." Thea sobbed.

"I'm the one who's sorry angel." Rae tried to talk through her tears. "I thought I'd lost you forever." She whispered fearfully, holding as tightly as she thought the battered woman's body could bear.

"Rae, even if you had walked away from me and never spoken or seen me again, you still wouldn't have lost me." She whispered back.

"I could never do that Thea. I love you too much."

"I love you and not one word about forever, and my dream of us was a lie." She stated the words confidently needing them to be believed.

"I hoped it wasn't. I just lost focus for awhile" Rae placed kisses into strawberry blonde locks. "Not for me either." Thea pulled back a little to see the blue that she loved. "You make me feel complete."

"You make me feel..." Thea tried to explain as they held each other's stare. "Seventeen again." She hoped Rae would understand.

"You are angel." Rae smiled softly at her.

"Why is 'I love you' never enough at moments like this?" She smiled back.

"Cause so many people throw it around like it's nothing." Rae moved her hand long enough to brush a stray hair off the bruise on the actress' cheek. "And then at these moments you know just what it really is and it's not to be thrown around."

Thea smiled despite the stitches and bruising that marked her beautiful face. Suddenly she was very aware that they didn't hurt quite as much.

"Oh be careful angel." Rae held her hand in Thea's hair. "Our first priority is getting you all better again. Though I have to admit." She smiled. "I'm so desperate to kiss you right now."

"Kiss me then." Thea encouraged her brightly.

"But angel your lip?" Rae asked hesitantly, the last thing she wanted to do was hurt her. "I might hurt you." She spoke softly to clarify that was her reason.

"All things get better quicker when they are kissed ask any mother." Thea replied smiling as she moved a bit closer.

"That is true isn't it?" She grinned, moving slowly and with great care closer.

Thea nodded as she felt Rae press their lips gently together. For the first time in what seemed like an eternity, Thea's nightmare subsided as she felt the touch of her lover's lips and she was able to kiss her back.

Rae gently pulled her a bit closer revelling in the touch that she'd feared she'd never have again. Thea moved her body closer drawn into the feel of the warmth and softness of the embrace she loved.

"I missed you." Rae moved back just slightly and whispered the words out onto the actress' lips.

"Now this is so much better!" Cleo stood in the door. Still in her sunglasses, holding Mac's leash in one hand and a single bag in the other. "I thought you two were going to ruin the best thing ever." She smiled brightly, pushing the shades back up onto her head.

Thea blinked and pulled away from Rae ever so slightly, startled by the sudden interruption.

"Rae watch your hands, our little star needs to heal!" The blonde called playfully as she moved further into the room.

"My hands are fine." Rae laughed and looked back to see Thea nod her confirmation.

"I figured one of us had to remember poor Marc Anthony." Cleo chuckled and moved over to drop on the couch. It was at that moment that Tori bounded in, an entourage of staff carrying enough bags to fill a shop followed behind her.

"Look, look!" Tori stopped as she saw Thea and Rae. She glanced at Cleo and then back to the couple by the fireplace. "Did we come in at a bad moment?"

"Oh no darling." Cleo motioned her over. "Come sit, we came at a perfect time." The young brown haired woman followed her instruction and came to promptly to sit on the couch next to Cleo. "Your sister and my Blackbird finally got their heads together." She smiled happily when the young woman moved quickly to fill her call.

"And that's good?" Tori looked to the tall woman next to her for confirmation.

"Cleo, she knows already." Rae bluntly filled them in on the total score.



"Good, good." Cleo nodded. "I've felt horrible with it hanging over my head."

"She does?" Thea looked at Rae with a gentle frown.

"Oh Tori." Rae realised that the actress had taken the comment differently but that her interpretation wasn't entirely wrong. "Eh yeah, she sorta figured it out that night in the condo."

"Oh." Thea managed to mumble though she was still somewhat lost.

"You'll never guess what we bought." Tori gushed, not at all bothered by the oddity of the comments that whirled around her.

"All's open and clear." Cleo affirmed from her spot. "I'm sorry little star, it was a bad judgement call for both of us." She spoke under Tori's understanding.

"Not now Cleo, this does not need to be discussed." Thea glanced at Tori to show she didn't want her younger sister involved. "Rae and I have cleared it all up."

"Oh course Thea." The blonde nodded. "Your discretion." She turned back to Tori. "Come on then darling, give us a show now." She patted the young girl's leg. "After all I didn't lose five pounds running the town to not get a show."

"Shall I try it all on?" Tori asked, only now slightly curious as to what all the double talk about but ignoring it just the same.

"Everyone got a few hours?" Cleo laughed happily as she polled the room. "Yes love, show them the formal first. I had a bit of a bet with your sister." The tall blonde tapped the younger woman's leg again.

"A bet? " Tori rested her hand on Cleo's thigh. "You never told me."

"Ah now telling is no fun." Cleo grinned at her. "Go on now!" Tori grinned back and jumped to her feet. "I'll have one of those drinks you like made up for you while your showing off." She added happily.

"Rae, love?" Thea asked gently as her sister left.

"Yes?" Rae looked at her.

"Do you think you could help Tori take all the stuff up to her room." The actress' words were soft.

"Of course angel." She kissed Thea on the nose. "If you're sure?" She added in a whisper hugging the actress again.

"Very sure." The actress breathed back.

"Okay." Rae reluctantly let her go and moved to pick up some of the stuff.

"It looks like my little sister will disappear under a mountain of bags." Thea watched the two of them leave, turning to Cleo as they disappeared.

"I'm sorry little star." Cleo began the moment they were alone. "I didn't mean to let her in on anything she doesn't need to know."

"It's all right." Thea shook her head.

"So talking worked?" Cleo prodded and the actress nodded again. To Cleo's dislike Mac bounded up next to Thea and she hugged the husky gently. "I have a peace offering for my horrible role in this." She handed Thea the one bag she'd carried in at her arrival.

"What is it?" Thea asked motioning that Cleo should show her.

"Well it took me ages." The blonde smiled as she opened the bag. "But he was the most special one and he just begged for me to bring him home." She pulled the fluffy brown bear out of the bag a thick velvet ribbon around its neck.

Thea smiled at the brown bear, carefully moving over to where Cleo sat with the bear held out in her hands.

"Is he okay?" She asked softly as she handed him over.

"He's beautiful." Thea replied her fingers closing over the soft fur.

"Well he had to be for my little star." Cleo purred.

"Have you named him for me?" She asked in a soft tone.

"Humm." Cleo looked at the bear. "How about..." She thought deeply. "Brutus, a right and noble bear!"

"I love it." Thea held the bear tight in her hand closing it over the one Cleo still had on the bear. "Thank you." She caught the blonde's eye.

"You are welcome." Cleo looked back at her. Unable to believe that at this moment she really meant what she was saying.

"I mean for everything. For what you have done for me, Tori and Rae." The actress tried to explain.

"I didn't do a thing." She waved it off and gently pulled her hand away. "It's nothing little star. I would do anything to make you three happy. I just adore your sister, such spirit."

"Yes, she has that." Thea laughed lightly.

"Wait till you see what we got." Cleo laughed happily. "I've signed my name so many times I almost forgot how to spell it." Her seething mind stopped for a minute as she realised she really had enjoyed the day. 'How odd?' She thought then laughed it off.

Thea got up and carried the bear over to another couch she sat down with Brutus on her lap. Marc Anthony came and curled up by her feet immediately.

"Everyone ready?" Rae walked back in smiling. "She's on her way in outfit number one."

"I don't know, are we?" Thea looked up half smiling.

"I ordered drinks for us." She moved over to sit beside the actress giving her dog a pat. "That should help. Who's this?" She looked at the bear.

"Brutus." Thea whispered staring at the door in anticipation of her sister's entrance.

"Cleo?" Rae asked to clarify surprised that the blonde would think to buy a bear. Thea nodded patting the technician's knee gently.

"Can I come in?" A shy call came from the doorway.

"Of course darling." Cleo called back to her. "Gorgeous women never ask darling. They stride in confidently. Come in as the gorgeous confident woman that you are!"

There came a light chuckle from behind the door before Victoria stepped in.

Rae didn't know why her eyes stuck first on the dark black suede shoes. The string ties coming up over Tori's ankle and to her mid calf were easily seen through the long slit. The slit ran up the left side of the dress and her eyes followed it up to see it finally end mid-thigh. It was only then the sheer shimmering cling texture of the dress struck the technician. She followed it up to the deep scooping neckline that gathered at the young woman's chest and moved into slight spaghetti straps that moulded into her shoulders.

"Gorgeous, simply gorgeous!" Cleo growled and began to clap. "Give us a turn now!"

Thea stared at her sister totally stunned.

"Okay, I left Tori upstairs." Rae choked as she stared. "I have no idea who this is."

Tori giggled happily as she twirled a couple of times. Showing off the low scooping back just to the top of her hip.

"Do you like it sis?" Tori asked as she turned to face them again.

"Stunning!" Thea breathed honestly shocked. She'd had no idea her sister could look so, so... 'Sexy!' The word broke into her head.

"We tried it on as a lark." Cleo admitted smiling at Tori. "But it looked so good on her, I couldn't dare let it be put back."

"You look great." Thea assured regaining herself.

"Show them the gold one next." Cleo prompted blowing Victoria a kiss. "You'll love the gold." She purred at the other two women.

"Gold?" Thea breathed. "You got more than one."

"Had to!" Cleo looked over at Tori and beamed. Victoria nodded and giggled again. "With those legs, they just beg for evening wear." She winked at the young woman and Tori squeaked as she moved closer to the door.

"I won't be more than a minute." The young girl looked to Cleo for a second.

"Hurry back darling, the room dims when you're gone." Cleo winked at Tori again as she left and the butler came in with their drinks "And we can't wait to be stunned again!"

Thea leaned heavily against Rae's leg. She breathed in as deeply as her injuries would allow. With a smile she remembered the look of sheer joy on her sister's face as she had turned and dashed out. She wasn't sure she could ever remember Tori so happy. The young actress shifted her gaze to Cleo.

'Well Miss. Angelina Eaton, it seems I owe you the world.' She thought as she studied the business woman closely. 'And though a huge part of me wants to know why you did it, the rest is just filled with admiration and gratitude. One day Cleo I will tell you how I feel.' She pledged silently to herself.

A strong hand gently massaging her shoulder drew Thea's attention back to the Tall, strong and beautiful woman she leant against.

'And you my darling,' Thea thought as she closed her eyes to embrace the sensations Rae's hands were causing. 'What can I ever say to you that would come even close to telling you how much you mean to me? Unlike Cleo I don't owe you the world Rae, you **are** my world. And I intend to spend every day of the rest of my life showing you that fact.'

Thea opened her eyes again as she heard the sound of footsteps on the stairs. With eager anticipation she turned her attention to the door waiting for her little sister's appearance. When Tori entered she did not disappoint. She turned and swirled in her gold chiffon and looked a million dollars.

'Just like a movie star.' Thea thought ironically. 'Or a great stage actress.' She added whilst smiling and nodding her approval. She found herself joining Cleo and Rae in applauding Victoria as she twirled some more.

'How perfect.' Thea thought somewhere in the recesses of her mind. 'I have spent all my life acting, with everything being just another act, and now at last I am about to experience the real world. A world not of pretence and imagined happiness, but of truth and reality.' She squeezed Rae's leg impulsively.

'I am about to take to the stage of life anew, I have no lines to learn and no character to play, for this time the theatre lies empty, there is no one to watch my performance, only those who play along side me. For I begin not a play for the masses, but I begin a life, my life, a life that can only exist, after the curtain falls.'

**The End.**

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