



SE TRAYNÓR
CRUEL

King

CRUEL KING

THREE KINGS

BOOK TWO

SE TRAYNOR

CONTENTS

Preface

1. Summer
2. Cathal
3. Ciarán
4. Summer
5. Cathal
6. Cathal
7. Summer
8. Ciarán
9. Cathal
10. Summer
11. Ciarán
12. Cathal
13. Summer
14. Summer
15. Summer
16. Summer
17. Summer
18. Cathal
19. Cathal
20. Ciarán
21. Summer
22. Cathal
23. Summer
24. Summer
25. Summer
26. Caden
27. Summer
28. Summer
29. Summer
30. Summer
31. Cathal

32. [Cathal](#)

33. [Summer](#)

34. [Ciarán](#)

35. [Cathal](#)

[Also by SE Traynor](#)

[About the Author](#)

PREFACE

Dear Reader,

As you've already read Book1, all I'll say about this one is it's darker, More bloody and brutal with scenes of violence. Also, it's filthier!

Love

Eve x

SUMMER

F lat on my back, my ears ring incessantly as the world around me dissolves into chaos. The explosion sends people running in every direction, their panicked screams barely heard. My vision blurs and the ground beneath me feels unstable, like it might give way any moment. Nausea twists my insides, threatening to spill out onto the pavement.

As the smoke billows from the wreckage, I'm transported back to another time, another place. A memory of a day in my past, when I was just six years old, resurfaces, a scene I had locked away, buried deep in the recesses of my mind – a car exploding, flames consuming everything in its path, including my parents.

Now, history repeats itself, with Cathal caught in the middle of it all.

Staring up at the smoky sky, tears stream down my face, mixing with the grime and soot as I struggle to catch my breath. My hands tremble uncontrollably, and I feel the weight of the past and the present crashing down on me. Guilt and fear intertwine, leaving me feeling lost and helpless. Why does this keep happening? What cruel twist of fate has led me here again?

Gasping for air, I choke on the acrid smell of burning rubber and gasoline that fills the air. The sirens in the distance do nothing to calm my racing heart, only amplifying the sense that the world around me is spiraling out of control. As much as I want to run away and escape this nightmare, I know I

can't leave Cathal behind. Sitting upright, my body screaming in protest, I blink a few times to clear the haze from my vision.

Trying to push the flood of memories back into the box where they belong, I can almost hear my aunt's voice telling me I'm worthless and that I bring disaster wherever I go. But I refuse to let her words define me anymore. For Cathal, for Ciarán and myself, I must find the strength to get up off the road and move forward.

Catching a glimpse of Ciarán, his face streaked with blood and eyes wild with fear, I think he's yelling something at me, gesturing for me to leave the scene, but I can't make out the words over the echo of the explosion and the chaos around me. When I nod, trying to make sense of what he's saying, he dashes towards the wreckage, desperate to find his triplet brother.

Tears prick at my eyes as I stand there, frozen in place, unable to comprehend what has just happened. My mind races with questions and doubts. Did Cathal survive? How could this happen? Does fate have it out for me? The images of my parents' car engulfed in flames all those years ago come back to haunt me again, making me feel like that helpless little girl again.

As I watch Ciarán disappear into the thick black smoke, my legs finally regain their strength, and I force myself to get up and move, staggering through the chaos. The feeling of uselessness gnaws at me; every fiber of my being wants to help, but I don't know how or even if I can.

The sound of people shouting and crying fills the air around me, blending with the sirens that are drawing ever closer. The sight of shattered glass and twisted metal beneath my feet only serves to heighten the sense of dread that overwhelms me.

Feeling the heat against my face as I near what was once a car, I spot Ciarán. Though covered in ash and sweat, he's managed to find Cathal and is hauling his unconscious brother toward the sidewalk.

My chest tightens at the sight of them, fear and relief battling for dominance. I want to shout, to call out to Ciarán, but my voice is lost in the cacophony of sirens and screams, my throat burning with the smoke billowing around me. Panic claws at my insides; I need to be by their side to offer any small comfort I can.

I push through the crowd, surging in the opposite direction, ignoring the sharp pain in my lungs from inhaling the thick, acrid air. The world around me feels surreal, like a twisted nightmare, but I focus on the two brothers ahead of me, willing my legs to carry me faster.

When I finally reach them, I'm out of breath, my heart thundering. Ciarán looks up, blood still streaming down his face, his eyes filled with determination. Cathal, on the other hand, is frighteningly still, his skin unnaturally pale.

Trying to keep my emotions in check, I clench my fists. This isn't the time for tears or collapse. They need me, and I refuse to let them down.

"Go back to the apartment," Ciarán growls.

Shaking my head, I try to speak. "N-no."

Ciarán's eyes lock onto mine, fury burning within them. "Summer, listen to me," he says, his voice urgent yet tender. "You need to go. Now."

"I'm not leaving you," I croak. "Don't make me! Is he..."

Glancing down at Cathal, I push down the nausea.

"He'll be fine. He's tougher than this."

"Is he alive?"

My gaze locks with Ciarán's, and his face softens. He takes me by my upper arms and nods. "Of course he is. Never met anyone as stubborn as him."

"Oh-okay," I mutter.

His words are meant to be comforting, but they don't quite reach me – not with the chaos swirling around us. The tension in the air is suffocating, uncertainty hanging heavy like a

dense fog. The sirens stop as the first responders arrive at the scene in what feels like forever but was probably only a few minutes.

“Okay,” I whisper again, nodding even though my heart is filled with a dread I can’t shake. I force myself to focus on Ciarán’s steadying presence beside me as we both watch over Cathal, helpless to do anything else.

Glancing down at my trembling hands, I will them to stop shaking. My mind is a whirlwind of emotions, threatening to pull me under, but I fight back, trying to anchor myself to the here and now.

“Summer,” Ciarán says again, more urgently this time, snapping me out of my thoughts. “We need to stay calm and focused. Can you do that for me?”

“Y-yeah,” I stammer, swallowing hard. “I’m here, Ciarán. Whatever you need.”

“Good,” he replies, a brief flicker of relief crossing his blood-streaked face. He grips my hand tightly as the paramedics get to work on Cathal’s unconscious form.

Inside, my doubts continue to gnaw away at me, feeding off my fear and insecurity, along with the mess of emotions I’m trying desperately to shove away.

My parents.

They died in a car explosion.

I was there.

I saw it.

They died, and I was sent to Aunt Margaret.

Aunt Margaret, who told me they died in a car *crash*.

It wasn’t a crash. The car exploded. I can see it clearly in my mind’s eye now that I’ve unearthed the hideous sight of it.

How?

Why?

Who wanted them dead?

Turning from Ciarán, I lean over and throw up on the ground, overcome with so much past trauma mingled with the current one, I can't separate the two now. It's a fucked up swirl of vomit-inducing pain that is about to swallow me whole.

Ciarán's grip on my hand loosens as he pulls away and grabs my hair to hold back for me. It's the sweetest thing he could've done.

As if he senses my inner turmoil, and maybe he can – there's always been an almost eerie connection between us, a bond that goes beyond the physical, he strokes my back and helps me upright when I've finished.

“Go back to the apartment, Tinks. I've got this.”

I shake my head, unable to find my voice amidst the maelstrom of emotions about to break me. Instead, I focus on what I can see – the way the paramedics work tirelessly over Cathal, their faces grim but determined.

“Do you need medical assistance?” another paramedic asks, coming over quickly.

“No, we're fine. Just save my brother,” Ciarán grits out, even though the cut on his head is still bleeding.

“Sir, you're bleeding.”

“I'm fine; save *him*.”

“We're doing everything we can.”

He nods, gulping back his emotions.

“We've stabilized him, but we need to get him to the hospital.”

“I'll meet you there.”

“We,” I stammer. “I'm coming.”

Ciarán ignores me as we watch in silent agony as the paramedics load Cathal onto a stretcher, their movements careful and deliberate. The sight of him so pale and lifeless sends a fresh wave of nausea roiling through me, but I force myself to keep watching, needing to bear witness to his fight for survival.

“Stay strong, brother,” Ciarán murmurs.

As the ambulance doors slam shut and it speeds away, sirens wailing, I cling to Ciarán, desperate for the reassurance he offers. Together, we stand amidst the chaos, our faces etched with worry and uncertainty, clinging to each other as if our lives depend on it.

And perhaps, in some small way, they do.

“Fuck,” Ciarán mutters, his eyes never leaving the retreating ambulance. “We need to move fast.”

“The police...”

“Can fucking wait.”

With that said, he grabs my hand, crushing it as he practically drags me back to the apartment building and away from the approaching police officers. My feet trip as I try to run to keep up with him, but my legs won't work properly.

We push our way through the frenzied crowd, each step taking us farther away from the scene of the explosion but not from the fear that threatens to consume us. As we stumble into the underground parking, I shudder at the memory of the flames devouring Cathal's car.

“Hey,” Ciarán whispers, pulling me close. “He's going to be okay, Summer. Remember what I said – Cathal's a fighter. He won't go down this easily.”

“I know,” I say even though I don't know anything, burying my face in his chest, inhaling the scent of him amidst the lingering smoke and ash. So much of me is screaming to tell him about my parents, but now isn't the time for him to worry about a nearly two-decade-old crime. He needs all of his focus on Cathal.

We both do.

As we stand there, hugging each other tightly, our faces etched with worry and uncertainty, I can't help but wonder what the future holds. Will Cathal survive? And if he doesn't, how will we ever pick up the pieces?

For now, though, all we can do is hold onto each other and hope.

CATHAL

The sterile scent of antiseptic fills my nostrils as I blink open my eyes, the harsh fluorescent lights assaulting my senses.

I'm in a fucking hospital bed.

My body screams with pain, but it's nothing compared to the raging inferno of fury that burns within me. Someone tried to kill me, and there is no way in hell I'll let them get away with it.

Gritting my teeth, determination surging through me as I attempt to sit up. Every movement is agony, but I refuse to be confined to this bed. The memories of the explosion creep into my mind, fragmented and hazy, but they're all I have to work with. Who the fuck would want me dead? My enemies are numerous, but who among them has the balls to take such a bold step?

With a wince, I manage to prop myself up on my elbows, sweat beads forming on my brow from the effort. I can feel the heat of the blast still lingering on my skin, the sharp stench of explosives clogging my senses.

"Fucking cunt," I mutter and flop back to the bed, stifling my cry of pain.

Broken ribs. Check.

Minor burns. Check.

Possible fractured skull. Check.

Concussion. Double Check.

All in all, I got off lightly. I was making my way to Ciarán and Summer when the explosion went off, so I was faced away and a few meters from the car. Any closer, and I'd probably be dead. Or at least have my fucking face burned off.

“Fuckers!”

Closing my eyes, I focus on the moments leading up to the explosion, but there's not a lot there. Not surprisingly.

“Fuck!” I hiss through clenched teeth, frustration mounting. It's not enough. I need more if I'm going to find the bastard responsible for this. But one thing is certain: whoever they are, they've made a fucking bad screw-up in coming after me and *not* making sure I was dead. Not to mention, with Summer so close, if anything had happened to her...it doesn't bear thinking about. If anyone thought I was hard on them before, they haven't seen nothing yet.

Shaking off the frustration, I grit my teeth and force myself to sit up again, ripping the nose tubes off and letting them drop. My body trembles, but I force myself to keep going. Unpeeling the heart monitor stickers hurts like fuck, but I keep going, one by one. The room is swimming in a haze of pain and nausea, but I can't afford to wait around any longer. If I don't find my would-be assassin, they will strike again, and I'm in no fit state to stop them.

Rising to my feet, my legs wobble, but I remain upright. Stumbling toward the door, the godforsaken hospital gown flapping around my bare ass, I stagger toward the voices coming from the waiting room.

Summer and Ciarán.

They look up as a nurse hurries over, berating me for being on my feet, and we lock eyes – theirs wide with shock, mine narrowed with resolve.

“Thal, what the fuck do you think you're doing?” Ciarán demands, his tone full of anger and concern. “Get back in bed.”

“Getting the fuck out of here,” I growl, clutching at my side as another wave of pain washes over me. “I have shit to take care of.”

“Like hell, you are,” Summer snaps, rushing over to support me as I sway unsteadily. Her touch is warm and comforting, but it only reminds me of how vulnerable I am right now, which pisses me off. “You nearly died, Cathal. You need to stay here and heal.”

“Fuck that,” I snarl. “Someone *tried to kill me*, and I won’t rest until I find them.”

“Look, man,” Ciarán interjects, placing a hand on my shoulder. “We get it. We want to find the bastard, too, but you’re in no condition to play detective right now. We need to lay low, play nice for the police and conduct our own search under the radar.”

“Then help me,” I implore, meeting his gaze with a desperate plea. “Help me figure out who did this before they try again and next time succeed.”

“Jesus, Cathal,” Summer whispers, tears glistening in her eyes.

“Fine,” Ciarán mutters.

“Great.” I relent, feeling the weight of the situation bearing down on me.

“You aren’t going anywhere,” the nurse pipes up. “We need to monitor your injuries; besides, the police want to talk to you.” She says that as if that’s going to make me stay.

“If I were under arrest, I’d’ve been cuffed to the bed. I’m going.”

“No. You were severely injured.”

“But I’m on my feet and just dandy.”

“You call swaying on your feet with your bare ass on show, just dandy, do you?” Her eyes narrow, and I can see she’s going to make trouble.

“You can’t keep me here.” I reach around and bunch the back of the gown closed with my fist.

“We won’t leave him,” Ciarán says. “And if anything worries us, we’ll be back.”

“This is against medical advice.”

“Yeah, whatever,” I mutter.

“We’re going, you can’t stop us.”

She grits her teeth, not prepared to die on this hill. “Fine. You need to sign an AMA form.”

“Not signing jack, just leaving.”

Taking a shaky step forward, Summer quickly grabs me, and I lean heavily on her but keep walking, ignoring the pain in my head and ribs.

Ciarán catches up after some placatory BS with the nurse and takes my weight off Summer.

Together, they guide me out of the hospital, each step bringing me closer to the truth – and to the person who tried to take everything from me.

“How long was I out?”

“A few hours.”

“What did you tell the police?”

“I’ve got my guy on it,” Ciarán mutters.

Summer hisses. “Oh, yes, the venerable PC Dunsten.”

Ciarán chuckles. “Guy like me needs a few cops in his pocket, Tinks.”

She huffs out a breath, and my chest tightens as we navigate the sterile hospital halls, each step more painful than the last.

“You sure you’re up for this?” Summer asks as we reach the entrance.

“Never more sure,” I grit out.

“You look like hell.”

“Feel worse, but I’m not sitting in that bed waiting to be stabbed to death, or injected with air, or whatever.”

“Okay, I get that.”

“Any ideas?” Ciarán asks as we head out into the dark night. Looks like a few hours was a bit more.

“Fucked if I know,” I growl, my mind racing in search of answers. The pain flares up with each step, almost bringing me to my knees.

“We need names. People who’d want you dead.”

“Slow down,” Summer pleads, her eyes filled with concern. “Cathal’s hurt, and we don’t want to—“

“Damn it, Summer!” I snap, anger and frustration boiling over. “I don’t have time for this shit. I need to find out who did this before they try again!”

“Whoa,” Ciarán snarls, coming to her defense. “Don’t be a dick to her. She’s trying to help. We’ll work on it, but we need to get you home first. One thing at a time.”

“Sorry,” I mutter, feeling a knob.

“It’s okay.” She forgives me too easily, but it makes me love her even more. Love. Is that what I feel? I don’t even know anymore.

“There’s no escaping whoever tried to kill me.”

“We get it, but right now. We are out in the open arguing about it. So let’s get in the car and fuck off, yeah?”

We stare at it for a few moments after Ciarán unlocks it with the remote locking.

“We checked it earlier,” Ciarán mutters when nothing happens. “But I guess I’d better do it again.”

Ciarán checks it over and gives the all-clear for explosives under the vehicle.

“Fuck,” I mutter under my breath, clutching at my side as Ciarán eases me into the passenger seat of his Hellcat before I collapse.

“Someone blew up my goddamn Ferrari.”

“And nearly you with it,” Summer points out, climbing in the back seat from the driver’s side.

Ciarán slides into the driver’s seat and slowly slides the key into the engine. Turning it, we wait with bated breath, but the engine roars to life, and we all breathe out. “We’ll figure it out, but you need to focus on recovering right now.”

“Recovering, my ass,” I snarl. “I want whoever did this to pay.” The anger surges through me like a tidal wave, overwhelming any semblance of rational thought. “My fucking Ferrari.” It wasn’t just a car; it was a symbol of my success and power.

“Look, Thal,” Ciarán says, steering us on the road from the hospital back to the city. It’s not far, a few miles at best. “We’re going to find who did this, okay? But right now, we need to get you home and make sure you’re safe, and who gives a fuck about your car? Buy another one.”

“Fine,” I relent as the cityscape outside the window blurs together, a kaleidoscope of lights and shadows.

As we arrive back at Ciarán’s city penthouse, exhaustion washes over me. Though my body screams in protest with each step, there’s a determination burning within me that refuses to be extinguished.

I know that whoever tried to kill me is still out there, and I won’t rest until they’re brought to justice. *My* kind of justice. If that means pushing through the pain and putting myself at risk, so be it.

As we enter the penthouse, I’m both relieved at being able to rest my body and uneasy at what lies ahead.

Summer’s gentle hands guide me into the bedroom I’ve been staying in the last few days, the softness of her touch a balm against the pain that pulses through my body. The bed linens feel like heaven beneath me, but I can’t shake the lingering dread coiling in my gut. She sits down next to me and strokes my face tenderly, her eyes clouded with worry.

“Is there anything I can do for you?” she asks softly, genuine concern lacing her words.

“Stay,” I rasp out, the single word revealing more than I want it to. I need her here with me, even if I can’t bring myself to say it outright. Summer hesitates for a moment before leaning down to kiss me, but I turn away at the last second, guilt gnawing at my insides as I do so. “I’m sorry, Summerbell. I’m just not ready.”

“Hey, it’s okay,” she reassures me, giving my hand a comforting squeeze. “We don’t have to rush anything.”

As compensation for my cowardice, I take her hand, and silently promise myself that I’ll show her how much she means to me when we’re both ready, when the danger has been dealt with.

In the background, I hear Ciarán pacing, his anger sharp and focused as he mutters orders to his crew over the phone. I know he’s furious about the explosion, and it only fuels my own rage. We will find out who did this, and they will pay. But for now, I give up. I need rest.

“Try to get some sleep,” Summer whispers, brushing a strand of hair from my forehead. “We’ll figure everything out tomorrow.”

“Okay,” I concede, exhaustion winning out over my desire for vengeance. As sleep begins to claim me, I cling to the warmth of Summer’s hand, her presence anchoring me amidst the dark abyss.

3

CIARÁN

All I can think about is finding the bastard responsible for this and making them suffer. Not only did they nearly blow up Thal, but Summer as well. And me, for fuck's sake. But Summer is what really makes me want to hunt down this fucker and rip his head off.

This was a direct attack and whoever's behind this just made a dangerous enemy. When I get my hands on them, they'll be begging for death long before I grant it.

Unless Thal gets to them first.

My phone rings, and I quickly answer it. "What have you got for me?" I demand Luke without preamble.

"Not much yet, boss. We're checking security footage where it happened, but so far nothing. They knew what they were doing."

"Inside job?" It's always my first thought. We're operating blind and vulnerable until we can identify the asshole involved. "Keep digging," I order tersely. "I want a name."

Ending the call, I resume pacing, adrenaline, and fury making me restless. It could be anyone.

Summer watches me pace and eventually walks towards me, her eyes worried. I pull her into a rough hug before I let her go. "How is he?"

"Sleeping, so that's good, right?"

"Yeah."

“He should’ve stayed in hospital.”

“No chance, Tinks. He’d rather have been blown to bits.”

“Ciarán!” Her face pales at my crass words.

Shrugging, I don’t bother to apologize. I know my brother. The bitter taste of revenge fills my mouth. Whoever did this will regret it.

“Did you speak to the police yet?” Summer asks.

I give a derisive snort. “Yeah. I gave a statement to Dunston, but I know fuck all. Wasn’t even there.”

She gives me a fierce glare but doesn’t comment.

“And neither were you,” I state.

“The paramedics saw us.”

“They see a hundred people a day, you think they’re going to remember?”

“You look exactly like him!”

“Tinks!” Rubbing my hand over my face, I inhale, reminding myself she is new to this. “It’s handled, love. You weren’t there, you don’t know jack. Okay?”

“Okay,” she murmurs and seeks my comfort again, which I give to her, needing it myself.

“It’s all good, okay?”

Summer nods understandingly. “What can I do to help?”

I look at her intently and feel a pang of guilt. She doesn’t need to get involved in this. But at the same time, her dedication and loyalty are admirable.

“Just be careful,” I say finally, the words coming out gruffly. “You don’t have to involve yourself in this mess. I’m keeping your name well away from this shitshow. It’s too dangerous.”

Summer’s expression turns stubborn. “I’m not going anywhere,” she declares firmly. “I want to help you and Cathal in any way I can.”

I nod reluctantly, knowing that arguing with her is pointless. Her loyalty is unshakeable, and besides, she has proven herself capable of handling herself under pressure.

“Okay,” I concede finally, knowing it’s just a placatory comment. “But promise me you’ll be careful.”

“I will,” she promises, a small smile tugging at her lips.

With that settled, I turn my attention back to our next move.

Letting her go, I glare at my phone. The silence is deafening. Dialing Luke again, when he answers, I growl, “Dig deeper into Cathal’s recent business dealings. Follow the money trail, see if it leads to anyone with motive.”

“Already on it.”

My mind races through the possibilities. This hit required resources and planning. Who would be bold enough to come after him so brazenly?

“Reach out to our contacts on the streets too in rival gangs. Someone out there knows something useful. Money is no object, pay whatever it takes. And get eyes on all our safe houses and front businesses. If this was a direct attack on Cathal, there could be more to come. No one lets their guard down.” I end the call with a growl of frustration.

The waiting is unbearable, this lack of control. I thrive on being three steps ahead, but now I’m stumbling in the dark. For Cathal’s sake, I need to restore order, and quickly.

Pacing the living room, I sift through my memories, looking for any clue as to who was behind this. Have I made too many enemies over the years? Overplayed my hand? Doesn’t matter now. All that matters is retaliation.

When I find the bastards responsible, there will be nowhere left for them to hide. I will rain down hellfire on their entire operation. If it’s a competing gang behind this, I’ll crush them completely.

The first priority is securing our position and preventing further losses. Merging my and Thal’s gangs is imperative. But

that won't be enough. We need to make a statement, show them we are not to be fucked with.

But make no mistake, vengeance is coming. They will regret ever tangling with me and mine. As the night wears on, my mind is consumed with thoughts of revenge. I can't rest until the bastard responsible for this attack is brought to justice. I glance at Summer, who has fallen asleep on the couch with her head resting on a cushion. The sight of her peaceful sleeping face brings a small smile to my lips, reminding me that there's more to fight for than just vengeance.

I take a deep breath and sit down next to her, placing a protective arm around her as I continue my train of thought. I need to keep my head focused and clear if I'm going to find the person behind this attack. And that means revisiting everyone who has ever crossed Thal or myself.

The hunt is on, and when we strike back, it will be swift and merciless. For now, I wait, rage simmering beneath a veneer of icy control. Patience is key, but our enemies' days are numbered. Their downfall is inevitable.

SUMMER

I t's late. I fell asleep on the couch, but it didn't last long. I can't sleep for fear of what happens next. I sit perched on the edge of the bed, watching the steady rise and fall of Cathal's chest as he rests. My heart aches at seeing him like this - battered, bandaged, and looking so vulnerable. My usual stoic protector is now the one who needs protecting.

Gently, I brush a strand of hair from his forehead, my touch delicate as if he might shatter. He stirs slightly but doesn't wake. After everything he's endured tonight, he needs time to heal, though I know Cathal's pride will chafe at such weakness.

In the other room, I can hear Ciarán on yet another terse phone call, his voice tight with barely suppressed rage. He's been working nonstop to identify the one responsible for the bombing, but so far, no solid leads. I know it's driving him mad. Ciarán thrives on control and decisive action. This waiting game does not suit him.

Still, he makes an effort to check on me periodically, his gruff voice softening slightly when he asks how I'm holding up. He even brought me a cup of tea earlier. It was gross. Too strong and sweet, but it was made in his awkward but well-meaning way, so I drank it without complaint.

Ciarán wears his tough exterior like armor, but I know there's more to him underneath. The way he looks at Cathal with that fierce protectiveness, their bond runs deeper than I can even imagine. Whoever hurt Thal will face Ciarán's wrath.

Unless, of course, Thal gets to them first.

And though violence breeds more violence, right now I'm glad for Ciarán's particular skills and single-minded focus. Cathal needs him, needs us both.

So I will stay, watching over him until those striking blue eyes open again. Until the man I care for deeply awakens and fills the air with his strength and intensity again.

My hand still cradling his, I rise and settle into the bedside chair. Today has proven how quickly everything can change, and how fragile life is. I almost lost him. That thought cuts too deep to dwell on. Glaring at the bandage on my arm, I yank it off and ball it up, hating myself for that weakness when I should be stronger. These men need me to be stronger, not some damsel that needs saving.

The hours crawl by as I maintain my silent watch over Cathal. He occasionally mumbles or stirs restlessly, but doesn't fully wake. I gently dab his forehead with a cool cloth, hoping to provide some meager comfort.

In the background, Ciarán's voice rises and falls as he continues coordinating with his men. His words are too muffled to make out from here, but his tone conveys the danger lurking beneath his outward calm. He sounds like a volcano ready to erupt.

I know I should try to get some rest, but sleep feels impossible. My mind replays those horrific moments on a loop - the deafening explosion, and seeing Cathal's broken body in the aftermath. He could have died. The thought makes my chest tighten painfully.

This world they inhabit can be brutal and unforgiving. I thought I understood that, but the brothers' strength makes me feel safe and protected to a degree. Seeing Thal now, so vulnerable, is a stark reminder of how quickly fortunes can change.

Eventually, Ciarán steps into the room, his forehead creased with weariness. "Why don't you try to sleep, Tinks? It's late. I'll keep first watch over him."

I start to protest, but he silences me with a look. “You won’t be any use to him exhausted. Get a few hours of rest. I’ll wake you if there’s any change.”

Reluctantly, I nod. He’s right, of course. I need to keep up my strength. With a gentle squeeze of Cathal’s hand, I whisper, “I’ll be back soon,” before slipping from the room.

Alone in our bedroom, the enormous bed providing no comfort, sleep still proves elusive. My thoughts churn with questions about who was behind this morning’s attack. Obviously, I have no ideas, but someone ruthless enough to target Cathal so directly clearly means business.

This isn’t over yet.

As I lay there in the darkness, fear and uncertainty twist and turn inside me. The world is a dangerous place, especially for people like Cathal and Ciarán. They live their lives on the edge, constantly dancing with danger, and I’m just along for the ride.

I think about what would happen if something were to happen to either of them. How would I cope? The thought is too much to bear. I need them both in my life, now more than ever.

Hours pass before exhaustion finally claims me. Even then, sleep is uneasy, filled with twisting nightmares that leave me waking up sweating and disoriented.

When the sun rises over the city, I’ve had about an hour’s sleep, but I drag myself out of bed and head back to Thal’s room. Ciarán is sitting in the chair now, his eyes heavy-lidded from exhaustion.

“How is he?” I ask softly as I approach.

“Flat out, but that’s good. He needs the rest,” Ciarán replies gruffly, stretching stiffly as he stands up. “Go get some breakfast or something. You look like hell.”

Smiling, I shake my head and take no offense. It’s typical of him to be so blunt. Still, he’s right. I could do with some food and caffeine to function properly. We both could.

“You too,” I respond, and he grins. “Come.” Holding my hand out for him, we leave the room. Glancing back at Cathal’s still form on the bed, his color appears better than when he left the hospital yesterday.

God, was it only yesterday?

This day seems like an eternity.

Ciarán heads straight for the coffeepot. It’s a welcome distraction from the weight on my mind, and I pour myself a cup as well, taking a sip of the hot, bitter liquid.

“We need to talk about what happened last night,” Ciarán says suddenly, his voice low and serious. “I need to know you’re okay, Tinks. That you’re not going to freak out on me because of what happened.”

“I’m not going to freak out,” I say with more confidence than I feel. “I’m worried about Cathal, about you. But I knew what I was getting into when I got involved with you guys.”

Ciarán grunts and takes a gulp of coffee, his movements deliberate and thoughtful. “It’s not just risking your life though, Tinks. This isn’t a game.” His words are sharp, but not as sharp as the pain in my chest as he speaks them.

“I know that,” I say softly. “But you can’t change who you are, Ciarán. And I *know* who you are and I’m still here.”

He nods slowly, still lost in thought. “I’m sorry you have to deal with this. With all of this danger and uncertainty.”

“It’s not just me,” I remind him gently. “It’s all of us. And I’m not going anywhere.” I’ve said this multiple times, but I feel like he’s fishing for the reassurance.

He lets out a deep sigh and runs a hand through his hair in frustration before turning to face me fully.

“I know that, Tinks. And I appreciate it more than you can imagine,” he says, his voice softening. “But I need you to promise me something.”

“Anything,” I reply immediately.

“Promise me you’ll be careful. That you’ll always think about your own safety first, no matter what’s going on around you,” Ciarán says firmly. “I can’t lose you, Tinks. Not after everything we’ve been through.”

I nod solemnly, my heart heavy with the weight of his words. “I promise, Ciarán. I’ll always be careful.”

He looks at me for a long moment before nodding as well and turning back to the coffeepot. We finish our breakfast in silence, lost in our own thoughts and fears.

We’re not out of danger yet. Not by a long shot.

But it is what it is now. There’s no going back.

CATHAL

The room swims into focus as I force my eyes open. My body aches, and it feels like someone's repeatedly slammed the butt of a gun into my skull. Groaning, I push myself up into a sitting position, wincing at the pain that shoots through my ribs.

"Easy there," Ciarán's voice is cautious, and I notice him sitting on the edge of my bed, watching me with concern. "You've been out for a full day."

"Fuck," I mutter, rubbing my face.

The memory of the explosion makes my head thump. I was lucky to make it out alive. But I'm not safe yet – far from it. I glance at Ciarán, his jaw set in resolve. He's ready to get back to work, too.

"Listen, Ciarán," I say, my voice rough. "We have work to do. We need to start merging the gangs, find out who's responsible for the fucking car bomb. If they're bold enough to try and take me out in broad daylight with a car bomb in your patch, they won't hesitate to try again."

Ciarán narrows his eyes, nodding in agreement. "I know. My guys are on it. So far, it's not going well. The authorities are all over it, and they want to speak to you."

"Of course they do," I mutter, pissed off.

"I told my guy that you'd fucked off after we brought you back from the hospital, and I don't know where you are."

"Well, it's a start. Won't hold them for long."

“Long enough.”

“Then let’s get to it,” I say, swinging my legs over the side of the bed and gritting my teeth against the pain.

Ciarán stands up and offers me a hand. “Let’s get you cleaned up, and then we’ll start making plans.”

Grunting as I’m forced to stand in a shower that feels like it’s made from shards of glass, eventually, the hell is deemed over by Ciarán, and I stagger out, prepared to kill myself by not allowing him to dry me.

Giving him a filthy glare, I snatch the towel and march back into the bedroom, deciding how gross it would feel if I wasn’t completely dry when I put my clothes on. I can’t bend. Hell, I can barely stand, but eventually, I’m in some fit shape to get dressed.

As I pull on a clean shirt, Ciarán hesitates by the door, a troubled look crossing his face. “I’m worried about Summer.”

“I know. She stays here.”

“Most of me agrees with that, but the rest, my gut, is telling me to take her with us. She will be safer with us. Plus, she’s going through something. She’s barely said a word since the explosion.”

“She’s scared. This isn’t the life she is used to. I hate that we have to do this to her. But she’s inexperienced – she could slow us down or worse, get herself killed.”

“True,” Ciarán concedes, biting his lip. “But I just can’t ignore the warning in my head telling me it’s a bad idea to leave her alone.”

“Yeah, I hear you. We bring her with us. But she stays close, and she follows our orders. No exceptions.”

“I’ll go talk to her. Make sure she understands the situation.”

“Good,” I mutter, trying to ignore the pounding in my head.

“Take some fucking painkillers, would you? You look like shit.”

“Would that be bird shit?” Summer’s voice is a gentle lilt next to Ciarán’s rougher tone.

“Huh?” Ciarán and I exchange confused frowns.

Summer moves closer. “Uhm, you said the other day if a bird shits on the window... I was trying to be funny.”

Ciarán snickers. “Oh, yeah. Yes, Tinks. He looks exactly like bird shit, splattered against the window.”

“Eww.” Summer scrunches up her nose, and I smile, even though it hurts my face.

“Everything okay, Summerbell?”

The question catches her off guard, but Ciarán said something was bothering her. It’s better out if we’re taking her into the field.

“Yeah, fine. What about you? You’re the one who was nearly killed.” She turns it around like a pro.

“I’m good.” The lie comes easily enough. I’ve had enough practice with it over the years.

“Summer,” Ciarán begins, his voice gentle but firm. “We need you to come with us today. It’s not safe for you to stay here alone.”

“Is that a good idea?” Her terrified eyes find mine, and I try to look reassuring. As much as I want to lock her away so she is safe. She isn’t safe anywhere. Not while this asshole is on the loose, and not while she is a sitting duck here all alone.

“It’s the only idea. We need you with us where we know you’re safe.”

Summer looks between the two of us, clearly weighing her options. Finally, she lets out a shaky breath and nods.

“Okay,” she whispers. “I’ll go with you.”

“Good,” I say, hoping this is the right move.

She nods, putting her game face on, but I can see the undercurrent of whatever is playing on her mind. I'm not forcing her to tell us. She will when she's ready. I'm the last person in the world who would make her tell us if she didn't want to.

As we prepare to leave, I feel a sense of foreboding settling over me. This isn't going to be easy, and there's no guarantee we'll all make it out alive. But we have no choice, there's no turning back now.

Ciarán tosses a duffel bag onto his bed, unzipping it with a sense of urgency. He carefully selects a few guns and extra ammunition, along with a couple of knives and brass knuckles. It makes me want my own shit, but I guess I'll have to make do with borrowing.

"Here," Ciarán says, handing Summer a small folding knife. She looks at it hesitantly, her fingers trembling as she takes it from him. "It's not much, but it's better than nothing."

"Use it only if you have to," I add, trying to ease her nerves. "Hopefully, it won't come to that."

"Okay," she whispers, clutching it tightly between her palms. She forces a weak smile, clearly trying to reassure us, but I can see the fear in her eyes.

Once we've packed everything, we head out to Ciarán's car. The sleek black vehicle gleams menacingly under the parking garage lights. Making sure that we aren't being watched or waited for, we pile in, Ciarán behind the wheel, me in the passenger seat, and Summer in the back, I can feel the adrenaline starting to pump through my veins, with a rhythmic pounding that echoes through my head.

Dammit. I forgot to take the painkillers.

As we speed off, Ciarán watching closely for tails, I think about the obstacles we're likely to face. Our enemies won't hesitate to use any means necessary to stop us – car chases, shootouts, ambushes. We'll need to stay one step ahead of them if we want to survive.

The first obstacle comes sooner than expected. As we round a corner, a black SUV appears out of nowhere, barreling towards us at full speed. Ciarán swerves just in time, narrowly avoiding a head-on collision.

“Shit!” he curses, gripping the steering wheel tightly. “They must have eyes on us.”

“Fuck,” I mutter, trying to keep calm for Summer when what I really want to do is ask Ciarán to stop the car, so I can get out and show them who they’re messing with. I’m not sure how far I’d get, but I’d die trying.

Ciarán pushes the Hellcat to its limits, weaving through traffic like a man possessed. The SUV stays on our tail, relentless in its pursuit. But Ciarán’s driving skills are unmatched, and slowly, we begin to pull away.

“Did we lose them?” Summer asks, her voice shaky.

“For now,” Ciarán replies, scanning the rearview mirror for any sign of our pursuers. “But they won’t give up that easily.”

6

CATHAL

The car falls silent as we race down the deserted road toward a warehouse on the outskirts of the city. Ciarán's intel has led us here, but I'm not convinced. Every stone unturned, though. My biggest fear is having left my gang for all this time. A couple of days is like an eternity, and while they knew I was going after Ciarán, things have taken a bit of a turn.

"I need to get back to my guys soon."

Ciarán glances at me briefly before turning his eyes back to the road. "I know. But we've got bigger shit to deal with right now."

Nodding grimly, I know he's right.

Dropping the visor so I can steal a glance at Summer in the mirror, she sits stiffly in the backseat, the knife we gave her clutched tightly in her hand. Her eyes are wide and alert, scanning the surroundings like a laser.

"Summer," I say softly, trying to gauge her reaction. "You okay?"

"Just dandy," she mutters, making me smile as she uses my words back on me.

"See, you should've picked better words. Now I *know* you're lying."

Her blue-eyed gaze lands on my reflection, and she grimaces. "I'm fine."

Sucking the air in through the side of my mouth in a gesture of disbelief as I shake my head, she snickers.

“Okay, fucking hell. I’m scared. I’m wondering if I’ve got the guts to use this thing,” she waves the knife around, “I don’t particularly want to die today, and it will kill me if I lose either of you. So, yeah, take from that what you will.”

“You’re beautiful,” I murmur, wishing I could turn around and look at her properly.

“*Riiight.*” Her eyes dart away, and she goes back to scanning the streets. She’s got a hawk eye. She’d be an amazing lookout.

“They’re back,” she says before Ciarán has seen them.

“Fuck, Summerbell, I’m impressed.”

“Save the adoration for later,” Ciarán grits out as a pair of headlights appear in the rearview mirror, rapidly closing in on us. I tense up, instinctively reaching for my gun, stuffed in the top of my boot, with a soft grunt as my ribs protest against the movement.

Ciarán floors the accelerator, weaving through the streets with uncanny precision. The other car stays hot on our tail, its engine growling like a predator closing in on its prey.

Our individual fears and insecurities are now magnified by the shroud of our world that surrounds us. We’ve all been forced to confront the very real dangers our enemies pose, and suddenly, the lines between ally and adversary seem blurred.

Ciarán drives onto a warehouse parking lot, crawling with his men, pulling up the handbrake, he executes a flashy turn. Pressing the button for the automatic window, he pulls out his gun and aims at the SUV as it sails past, opening fire.

Bang.

Bang.

Summer slaps her hands over her ears, her eyes wide in fear.

“Don’t worry,” I murmur, they won’t come back with all this lot to go up against.

She nods, looking terrified as fuck. I wish we’d left her at home now. But if we had, would she now be in the hands of our pursuers instead?

“Fuck,” Ciarán mutters under his breath. “Everyone okay?”

“Just dandy,” Summer and I say together, which eases the tension and makes her smile.

She takes in the men milling about the parking lot and breathes out. “I’ll stay here.”

Exchanging a glance with Ciarán, I will do whatever he says.

“We can’t risk leaving you here alone,” Ciarán says, his eyes scanning the surroundings. “We’ll bring you with us but stay close and do as we say.”

Summer shakes her head, her expression determined. “I’ll be fine here. I don’t want to go in there.”

Ciarán’s jaw clenches. “Summer, I don’t think that’s a great idea.”

“Look, I’m going to be nervous as fuck going in there with hundreds of men. I’ll be a distraction, and they’ll spot my weakness. I’d rather just stay here. Lock it up, I have my phone and knife. Maybe leave me a gun...”

I’m already holding one out to her that was shoved into the top of my other boot. “Sure about this?”

She takes it with a shaky hand. “Yes.”

“I’ll leave Ronny to look out for you,” Ciarán states, not arguing with her, which surprises me. Maybe he is as worried about her going into the lion’s den as she is. “That SUV won’t be back, but Ronny will protect you if anything else goes down. Call us, and we will be right out.”

Summer pulls out her phone as Ciarán edges the car closer to the building.

A metallic grating noise, which doesn't do my head any favors, sounds into the silence as the men open up the warehouse delivery entrance.

"Perfect," Ciarán mutters as he drives in.

"Stay safe, Summerbell. Fire and ask questions later, got it?"

Summer tries to look confident as we exit the car, guns drawn. Locking her in, we quickly make our way towards the warehouse entrance. Ciarán's men fall into step behind us, their weapons at the ready.

The smell of sweat, steel, and oil hits us like a wall. My senses are on high alert as we step inside. The space is enormous, with stacks of crates and pallets lining the walls and a few battered vehicles parked haphazardly in the center.

"Keep your guard up," Ciarán warns as we make our way deeper into the warehouse. "We don't know what we're up against here. I know this gang, but not well. They could be bullshitting about knowing anything."

"No stone, though, right?"

"Right."

With a last look back at Summer, we head into the meet, but my expectations aren't high that we will immediately find who tried to kill me. If anything, this meeting might just be a trap to take us out for good. I take a deep breath, steeling myself for whatever is coming.

SUMMER

Sitting in Ciarán's car, the smell of leather and the subtle undertones of aftershave fills my nostrils as I wait for him and Cathal. My fingers tap restlessly against my thigh. I'm not sure what all of this was about, except they have a lead on whoever tried to kill Cathal. Freezing suddenly, I stop breathing. Did anyone check this car before we piled in?

Remembering Ciarán saying something about having eyes on it the entire time, I think he meant a spy camera. Hopefully, we are fine.

"Bit fucking late now," I mutter, breathing out and taking my lumps. I'm not getting out of the car, so it's tough shit.

To say I'm scared would be a massive understatement. I'm shitting myself. I have no idea how to use a gun, point and shoot? What about a safety? Isn't that supposed to be on?

"Dammit, guys. You've seriously left me flying blind here." That pisses me off, not at them, but at being helpless. I need to be more badass, fit in with their lifestyle, and learn how to shoot and stab things. Hopefully, I will never have to, but I'd like to know how anyway.

Climbing through the seats into the passenger side, I feel slightly less nervous. I can see more from here. Placing the gun in the glove box, I grip the knife and scan the area.

Outside, the warehouse seems quiet. An eerie silence pervades, only interrupted by the distant wail of a siren and the rumble from the train tracks close by. The men have gone

further into the warehouse, so I'm alone, save for Ronny, whoever the fuck he is, *wherever* the fuck he is.

The sky, seen through the open doors of the warehouse, is bright on this summer day. But there is something so sinister about being in this warehouse. It doesn't feel real. The closeness presses in, making the space feel smaller and more suffocating. I shiver involuntarily, even though the temperature inside is comfortable.

I glance around the desolate space, taking in the graffiti-covered walls and boarded-up windows. It's not the kind of place anyone would choose to be, but it's where we find ourselves.

As I continue to wait, the tension builds. I wonder what waits for us at the end of this journey to track down the would-be assassin and whether joining forces will truly bring the power and security the brothers crave. The future hangs in the balance, and all I can do is hope that we make the right decision.

My eyes are suddenly drawn to a figure emerging from the shadows and into the warehouse. My heart lurches, and my breath catches in my throat. The man's stride is slow and calculated, his tall frame draped in a worn leather jacket that hangs open, revealing a faded t-shirt beneath. The warehouse gloom obscures his face, but there's something about him – something familiar that sets my nerves on edge.

I squint, trying to get a better look, but the murky light refuses to reveal any more detail. My hands grip the knife as if it's a lifeline, knuckles turning white with the force of my hold. A cold sweat breaks out along my brow, and I can't dismiss the hunch that I know this man from somewhere.

He walks past the car, several meters away from me, face forward, not noticing me sitting here. Recognition slams into me like a freight train. I blink, unable to believe my eyes, but there's no mistaking it: the sharp cheekbones, the piercing gray eyes – eyes that once looked upon me with love and warmth.

It's him. It's my father. My supposedly dead father.

Frozen, I watch as he strides deeper into the warehouse, oblivious to my presence. I struggle to reconcile the man before me with the one who had disappeared from my life so many years ago, leaving only questions and a gaping hole in my heart.

My mind races, trying to make sense of what I'm seeing. What is he doing here? How could he be alive when I'd spent so much time grieving for him, burying him in the ground and in my memories? My hands tremble on my lap, and I question everything I thought I knew about my past.

As my father passes by, I study him closely, searching for the man I remember. The one who used to hold me close and promise that everything would be alright. But all I see is a stranger – hardened by time, his eyes no longer filled with warmth but carrying a cold determination that twists my insides.

Doubt creeps in, heavy and suffocating. Could I be mistaken? Is it possible that this man just looks like my father – a cruel trick of fate meant to torment me further?

Taking a deep breath, trying to steady myself, I've learned to survive in this dark world, and I won't let the ghosts of my past drag me down. No matter how much it hurts, I have to believe that this isn't him – that my father is truly gone.

But as the figure disappears into the darkness behind me, a tiny part wonders if it is him and what that means for me and the dangerous path I now walk.

Biting my lip, trying to stifle the whirlwind of emotions about to overwhelm me, the possibility that my father is still alive feels like a cruel joke; it's too much to process. My thoughts race, grasping at memories I thought I'd buried long ago.

“My Summer sunshine,” I mutter.

It's been years since I last heard those words, but they still echo in my mind, taunting me.

Why did I end up with Aunt Margaret if he's alive? What about my mother? What kind of parents would leave their

child with someone so heartless and cruel?

The ache inside me intensifies as I remember the countless nights I spent huddled under thin blankets, shivering from the cold, crying, grieving, while Aunt Margaret glared down at me with disdain. She never let me forget that I was a burden – an unwanted reminder of her dead sister.

As much as I want to tell myself it's not him, I know in my gut that it is. All those carefully constructed walls I built up carefully and meticulously begin to crumble, and the sting of betrayal hits me hard. If he truly has been alive all this time, why hasn't he come for me? Why did he, they, abandon me to a life of pain and suffering?

“Fuck,” I whisper, tears pricking at the corners of my eyes. I can't let myself break down. Not here, not now. If this really is my father, then I need answers. And I'll be damned if I let anything, even my own emotions, stand in my way. I need answers, but I can't bring myself to get out of the car to confront him. Not now. I need a minute, a day, a week, a year to process this. It hurts to breathe right now, and I don't want to face him until I'm more stable. Exhaling slowly, my mind reeling, I decide that I need to talk to Ciarán and Cathal about this. They need to know. I just need to find the right time to bring it up, and that time is not now. We need to focus on the assassination attempt, which is more important right now, especially as I don't even know for sure if it's my dad.

It's probably not. You're scared. You're overthinking everything.

“Yep,” I mutter. “Overthinking it. Right? Right.”

CIARÁN

The damp air clings to my skin as I stand in the heart of Manchester's underworld, a place where shadows hold power and blood runs thicker than loyalty. The city is carved up like a pie, each slice marking the territory of rival gangs vying for control.

Cathal and I have survived in this world by leading our own gangs. But we've reached a point where survival isn't enough; we want more – power, resources, respect. It's a dangerous game we're playing, but there's no going back now. Our decision to merge our gangs has made us a force to be reckoned with, and the other players in this deadly game have taken notice.

That's why Cathal was targeted, and why it means I'm next. I haven't told Summer because I don't want to worry her, and Cathal and I haven't said it out loud, but he knows. He isn't daft.

As we stride further into the murky, damp-smelling warehouse, I can feel the weight of expectation pressing down on me. This merger isn't just about pooling our resources or bolstering our ranks; it's about sending a message that the Gannon brothers are no longer rivals and we are a force to be reckoned with. A fleeting thought of Caden drifts through my head, but I can't worry about him right now. He always was a wildcard. The youngest, and he felt it with every breath he took, with every time he tried to separate himself from me and Cathal. Maybe it's time to make amends with him as well.

“Do you think this lead is solid?” Cathal asks as we stop in front of a group of men.

“Guess we’ll find out.”

The smell of smoke lingers in the air, making me want to light up a cigarette, but I don’t. I need my hands free in case shit gets real.

“Gentlemen.”

Recognizing the American drawl, I close my eyes briefly and groan before plastering a smile on my face. Turning to face the formidable mafia leader who, due to the sheer size of the territory, runs the Manchester underworld, I step forward.

“Ruby Bellingham,” I say. “Figured you’d be here.”

“Who do you think called the meeting?” she asks, raising her eyebrow.

Ruby Bellingham is a force to be reckoned with. Dark-haired, green-eyed, and undeniably beautiful, she exudes arrogance and confidence in equal measure. As the leader of the city’s largest mafia syndicate, she has never been one to shy away from asserting her dominance in Manchester’s underworld. She and I have had our share of encounters, each one ending in a tense standstill, neither side willing to back down. Ruby’s relationship with my brother is no different – two equally stubborn forces colliding with enough intensity to spark a wildfire. Our cousins, Declan and Cillian, are with her. They’re identical twins that kinda look a bit like we do. It’s unnerving. Growing up, it was like there were five of us, not three. Their demeanor is brooding and serious, much like ours. They have been through as much hell as we have.

“Declan, Cillian,” I nod, acknowledging their presence as they stand behind Ruby. “Been a while.”

“Didn’t know we were having a family reunion today,” Cathal grits out, his tone dripping with sarcasm.

“Yeah, well, here we are,” Declan mutters.

“What do you know?” Cathal spits out.

“First things first,” she clips, her voice hard as steel. “Your little merger is causing quite a stir, and I’d like to know what this means for the rest of us.”

“Us?” Cathal scoffs. “Since when do you care about anyone else in this city?”

“Believe it or not, Cathal, I have a vested interest in maintaining some semblance of order. Your newfound alliance threatens that balance.” Ruby’s voice is calm and collected, but there’s an edge to her words.

“Maybe you should learn to adapt,” I suggest.

“Or maybe you should learn your place,” she retorts, not missing a beat. “I didn’t claw my way to the top by allowing assholes like you to disrupt the status quo.”

“Is that a threat?” Cathal growls, stepping closer to Ruby.

“Call it a friendly reminder,” she says, her eyes flicking between the two of us as she stands her ground. “I’m just here to make sure we’re all on the same page.”

“Fine,” I say, leaning against the wall and crossing my arms over my chest. “We’re listening.”

“Good,” Ruby replies. “Your alliance may give you power, but it also makes you a target. Do you really think the other gangs will just sit back and let you take over?”

“You’re telling us shit we already know. We are here to find out who the fuck tried to blow Cathal up.”

“Of course not,” Cathal snaps over the top of me. “But they’ll learn quickly enough that they don’t stand a chance against us.”

“Bold words,” Declan says, raising an eyebrow. “But can you back them up?”

He sneers. “Wouldn’t be standing here if we couldn’t. And quite frankly, Ruby, I don’t see why any of this is your business. You’ve got your territory, and we’ve got ours. If you’re so worried about maintaining order, focus on your own people.”

“Because when chaos reigns, everyone loses, Cathal. I’m trying to prevent that from happening by ensuring we all understand the new boundaries and expectations,” she insists, her green eyes filled with determination.

The tension in the warehouse is stifling as Ruby and I lock gazes, neither of us willing to back down. Cathal shifts next to me, clearly weakening on his feet. We need to move this along pretty fucking swiftly.

“Look, we’re all trying to survive in this fucked-up world,” Ruby says, her tone laced with irritation. “What you two have done by joining forces is a game-changer, which means every other gang has to reevaluate where they stand in the grand scheme of things.”

“Is that what this is about?” I ask, my voice dripping with venom as I feel we’ve been well and truly set up. “You’re here to remind us of our place?”

“Hardly,” she snaps back. “I’m here to make sure you don’t forget that your actions have consequences – for all of us.”

“Enough!” Cathal interjects, his anger rising to the surface. “We get it, Ruby. We know there’s a target on our backs, obviously, but we’re not changing our minds about combining the gangs. What we want to know now is if you know who fucked me over?”

“I have something,” she says, reaching into her jacket pocket.

My men go on red alert and step forward, ready to open fire. At least the loyalty is there after my little display of power a few days ago. For now.

Ruby holds up her other hand before pulling out a small, flat box.

She tosses it to Cathal, who automatically reaches out to catch it, forgetting about his ribs.

“Oof,” he grunts softly as he catches it.

“You didn’t get this from me.”

He nods stiffly, pissed off beyond belief that she saw his weakness. “We done?”

“Actually,” Ruby interrupts, her attention shifting to my car. “I wanted to speak with Summer for a moment.”

“Nuh-uh,” I say, stepping forward. “She’s off limits.”

“It’s girl talk. Nothing more sinister than that.”

It doesn’t even surprise me that Ruby already knows about Summer. She has eyes everywhere.

“Fine,” I grumble, knowing I don’t really have a choice. It’s comply or get on her bad side, and to be honest, while that doesn’t scare me, it’s a waste of time and resources when we have bigger fish to stab in the guts and slice open.

Nodding her thanks, Ruby approaches the car with Cathal and me close behind, ready for action. I doubt Ruby will hurt her. Word is, she is big on protecting women, not hurting them. Summer is probably safer with Ruby than with us.

This is proved correct when I see her demeanor shift. Her previous arrogance fades, replaced by genuine gentleness. She raps on the window. “Summer, my name is Ruby Bellingham. Ciarán and Cathal are right here. I’m not going to hurt you. Can you open up?”

Summer’s gaze swivels to mine, and I nod reassuringly.

Slowly, Summer opens the car door and climbs out. Cathal has tightened his grip on his gun, and I can’t say that mine hasn’t let up either.

Ruby smiles. “Hi.”

“Hi,” Summer replies cautiously.

“You okay?”

Summer nods, casting her gaze furtively between us and Ruby. “Y-yeah. Erm, you?”

“I’m good. Listen, this world can be brutal for women, and I just wanted to make sure you’re okay.”

Summer hesitates before answering, clearly taken aback by the unexpected display of empathy. “I’m fine.”

“Good,” Ruby nods, her gaze filled with relief and determination. “Just remember that you don’t have to go through this alone. If you ever need someone to talk to, or if things get too rough, reach out to me. We need to look out for one another.” She hands Summer a business card.

“Thanks, Ruby,” Summer says quietly, taking it.

Ruby nods before turning back to face my brother and me. “You’ve made your point, and we’ll do our best to adapt to the reorganization. But remember that every action has a reaction. You may think you’re invincible now, but nobody stays on top forever.”

Declan and Cillian nod in agreement, their faces impassive yet foreboding, as if they’re silently issuing their own warning.

“Understood,” I reply tersely, my eyes never leaving Ruby’s. “Now, if you’ll excuse us, we have work to do.”

“Of course,” she says, her voice cold and distant once more. “We’ll be seeing each other again, I’m sure.”

And with that, Ruby sweeps out of the warehouse, followed closely by Declan and Cillian.

Ruby shifts her gaze back to the men behind us before quickly looking away.

“Well, guess we got what we came for,” I mutter.

“Maybe,” Cathal replies, glaring at the box. “Time will tell.”

CATHAL

The penthouse is dimly lit as we enter, with night falling around us. The shadows stretching across the floor like gory tendrils taunt me.

“Fuck,” I mutter under my breath. The tension in the room is suffocating, and my whole body aches from head to toe.

“You okay?” Ciarán asks, shutting the door behind us.

“Fine,” I grit out, trying to regain some semblance of control. “Just want to get this open.”

Nodding, he crosses to his laptop and opens it, sitting on the sofa and holding out his hand.

Opening the box reveals a cold, metallic object inside. It’s a USB drive.

“Let’s see what we’ve got here,” Ciarán mutters.

I can’t answer. In the pit of my stomach, dread coils tighter, but I need to know the truth, no matter how ugly it may be.

Handing it over, he plugs the USB into the laptop, waiting as it scans and loads the content.

Leaning over the back of the sofa, I glare at the screen and blink. “Who the fuck is that?” I ask after a few seconds of staring.

“Fucked if I know,” Ciarán says, holding the laptop up by the sides so he can get a better look at the grainy image of

some asshole in a black hoodie, bending down next to the Ferrari.

“For fuck’s sake,” he mutters and throws the laptop onto the coffee table where it bounces onto the floor and turns off. “What the fuck good is this?”

Inhaling deeply, I try not to blow my top. It will do no good and it might scare Summer. She is lurking near the door, almost as if she doesn’t want to come in.

“You okay?” I growl, running a hand through my hair in irritation that this video proved nothing.

“Erm, yeah?”

“That’s a question, Tinks. Try again,” Ciarán says, standing up and going to her. “You get spooked before? With Ruby?”

Summer shakes her head. “No, not with her. She’s nice...”

My snort of amusement does nothing to quell Summer’s anxiety.

“It’s just, I saw someone. One of your guys, I guess. He came into the warehouse a few minutes after you left me in the car.”

“Oh?” I move in closer. She has my full attention now. “Did he hurt you?”

She shakes her head. “No, he didn’t even see me, but I saw him.”

“You know him?”

She shrugs. “Forget it, it’s stupid.”

“No,” I say, going to her. “It’s not stupid if you have your concerns. Your safety is more important than anything.”

“Even your own?”

Her challenge is a piece of piss. “Every time.”

She smiles softly. “Well, I wasn’t in danger. I just thought I recognized him. He has a leather jacket on and a faded t-shirt. Tall-ish, graying hair, late forties.”

Ciarán frowns. “Doesn’t sound familiar.”

“He came into the warehouse after you left me,” Summer says again and then chews her lip. “Fuck.”

“What?”

“Nothing, I must’ve imagined it.” She presses her hands to her eyes. “I must be tired and hallucinating. Or maybe it’s wishful thinking, or trauma.”

“Trauma? Summer, what is going on?”

She sighs. “It’s not important. What is important is finding out who tried to kill you. They didn’t succeed, so they’re going to try again.”

Ciarán and I exchange a glance. We know better than anyone what a master deflection looks like, and Summer is a pro.

“You can tell us anything, anytime, Summerbell. Please, don’t shut us out.”

“It’s nothing. I swear. I’m just tired.”

She has left us no choice but to accept her excuse for now, but whoever this fucker is that’s spooked her, we need to find out who he is and why. I wonder briefly if they are connected, but no shit went down in the warehouse. If it was the same guy who tried to blow me up, surely he would’ve tried something.

“Right, well, I’ll get Luke on it,” Ciarán says, turning to the fallen laptop and slamming it shut. “He knows how to work shit like this.”

Nodding, I press my lips together. Worried doesn’t cover what I’m feeling right now, but none of the concern is for me. It’s all for Summer.

“I’m going to go and lie down for a bit,” Summer mutters and darts off before either one of us can stop her.

“Go,” Ciarán says, waving his hand at the hallway. “I’ll call Luke.”

Hesitating, as I have no idea what I’m supposed to say to Summer, I make my way slowly to the room she shares with

Ciarán.

Expecting her to be on the bed, I don't find her there, but instead staring out of the window, her arms folded.

“We need to make sure you're protected.”

“Fuck that,” Summer snaps, glaring out of the window. “You're not going through this alone, Cathal. You're not shutting me out.”

“Oh, like you're shutting us out?”

“Fuck you.”

“You've got a dirty mouth on you, girl.”

She turns to face my level stare. “You want it wrapped around your cock?”

Narrowing my eyes, my stare turns less pleasant. “Vicious little Summerbell.”

She takes a bold step towards me, even though the atmosphere has gone icy cold in here.

My chest heaves as I struggle to find words, my emotions a tangled mess inside me. I want her at the same time as I'm not sure I can. Doing what I did when I abducted her was easy. I didn't know her, nor did I care. Now is a whole other ball game.

Acting purely on instinct, I step forward and grab her shoulders, and shove her onto the bed, keeping her down with the pressure I'm exerting.

“Thal!” she snaps, struggling to get free of the heavy weight I'm placing on her.

Easing up with a low growl, I quickly pull the waistband of her leggings and panties down while she squirms to get away from me.

“Be still,” I snarl.

“Thal!”

“Summer,” I growl, my voice hoarse with a lust I haven't felt as long as I've lived. “Shut the fuck up.”

Her eyes widen in surprise, but she doesn't protest further as I quickly pull my cock out and fall on top of her. Leveraging myself on my hands, either side of her, I stare into her eyes filled with fury and longing. Grabbing my cock, I balance myself with my knee on the bed and ram it into her without a sound.

Fuck, she feels good. So tight. So hot.

Slamming in and out of her, my need for her is so intense, my thoughts are a blur of want and lust.

I pound into her again, her pussy gripping me like a vise. "You're a dirty little girl," I snarl as I thrust into her, feeling the surge of my impending orgasm take hold, which won't be long in coming. "You like a fucking hard cock taking your pussy, don't you?"

"Yes," she cries out, her voice lost and breathless.

"You fucking love it," I pant, my voice low and rough, my thrusts becoming more powerful, more demanding. "You love my cock fucking you. You can't get enough of it, can you?"

"Thal!"

My name pours from her lips and it's more than enough to shove me over the edge of the cliff. Knowing I've used her, violated her doesn't make it go away. My orgasm crashes over me and I unload into her tight little pussy with a loud grunt before I pull out and roll over to lie next to her on the bed, panting and disgusted with my actions. The full weight of what I've done presses down on me. The adrenaline that fueled me moments ago dissipates, leaving behind a heavy pit of guilt in my stomach.

"Summerbell, fuck...I'm so sorry," I stammer. "I didn't mean to hurt you."

"You didn't. I'm okay."

"No, it's not fucking okay," I say, my voice cracking. "You deserve better than this, better than me." Sitting up, I shove my cock back in my pants and drop my head in my hands.

Summer sits up as well. “Cathal, listen to me. You didn’t do anything wrong.”

My chest tightens as I try to hold back the surge of emotion threatening to spill over. “I can’t lose you, Summerbell. Forgive me, I’m sorry.”

“You won’t,” she promises, her voice steadier now. “There is nothing to forgive. You need to forgive me for being a brat before and saying what I did. That was awful and I’m sorry.”

Shaking my head, I sigh. “You don’t need to tiptoe around me, Summer. I can see your fire growing. Ciarán brings it out in you. Don’t let it die because of me.”

“You both bring it out in me. I love myself around you.”

I exhale slowly, allowing myself to really take in her words. It’s terrifying to let someone in like this, to trust them with my heart and my fears. But Summer’s seemingly unwavering belief in me gives me hope.

Reaching out carefully, I wrap my arms around her. She sighs happily and rests her head on my chest.

“Do you think Ciarán heard us?”

“Yes.”

“Do you think we can try this again sometime but properly?”

“Yes.”

“Good,” she murmurs. “That’s good.”

A sense of peace which has been adrift for so long collides with my soul and I tighten my grip on this tiny blonde woman who has turned my whole life upside down. She is perfection and I will do everything in my power to keep her safe. So Ciarán and I are going to have to make her tell us what is going on with her. She is holding something back, and it’s affecting her deeply. I just hope she trusts us enough to tell us and lets us help her.

SUMMER

The warm glow of the lamps fill the bedroom. The city's skyline sprawls before me through the windows, a beautiful reminder of how far I've come in such a few short weeks. Ciarán, Cathal, and I are building a life together - complicated, messy, but ours.

Glancing at my reflection in the window, taking in my petite frame and soft features. My wavy, blonde hair falls gently on my shoulders, framing my pale face.

My attention shifts to Cathal. His tall, muscular form silhouetted against the fading light. His dark, unruly hair and chiseled jawline make him undeniably attractive, but it's his intense blue eyes that truly captivate me. They hold a world of secrets, pain, and longing that only I can see.

Cathal and Ciarán are everything that I'm not - intense, possessive, and obsessive, traits forged from an abusive past that haunts them every day.

"Summer," he murmurs, turning towards me, his voice rough yet soothing.

"Did you ever think we'd end up here with two losers like us?" he asks, his voice low and laden with emotion.

"Never," I breathe, resting my head on his shoulder. "You two are perfect and I wouldn't change either of you for the world."

Reaching out tentatively to touch his face, but as my fingers graze his cheek, he flinches away, his eyes darkening. The recent car bomb explosion left him with injuries that have

yet to fully heal - a constant reminder of the dangers that lurk around every corner.

“Sorry,” I whisper, pulling my hand back. “I didn’t mean to hurt you.”

“No, it’s not that,” he mumbles, looking away. “It’s just hard sometimes.”

“Talk to me,” I say softly, sensing the depth of his struggle. “I want to be here for you, Cathal.”

He hesitates, as if weighing whether or not to open himself up to me. Finally, he takes a shaky breath, his eyes meeting mine again. “Being touched, it brings back memories. Of things best left forgotten.”

“I know, baby,” I murmur to him, reaching for his hand this time, taking care to be gentle. “I’m so sorry for what you had to go through.”

Cathal hesitates but then tightens his grip around my hand, and I can see the conflict in his eyes - the desire to push past his pain and embrace the love we share, warring against the fear that holds him back.

“Let me help you,” I urge him, our faces inches apart. “I want to be there for you. Always.”

“Promise me,” he says, his voice raw and vulnerable. “Promise you won’t let go, even when it’s hard.”

“I promise. I’m not going anywhere.”

Cathal takes a deep breath and nods, unshed tears shining in his eyes. “Summer,” he whispers softly, his intense green eyes searching my face as if trying to read my every thought. “I need you to keep pushing me. Help me become the man you deserve.”

Smiling at his sincerity, even as I see the insecurity lurking beneath the surface, it’s almost hard to believe that this gentle, vulnerable man is the same fierce and possessive Cathal Gannon who dominates any room he enters. We’ve been through so much together in such a short amount of time.

“Of course, I will.” Being bold, I gently trace the line of his jaw with my finger. The muscles beneath my touch tense, but he doesn’t pull away—a testament to how desperately he’s battling his demons.

“Please, don’t stop touching me,” he murmurs, his face contorting with a mix of pleasure and pain. “Even when it feels like too much, I need you to keep going. Show me I’m worth fighting for.”

My soul breaks at the rawness of his words, and I lean in to press a feather-light kiss on his forehead. “You don’t have to convince me, Cathal. I know you’re worth it.”

As we sit there, my hand resting gently on his chest, I feel the steady thud of his heartbeat beneath my palm. Each beat resonates within me, echoing the rhythm of my own heart. The world outside seems to fade away.

“Thank you, Summerbell,” Cathal says softly, his eyes shimmering with gratitude. “You have no idea how much this means to me.”

“Actually, I think I do,” I say, a small smile playing on my lips. “Because I need you just as much as you need me.”

His hand moves to cover mine, the warmth of his skin seeping into me and a tingle over my skin. The connection between us is undeniable—a force that transcends any obstacle life might throw in our path.

“Then let’s keep fighting together,” he vows, the steel in his voice belying the vulnerability in his eyes. “For each other, for Ciarán and for this life we are trying to build here.”

“Always,” I promise, sealing the vow with another tender kiss.

Cathal’s eyes burn with determination, a fierceness that I’ve grown to admire in him. “No matter what happens,” he swears, his voice low and unwavering, “I won’t let my past ruin what we have, Summer. We deserve better than that.”

I study his face, the lines of pain etched there, and I know he means every word. My heart swells with affection for this

man who has been through so much, yet still finds it within himself to love me.

“Okay,” I say softly, nodding my agreement. “But you have to promise me something, Cathal.”

“Anything,” he replies, his gaze never leaving mine.

“Promise me that if it ever becomes too much—if you need to stop or take a step back—you’ll tell me,” I insist, my voice firm but gentle. “I want to help you, but I can’t do that if you don’t communicate with me.”

He hesitates, a flicker of uncertainty crossing his features. But then he nods, taking a deep breath. “I promise, Summer.”

We sit there for a moment, just holding each other’s hands, our unspoken commitment filling the room as the city lights twinkle outside our penthouse window.

Ciarán and Cathal’s past may haunt them, but with every touch, every whispered word of love, we’re slowly tearing down the walls that have kept them captive for so long. Together, we’ll build something new—something stronger than any of us could have ever imagined.

“You two work it out?” Ciarán asks, entering the room.

“Yeah,” I answer for both of us. “All good.”

“Good, because Luke is on this video and he reckons he can have it blown up and smoothed out in hours. Then hopefully we will know who the fuck to gun down and make them wish they’d never been born.”

“Too fucking right,” Cathal snarls. “I’m going to peel his fucking skin off inch by inch, so he remembers as he screams for mercy while he’s dying, who he decided to fuck with.”

Cathal drags his hand out of mine and steps back, his face dark and scary. For a moment, I’m afraid, but then it dissipates as quickly as it rose. Whoever tried to kill Cathal and possibly Ciarán as well, deserves everything they get, and I’m not even sorry about the lack of guilt I feel over this decision. I won’t stand in their way or be the one to stop them from dealing with things how they do.

I'm in their world now and I couldn't be happier.

CIARÁN

The air in the Angel pub is thick with tension, like a storm waiting to break. I watch as Cathal's gang swagger in like they own the fucking place, and my own, trying not to rise to the past threat. Making sure Summer is tucked away in the corner booth nearest the door with Ronny watching her again, which seems to be his go-to position lately, I make a mental note to ask him about this guy Tinks saw the other night. Things have gotten away from me, and my head is up my ass, but I gotta get it together and do things right for my girl. Our girl. Cathal's return to my life has been surprising, comforting, and threatening all at the same damn time. Trust him to make a fucking show of himself when being in the mafia is all about laying low.

"Remember, it's all about control," I murmur to Cathal, my voice low enough that only he can hear. His eyes flicker to mine for a moment before returning to the scene before us.

"Right," he says, his voice equally quiet. "Control."

"Listen up, assholes," I shout out once everyone is assembled. "You've heard the rumors, you've seen the proof, and this is happening. Cathal and I are merging, and you guys need to get on board, put your past rivalries aside and get with the program, A-SAP. This is better for all of us. The territory has expanded, the wealth will be evenly distributed, and it's time to make new friends. Got it? Anyone got a problem; you know where to find us."

A low rumble resounds through the otherwise silent pub. My guys and Cathal's are struggling to find their place in this

new alliance, each member subtly jockeying for position. It's a delicate dance, a test of strength and loyalty.

As we stand there, observing the problematic, but not unexpected, uneasy merging of our two worlds, I see the first signs of trouble. A couple of Cathal's men huddle together, whispering, their body language unmistakable - they're planning something. As if sensing my gaze, one of them looks up, meeting my eyes briefly before glancing away.

"Got a problem over there," I nod towards the pair, alerting Cathal to the potential threat. His gaze is already on them, his expression dark.

"I see it," he mutters under his breath. "I knew this wouldn't be easy. Those two bastards have always been trouble."

"Time to show them who's in charge then, isn't it? You up for it?"

Cathal takes a deep breath, squaring his shoulders. "Always."

It's not my place to question him. If he feels like his ribs can take another hit, not to mention his skull, then that's up to him. I'm not his keeper and I'm not his fucking nurse.

We stride over to the two men, our presence causing them to fall silent immediately. An air of defiance surrounds them, but I can also sense fear lurking beneath the surface.

"Something you want to share with the rest of us?" Cathal asks, his voice hard and unforgiving.

One of the men, a tall brute with a scar across his cheek, steps forward. "We don't need your brother's gang," he sneers, looking at me with contempt. "We can handle our business just fine on our own."

"Is that so?" Cathal replies, his tone ice-cold. "Because it seems to me like you're forgetting who's in charge here."

"Maybe it's time for a change," another man pipes up, emboldened by the first speaker.

“You planning a coup, Mikey? Fucking bold,” Cathal snaps, his fury barely contained. “You have two choices - fall back in line or get stitches. Which is it?”

The men exchange glances, their expressions angry and uncertain. The weight of their decision hanging in the air, the outcome unpredictable, but the threat to Cathal’s control all too real.

“Let me make myself clear,” Cathal continues, his eyes locked on the challengers. “Anyone who isn’t with us, who doesn’t respect our leadership, can fight us, right here, right now.”

Their hesitation is all it takes for Cathal to lose his rag. His temper is notorious, and I don’t envy these assholes one bit.

With lightning speed, Cathal’s fist crashes into the scarred man’s face, at the same time as he drags his knife out of the back of his pants, that wicked looking, curved blade that is a thing of beauty. One punch from Cathal is all it takes for him to drop to the floor with a sickening crunch, his nose flattened and blood spurting out everywhere. Before the others can react, Cathal grabs the one called Mikey in a chokehold, squeezing mercilessly, his blade gleaming in the low-level pub lights.

“Still feeling brave, Mikey?” he growls. “Ready to challenge me now?”

Mikey’s face turns purple, his hands clawing uselessly at Cathal’s arm. The rest of the gang watches in stunned silence, afraid to intervene.

I move to stand guard over the groaning scarred man, pulling my gun out and aiming it in his face to discourage any ideas of jumping back up to help. Too bad Mikey is a goner, and he doesn’t even know it yet.

Cathal loosens his chokehold on Mikey, who thinks he’s gotten away with it, so he doesn’t expect the blade. Cathal draws it across Mikey’s throat, a deep and final cut that he won’t survive.

Blood spatters up, spraying some of the men closest to them and they gulp, their faces pale as they witness the brutal execution of their fellow gang member.

Cathal hurls Mikey away in disgust. The man crumples to the floor at Thal's feet, gurgling before he goes quiet. His companion stays down, blood streaming from his shattered nose., staring in shock at his dead friend.

"Anyone else?" Cathal asks, deathly quiet.

Everyone stares at the floor, avoiding his gaze.

"Good," Cathal nods firmly. "Then this matter is settled. We're merging operations and that's final. Get on board or you're six feet under."

He turns and stalks away, the picture of barely contained rage. I follow close behind.

"Think they got the message," I mutter with a soft snicker.

"Fucking cunts," Cathal growls.

Looking up, I see Summer staring at us, her face pale but as blank as she can get in the moment. She licks her lips and swallows before she rises slowly. I shake my head and she sits down again. It's not that I don't trust Cathal with her, but in this particular moment, I'm not risking her.

"Fuckin' traitors," Cathal spits, his words laced with venom. The darkness in his eyes mirrors the storm brewing within me. We won't let them win; we can't afford to. He swallows back the shot of whiskey Paddy put in front of him and offers one to me. I shake my head. I need to steer clear of the stuff or risk losing myself again.

A scuffle at the front of the pub makes us both turn instantly, weapons raised. A rival gang has been waiting for this, waiting for all of us together to make the merge official. Thal's men have taken it upon themselves to bury the hatchet and have dived forward with my guys at their backs to start an all-out fucking war in the middle of the Angel.

What the fuck is wrong with these rival idiots?

"Christ!" I mutter.

“These fucking cunts!” Cathal growls.

I holster my gun and pull a knife, ready to throw down.

“You’re all fucking dead,” I yell, surging forward with Thal next to me. Grinning at him, we both know this is now an all-out battle, and we both revel in the violence.

Thal swings his knife wildly, slicing and dicing and not giving a shit who he takes out. His cruel streak has come out to play, and he is reveling in it. I don’t need to look up to know that Ronny has taken care of Summer and stashed her in the back office. He will guard her with his life or die. He knows this.

I roll into the fighting circle, my men and Thal’s back-to-back, fighting side by side. Grabbing a guy by the shirtfront, my blade flashes out, slitting his throat wide open, spraying blood on my face.

It’s fucking glorious.

This is what we’re made for, what we fucking live for, this is why we’re here at the edge of annihilation. A fight to the death.

It’s a chaotic mess, bodies flying, blood spilling, howls of rage and pain fill the air.

CATHAL

I move from one man to the next, fighting with everything I have. My ribs have taken another beating, my head pounds, but no one will take me down. I'm lost to the bloodlust.

My blade connects with something, flesh maybe, and my grip slips. My knife flies out of my hand and I struggle to keep hold of my opponent. A hand grabs me by the throat; I didn't even see it coming. I can't breathe.

Slamming my elbow back into his gut, and then his nose, I shatter it with my next blow. The crunch of his bones is music to my ears. The warm, coppery scent of his blood fills my nostrils as his grip loosens. Dropping my elbow back down, I hammer the man in the face, pulping his nose and crushing his cheekbone. Ducking I scoop up my knife and my hand comes back up, the blade slicing his guts wide open to spill out all over the floor at my feet.

Darkness fills my vision, and my thoughts go black as someone delivers a punch to my skull. The man drops to the ground. I would guess dead, but I don't fucking care.

"Cathal!" Daz roars my name and I shake my head to clear it.

"You motherfucker!" I snarl and launch myself at the man who took me down as Daz joins me, beating on the rival gangster until his fists are a bloody mess.

The gangster's eyes widen, panic sets in and he drops the knife he had in his hand. I reach down and grab it. Hand to

hand is his only way out, and he doesn't have a fucking chance.

I drive my fist into his face with all the force I can muster, fighting for oxygen and feeling my ribs crack further with the force of my blow. Daz moves out of the way and onto the next, leaving this cunt for me. I stand over him, his blood on my hands and my knife in my hand.

Time slows down, and I focus on the man before me. I move towards him, my knife drawn back. I have to end this. They say I'm cruel and now I'm going to show them just how they underestimated that.

I bring my hand down, severing his fingers with the blade. His scream of agony takes over the room, making everyone stop and stare. I raise the blade, burying it into his eye socket, killing him instantly.

My hand is covered in blood. I pull it back with a sucking noise that brings a smile to my face.

A wicked laugh rumbles through my chest.

There's more of them. Seems like more assholes were lying in wait for us to merge to take us out. We are at a disadvantage, but I don't care. I cut through ranks of men who are trying to kill me, taking pleasure in the fact that they can't fucking touch me. They are nothing. Pieces of shit on the bottom of my shoe.

The Angel is filling up with blood, bodies, and shredded furniture, and I'm fucking in my element. This is where I fucking belong, fighting at the edge of life and death.

My blade, Nancy, is like a fucking goddess in my hand. Wickedly sharp, all it takes is a bit of force to get the job done. Slamming the blade down onto an arm that reaches for me, I feel a rush of pleasure deep inside my soul when I hear more than one man scream out when they see his blood flying all over the place and his hand hanging on by a thread.

I back hand another one, ramming his face into a table and then a wall. My fingers close around his throat, and he chokes on his own blood, drowning on it as it fills his mouth. I let him

go, but his body crumples to the floor, too weak to stand. I step over him and move onto the next. This is where I belong.

Ciarán is holding his own. I don't need to worry about him. There are heavy casualties on both sides, but we will survive this because they have never seen the Gannon brothers fight together.

Sweat drips off my forehead, running into my eyes, or maybe it's blood. I wipe it away. The Angel doesn't look good. The floor is covered in bodies, furniture is broken, and blood is everywhere. It's a fucking mess, but no one looks ready to back down until a group of younger guys start to back out of the doors, leaving the rest to fight it out.

I stalk after the cowards, ignoring the brothers with me. As I pass Ciarán, he kicks someone in the balls, which makes me chuckle. I'm vindicated when I see Ciarán's smile. He loved hurting this fucking asshole as much as I did.

The coward has one foot out the door when I grab him by his collar and unceremoniously yank him back into the bar. He tries to escape me, but I lock my hands around his throat, squeezing off his airway. I feel his pulse beating in his neck.

"You want to run, you fucking pussy? Huh?"

I squeeze his throat and slam his face into the wall, knocking him out cold.

Someone grabs my shoulder from behind. I spin, my knife up, ready to cut this fucker into pieces. I mean, I'm in a fucking bad mood right now, and I don't give a shit if I have to kill everyone in here until it's just me and Ciarán left.

"We're done here, man." Ciarán bends over to catch his breath as I glance at the sheer destruction that surrounds us. The sound of the sirens outside brings reality crashing down and with a swift nod, ignoring the agony in my entire body, we stalk to the back of the pub and slip out, seeing Ronny rushing away with Summer on the corner near Ciarán's apartment. We are covered in blood, guts, bruises and God only knows what else. We need to get off the streets.

"You okay?" Ciarán rasps.

“Yeah, you?”

He grins and I return it as we slip into a back alley, knowing Ronny will have our girl back in the apartment before we get there.

SUMMER

My heart thumps wildly, a wild rhythm that makes it hard to breathe. Seeing Cathal and Ciarán in such a brutal fight has made me feel nauseous at the same time as exhilarated.

“Hey, Summer,” Ronny grits out as he hurries me away from the scene.

Looking back over my shoulder to see if I can see Ciarán and Cathal, I absently murmur, “Hmm?”

“Your parents, Summer. They’re alive.”

Stopping dead on the sidewalk, I blink a couple of times. “What?”

“Your parents are alive. I know you saw your father the other day in the warehouse.” His muttered voice is hard to hear, and he’s glancing around nervously.

“I don’t understand.” My brain has turned to mush.

Ronny grabs my arm tightly and drags me forward. “We gotta keep moving. The cops are coming.”

The words echo in my head. “How-how do you know?”

“I just do. Look, you didn’t hear this from me.”

“What?” Shaking my head, I’m confused, and I don’t know where to start with the gazillion questions battering my skull suddenly. “They died in a car crash. No, explosion...”

“That was staged,” he says calmly, as if revealing some insignificant detail. “Your parents have been living under new

identities since the fire. They had to disappear.”

“Disappear?” My hands clench into fists, nails digging into my palms. “You expect me to believe that? Why the hell would they fake their own deaths and leave me behind?” Anger is now getting the better of me. This is...this is...there is no word for this.

“They didn’t have a choice,” Ronny replies, meeting my gaze without flinching. “I can’t tell you any more than that, but I know you saw Derek, so I’m telling you and I’m also telling you not to go digging.”

“Not to go digging!” I exclaim loudly.

He shushes me sternly as he leads me into the apartment building. “Quiet,” he snaps. “This is serious, Summer. You need to forget it and move on and do not mention this to the Gannons.”

“Why?” *Too late.*

“Trust me.”

“I don’t *know* you! Tell me where they are,” I command, struggling to keep my emotions in check. “Now.”

“I can’t do that,” Ronny says, his eyes flickering with something akin to pity as he stabs the button for the elevator.

Whatever conversation we were having is cut short as Ciarán and Cathal catch up to us, drenched in blood.

“Fuck!” I shriek as the elevator doors close. “Are you guys hurt?”

“I’m dying,” Cathal murmurs, leaning heavily against the side of the elevator, slumped over as if he is holding his body upright by sheer force of will.

“Shit,” I mutter, going to him, shoving Ronny’s shocking statement under the mental mat for now. “We need to get you to a hospital.”

“He’s being a pussy,” Ciarán snaps. “He’s not dying. He’s fine.”

“Easy for you to say. Your ribs aren’t snapped in a hundred different places.”

“How do you know?”

“Jaysus,” he whispers. “Shut the feck up.”

Pressing my lips together at his suddenly much deeper Irish accent, I feel myself go wet. It always did things to me before I met Ciarán. Now it’s so fucking hot, I wish Ronny wasn’t here so I could engage in some elevator sex.

When the doors ding open, three of us get off, but Ronny stays on board to head back down. Our gaze locks and his jaw clenches, imploring me not to say anything. I don’t know why, but I feel in my gut that I have to keep my mouth shut for now. “Thanks for everything,” I say to him, with a nod.

“Welcome,” he snarls and stabs the button impatiently as the doors slide closed.

I jump when Ciarán slaps his hand to the elevator door to stop it from closing.

“Who was that guy in the warehouse? Not one of mine. Did you see him?”

“What guy?” Ronny asks, his eyes firmly on Ciarán.

Ciarán looks at me briefly. “Older guy. Not one of mine. Fuck knows what else.”

Ronny shrugs. “Guessed he was with Ruby seeing as she showed up right behind him and spoke to him before he turned around and left.”

Ciarán’s eyes narrow but he accepts that. “Fine.” He releases the elevator and the doors slide shut.

“Tinks,” Ciarán asks, facing me. “Are you okay? What you saw earlier was savage.”

“I’m okay,” I mutter, entering the apartment with Thal leaning heavily on me. He collapses on the sofa and closes his eyes. “Sure he is?”

“Yeah,” Thal grunts. “Let me sleep.”

Gritting my teeth, I glare at him. “You don’t need to be so fucking hard.”

“Says who?”

“Me.”

“I’m hard as nails. Toughest cunt you’ll come across. S’who I am, Summerbell.”

“You’re pigheaded and an ass.”

“Those too.”

“Humph.” Folding my arms across my chest, I sigh. “Well, you two have fun being so hard. I need to go and...be somewhere else.” Turning with a huff, Ciarán grasps my arm lightly, drawing me to a stop.

“Tinks. Is everything okay?”

“You keep asking me that.”

“Because I’m not sure, and I’m worried about you.”

“I’m fine. Tired.”

He nods slowly and lets me go. With a stiff smile, I hurry down the corridor to the bedroom, rushing inside and closing the door behind me. I need space. I need time to process this news and figure out what the hell I’m going to do about it. Ronny makes it all seem so cloak and dagger, but why? Why would my parents fake their deaths and do whatever it was my dad was doing in that warehouse the other night? None of it makes any sense.

I’m so fucking annoyed. Angry. Incensed. How dare they? How dare they keep this from me? I feel like I’ve been waiting for them to come back, to swoop in and save me from a life which was carting me to a place I didn’t want to go, and all the while, they’ve been here.

And yet...I can’t help but feel that there’s more to the story, more to the whole thing. Something that I’m not getting, something that Ronny isn’t divulging.

Raking my hands through my hair, I pace around the room. I feel like a caged animal, needing to break free, but I can’t.

What am I going to do?

“Summer? Are you okay?”

Turning around, I see Ciarán leaning against the door. His hand is bandaged up and his face is a mess. He must be in pain, but he doesn't look like he's in agony. I shake my head.

“What is it?” he asks softly. “What's wrong?”

“I can't...it's too much.”

“Talk to me.”

“I-I can't.”

“You can.”

“I can't,” I cry. “I can't do it right now.” I need to get out, to run in the opposite direction, to do something to take my mind off these things that are running through my head. “I'm sorry, Ciarán. I can't.”

“It's okay, Tinks,” he murmurs, coming closer and wrapping his arms around me. “I know what you saw today was horrifying and will stay with you for a long time. If it's too much...”

“No, it's not that. I don't care about that. You did what you had to do.”

“Then what?”

Sagging into his embrace, I'm exhausted. “I'm tired and I think I'm coming down with something,” I lie.

“Let's get you to bed.” He leads me over and sits me down on the edge of the sumptuous king-sized bed.

“Shouldn't I be playing nursemaid? I'm worried about Thal.”

“He's fine. He's asleep.”

“What about his concussion?”

“I'll keep an eye on him. Not our first rodeo and definitely not our last.”

Nodding, trusting him to take care of everyone, I kick my shoes off and, not bothering to undress, I sink into the bed with a sigh.

“I’ll make you some tea.”

“Thanks.” Feeling guilty, I give him a smile, but he can see it doesn’t reach my eyes and smiles back sadly. I know I’m worrying him, and I *should* speak up, but I just can’t help feeling my gut is right on this and to keep quiet. For now. Just until I know more.

Turning over and curling up, tears seep out of my eyes, and I squeeze them shut. All that time I was with Aunt Margaret, and I could’ve been with my parents.

No matter which way you twist it, that fucking hurts.

SUMMER

The shrill beep of the alarm clock startles me from sleep. Groggily, I fumble to silence it and blink against the pale rays of sunlight filtering through the curtains. For a blissful moment, everything seems normal and routine.

Then, like a crashing wave, the events of the past weeks flood my mind - the danger, the violence, my growing entanglement with Ciarán and Cathal. The ever-present knot in my stomach returns.

Lying there for a moment, alone, I wonder where Ciarán is. Cathal doesn't share this bed with me and it's disappointing. I hope one day we all cram into it and I can sleep nestled between them. Not that they sleep much. Either of them. Guess it's part of the life.

Sitting up, I rub my eyes, feeling a yawn building in my chest. The room is silent except for the faint sounds of the city outside. I take a deep breath and slide out of bed, my bare feet landing on the cool wooden floor.

Stretching my arms above my head, I feel my muscles ripple under my skin. The thought of Ciarán and Cathal, their strong bodies pressed against mine, sends shivers down my spine. I can almost feel their hands on me, their lips on mine.

But then the reality hits me. We're not just involved in some steamy threesome. Well, twosome with a strong possibility of evolving. We're facing danger at every turn. It's a heady combination that leaves me constantly on edge.

Still, I can't help but long for their touch. Their fierce protectiveness over me has only heightened the attraction I feel towards them.

Shaking my head, I try to clear my thoughts, knowing that dwelling on them will only lead to trouble. Instead, I make my way to the bathroom and turn on the shower.

As the water cascades over me, I let out a sigh of relief. The heat seeps into my bones, washing away the tension and leaving me feeling renewed.

Cleansing myself, the soapy foam slides down my body like a layer of sweet frosting. Washing my hair, I breathe in the citrusy scent of shampoo and let the tears fall, as is my ritual. No one knows, no one hears. It's just me and the hot water.

After a few minutes of self-pity, I turn the water off and towel myself dry, the fluffy black cotton cozy and comforting against my hot skin.

Outside, I can already hear birds chirping and the distant sound of traffic. It's all so *normal*. But then again, maybe that's what drew me to Ciarán and Cathal in the first place. The need for something different. Something thrilling.

Throwing on some underwear and my robe, I towel dry my hair and venture to the kitchen. Preparing a modest breakfast of strong coffee, buttered toast, and a small bowl of fruit, I feel I might need a shot of whiskey to go with this and the matter at hand. The familiar rituals soothe me somewhat, providing a veneer of normalcy.

As I sip the hot coffee, letting the bitterness ground me, I steel myself for the conversation ahead. I know Ciarán and Cathal will resist my plan to return to work. But I need this. I need to reclaim some independence, some sense of my old life. I cannot hide here in the penthouse forever.

Right on cue, I hear the heavy tread of footsteps and the brothers wander into the kitchen, smiling when they see me.

"Morning, Tinks," Ciarán rumbles, dropping a quick kiss on the top of my head before making a beeline for the coffeepot.

Cathal offers me a gentle smile as he sits down across from me. “Sleep okay?”

“Well, enough,” I reply, wrapping my hands around the warm mug tightly and resisting the urge to add it would be better if he were next to me. He isn’t ready and I’m okay with it.

Taking a deep breath. “Listen, I’ve been thinking. It’s time I get back to normal life a bit. Including going back to work.”

Ciarán freezes, mug halfway to his lips. Cathal’s eyebrows raise in surprise and concern. Here we go.

“No.”

“Yes.” I meet his steely gaze.

“Not happening.”

“It is.”

“This is a severely bad idea.”

“I’m going to get dressed.” Steadily, I rise, knowing that this isn’t over by a long shot.

They follow me quickly, but I’m faster, reaching the bedroom and shrugging out of the robe. Opening the closet, I reach for my work uniform and get dressed as Ciarán and Cathal glare at me from the doorway.

“Take those off right now.”

Meeting Ciarán’s gaze, I give him a sultry smile, which distracts him momentarily. But then he’s back to being fierce and protective, taking a step closer to me.

“We need to talk about this.”

“So talk.”

The silence is deafening as he gathers his thoughts.

SUMMER

The morning light filters through the curtains as I stand in front of the mirror, adjusting my uniform for work. A part of me is nervous about stepping back into the world, but I'm determined to maintain my independence and not rely on Ciarán and Cathal for everything. My fingers fumble with the buttons, but I get them done up properly.

"Summer, are you sure about this?" Ciarán's voice comes from behind me. I can see his reflection in the mirror, tall and brooding, his blue eyes filled with worry.

"Absolutely," I reply, meeting his gaze in the mirror. "I need to do this, Ciarán. I can't just hide away forever."

Cathal enters the room, leaning against the doorframe with a conflicted expression and a mug of coffee in his hand. "We understand your need for independence, but we don't like the idea of you going out there alone, Summerbell," he says, his tone soft but firm.

"Look, I appreciate your concern, but it's just work," I insist, turning to face both of them. "I won't be alone at the store, and it's not like it's far from here."

Ciarán runs a hand through his dark hair, obviously agitated. "That's exactly what worries us, Tinks. It's not *here*. We just want to keep you safe."

"Keeping me safe doesn't mean keeping me locked away," I argue, staring them down. "I need to have some semblance of normalcy in my life, and that means going to work and taking care of myself."

Cathal sighs, his shoulders slumping as he concedes. He is exhausted, in pain, and not in the mood for this argument. I get it, I do. But fuck. I'm not a kept woman. I *won't* be.

“Look, I get that you both care about me, but I can't just sit around and do nothing,” I snap, my hands on my hips as I face Ciarán. “I need to be able to live my life without constantly feeling like a burden.”

Ciarán's jaw clenches, his eyes darkening with frustration. “It's not about being a burden, Tinks. This world we live in is dangerous, especially for someone like you. We're just trying to protect you.”

“Protect me?” I scoff, shaking my head and ignoring the *someone like you* comment. “I don't need your protection all the time. I've survived this long on my own, and I can still take care of myself.”

“Tinks,” Ciarán snaps, losing his patience. “We know you're strong, but there's so much at stake here. We can't risk losing you.”

“Jesus, Ciarán,” I exclaim, my anger boiling over. “I'm only going to work, not walking into a war zone! I need to have some control over my own life.”

“Damn it, Summer, I just want you to be safe!” he shouts, his eyes blazing as he matches my intensity. “Why can't you get that through your head?”

“Fuck you! You need to trust me to make my own decisions and let me live my life!”

A tense silence fills the room as Ciarán stares me down, his chest heaving with the weight of our argument.

Cathal's gaze flickers between Ciarán and me, his jaw tense as he processes the situation. “Look. We're not trying to control you, Summerbell. We need to know you're safe. You're putting us in a difficult position here, love.”

I sigh, knowing deep down that their concern comes from a genuine place. “I don't mean to do that. However, my desire to regain some semblance of normalcy is too strong to ignore.

I can't keep living like this. Hiding away and relying on you two for everything. I need to do this, Cathal."

He regards me with a pained expression before turning to Ciarán, who still looks ready to argue. But after a moment, Ciarán's features soften, and he lets out a defeated breath.

"Fuck," Ciarán mutters, pinching the bridge of his nose. "This goes against every-fucking-thing I know is right."

"No one will come for me in the middle of a busy department store," I argue. "Drop me off and pick me up, whatever, but I need to do this."

His glare makes my mouth go dry. He is furious, and he isn't afraid to show it. But if I back down now, I will never win an argument with them, ever. They both need to know that I'm not someone they can push around. That's not how this works.

As the seconds tick on and Ciarán's jaw gets tighter, I falter.

I take a deep breath, my head swimming. "I'll stay in the store until you come for me."

Ciarán and Cathal exchange a glance, their expressions unreadable, but I can sense their relief in the air.

"Fine."

With an awkward nod, they each turn away, leaving me to carry on getting ready for work on my own.

The argument still lingers, casting a dark cloud over what should have been a simple morning ritual.

Giving myself one last critical look in the mirror, I wince. My face is pale, my eyes rimmed with dark circles, but I'm determined to push through this day. As I step out of the room, I catch sight of Ciarán leaning against the wall, arms crossed over his chest, jaw clenched. He doesn't say anything, but his presence alone is enough to remind me of the strain our disagreement has caused.

"Let's go," I mutter, grabbing my bag and pushing past him, trying to ignore the way his eyes bore into me, cold and

unyielding.

Minutes later, the three of us walk side by side, the tension between Ciarán and me a horrible fog despite our shared silence. The protectiveness from both brothers, their bodies poised and alert, ready to guard me from any potential threat, is sweet but a bit suffocating.

As we approach the store, I notice how Ciarán and Cathal subtly position themselves closer to me, their body language screaming that they're on high alert. It's a stark reminder of just how much my life has changed since becoming entangled with these two dangerous men.

My heart aches, torn between wanting to be close to them and the need to maintain some semblance of my old life.

"Thank you," I say softly, not sure what else to add when we reach the entrance to the store, and the reality of what I'm about to do settles heavily on my chest.

"Remember, stay inside until we come back for you," Ciarán reminds me, his tone firm but not unkind. I nod, swallowing the lump in my throat.

"Okay," I agree, knowing that this compromise is necessary.

"See you later," Cathal says, his voice laced with concern.

"Take care, Summer," Ciarán adds, his eyes desperately searching mine for a moment before I turn away.

As I begin my shift, I sigh and make a decision that will make them happy. This will be my last shift here. The need for routine and independence is strong, but my attachment to Ciarán and Cathal is even stronger. I must find a way to reconcile these two sides of my life and learn to navigate the treacherous waters that come with loving them. Deep down, I know it's a sacrifice I'm willing to make for them—for us.

SUMMER

“Okay, you smartass dickheads. You were right. I was wrong. I admit it.” The usual hustle and bustle of Manchester city seems to have an undercurrent of something sinister. I glance around, my eyes darting from one unfamiliar face to another. There are too many strangers lurking in the shadows; it feels like they’re watching me. Muttering to myself as I walk through the department store, refolding clothes and helping customers, the uneasy feeling is unnerving. I’m not sure if it’s because I’m being watched or because I’m thinking about someone watching me. Either way, I wish it was home time, but am I fuck calling up the guys to come and get me early. Besides, if I know them, Ronny is knocking about somewhere and maybe it’s just him watching me work. If it is, I want a word with him when I eventually spot him. So far, no dice.

“Summer,” my manager Crystal snaps her fingers in front of my face, bringing me back to reality. “Get it together, will you? You’re wandering around here with your head up your backside.”

“Sorry,” I murmur, wondering if I should bite the bullet and tell her now, I’m quitting. But then she might want me to go right now and then I’d have to hang around waiting for the guys to pick me up. Better to do it when it’s time to leave, then I can run and not look back. I hate her. She is a battleaxe who is just plain mean. Sure, not Aunt Margaret mean, but still an asshole.

Crystal raises an eyebrow, her face pinched with annoyance, but doesn't say anything as I dart off to fold some already folded sweaters.

As the day drags on, the unease never fades, and Ronny doesn't show his face to me, so I'm growing more paranoid by the second.

In the end, I can't stand it any longer. Sneaking into the break room, I pull out my phone and message Ciarán to come and get me as soon as possible.

Grabbing my bag, I march up to Crystal in her office and say, "I quit. I'm leaving now."

"You can't quit," she sneers. "You have to work your notice."

"No, I don't. I'm going now and I won't be back." Without a further word, I scamper out of the office and checking my phone to see that Ciarán has messaged back that they're on their way, I head out back to the floor through the back of the store.

Suddenly, a hand clamps down over my mouth, muffling my startled scream. A thick arm wraps around my waist, dragging me further down the corridor and out of the fire exit at the back of the store that leads to a dark alley. The fear I've been trying to suppress all day surges forward, overwhelming me completely.

"Look what we've got here, boys," a gruff voice sneers in my ear, his breath hot and rancid. "A pretty little plaything for us to pass the time."

"Let me go!" I shout, my voice muffled against the hand covering my mouth. I thrash wildly, kicking and clawing at my attacker, but he only laughs, tightening his grip.

"Feisty one, aren't you?" he taunts, shoving me roughly against the wall and keeping the pressure on me so I can't move. I gasp for air, panic clawing at my insides like a wild animal trying to escape.

"You're too important to the Gannon brothers for us not to have a little fun first before we cut you up and send you back

to them in pieces,” another one says, stepping out of the shadows, a mask covering his face, like the other one.

“Fuck you,” I spit, fighting against the terror. “When they find out what you’ve done, you’ll wish you were dead.”

“Is that so?” The man holding me snickers. “Let’s see if they’ll even recognize you after we’re finished with you.” He flashes his blade in my face, and I whimper. He’s so strong.

Summoning all my paltry strength, I slam my heel down onto his foot, forcing him to step back a bit, but he doesn’t loosen his grip.

“Nice try, sweetheart,” he sneers. “But you’re not getting away that easily.”

Just as I brace myself for the inevitable pain of being stabbed and sliced up into fish food, a loud crash echoes through the alleyway.

Ciarán and Cathal, their faces twisted with rage, don’t hesitate for a second, charging at my assailants with a ferocity that chills me to the bone.

“Get the fuck away from her!” Ciarán roars, his fists connecting with the face of one attacker, sending him sprawling onto the ground.

“Touch her again, and I’ll fucking kill you,” Cathal growls, landing a brutal kick to another’s ribs.

The attackers try to put up a fight, but they’re clearly outmatched by the sheer force of the Gannon brothers. They crumple under the relentless assault, blood staining the pavement as Ciarán and Cathal refuse to let up, utterly devoid of mercy.

Ciarán stabs one of them in the guts while Cathal takes out the other one, with a fist to his face, leaving him for Ciarán to clean up, favoring his left side which makes me feel like shit for putting him in even more harm’s way.

“Summer,” Cathal wheezes. He gently takes me in his arms, checking me over for injuries. “Are you okay? Did they hurt you?”

“I’m fine,” I choke out, feeling the panic start to ebb away. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry. You were right. I was wrong. I quit. I knew it earlier, and I hung on. I should’ve just stayed in the penthouse. I was stubborn and an idiot...”

“Shh, it’s okay,” Ciarán murmurs, wrapping me in a protective embrace as well. “You’re safe now. We won’t let anyone hurt you. You quit?”

“Yeah.”

“Good,” Cathal says softly, pressing a gentle kiss to my forehead. “We’ll keep you safe, Summerbell. Always. We promise, but you have to work with us.”

“I will, I swear. Where’s Ronny?”

“Good fucking question,” Ciarán growls, looking around and confirming my suspicion that he should’ve been here.

Should’ve, but wasn’t.

The world around me feels like it’s coming apart at the seams. I’m a target. I can’t help the tears that prick at the corners of my eyes as I grapple with the reality that there’s no going back. My connection to the Gannon brothers and the danger surrounding them has seeped into my life.

“Teach me how to defend myself. Teach me how to use a weapon.”

Cathal raises an eyebrow, a hint of surprise flickering across his features. “Are you sure about this, Summer?”

“Fuck yes, I’m sure,” I snap, surprising even myself with the intensity of my conviction. “I’m not content to just be protected anymore. I want to fight back. I need to know that I can stand on my own two feet if I have to.”

Ciarán hesitates for a moment, looking torn. But then he nods, his jaw set with resolve. “All right. We’ll teach you. But you have to promise us one thing.”

“Anything,” I say without hesitation.

“Promise us you won’t go looking for trouble,” Cathal says, his eyes dark and serious. “Learning to defend yourself is

one thing, but seeking out danger is another.”

“I know,” I reply, swallowing hard. “I won’t, I promise.”

“Then let’s get started,” Ciarán says, some of the tension dissipating from his shoulders as he reaches out to squeeze my hand reassuringly as he leads me out of the alley and back onto the main street, leaving the bodies of my attackers behind a dumpster. The body count is sky high. *How* are the police not kicking our door down? How deep are they in Ciarán’s and Cathal’s pockets? I don’t even want to think about it. The thought that no one is really safe in this city makes me nauseous and that is a feeling of vulnerability that I can no longer accept. I’m here, I’m in this up to my fucking eyeballs. It’s go with the flow or die.

I choose the Gannon brothers. I choose their life. I choose the darkness. Now I have to live with it.

SUMMER

The sound of the gun firing reverberates through the empty warehouse, and my hands tremble as I lower the weapon. I can't believe I just shot a gun for the first time in my life. It feels so foreign, but at the same time empowering.

"Good," Ciarán says, standing behind me with his arms crossed. "Your aim is a little off, and the kickback was too harsh. You need a firmer grip, but you did good."

Snickering, I turn to him. "A little off? You're lucky I didn't shoot you and you're standing behind me."

He grins and shakes his head. "No, you did well, Tinks. Don't diminish what you're doing here. You're being brave, safe, and smart."

Lowering my gaze, I blush furiously at his compliments, hoping he says more things like that. I want to impress him; both of them.

Cathal steps forward, picking up a knife from the table beside us. "Now let's try something more close quarters."

Gulping, I look down at the blade in his hand. It's the one he handed me the other day when we were in this warehouse and I saw my father, it fires up my anger and I grip the knife he hands me tightly. "Right," I say, taking a deep breath. "Show me what to do."

"First, you need to know how to hold it properly," Cathal instructs, guiding my hand around the handle of the knife.

“Keep your grip firm, but not too tight. You want to be able to maneuver it easily.”

“Okay.” I nod, feeling the weight of the weapon in my palm. It feels oddly comforting, like an extension of my body.

“Now, let’s practice some basic strikes,” Ciarán says, stepping forward with a padded target. “Aim for the vital points — throat, stomach, kidneys.”

“Eyes,” Cathal adds and I balk.

“Are you sure about this?” I ask hesitantly, staring at the target.

“Trust yourself, Summer,” Ciarán reassures me, his voice calm and steady. “You’ve got this. Think about the one person you’d love to stab in the guts.”

“Crystal?” I mutter, more to myself, but they both jump on it.

“Who’s that?”

“My manager at ex-work. What a bitch. Overly critical and makes comparisons between how you worked yesterday and how you’re working today. And not good ones either. Total cowbag and I’m glad I don’t have to see her fucking ugly face ever again. Rah!” I lunge forward, catching Ciarán by surprise as I ram the knife into the target. “Oww!” The pain reverberates up my arm, and it goes numb.

“Erm, okay. Anger issues regarding Crystal,” Ciarán murmurs. “Want us to take her out?”

“Would you? I swear she was the one who told Gary what we did on my birthday.”

Biting my tongue when his ears prick up, he lowers the target. “Come again? And mention that fucker to me again, and we’re going to have a problem.”

“Jealous?” I snarl.

“Too fucking right. You don’t have a photo of *me* next to your bed.”

“No, I have you *in* my bed, you asshat.”

“And don’t you fucking forget it,” he growls. “Back to your birthday.”

“What happened on your birthday?” Cathal asks, looking between the two of us.

Ciarán smiles slowly, sexily and with the edge of predator that makes my pussy go damp. “I railed her in the club where everyone could see. Sank my dick into her hot, wet pussy and pounded into her until she came all over my fucking cock. It was hot as fuck.”

Eyes wide, my cheeks go red again, but this time from embarrassment. “It was,” I croak, casting my gaze to Thal, who has his eyebrow raised and a soft smirk on his face.

“Oh, I see. You like that, do you, Summerbell?”

“Maybe.”

“You fucking loved it,” Ciarán says slyly. “Drenched my cock and made me yours for life.”

“Hmm, well. Can we get back to the training before we forget and do other things?”

“Probably a good idea,” he murmurs, but his eyes are ablaze with lust. It’s been a couple of days since we last had sex, what with one thing and another getting in the way.

Taking a deep breath, as Ciarán raises the target again and pulls out the knife. I take it from him and focus on the target, striking out with the knife, and plunging it into the pads, expecting the pain and bracing myself for it this time. A surge of adrenaline courses through me, and I grin, knowing that was better.

“Nice, but let’s get back to the guns.”

“Okay,” I agree, picking up the weapon again from the hood of the car. The fear and anxiety that had plagued me earlier have given way to determination, and I know that I’ll do whatever it takes to ensure my safety.

“Remember, Summer,” Cathal calls out as I take aim. “It’s not just about hitting your target. It’s about staying alive.”

I nod, steadying my breathing and focusing on the target in front of me. I know that this new skill could mean the difference between life and death, and I refuse to let fear hold me back any longer.

With grim resolve, I pull the trigger, and the bullet lands nowhere near its mark, but closer than last time, so I take that as a win.

The moment we step back into the penthouse, Ciarán presses me against the wall, his lips crashing onto mine with a ferocity that takes my breath away. The adrenaline from our earlier training session still courses through my veins, and I can feel the same intensity in Ciarán as he tugs at my clothes, desperate to feel my skin beneath his hands.

“Fuck, Summer,” he growls, his fingers digging into my hips as he lifts me off the ground. “You have no idea how much you turn me on when you’re like this.”

My legs instinctively wrap around his waist, hands clutching at his broad shoulders for support. “Show me,” I whisper, my voice thick with desire. “Show me how much you want me.”

His eyes flash with an almost animalistic hunger, and without warning, he carries me over to the large couch in the living room, tossing me down onto the soft cushions. He quickly sheds his own clothing before joining me, his body pressing against mine in a way that leaves no doubt about his intentions.

“God, I need you so fucking bad,” he murmurs, his hands exploring every inch of my body as if trying to commit it to memory. Our lips meet in a searing kiss, tongues tangling together as we lose ourselves in each other.

From across the room, I hear Cathal clear his throat, drawing our attention. He’s standing by the door, watching us with nervous amusement and desire. I feel a flush creep up my cheeks, but Ciarán doesn’t seem fazed at all.

“Enjoying the show, brother?” he says with a wicked grin.

Thal nods and leans against the door, happy to watch even though I’m desperate for him to join in, I’ll wait.

Ciarán pushes my legs apart and attaches his mouth to my pussy, licking and sucking at my juices like he can’t get enough. I let out a moan, gripping the cushions beneath me as my head falls back. I don’t know where Thal is right now, but I wish he’d come over. I’d love to see him touching himself as he watches the two of us.

“Ah fuck. Oh yes. God, that’s good.” My pussy contracts as Ciarán drives me to the edge.

“Fucking hell, you taste as good as you look, Tinks,” he says between licks.

“I want you to fuck me so fucking hard.”

“Not yet.” He raises his head from between my legs and stares up at me, his lips glistening with my juices, and I want to lap it all up. “I’m going to make you beg for it first.” With that, he takes my wrists and pins them above my head as he sinks his cock into my aching pussy.

“Oh, fuck.” He’s so thick and wide that I feel like he’ll tear me in two.

“You want this?” he asks, his voice low and dark.

“So much,” I moan, trying to push my hips upward so he’ll come down on me already.

“You want more?”

“Yes.”

He pulls out, standing over me with his massive cock inches from my aching pussy. “Beg for it.” He gives me an evil smile and my pussy clenches.

I can’t believe I’m going to beg for him to fuck me. “Please. Please fuck me.”

“Not good enough, Tinks.”

“Please, Ciarán. Please fuck me. I need your cock inside me. I need to feel you coming inside me.”

“Better.” He thrusts back inside me, hard and strong, pounding into me until the couch beneath me is rocking back and forth on the floor.

“Fuck, yes, fuck me, Ciarán. Oh, God.”

He releases my arms and grips my hips, controlling the speed and depth of his thrusts until I’m clawing at his back, desperate to give him the release he wants.

“Give it to me, Tinks. Give me that fucking hot pussy. Show me what I do to you.”

I’m so close. “Yes, fuck. Oh, yes.” My pussy clenches again, and I know I’m going to come any second now.

“That’s right, baby. Give me that fucking sweet pussy. I’m going to fill you up with my cum.”

“Oh, fuck, yes. Oh, Ciarán.”

He lets out a primal growl, and the next thing I know, he’s collapsing on top of me, his satisfying weight pressing me into the couch. “I love you so fucking much, Tinks,” he whispers against my ear, and I beam with pride as I hold him close.

“I love you too, Ciarán.” The orgasm crashes through me as I run my hands up his muscular, inked arms.

“Fuck,” he groans. “Tinks.” He thrusts hard and explodes inside me, his cock pumping out enough cum to fill me up and pool out of my pussy to soak the couch beneath me.

Then he kisses me again, eager to start all over.

CATHAL

Leaning against the front door of the penthouse, my heart pounds as I watch Ciarán and Summer fucking like bunnies. Their lips crash together, their hands roaming each other's bodies with an urgency that makes me feel both envious and uneasy.

"Come on, Cathal," Ciarán murmurs against Summer's lips, his eyes locking onto mine, filled with desire and invitation. "Don't be shy."

Summer gasps, but the longing in her gaze is hard to ignore.

My body shakes with conflicting emotions. A part of me wants to join them, to lose myself in the heat of their passion. But another part of me hesitates, held back by the ghosts of my past and the fear of being vulnerable again.

"Fuck," I whisper. My knuckles turn white as I clench my fists tightly, and I try to steady my breathing. Can I really let go of my fears and trust Summer? Ciarán has, but he always was stronger than me.

"You don't have to," Summer says gently, concern written all over her beautiful face as she pulls away from Ciarán to look at me. Her eyes are soft, understanding, and she knows my inner turmoil.

"Y-yeah, I do," I stammer, forcing a smile onto my lips even though it feels like a lie. "Just give me a minute."

"Take your time," Ciarán says. "I'm nowhere near done with her yet."

As I stand there, wrestling with my thoughts and emotions, I realize that I have a choice to make. I can either let my past dictate my future, or I can take a chance on something new, something that might bring me the happiness and connection that I see Ciarán has with her. I want it so bad, I can almost taste it.

Unbuttoning my shirt slowly, I feel a little bit more of my fear and hesitation slipping away, replaced by the burning desire for intimacy that's been simmering just beneath the surface.

Watching the two of them, intertwined like they were made for each other, memories from my past rush through my mind — a whirlwind of pain and betrayal that makes it nearly impossible to breathe. My head screams at me to leave, to run far away from this vulnerability, but my body aches for her touch.

Hesitantly, I step forward, my skin tingling with anticipation, reminding myself that it's okay to be scared. That maybe taking this leap of faith is exactly what I need to heal.

Taking another deep breath, trying to steady my nerves as I unbuckle my belt, then unbutton and unzip my jeans. The sound of the metal clasp seems to echo in the room, amplifying the significance of my actions. Kicking off my shoes and socks, I step out of my jeans, leaving me standing there naked.

“Come here,” Summer says, her voice low and inviting as she reaches for my hand.

Stepping forward, placing all my trust in her, I join them. Summer shifts her attention to me, her warm hands sliding up my thighs as I stand in front of her. Her touch sends shivers through my body, stirring up a flurry of emotions. She lifts her chin up so I can stare down into her sky-blue eyes. “I'll take care of you.”

Her words are my undoing, and I give in to the sensations coursing through me as my cock stiffens further. Summer's tongue teases along my hip before dipping lower. I gasp as she

takes my dick into her mouth, sucking gently at first, testing the waters.

“Fuck, Summer,” I groan, my hands instinctively tangling in her hair as she works her magic. Her tongue swirls around the sensitive tip of my cock, eliciting shudders of pleasure that cut through my body like wildfire.

“Let go, Cathal,” she murmurs against my skin before taking me deeper into her mouth. The heat and wetness of her tongue wrapped around me like a vice, drawing out groans I didn’t know I could make.

“Feels so fucking good,” I grit out, my body trembling as I fight the urge to thrust deeper into her welcoming mouth. Every stroke of her tongue sends jolts of electricity through my veins, awakening a ferocious desire that refuses to be tamed.

As the intensity builds, my thoughts blur, and the weight of my past trauma seems to dissipate, if only for this fleeting moment.

The warmth of Summer’s touch seeps into my core, and with it, confidence takes root. My body responds instinctively to her movements, each caress setting my skin on fire as I embrace the sensations coursing through me.

“Fuck, you’re amazing,” I grunt, my voice raspy with need.

Summer’s eyes flick up to meet mine, a wicked smile dancing on her lips when she pulls her mouth from me to my disappointment.

She continues to explore my body, her fingers tracing lightly over my busted ribs gently. An unfamiliar serenity washes over me, pushing back the shadows of doubt that have plagued my thoughts for so long. The connection between us is undeniable, and I allow myself to be fully present, to feel every lingering touch and stolen breath.

My gaze shifts to Ciarán, who watches us intently from where he sits on the edge of the couch, his cock in his hand as he jacks off slowly.

“Looks like someone’s eager to play,” Summer murmurs, following my line of sight to where Ciarán sits.

I chuckle softly, feeling more at ease in my skin than I ever have, and I know he does, too. We’re both bound by our desires and the vulnerabilities they force us to confront. “Yeah, he does.”

“Are you ready for her?” Ciarán asks, his eyes searching mine for any hint of hesitation.

I hesitate for a brief second before nodding. “Yeah, I am.”

“Good, because I need you, Thal,” Summer whispers, rising and pressing her lips against mine in a searing kiss that leaves me breathless.

Inhaling deeply, I muster the courage to take control of the situation. I’ve been feeling the heat build up inside me, a burning desire that craves release. My eyes lock onto Summer’s, and I see an unspoken invitation to assert my dominance.

Summer’s lips curve into a sultry smile as she lays back on the couch, her body a vision of pure temptation.

“Like what you see?” she teases.

“Fuck yes,” I growl, sitting and grabbing her hips to pull her onto my lap. She straddles me, her pussy pressing against my cock that is the hardest it’s ever been. My frustration has reached its boiling point, and the need for release is overwhelming.

“Show me how much,” Summer whispers, her breath hot against my ear.

With a primal groan, I flip her onto her back, my hands gripping her thighs as I position myself at her entrance. As I push into her, her walls clench tightly around me, and I let out a guttural moan. The sensation of being buried inside her is intoxicating, and I nearly lose myself in the pleasure it brings.

“Harder,” Summer demands, her nails digging into my shoulders. Her words fuel my desire, and I oblige, thrusting into her with raw intensity.

“Is this what you want?” I pant, my voice strained as I pound into her relentlessly.

“More,” she gasps, her legs wrapping around my waist to pull me deeper inside her.

As our bodies collide, Ciarán watches us intently. His hand lazily stroking his own cock, his eyes filled with lust as he takes in the erotic scene unfolding before him.

“Fuck, Summer, fuck you feel so good.” Leaning down to capture her lips in a heated, passionate exchange, our tongues tangle together, fighting for dominance as our bodies move in perfect sync.

The raw intensity from earlier has gradually shifted into something deeper, a connection that goes beyond physical pleasure.

“Look at me,” Summer whispers, her voice strained with desire. I lock eyes with her, seeing the fire within them as we share this intimate moment. It’s as if we’re baring our souls to one another, all our vulnerabilities exposed.

“Fuck, this is hot,” Ciarán comments. “It’s like watching myself fuck her.”

Snickering, I’m grateful for the comedic relief and increase the intensity of my thrusts. I fuck her like I’ve never fucked anyone before and it’s satisfying to see the pleasure on her face, the moans spilling from her lips.

“Come for me, Thal,” Summer whispers, her voice laced with urgency.

Rearing back, I grip her thighs and slam into her with renewed intensity. Almost instantly, my body tenses and the orgasm rips through me, my cock pulsing as I fill her with cum. Summer’s pussy clenches around my cock as she moans my name, her hips bucking reflexively.

“Now that you’re finally fucking me...now that I’m finally feeling you come inside me, I’m not sure I want you to stop. I need you so much, Thal. Both of you.” She reaches out to grasp Ciarán’s hand, and he takes it, kissing it and lacing their

fingers together. “I can’t wait to take you both at the same time.”

“Fuck, Tinks. I’m ready to go right now.”

Laughing softly, I pull out of her. “I need a fucking minute.”

“A minute is all you get, and then it’s time to call it.”

“Call what?”

“Ass or pussy? I’m easy either way.”

Summer moans, her excitement echoing around the room as the image of us both fucking her fills her mind. “Pussy,” I murmur, stroking her pretty, perfect cunt before I thrust my fingers deep inside her, watching her throw her head back. Pressing down on her clit with my thumb, I rotate it gently and she writhes on the leather, sticky and sweet. “God, you’re beautiful.”

She gasps, climaxing fiercely around my fingers, and I groan with need. Now that she has unlocked the gates, my desire for her has been unleashed and I won’t ever stop wanting her impaled on my cock.

Finding the courage inside me to pleasure her with my tongue, I shove her legs wide apart and fall between them, flicking her clit until she cries out for more. Her pleasure is my weakness.

I’ve been fighting against this fire that burns inside me for her, trying to deny it, but the more I try to put it out, the more I ignite it. She is addictive. Her taste and scent drive me to the brink of insanity. I’m captivated; I don’t fight it, because I don’t want to. I’ve never wanted anything more than I want her. I’ve fallen deep and the tiny part of me that doubts this is real fights for survival under the burning brightness of the obsession I feel for her. It’s real. Fucking real, and I won’t ever let her go, even if she wants to run, she is mine. Lifting my head from her pussy, I reach for my pants, pulling out the knife still lodged in the back pocket. Her eyes widen in fear, but Ciarán has marked her. Now it’s my turn.

“Turn over,” I growl.

She hesitates, long enough for me to grab her hips and flip her over so she is face down on the couch.

Ciarán steps up, holding her shoulders as I draw the tip of the blade gently over the exquisite skin. “Next to mine,” he murmurs.

With a nod, I focus on carving my name down her back, alongside my brother’s, making sure she can never escape me.

CATHAL

The moment Luke's voice crackles over the phone, I know judgment day is here. "Give me a name."

"Seamus O'Reilly," he says, shocking me, filling me with a bitter sense of betrayal.

"Any doubts?"

"None. Sent you the cleaned-up video."

Pulling the phone from my ear, I glance at the message Luke sent and tighten my grip until my hand hurts. Seamus has been a trusted member of my gang for years—practically family. He used to run with our dad but left with me when Ciarán took over and I formed my own crew.

"Got a location?"

"He's in the Old Dog in your sector."

"Thanks," I mutter and hang up.

Not waiting for Ciarán, who is taking care of Summer in the bedroom after I branded her with my name, I storm out of the penthouse, my mind racing with dark thoughts as I make my way toward the run-down pub. The cool night air does little to temper my anger, but I have no intention of calming off before I confront Seamus. This traitor needs to understand that he should've fucking killed me.

The pub looms ahead, not too far from Ciarán's apartment, its drab, faded sign and weathered door a testament to its legacy as a dying breed.

Striding inside, I nod a greeting to the landlord, who knows just by looking at my face that shit is about to go down and rings the bell for last orders.

There, in the corner, playing poker with a few of my guys, is the traitor who is about to wish he'd never been born.

“Did you really think you'd get away with this, you fucking cunt?” I snarl, stalking toward him and grabbing his collar to haul him to his feet.

“Th-thal... I can explain,” he stammers, fear clear in his eyes.

“Too fucking late, you asshole. You tried to fucking kill me, Seamus! You betrayed me and you know what happens to fucking traitors.” My voice echoes through the rapidly emptying pub, and I relish the terror it instills in Seamus.

He struggles in my grip, trembling. “Please, Thal... It wasn't like that... I didn't... I didn't want to hurt you!”

“Your time for redemption is long gone,” I state, my voice cold and unyielding. “You've made your choice, Seamus. Now it's time to face the consequences.”

“Fuck,” Seamus mutters under his breath before looking up at me with desperation in his eyes. “Thal, it wasn't personal. They threatened my family, man. What was I supposed to do?”

“Your loyalty was supposed to be with me, not some fucking scumbags using your family to screw with you,” I snap, my anger boiling over. “Do you think I wouldn't have protected them? That I wouldn't have gone to hell and back for all of you?”

“Jesus, Thal, I didn't know what else to do. I'm sorry. I'm so fucking sorry,” he says, but his words fall on deaf ears. The damage is done and there's no turning back now.

“Sorry doesn't fix this, Seamus,” I seethe, feeling the weight of his betrayal crash down upon me like an avalanche. It's not just about the attempt on my life; nearly Ciarán's as well, not to mention how close Summer was to the car bomb,

it's about the fact that someone I considered family has turned their back on me.

"Please, Thal, let me make it right. I'll do anything. It was Mikey. He made me do it. He didn't want the merge to go ahead," he begs, as I drag him out of the pub to the alley running behind it that stinks of piss and garbage.

"How convenient to blame a dead man," I drawl, shoving him to the ground.

"Thal!" Ciaran's voice behind me echoes around the alley. "What the fuck?"

I know he's pissed because I fucked off without a word, but this is fucking personal.

Stepping up next to me, his voice is dangerously low when he speaks. "What the fuck is this, Thal?"

"Luke found out it was this piece of shit that tried to blow me up. He sold me out."

"Jesus Christ," Ciarán mutters. "You fucking knob."

"I'm sorry, Ciarán, honest to God, it was Mikey..."

Ciaran's loud snort of disbelief cuts him off, and he knows he's had it.

"Traitors don't get a second chance with the Gannon family," Ciarán says coldly.

Raising my gun to Seamus's head as he kneels in front of me, begging for his life, I just don't give a single fuck.

"You should've fucking made sure I was dead, Seamus," I announce, pulling the trigger.

The gunshot echoes through the alley, and I smile grimly as I watch Seamus's brains bounce against the wall behind him.

It's done.

"Let's get out of here," Ciarán mutters, turning and striding away.

With a last look of disgust at Seamus, I follow Ciarán out of the alley and back in the direction of the penthouse.

“You okay?” he asks after a beat.

“Fine.”

“That was one fucking betrayal.”

“And now it’s dealt with.”

“You sure it ends with him?”

Shrugging, who can ever be sure in this life? Isn’t that how it goes? Looking over your damn shoulder, never knowing when your time is up? “If it’s not, we deal.”

He nods slowly as he we head back into the city center with its bright lights and happy people sharing a meal and a drink and a few laughs. So carefree, so unburdened. Sometimes I wish my life had turned out that way, but with our father, it was never gonna happen. We were all doomed from the start of it. Thinking of that makes me think of Caden again. Just as I’m about to bring him up to Ciarán, he lets out a wicked laugh.

“Hang on, there’s something I need to do.”

“What?”

“Wait here.”

“Like fuck.” I follow him quickly, knowing we need to get off the streets.

He marches up to some preppy looking guy, who is laughing and flirting with some woman in a short skirt and too-tight top.

“You,” Ciarán snarls, shoving him back with a hand to his chest. “You’re a fucking cunt, you know that?”

“Excuse me?” he replies, looking shocked by the accusation.

“Do yourself a favor, love and run as far away from this dickhead as you can,” Ciarán says to the woman.

Eyes wide, she scampers off, sensing a threat when she sees one, and Ciarán is all guns blazing for this douche canoe.

“Summer told me all about you and your game,” Ciarán says. “You think you can treat my woman that way?”

“Hey, she wants to act like a slut, then she gets treated like one.”

“What the fuck did you just say?” I snarl, shoving Ciarán out of the way to get in this guy’s face myself. “I fucking hate that word and now I’m going to fucking kill you for calling Summer that.”

The guy’s face pales before he runs off like a fucking coward.

Ciarán shakes his head with a sigh. “One day, I’ll get my knife in his gut. He keeps running away.”

“Like a fucking pussy. Well, now he has two of us looking for him. He’d better keep running.”

“No doubt,” Ciarán agrees, and we share a sinister smile before we hear the sirens in the background and make a motion back to the apartment to lie low. This month has been as bad as it gets in this city, and it’s going to come back to bite us on the ass. The question is when.

CIARÁN

The sound of Cathal's voice fills the penthouse as I lounge on the sofa, smirking at his growing frustration.

He paces back and forth in front of the window, the phone pressed tightly against his ear.

"Listen, you bloody idiot," he growls, "I don't fucking care about your stupid policies. My fucking Ferrari was blown up, and I expect you to cover it!"

Stifling a chuckle, I watch him go red in the face with anger. The veins in his neck are visible, a testament to his mounting rage. It's amusing to see my brother so worked up over something as trivial as a car, especially knowing that he could buy another one with no problem.

"Of course it was intentional, you little prick! Do you think cars just explode for no reason?" His voice rises, and I laugh at the absurdity of this situation.

Cathal shoots me a glare, but I only grin wider, leaning back and resting my arms behind my head. "Hang up," I say. "Just buy another fucking one and be done with it."

"Fuck off, Ciarán. That's not the fucking point," he snaps before turning his back on me. "Look, just sort this out. I'm done talking to you." With that, he ends the call and tosses the phone onto the nearest table, letting out an irritated grunt.

"Insurance companies," he mutters, running a hand through his dark hair. "Nothing but a bunch of useless wankers."

“Ah, cheer up, Cathal,” I say, pushing myself up from the sofa and walking over to him. “It’s not the end of the world. Besides, think of how much fun you’ll have picking out a new one.”

He scowls, folding his arms across his chest. “Easy for you to say. It’s not your car that was blown to bits.”

“True,” I admit, “but if it were, I wouldn’t be wasting my time arguing with some pencil pusher at an insurance company. Besides, rather the car than you, yes?”

“Suppose.”

His petulance amuses me more. But before I can continue this conversation, a sharp knock on the penthouse door interrupts us. We exchange wary glances—we aren’t expecting any visitors.

“Police! Open up!” a voice calls from outside.

“Shit,” Cathal mutters, his eyes wide with alarm. “Knew they’d fucking catch up to us.”

“Don’t panic,” I say, grabbing his arm and leading him to the secret room I built for situations like this. It’s tucked away behind a bookcase in the guest room. “Get in,” I mutter when I open it up.

“You’re fucking joking, right?”

“Nope.”

As soon as he slips inside the small space, muttering curses, I close it up and stride over to the front door, unconcerned and annoyed. Swinging it open, I find two CID Detectives standing in the hallway, their expressions stern.

“Good morning, detectives,” I greet them with a smile. “What can I do for you?”

“Are you Ciarán Gannon?” one of them asks, eyeing me suspiciously.

“Yep,” I reply, keeping my tone light and friendly. “And what brings you to my humble abode?”

“Detectives Johnson and Franks. We’re here to ask you some questions about the recent car bombing and slew of murders across the city,” Johnson says, his voice gruff. “We have reason to believe your brother, Cathal Gannon, may be involved.”

“Ah,” I say, feigning surprise. “Well, as far as I know, Cathal left for Ireland a few days ago. I haven’t heard anything about a car bombing, though. Sounds dreadful.”

Franks narrows his eyes at me, clearly not convinced. “You expect us to believe that you don’t know anything about it? Your brother’s car was the one that was bombed just down the road from here. It’s been all over the news.”

The sarcasm is dripping in his tone. He doesn’t give a flying shit who I am. He knows; he knows exactly whose door he is darkening, and he doesn’t give a crap. That tells me two things: one, he is pretty fucking dumb, and two, he is in someone else’s pocket that isn’t mine.

“Like I said, detective,” I reply, maintaining my composure, “Cathal’s in Ireland. I haven’t spoken to him since he left.”

“Mind if we take a look around?” Johnson asks, already beginning to step past me into the penthouse.

“Of course not,” I say, forcing a smile as I step aside to let them in.

The detectives step further into my penthouse, their eyes scanning every inch of the place for any sign of Cathal.

“Nice place you got here,” Johnson remarks, eyeing the lavish décor with admiration and suspicion.

“Thanks,” I reply, keeping my voice steady. “But as I said, my brother isn’t here.”

“Right, we’ll see about that,” Franks grumbles, beginning to move towards the hallway which leads to the bedrooms.

Just as I’m about to cause a distraction which will probably get my ass hauled down to the nearest station, a familiar face appears in the doorway as if expected.

“Hey, Ruby,” I murmur, wondering what the fuck she is doing here right at this moment in time.

“Ciarán,” she says, her eyes flicking past me to the detectives. “Am I interrupting something?”

“Not really. These detectives are just asking some questions about Cathal.”

“Really?” Ruby feigns innocence as she walks into the penthouse, sizing up the officers with a daring smile on her lips. “Isn’t he back in Ireland?”

“Yep.”

“Is that so?” Franks smirks, clearly unimpressed. “And what makes you so certain?”

“Because I know,” Ruby replies confidently, crossing her arms over her chest.

A sudden movement in the hallway catches their eye.

My heart hammers as I watch the detectives’ eyes fall on Summer, who stands at the entrance to the hallway, still half asleep.

“And you are?” Johnson asks, his gruff voice cutting through the tension like a knife.

Summer looks terrified—and with good reason.

Before either of us can answer, Ruby interrupts. “You know,” she says, her expression deadly serious. “I was talking to the Police Commissioner at lunch just the other day about this car bombing. He mentioned how important it is to be thorough in these investigations.”

The mention of the Police Commissioner sets the CID officers on high alert, which is deeply suspicious. They exchange uneasy glances as I frown at Summer. She runs a hand through her hair, biting her lip as the tension goes up by several hundred notches.

Ruby throws a challenging glare at the detectives, and for some reason known only to them, they back down.

“I see,” Franks mutters, his voice noticeably less aggressive now. “Mr. Gannon, if you hear from your brother, you need to inform us straight away.”

“Of course.”

As the detectives finally leave the penthouse, my relief washes over me like a tidal wave. Cathal remains hidden and Summer’s identity remains protected, and while I know the danger isn’t over, at least we’ve bought ourselves some time. I glance over at Ruby, silently thanking her for stepping in.

“Care to share what that was about?” I ask with a raised eyebrow.

“Nope, above your paygrade.”

“Funny.”

“Always happy to help,” Ruby says with a small smile.

“Summer, you okay?” I ask softly, turning my attention to her. She nods, but I can see the fear still etched in her eyes. I wrap an arm around her, pulling her close to me.

“I’ll leave you to it. This was lucky timing, Gannon. Get your house in order,” Ruby says before she strides off, leaving me wondering who the fuck she is in bed with so high up in the city that she can scare off the CID.

“Fuck,” I mutter. “I’ll get Thal.”

She nods as I go to retrieve Thal from the safe room. “That was fucking close,” I murmur, and he nods, the tension in his jaw is unmistakable.

“We need to move somewhere safer,” he says, stopping in his tracks and looking me dead in the eye. “This place isn’t secure enough anymore.”

“Agreed,” I say, my mind already shifting into high gear. Moving won’t be easy, but it’s a necessary step for our safety. “We’ll start searching for a new place immediately.”

Cathal nods, pulling out his phone with quick, decisive movements.

“Summer,” I say gently, turning to her. She seems lost in thought, her brow furrowed, and her lips pressed tightly together. “You sure you’re okay?”

She looks up, startled by the sudden reality of her situation. “Yeah, fine. We could go to my house,” she replies softly, her voice wavering slightly.

Reaching over to squeeze her hand reassuringly. “No, it’s too obvious. Plus, it’s already up for sale. We’ll find a place where we can feel safe, I promise.”

“Damn right,” Cathal mutters, his focus still on his phone. “And if anyone tries to fuck with us, they’ll regret it.” The sharp edge to his voice shows his nerves, which I know is all about Summer. As much as I hate to admit it, she is our weakest link. If she’s pulled in for questioning, she will crack. There are no two ways about it. We have to protect her from that for herself and for us at all costs.

SUMMER

The dim light in our bedroom casts shadows on the walls as Cathal and I stand near the edge of the bed, our eyes locked together. My heart races, my breath catches in my throat, and an almost tangible tension fills the air around us—thick with desire and anticipation.

I wince slightly as I shift my weight from one foot to another, trying to find a comfortable position. The branding marks on my back are still raw, a constant reminder of the dark bond that now ties me to Cathal and Ciarán. The burn stings and throbs, but it's a pain I've come to crave, a testament to the depths of our connection.

My skin feels tight and sore as I move, but it's a small price to pay for the pleasure and intensity that comes with being Cathal's possession. Each time I feel the burn of them, my body quivers in discomfort and arousal, knowing that they were placed there by his hand next to his brother's. Ciarán is allowing us some time alone, to be together, just the two of us, and I intend to make the most of it.

His eyes, piercing blue and dark with lust, seem to see straight through me, leaving me vulnerable and exposed. It's terrifying and exhilarating all at once, and I can't get enough of it.

He turns me around, shedding the robe from my naked body gently, letting it pool at my feet.

Cathal's fingers hover over the sensitive skin of my branded back, his touch feather light as he traces the shape of

the intricate design. His concern for me is clear in the gentle way he treats my aching body, but I can feel the barely contained desire that courses through us both.

“Does it hurt?” he asks, his voice low and husky.

I bite my lip, hesitating for a moment before answering. “It’s bearable. But if you touch me some more, I might just forget about the pain altogether.”

He leans in, pressing a soft kiss to the tender area. The sensation sends sparks of lust over my skin, a shiver of pleasure mingling with the lingering discomfort.

“Summerbell,” he murmurs, his breath hot on my branded flesh. “I want you to know that I’m yours.”

His words send a thrill of excitement racing through me, igniting a fire deep within my core. I turn to face him, our eyes locking in a heated gaze, and I can see the truth of his words reflected in the depths of his blue eyes.

“I know,” I whisper. “Show me I belong to you.”

“Believe me, love,” he growls, pulling me closer until our bodies are pressed tightly together, “I plan on doing just that.”

His urgency thrills me. He has no hesitation, no fear of me now. He is all in, and the deepening obsession he has with me is both terrifying and beautiful at the same time.

His lips find mine in a fierce kiss, full of pent-up desire and longing. My hands tangle in his dark hair as we lose ourselves in each other’s embrace. Our tongues dance together in a passionate exchange, fueling the fire that continues to grow within us.

Thal’s hands roam my body, his touch possessive and demanding. Each caress sends shivers down my spine, leaving me desperate for more. His fingers trace the curve of my hip, dipping lower to brush over my pussy. I moan into his mouth, my legs parting instinctively to grant him access.

“Fuck, Summer,” he mutters against my lips, his voice thick with need. “I want you so damn bad. I can’t get enough of your cunt.”

“Take me, Thal,” I breathe, my head swimming with his coarse words. “Show me how much you want me.”

He walks us back to the bed with a predatory glint in his eyes. He gently lays me down, pushing my legs wide open, taking a moment to drink in the sight of me sprawled out in front of him. His gaze is intense, full of hunger and a spark of something that scares me. It’s as if nothing will stop him from claiming every inch of me.

“Mine,” he growls, pulling out his knife and ripping away his tee with the sharp blade. The sound of fabric tearing fills the room. He spins the blade around and trails the handle over the soft skin of my stomach before ramming the handle into my pussy with a loud grunt.

“Ah!” I cry out at the invasion.

I’m surprised by the sudden sensation, the shock of the crude intrusion bringing tears to my eyes. With a wicked smile, he watches me struggle to adjust to the foreign sensation.

He pulls the knife back out before pressing it against the skin of my thigh, leaving a sharp, burning sensation behind.

“Thal!” I cry out as a wave of pain cuts through me.

“Does it hurt?” he asks, his tone deceptively soft.

“Yes!”

The knife trails down my leg, over the sensitive skin of my inner thigh, but my pussy responds, growing wet in anticipation. He leans in, running his tongue over the same skin, soothing the sensation, taking my pain away with his sinful kiss.

He keeps his eyes locked on mine, watching for any slight change in my expression as he traces the knife over another sensitive area.

“You’re mine, you know that, don’t you?” he says, his voice low and rough.

“Yes.”

“I can do whatever I want to you.” He pushes the handle of the blade back into my cunt, burying it a little deeper.

A shiver of pleasure and pain shoots through me, almost overwhelming the discomfort. My body craves the stimulation, needing it to satisfy the desperate ache that’s building deep within my core.

“And you’ll let me, won’t you, Summerbell?”

“Yes. Yes, I’ll let you do whatever you want.”

“Good girl,” he says, his voice rough with desire.

I close my eyes, losing myself in the sensation of him moving the knife’s handle inside me all the way up to the hilt.

My juices coat the handle, making the sensation even more intense. I moan loudly as he fucks me with the knife, unable to get enough of the strange and exciting sensation as Thal’s possession leaves an impression on my very soul.

Thal removes the knife and throws it to the floor. His hands glide over my body, pinching and teasing my nipples until they’re hard and aching for his touch. They’re so sensitive now, sensitive to every touch, even the slightest graze, sending a rush of pleasure through me. He continues to tease me, never lingering in one place too long, never giving me enough to sate my ever-growing thirst.

“Please, Thal,” I moan, desperate for more of his touch.

He’s merciless in his torture until I’m writhing and moaning beneath him. But I know he wants to take his time. He wants to be cruel and merciless with me and I’m going to let him.

“Please,” I beg, desperate for more. “I need you, Thal. Please, fuck me. I need you!”

“Like this?” he murmurs, his lips brushing over my inner thighs.

“Yes, oh yes.”

He pushes my legs apart further, exposing my pussy and making me feel deliciously vulnerable. His hand trails over my

body, his fingers teasing my skin as his tongue circles my clit. I'm aching for release, desperate for his touch, and I can't hold back another moment.

"Thal! Please!"

"If you come, I'm walking away."

With a soft whimper, I bite my lip, trying to hold back the wave of pleasure surging through me. "Thal! Please!"

He laughs, sinking his fingers deep inside me.

"What's wrong, Summerbell? Can't hold on anymore?"

"No, please!"

"Beg for it, then. Beg me to make you come."

"Please, Thal! Please make me come. Please fuck me with your fingers. Please, I'm begging you. Please."

"Is this what you want?"

"Yes, please."

He rams his fingers deep inside me, hitting my g-spot with every stroke.

"Oh, fuck!" I cry out at the sensation.

He circles my clit with his thumb, a slow, torturous motion that makes me squirm beneath him. His expert touch drives me wild, my body craving more of his touch. I don't think I'll ever get enough. He has me completely under his spell. He's mastered my body already and I'm utterly helpless to stop it.

"Yes, Thal, yes!"

"Your cunt is mine, Summerbell. I own it."

"Yes!"

"You're a dirty little girl, aren't you?"

"Yes!"

He thumbs my clit, hard and rough. "Beg me to fuck you."

"Oh, God!"

“Beg me, Summerbell. Beg me to fuck your dirty little cunt.”

“Please, fuck me! Please!”

He thrusts three fingers deep inside me, taking my breath away. His other hand continues to tease my clit, driving me insane with the sensation.

“Fuck! Thal! Yes, please let me come!”

He finger fucks me relentlessly, pushing me closer to the edge. I can't hold back anymore and I'm going to fall.

“Thal, I'm going to come!”

He withdraws his fingers quickly and I let out a sob as the edge he has left me on makes my body tremble with desperate need. “I said no, dirty girl.”

He spans my pussy with his hand, a hard slap that leaves a stinging sensation.

“Oh, fuck!” I cry out.

“Do you still want to come now?”

“Yes!”

He spans my pussy again, the sting of pain making my body crave more. I hike my ass up off the bed, trying to position it at just the right angle.

He spans my pussy again before thrusting his fingers deep inside me. “Come for me, Summerbell.” The wicked tone of his voice turns me on like a light switch. He twists his fingers and as soon as I'm about to climax all over his hand, he draws back with a soft laugh.

“Changed my mind.”

“No,” I weep, tears seeping out of my eyes. “Please, don't be cruel to me.”

“Cruel,” he murmurs.

My chest heaves as I fight to catch my breath. I'm completely at his mercy.

He rises and strips off his jeans, his cock bouncing in front of him, ready to claim me. He drags the head of his cock over my clit. I'm so close to coming and I can't take it anymore. I need him inside me. I need to feel his cock fucking my pussy.

"I want you in my cunt!" I hiss, getting frustrated and upset.

I have never needed to be filled so desperately. My pussy needs it to be fucked, and I need it now.

"I don't think you do."

He rubs the head of his cock over my clit again, but he doesn't push it inside me. He just moves the tip around, teasing me, tempting me. I'm aching for him, but I know he's going to take his time.

"Let me see how much you really want it."

He pushes two fingers deep inside me, drawing out my juices and coating his cock. I moan loudly, my body aching to be fucked.

"You want to feel me stretching your cunt, Summerbell? You won't be able to walk straight for a week. And it's going to be my cock that does it. That makes you a filthy little girl. So desperate for my dick. Look at you, squirming all over the bed, dripping wet, begging me for my cock in your cunt."

"I'm so fucking dirty. My cunt needs your cock."

"Just one finger right now."

With soft, slow movements, he slides his finger in and out of my pussy, pushing deep and going at his own pace.

I whimper in frustration. "Stop being cruel to me."

"I'll stop when you say the words."

"I'll do anything!"

"It's not enough. I know you're aching for it."

He slides a second finger inside me, stretching me and driving me wild with pleasure. I'm going to come in a moment, and he knows it.

“I’m going to fuck your little pussy so hard. I’m going to fuck your cunt raw, Summerbell. I’m going to fuck you just like the filthy little girl you are.”

“Yes! Please! Fuck me!” My voice is hoarse and strained, but I need him to know how much I want him, how I’m not giving up no matter how mean he is to me.

He slides his fingers out of my pussy and a dull ache fills my body. He guides the head of his cock inside me, just the tip, before teasing me and sliding out again.

“You’re a dirty little girl and you need my cock.”

“Yes.”

“What do you need?”

“Your cock! I need your cock, Thal. Please!”

“Will you give me your cunt? Say it.”

“I’ll give you my cunt. I need your cock inside me. Please, fuck me, Thal.”

“That’s my good girl.”

He drives his cock all the way to the hilt, slamming into me and taking my breath away. I moan loudly, my body already out of control.

He pumps his hips, his cock delving deep inside me over and over again. I’m a screaming, moaning mess, my body completely out of control. I lose myself completely to the sensation.

He thrusts deep, and I drench his cock. I’m going to come; my body is aching for it. But at the last moment, he pulls out, leaving me shaking and desperate for it.

“Get on your knees. I’m going to fuck you like a fucking animal, like the fucking bitch on heat that you are.”

Sobbing openly as I climb off the bed, I get on all fours, my ass in the air.

He drives his cock deep inside me, spanking my ass. “You’re fucking filthy. Such a dirty little girl.”

“Yes...”

He slides his finger over my asshole, and I shudder, my body trembling with need.

“I’m going to fuck this sweet little ass of yours with my fingers while I ride your tight cunt, Summerbell.”

I’m incapable of speech, so I just let out a cry of frustration.

He teases my asshole with his finger, sliding in and out. The sensation is too much and at the same time, it’s not enough.

He spanks my ass and pushes his fingers deep inside my ass, pumping them in and out, stretching my ass wide as he pounds into my pussy with his cock.

It’s too much and I’m shaking and crying. His pace increases and his breathing grows ragged.

“Take it, Summerbell. Take my cock in your cunt and my fingers in your ass.”

He spanks my ass again and my body shakes, on the verge of coming. His fingers slide out of my rear hole, and he slaps my ass again.

“Come for me, Summerbell.”

He drives his cock deep inside my pussy and my body responds. My entire body trembles and my pussy clenches around his cock.

Coming so hard, I drench his dick, riding out the orgasm with a loud roar of triumph. He continues to fuck me, his fingers now teasing my clit.

I’m helpless to resist as he fucks me, coming again and again, my body shuddering with pleasure. I scream, completely out of control.

He is relentless.

He grabs my hips, thrusting like a wild man. With one last pump, he comes inside me with a cry of victory, filling my

pussy with so much come, it drips back out and down my thighs.

Collapsing face first on the bed, he covers my body, keeping his dick buried deep inside me. Panting, we are a mess, but I'm elated and satisfied, and I want to do it all over again, only this time with Ciarán as well.

CATHAL

Standing by the window, I watch Ciarán wake Summer with a sudden jolt. Her eyes fly open, disoriented and startled by his presence.

“Pay attention, Tinks,” Ciarán commands, his voice low and menacing. He places the cold steel of a knife into her trembling hand, forcing her to focus on him.

Summer’s brow furrows in confusion, her sleepy mind struggling to grasp what Ciarán wants her to do with the weapon. I can see her chest heaving, fear etched into her expression.

“Wh-what do you want me to do?” she stammers.

He glances down at the knife, her fingers tightening around its handle.

“Summer,” he says, his voice firm yet laced with an undercurrent of excitement, “Thal wants you to brand him. Make him truly yours.”

Turning my back, I’m naked, exposed and vulnerable—ready for her mark. I brace myself for the pain, the pleasure, and the knowledge that our bond will be forever changed.

“Are you serious?” Summer whispers, her eyes wide with disbelief as they shift between Ciarán and me. The knife trembles slightly in her grasp, a testament to her uncertainty.

“Deadly serious,” Ciarán replies, with a wicked grin as he takes a step back, giving her room to move. “Show him how much power you hold over him.”

For a moment, she hesitates, her mind racing with conflicting emotions as she tries to comprehend the weight of what's being asked of her. Slowly, she gathers her courage and approaches me, the knife held firmly in her hand.

“Okay,” she murmurs, her voice shaky but resolute. “I’ll do it.”

As she draws closer, I can feel the heat of her body, the intoxicating scent of her skin mingling with the scent of our fucking earlier. It’s almost too much, the anticipation building within me like a coiled spring, ready to snap at any moment.

“Are you sure about this, Cathal?” she asks softly, her breath warm against my ear as she reaches out a tentative hand to touch my shoulder, her fingers light and hesitant.

“Yes.”

The scars from my past, remnants of a childhood filled with abuse, are visible to Summer, and I know that she’ll be adding her own mark to this twisted tapestry.

“Get on your knees and carve your name into my skin.”

She doesn’t speak, but I can sense her hesitation, the weight of what I’m asking her to do hanging heavily between us. I keep my gaze fixed on the world outside the window, trying to find solace in the darkness that envelops everything beyond the glass.

Summer’s hands tremble slightly as she positions herself behind me, the cold steel of the knife pressing against my lower back. I take a deep breath, willing myself to remain still, to surrender to this moment and the bond it will forge between us.

“Are you ready?” she asks quietly, her voice wavering under the strain of her emotions.

“Do it.”

The first cut is shallow, tentative, as if she’s testing the waters before diving in. But as she gains confidence, the pressure increases, and the pain intensifies. Hands splayed on the cold glass, I grit my teeth, savoring the delicious agony

that comes with each etched letter, knowing that this is as much a part of our connection as the love we share.

With one last cut, she completes her task, my skin a canvas for her mark. As she rises and stumbles back, I can feel the warmth of my blood dripping down my ass and legs; the knowledge that she now owns a part of me that no one else ever will, fills the dark space in my soul that has no comfort.

Turning to face her, my cock stiffening with each passing second, Ciarán grips Summer's arms, pulling her away from me. She gasps, startled by the sudden interruption. His eyes burn with a feral intensity as he takes in the scene before him.

Ciarán spins Summer around to face him, pushing her against the wall. Her breath hitches, conflict in her eyes - torn between submitting to Ciarán or resisting his advances.

"Please," she whispers, her voice trembling. "I don't know if I can handle any more tonight."

"Of course you can, Tinks," Ciarán murmurs, his tone deceptively gentle. But I know my brother well enough to recognize the edge beneath his words. He's not asking for permission; he's staking his claim.

His fingers grip her hips roughly.

"Fuck," she gasps, her body tensing as Ciarán thrusts into her without warning. He holds her up, pounding into her relentlessly as she whimpers.

"Take it, Summer," Ciarán orders, his voice strained with effort. "Take every fucking inch of my cock. You're ours now, remember?"

As my brother claims Summer with a raw, primal intensity, it's both beautiful and terrifying to witness, and I feel a twinge of envy at the depths of their connection.

"Fuck, you're insatiable," he grunts, slamming into her even harder. The force of his thrusts pushes her against the wall, and he lifts her up, her legs wrapping around his waist as he fucks her mercilessly, but she is tired and her head lolls as my brother takes what he wants from her, regardless.

Summer moans as Ciarán continues to pound into her, her hands fisting at his chest to keep from falling. I watch them, transfixed by the scene before me, my cock growing even harder.

Ciarán's fingers dig into her hips, his cock buried deep inside her as he fucks her relentlessly. Her eyes flutter as his strokes are harsh and rough.

"Come for me," he demands, his voice almost a growl. "Come on my cock. I want to feel you come apart in my arms."

Summer sobs, exhausted, as my brother continues to pound into her.

"Come for me now, Tinks. I'm not waiting for you," he goads.

"I can't," she stammers. "Please."

"You can, and you will," Ciarán grunts. "Don't test me right now, Tinks. I'm not in the mood to be gentle."

Summer sobs softly as her body shakes around Ciarán's cock as he fucks her relentlessly.

"Can't wait, Tinks," Ciarán murmurs, his voice hoarse with lust as he continues to fuck her, then he groans loudly, unloading inside her pussy with everything he's got. Seeing him use her has aroused me beyond belief.

"Your turn," he says, turning with Summer in his arms and drops her on the bed.

She lays there, panting and ravaged, and it turns me on more than anything I've ever seen.

"Fuck," I growl and turn her over, so she is face first on the bed. Spreading her legs wide, I fall onto her, my cock ready to go.

Plunging into her with all my weight behind my thrust, I fuck her hard and fast.

"God," she mewls, her voice sexy and breathy, "I can't take any more."

“You can,” I grunt, my balls tightening as I thrust into her. “You’re our little cum dumpster now, Summerbell, and you will take this for as long as our cocks are ready to fuck you again and again.”

“Please,” she begs.

“Fill her up, Thal. Fill her cunt with your cum.”

“Fuck,” I groan, my cock swelling as I pump harder. “Fuck!” Grunting, I grip her hips as I pound into her mercilessly. My thighs slap against her ass with each forceful thrust, her desperate whimpers filling the air.

“I’m close,” I growl. “I’m going to dump my cum into you, Summerbell, and you’ll take my load like a good fucking girl. Do you hear me?”

Pounding into Summer with a relentless force, I revel in her cries of pain, knowing the undercurrent of pleasure is there as well, the sound feeds my own dark desires. With one final thrust, I empty my balls inside her, gripping her hips so tightly, I’ll leave bruises. This is how sex usually goes with me. Minimal contact, face turned away.

Used to go before Summer fell into my life like a revelation from God himself.

“Here you go, Ciarán,” I pant, with a wicked smirk, pulling out of her and pushing my brother toward her. “She’s all yours again.”

“Good,” he rasps, grabbing Summer and dragging her up and then bending her over the edge of the bed.

“Please,” Summer gasps as she looks up at us with desperation in her eyes.

“You want us to stop?” I ask, knowing that if she came out and said ‘yes’, we would both back off in an instant.

But as soon as the offer is there, she rallies and lowers her eyes, not making another sound.

“Thought so,” Ciarán murmurs. “You love being our whore, don’t you, Tinks?”

Growling as he comes dangerously close to my trigger word, I struggle to control my breathing.

But he knows. He knows my limit.

He slams into her with a roughness that makes her whimper, but she doesn't fight him. Instead, she submits to our desires, accepting her place as an object for our pleasure and hers isn't required.

As Ciarán takes her again, a sick thrill pulses through me. There is no tenderness or pleasure for Summer in this act, but she doesn't resist. She accepts it, and a twisted part of me enjoys the control we have over her.

“God, she's so fucking tight,” Ciarán grunts, his fingers digging into her hips. “I want her ass. You game for making her a twofer?”

“Always,” I reply darkly, stepping up. I don't even know how my cock is hard again already, but this situation, this sick, twisted darkness that has descended on the bedroom, is flicking my switch big time.

Grabbing her, I haul her upright when Ciarán lets her go, feeling her knees buckle. Her eyes are glazed over, and she's gone limp. Lifting her leg over my arm, I brace my hand on her hip and guide my cock into her tight little cunt.

Ciarán reaches for the lube in the nightstand and liberally applies some to his fingers so he can prepare her ass while I fuck her pussy. With him stepping in behind her, I lift her leg higher, and she moans, throwing her head back as Ciarán slips his fingers into her asshole.

“God, you look so fucking hot,” I grunt. “So fucking hot, Summerbell.”

She whimpers her response when Ciarán, ready for action, positions her where he needs her. I pound into her in a steady rhythm, watching her face when Ciarán thrusts into her ass.

“Fuck, so tight, so hot, fuck, Tinks. Fuck.”

Her mouth drops open in a silent scream for mercy as we rail her harder than she's ever experienced before. Placing her

leg on my shoulder, my lower back burning from the cuts she made, I thrust harder, faster, giving her everything I've got, needing her to know that no one else has this with me. With us. Clasp my hand around her throat, I pull her closer to me, seeing her eyes widen when I squeeze ever so slightly.

"Thal," she croaks.

"That's it, baby. Say my name while my dick is inside you."

"Thal," she pants.

"Are you going to come on my cock?"

"I c-can't, Thal, please."

"If you don't come, that means you've let us use you," I mutter. "You need to come, Summerbell."

"C-can't. Too tired, too sore."

"Fuck!" Ciarán roars and thrusts hard one last time before he detonates inside her ass.

She gasps, her body trembling with weakness, but I won't let her go without her pleasure now. I won't subject her to being a *whore*. She doesn't deserve that.

We've had our fun and now she needs to come.

Pulling out of her, I lay her on the bed gently and she curls up into a ball.

"No, Summerbell, you need to come."

Pulling her knees away from her chest, I spread her legs. We have brutally ravaged her pussy. She is red raw.

"Go and run her a warm bath," I instruct Ciarán, still breathless from his exertions.

He nods and goes without another word.

"I need you to come for me, Summer, okay, baby girl?"

She whimpers when I touch her swollen clit.

"That's it, sweet girl. Come for me."

“Thal,” she whispers, her voice so soft, I have to lean in close to hear. “I’m so tired.”

“I know you are, love,” I whisper, “but I need you to come for me, anyway. Can you do that?”

She nods, her eyes squeezed tight.

Groaning softly, I slip my fingers into her and rub her clit hard. She thrusts her hips upward and my heart swells for this amazing woman so eager to please me, even now, after I’ve used her like a fuck toy.

“Come for me, Summerbell. Come for me,” I order.

“I-I can’t,” she gasps. “I’m so tired.”

Ducking my head, I lap softly at her clit with my tongue and it’s what she needs. She writhes on the bed as I massage her into a state of unfettered desire.

“Come for me, Summerbell. Come for me now.”

She screams out my name as her orgasm crashes over her and she comes all over my mouth, her body is shaking from the power of it.

I don’t know if she is ever going to recover from this.

I’m not sure I want her to.

SUMMER

“**S**hit,” Ciarán mutters when he collapses onto the plush couch. The tension is a suffocating force that threatens to choke us while the danger lurking outside seems to be closing in.

“Fuck me,” Cathal pants, wiping sweat from his brow. “This is getting ridiculous. These battles are becoming a real problem.” His words hang heavy, a stark reminder of how fragile my life has become.

“Everything okay?” I ask, even though it is trite and pretty much rhetorical.

“Yeah, fine. Are you okay, Tinks?” Ciarán asks, concern lacing his voice. The worry in his eyes is genuine, and it tugs at something deep inside me.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” I reply, managing a weak smile, but he knows me too well and knows something is going on with me.

“You sure?”

Nodding, I flick my gaze to Cathal. He is fuming. He has a sharp temper that scares me, but I know he would never turn it on me.

“Damn it,” Cathal curses, running a hand through his dark hair. “These assholes have to start learning that this is not negotiable.” He pounds his fist against the armrest, frustration etched across his features.

“Agreed,” Ciarán says. “I think it’s time we hit the streets ourselves to shake the trees. I’ve become too complacent and

wrapped up in...other things.”

He doesn't need to say the other things is me. I know and I know that I'm taking up too much of their collective time. They have bigger issues than worrying about and screwing me all the time. Wincing as my pussy protests against more screwing right now, I press my lips together. Yesterday was brutal. My back still hurts from the fresh cuts, but I don't know which aches more. The thing is, though, I fucking loved the way they treated me. It was dirty, depraved and degrading. But it made me feel like a fucking goddess.

“Tonight we'll collect the loan in person,” Ciarán continues when I avoid looking at him and stare out of the window instead.

I'm trying to find the right time to tell him about my parents, but it just never seems to be right. One day. Maybe.

“Yeah, too fucking, right,” Cathal grits out. “I'm itching for someone to fuck us over.”

“All right, calm the fuck down. We don't react unless we have to, but our faces need to be seen on the street, doing the dirty work. We're losing respect and I won't fucking tolerate that.”

“My parents are alive,” I blurt out and cringe at the suddenness and bad timing.

“What?” Ciarán asks, frowning as he turns his full attention to me.

Slowly facing him, I fold my arms defensively. “My parents aren't dead. They are alive somewhere.”

“How do you know that?”

“A little bird told me. Is that how you say it?”

He smirks. “You don't want to say, okay, I hear you. But are you in danger?”

“Fuck knows. They're my *parents*. Although, they did leave me with that narcissistic gaslighting cunt to raise me, so maybe.”

My mood has dropped into blackness. Since leaving Margaret's home two hundred miles away and not looking back, I've been content, never falling too far into the depression that plagued me while I was under her 'care'. But lately, I feel the darkness swarming around me, but this time it's demanding action. I know it's because of the world I've been thrust into, but it doesn't scare me. What scares me is that I'm not scared.

"What do you want to do about it?" Cathal asks.

"Good question. I think first and foremost, seeing as I have no idea where they are, I want to confront Margaret."

"Road trip?"

"Nope. I don't want to see her or be anywhere near her. I'm doing this the coward's way: over the phone."

Ciarán rises immediately. "Tinks, you are not a coward. I don't think anyone could accuse you of that. You have your reasons for not wanting to see her and they're valid. She is rancid fucking cunt, and I would off her if you asked me to."

"So would I," Cathal growls, eager to be included in the potential assassination of my aunt.

Snickering at how cute it is, I inhale deeply.

"Look, this way I can just hang up on her if she starts. I don't expect any answers, but I have questions and I want her to know I know, you know?"

"Totally." Ciarán kisses the top of my head and hands me his phone.

Nodding my thanks, I take it from him, pulling my big girl drawers up.

As I dial Aunt Margaret's number, my heart pounds in my chest like a caged animal. The phone rings once, twice, three times before she answers.

"Hello?" Aunt Margaret's cold, clipped voice sends a skitter of immense hatred over my soul.

“Aunt Margaret, it’s Summer,” I say, struggling to keep my voice steady. Confronted with her mean, cruel voice, I’m regretting this decision instantly, but Ciarán takes my hand and laces our fingers together, showing me his support and it gives me the balls to carry on. “We need to talk.”

“About what?” she snaps, her tone icy.

“About why you lied to me about my parents’ deaths,” I state, trying to maintain control. “And why you were always so fucking mean to me?”

Biting my lip, I shake my head as Ciarán pulls a face at me. I shrug. It’s out there now. No takey-backkeys.

A brief pause follows before she responds, her voice dripping with disdain. “Is this really necessary, child? I did what I had to do, or would you rather you lived on the street?”

“Did what you had to do? You lied to me and made my life miserable!” My anger flares, but I force myself to take a deep breath and continue as I drag my hand out of Ciarán’s and turn my back on the brothers. “Why, Aunt Margaret? What possible reason could you have?”

“Your parents were weak, Summer. They couldn’t handle their responsibilities, and they left you vulnerable,” she says cryptically. “I had to be the strong one, to ensure you survived.”

“By lying to me and treating me like shit?” I demand, my voice shaking with rage. “You don’t get to decide what’s best for me. I deserve the truth.”

“Fine,” Aunt Margaret hisses. “Your parents were involved in something dangerous, something that cost them their lives. I took you in to protect you, to make sure you didn’t suffer the same fate.”

“What dangerous thing? What were they involved in?” I ask, desperation seeping into my voice.

“You don’t need to know,” she replies, a cruel edge in her tone. “It’s better if you stay ignorant, which isn’t hard in your case.”

“Fuck you, Aunt Margaret! I have a right to know!” I shout, my frustration boiling over.

“Enough!” Her voice is like ice, cutting through the air and that tone brings back past trauma of when I made her so angry, she used to lock me in my room without food for days. “Never speak to me about this again.” She hangs up, as I was prepared for her to do.

I stare at the phone, my hands trembling, as the weight of Aunt Margaret’s words sink in. I hate her. But now, I can’t help the gnawing fear in the pit of my stomach that whatever secret my parents were hiding, it must be darker than I could’ve ever imagined and maybe she is right. Maybe she did try to protect me, but she didn’t know how to be a parent. Always ice-cold, never involved with anyone, never had kids of her own. She is the classic case of better off alone.

Ciarán and Cathal exchange worried glances before they both wrap their arms around me, their warmth providing a small measure of comfort amid the storm of emotions raging inside me.

My chest feels tight, and a burning rage coils in my stomach like a venomous snake, ready to strike. Aunt Margaret’s refusal to shed light on the mysteries of my past is infuriating, but I won’t let her win. If she thinks she can keep me in the dark forever, then she’s sorely mistaken.

“Tinks,” Ciarán says softly, his thumb gently tracing circles on the back of my hand. “If you want to get to the bottom of this, just ask. We’ve got resources.”

“Right,” Cathal says, his voice firm and resolute. “Whatever it takes, we’re not backing down.”

Their unwavering support rallies my spirit, and I take a deep breath, steadying myself. “You’re right. We can’t let her control our lives. We’ll find the truth, even if we have to tear down every wall she’s built around it.”

“Fucking right, we will,” Ciarán grins, his eyes blazing with resolve.

Cathal nods in agreement, a fierce expression painting his handsome features. “And if anyone stands in our way, they’ll regret it.”

SUMMER

A sudden commotion outside the penthouse front door startles us from our thoughts. A thud and a muffled curse has Ciarán's eyes narrowed as he cautiously approaches the door, his hand poised on the doorknob.

Cathal is quick to push me behind him as Ciarán glares at the security camera footage but must see nothing untoward as he swings the door open with a forceful jerk, a string of colorful curses escaping his lips. Cathal rushes over, and together they haul a man inside, his body limp and heavy between them. I can't see his face yet, but I can tell he's in terrible shape.

"Jesus Christ, you fucking wanker. What happened?" Cathal asks.

"Never mind that now," Ciarán barks, clearly agitated. "Just help me get him onto the couch."

Catching a glimpse of the man's face, strange recognition hits me like a ton of bricks. This is the third triplet brother. Caden, I think his name is. His dark hair clings to his sweaty forehead, and his blue eyes are clouded with pain.

"Fuck me," I whisper, unable to tear my gaze away from him and my two lovers, rampant thoughts ripping their way through my mind that I can't stop, and I'm not even sure I want to.

"Summer, stay back," Ciarán orders, the raw emotion betraying his tough exterior.

“Is there anything I can do to help?” I ask, desperate to be useful in this terrifying moment, seeing as Caden is hurt and bleeding all over the couch.

When they don’t answer, I take matters into my own hands. I’m not letting their brother die on our couch. It’s not happening. A sense of urgency overwhelms me as I rush to Caden’s side, and I catch sight of his wound—a deep gash in his side that seeps blood, staining his shirt a dark crimson.

“Shit,” Caden grits out through clenched teeth, his face contorted with pain. “That fucking hurts.”

“Well, it will do, you fucking cunt,” Cathal growls. “Who did this?”

“Later,” he murmurs, catching sight of me and showing more than a passing interest which buoys my ego like it’s filled with helium.

“Stay still,” I instruct, trying to keep my voice steady despite the panic I feel at how bad this wound is. “Let me get the first aid box.”

“Fuck’s sake,” Cathal growls. “I was nearly blown up, but you get the full Florence Nightingale treatment.”

“That shocks you?” Ciarán asks.

I don’t hear the reply over my rummaging in the cupboard for the first aid box.

Returning with it, I kneel beside him and meticulously pull out everything I think I might need to clean and bandage the wound. The air between us is charged with something I can’t quite place as I work carefully, doing my best to minimize his pain.

“Fuck, that hurts,” he gasps, his fingers digging into the couch cushions when I start.

“I guess a hospital is out of the question?” Our eyes meet for a split second, and something electric passes between us. It’s a connection I can’t deny—one I haven’t felt with anyone besides Ciarán and Cathal. Is it possible to feel this way about all three brothers?

“Have I died?” he murmurs.

“Not yet.”

“You sure? Because you look like a fucking Angel.”

“Oh, smooth,” I giggle, rolling my eyes. “That ever work for you?”

“All the fucking time. Is it working now?” His gaze lingers on mine for a moment, and I’m struck by the marked difference in his blue eyes. Ciarán and Cathal have a darkness that lurks in theirs that draws me to them instinctually. Caden, on the other hand, doesn’t seem to share that darkness, which intrigues me. A lot more than it should. A strange warmth spreads through my chest as we share this brief connection.

“No,” I murmur, feeling Ciarán and Cathal’s burning gaze on me.

As I tend to Caden, my thoughts race, a whirlwind of emotions swirling within me. This dangerous dance between us has only just begun, and I’m left wondering where it’ll lead, if anywhere.

“You always have to be the center of attention, don’t you?” Cathal mutters, tearing his gaze away from me to cast a sidelong glance at his younger brother.

“Fuck off, Cathal,” Caden replies, voice strained but still managing to inject some sass into his words. “It’s not like I planned this.”

“Well?” Ciarán snaps. “Who was it?”

“No one. It’s nothing,” Caden mutters.

“Almost done,” I say softly, trying to break the tension, finishing with the antiseptic. I quickly cover the wound with a thick layer of gauze, securing it in place with medical tape. It’s far from a professional job, but it’ll have to do for now.

“Thanks,” Caden murmurs, his eyes meeting mine again with that open stare that is doing things to me it really shouldn’t. He’s doing his best to keep up appearances, but the pain he’s in is written across his face.

“Anytime,” I reply, forcing a small smile. “Actually, scrap that. Don’t get stabbed again.”

“I’ll try not to, angel,” he says with a flirty smile that reaches his eyes. “Although, if I’ve got you to take care of me, I might get stabbed more often.”

“Fuck right off,” Cathal growls.

“It’s Summer,” I murmur.

“Suits you,” he mutters and closes his eyes as he leans back, his face contorted in pain.

“It’s not as bad as it looks,” I add to Ciarán, avoiding Cathal’s simmering glare. “Not that I’m an expert, but it’s shallow, so I think he’ll live.”

“What a shame,” Cathal mutters.

“Summer,” Caden murmurs, and the sound of my name on his lips feels like a caress. “Can you pass me that water?”

“Of course,” I say, handing him the unopened bottle I had set on the coffee table earlier and open it. Our fingers brush as he takes it from me, and the warmth of his touch sends a jolt of electricity through my body.

“Thanks,” he whispers, his eyes never leaving mine as he takes a slow, deliberate sip from the bottle. The way he maintains eye contact feels like a challenge—or maybe an invitation.

“Are you feeling any better?” I ask, trying to keep my voice steady despite the butterflies that have taken up residence in my stomach.

“Getting there,” he replies with a smirk, setting the bottle back down. “You’re a damn excellent nurse, you know that?”

“Thanks,” I reply, blushing furiously.

“Now that you’re done bleeding all over my expensive sofa, want to tell us what the fuck is going on?” Ciarán barks. “You don’t show your face for years and now, all of a sudden, you show up on my doorstep with a hole in your side.”

“Nothing I can’t handle. I was in the area, your apartment was closest. No big deal,” Caden says.

“This is *my* patch. What the fuck were you doing here? Was this one of my guys?”

“Our guys,” Cathal mumbles, in such a pissy mood, I’m slowly retreating so I don’t get caught in some triplet crossfire that is definitely brewing big.

“Yeah, about that...” Caden says, looking between them as I reach the hallway. “Care to share?”

“Fuck you,” Ciarán snarls. “Start talking.”

“Wasn’t one of your guys. Now leave it.” For the first time since he arrived on the doorstep, I see the darkness in him. It’s just as fierce as his brothers’, but all it does is make him more attractive to me.

This is something I’m going to have to squash because I don’t see either Ciarán or Cathal accepting any feelings I might have for Caden. From this small interaction, I can see the youngest triplet is somewhat of an outsider with his two older brothers.

Unfortunately, all it does is draw me in even more, makes me want to know what makes him tick, makes me want to know him as well as I know Ciarán and Cathal.

Not good.

Not good at all.

SUMMER

Caden sighs and leans back against the plush pillows propped behind him. A pained grimace crosses his face for a moment before it fades, replaced by a contemplative expression.

“Summer, can I tell you something?” he asks hesitantly, his blue eyes searching mine.

Handing him a cup of tea, I smile. “You going to tell me who did this? Your brothers are pissed you’re not telling them anything.”

“Not that. Told you, angel, it’s nothing.”

“Not nothing.”

He swallows a mouthful of tea and hands it back to me to place on the nightstand. “I grew up always feeling like I was living in the shadows of Cathal and Ciarán. They were always so strong, so assertive, whereas I was always the fun one.” His voice cracks, and he takes a shaky breath before continuing. “I tried my best to fit in, to be what everyone expected of me. But at the end of the day, I couldn’t shake the feeling that I would never measure up to my brothers. They don’t take me seriously, but it’s fine. I can handle this. Just needed somewhere to lay low. They get that.”

“Hey,” I say softly, moving closer to him and being unable to resist placing a hand on his cheek briefly. “You are more than enough, Caden. You don’t have to be anyone but yourself.”

He smiles, his eyes sad, which rips right through me. "Thanks, angel. That means more to me than you know."

"Have you ever talked to your brothers about how you feel?" I ask tentatively, not wanting to get in the middle of this, but at the same time, feeling sorry for Caden.

Caden shakes his head. "I've always been afraid that they would see it as a weakness, especially in our world, where strength is everything."

"Maybe they'll surprise you," I suggest gently. "Sometimes, sharing our vulnerabilities can bring us closer together."

He considers this for a moment before nodding slowly. "Maybe you're right. It's just hard, y'know?"

"I understand," I whisper, giving his hand another reassuring squeeze. "But try. They might surprise you."

Feeling like we've crossed some invisible threshold, deepening the connection between us and despite the darkness that surrounds us, it feels like we've found something real and worth holding onto.

Somehow, despite his own demons, Caden retains a sense of humor and a zest for life that is both refreshing and intoxicating, and I question my feelings for him. Are they real, or does my heart just long for him because he's a carbon copy of Ciarán and Cathal?

"Summer?" Caden's voice breaks through my thoughts. "You okay? You seem lost in thought."

"Uh, yeah," I say, shaking my head slightly, trying to dispel my doubts. "I'm fine." I've never experienced such conflicting emotions before—the desire to be close to someone, yet the fear that my feelings might be clouding my judgment.

"Summer," Caden says softly, noticing the way my smile fades. "You can talk to me about anything. I'm here for you."

"Thanks," I murmur, touched by his concern. "But I'm okay."

He nods slowly, accepting it. “I can’t thank you enough for everything you’ve done for me. You’ve been by my side since I stumbled into this place, sliced open and bleeding. I didn’t expect you, and it’s been a far more pleasant experience than being manhandled by those two thugs out there.”

Giggling, I shrug. “You’re welcome.”

My heart leaps when he reaches for my hand, his fingers intertwining with mine.

A warmth spreads through my body, and I smile. Despite the darkness that surrounds us, I find solace in this quiet moment with Caden. It’s like an oasis of light where laughter and trust thrive. But I feel as if my loyalty to Ciarán and Cathal is being tested.

Pulling my hand away gently, I know I have to leave this room and go to find Ciarán and Cathal.

Closing the door softly behind me, I run into Ciarán in the hallway.

“Is he settled?”

“Yeah.”

“Did he tell you anything?”

“Nope.” Part of me wants to betray Caden’s confidence and tell Ciarán how his brother feels, but part of me thinks he already knows, anyway.

“Little shit,” he mutters and storms off back to the living room.

Marching after him, I snap, “Hey! It’s comments like that which make him feel inferior.”

He turns to me slowly, disbelief on his face. “Oh really,” he drawls sarcastically. “And you know how deeply he feels all of a sudden.”

“A blind man could see it.”

“Something you want to share, Tinks?”

Knowing I'm busted, I have to say something. "Obviously, I'm attracted to him. But he has this vulnerable side to him, that's sweet and funny, and I..."

"And you what? Have fallen for him?"

"No!" But the old saying about protesting too much hits home right about now. "I barely know him. He's been here an hour, tops."

"I knew you for seconds and fell for you," he points out.

"Well, that's you."

"Ouch," he mutters. "You're supposed to say it back, Tinks. Cut a man to the quick, why don't you?"

"You know it didn't go down like that."

"But it did with Cathal."

"No," I say, getting pissed off. "I was primed to fall for Cathal because I'd already fallen for you. Don't you get it?"

"So based on that, you have been doubly primed to fall for Caden."

"Jesus!" I hiss. "What is wrong with you?"

"Trying to get you to admit that you want to fuck my brother."

"So what if I do?" I snarl. "You going to stop me?"

"Whoa," Cathal says, stepping into the room from the kitchen. "What the fuck is this?"

"This is us bearing witness to Caden's charm, once again, affecting the woman we love."

Narrowing my eyes, I fold my arms. "The *woman* we love? How many have there been?"

"Just one. You. But there have been other women, Tinks. Separately, obviously," he adds as he finally sees the root of my actual issue with his statement.

"Obviously," I growl.

"Jealous, Tinks?"

“Fuck you. You’re jealous, and it’s ridiculous. You accept Cathal in my life, so why not Caden?”

“Is that what you want?” Cathal asks, coming closer and giving me a searching stare.

“I don’t know!” I wail. “This conversation went off the rails, fast. The point I was trying to make is that your brother doesn’t feel like he can talk to you.”

“He lands on my doorstep and expects me to help him, he damn well better tell me why,” Ciarán responds.

“Thought it was *ours*,” I retort.

“It is ours.”

“Look. I don’t know what the fuck I’m feeling, but I’m not trying to sleep with your brother, okay?”

“Then what are you trying to do?”

“I don’t know! I like him. He’s sweet.”

“He does this every time! He knows you’re involved with us, and he wants to rip you away from us. Only this time, he gets to hit us both with one fell swoop,” Ciarán yells, running his hand through his hair.

“So throw him out,” I say, trying to calm the fuck down before this goes somewhere dangerous. “My loyalty lies with you two. I love you both, you know that.”

He heaves a breath and visibly calms down, while Cathal watches this argument wordlessly. “I trust you, Tinks. I *don’t* trust him.”

“He has given us no reason to trust him and the animosity between us for the last few years has been brutal, Summerbell. Try to understand that this isn’t us turning our back on him. It’s more complicated than that.”

“But all was forgiven with you two. Why not him as well?”

“Who even knows if that’s what he wants? He could be here to break us apart.”

“Well, you won’t know unless you talk, will you?” I spin and storm off down the hallway to my bedroom, slamming the door behind me. This is the last thing I wanted, but I brought it on myself by interfering. I should’ve kept my mouth shut and my head down.

Sitting heavily on the edge of the bed, I drop my head in my hands and hold back the tears desperate to come out.

The door opens, but I don’t look up. I’m too weary to fight anymore.

Dropping to his knees in front of me, Ciarán takes my hands and pulls them away from my face. “I’m sorry. I was a jealous, paranoid dick, and I took it out on you.”

“It’s fine.” The words automatically spill from my lips, even though it’s not fine. None of this is fine. I just want it to go away so we can be happy again.

“No, it’s not,” Cathal says behind us.

Ciarán drops my hands and turns around on his knees to look at Cathal. “No, it’s not.” He turns back to me. “I love you.” He kisses my cheek.

“I love you, too.”

“Don’t say it just because I have. You’re angry and that’s okay.”

Sighing, I cup his face and stare into his eyes. “Whatever happened out there was not fun. I didn’t intend for it to turn into a shouting match.”

“Neither did I.”

“Are you really worried Caden is going to betray you?”

He shrugs. “If that was his plan, he knows we are talking about it now.” He snickers, and I join in momentarily.

“I think the three of you need to have a conversation.”

“Do you want to sit on his dick, Tinks?”

The seriousness of his question is ruined by his choice of words, and I giggle. “Do you want to see me sitting on his

dick, Ciarán? Maybe with Thal's cock in my ass? How does that picture look to you?"

"Fuck, you're wicked," he pants. "Now, it's all I can think about."

Wondering what possessed me to say it, I smile anyway. "I don't know what the future holds, but this isn't about me. You three need to talk."

Ciarán nods slowly as Cathal joins us on the bed. He runs his hand under my top, caressing the scabs on my back gently. "I want to see you sit on Ciarán's dick," he murmurs in my ear, "before I shove my cock in your ass."

"That can be arranged," I reply with a smile as Ciarán gets up to slam the door closed and locks it for good measure.

"Just in case," he murmurs darkly, stalking toward me like a predator. "I'm not ready to share you with him yet."

"Not yet," Cathal whispers against my neck as he kisses me, licks me, and drops his hand between my legs.

Throwing my head back as I revel under their touches, all I can think of are their words.

Not yet.

CADEN

Pain sears through my side, and I grit my teeth, trying to ignore the throbbing ache. Lying in the guest room of Ciarán's penthouse, jealousy and self-doubt plague me. I knew it was a mistake coming here, but now it's even worse than I thought it would be.

Summer.

As much as I hate to admit it, Summer has had an incredible impact on my brothers. It's like she's breathed new life into them. The dark and brooding energy that once dragged them under seems to dissipate when she's around. She's the light that chases away their shadows, and I find myself envious of that connection, that magic she weaves around them.

"Fuck," I mutter under my breath, pressing a hand against my wound, trying to ease the pain. If only I could have her in my life, maybe things would be different. But no matter how much I try to be the charming, flirty version of myself, nothing ever changes.

My jealousy festers, but deep down, I know it's not about wanting to take away what my brothers have. It's about wanting something like that for myself, someone who could break through my barriers and make me feel alive again. But for now, all I have is pain and darkness, covered up with the fake light I try to force to the front every damn day. It's fucking exhausting. I need someone I can be myself around who knows my innermost secrets and doesn't fucking run like that bitch two years ago who fucked me over. The unending

question of whether or not I'll ever be enough is enough to bring tears to my eyes, but I blink them away, gritting my teeth.

I hate that I caused the argument between them earlier, but I didn't hate what I heard. Summer feels the instant connection between us, but it's not surprising. She is with my triplet brothers. She sees them in me. It's fine for now, it's what will draw her in, but one day I want her to know *me*.

Lost in my thoughts, I'm suddenly jarred by the sound of the bedroom door slamming shut, followed by the unmistakable click of the lock. A wave of heat rushes through me as I realize what's happening behind that closed door. Ciarán, Cathal, and Summer are together, fucking and excluding me.

"Fuck," I hiss as the jealousy boils up. The pain in my side intensifies as I shift in the bed, struggling to find a position that doesn't make me want to groan with agony.

The sounds coming from the other room only fuel my longing to be included, but as usual with my brothers, I'm left out in the cold.

I force myself to focus on something else, anything to drown out the sounds of pleasure and passion that seem to mock my loneliness. My breaths come in shallow rasps as I attempt to calm myself, but the pain in my side serves as a constant reminder of just how fucked up everything is right now.

But despite my efforts to ignore it, the harsh truth remains—I'm alone and in pain, while my brothers and the woman I suddenly crave are screwing like rabbits and sharing something that I can only dream of. And as much as it hurts, I wonder if maybe I don't deserve that kind of love and happiness after all.

It hurts like a motherfucker, but it's a fact—they must see me as a failure. A weak link in the chain. The thought gnaws at me, opening up old wounds I've tried so hard to stitch shut.

This isn't just about physical pain—it's about proving myself to the two people I care about most in the world: my brothers. And now the beautiful angel whose light has breathed life back into my dark existence.

“Fuck this,” I grit out through clenched teeth. No more wallowing. Time to sort my shit out and face whatever reality is waiting for me.

As quietly as possible, I swing my legs over the edge of the bed and push myself up, sucking in a sharp breath when my injury protests. Ignoring the agony, I grab my bloody, ripped tee and pull it on with shaky hands before struggling with my boots that Ciarán ripped off when he practically threw me in the bed earlier.

Opening the door quietly, I walk silently toward the front door.

Pressing my hand against the throbbing wound in my side, I push the door open and slip out to the elevator.

Striding across the lobby, ignoring the pain, I exit the building, the cool air a welcome relief on my sweaty face and battered body, but it's a small price to pay for the chance to finally sort my shit out—away from their watchful eyes and crushing expectations, and this way, I don't have to tell them fuck all. Ciarán wouldn't have let it lie. He wants to know who came after me and I'm not telling them jack.

Leaning against the exterior wall of the apartment building, the pain in my side flaring with each breath. “Fuck.” I should've known better than to come here in the first place, chasing after some fantasy of belonging that's always been just out of reach.

Clutching my side, I force myself to focus on the task at hand—getting the hell out of here and putting as much distance between me and the penthouse as possible.

Pushing off the wall, I stumble into the shadows. My body protests with every step, but I grit my teeth and keep moving, determined not to let my brothers witness my pathetic retreat.

“Hey, man, you okay?” Some random guy approaches me, genuine concern in his eyes. But all I can think is how he doesn’t know the half of it.

“Mind your own damn business,” I snap, shoving him away and continuing on my agonizing journey as he yells curses at me I deserve. He was trying to help, but I don’t need his fucking help.

My mind is consumed with thoughts of what could have been and what will never be. They will never let me back in. Not the way I need them to. The pain in my side is secondary to the pain in my heart. It’s like a knife twisting inside me, a constant reminder of my failures. A reminder that I’m not good enough for anyone, let alone someone like Summer.

But I can’t keep dwelling on this. I need to keep moving.

As I walk through the busy city streets, the surrounding bustle only emphasizes the darkness in my soul. It’s like a physical weight, dragging me down, suffocating me.

I keep walking, one step at a time, until the pain in my side becomes too much to bear. Collapsing onto a nearby bench, I grunt, leaning heavily on the arm of the old metal bench. I need to get off the streets. They’ll still be looking for me, ready to end this once and for all. Hauling my sorry ass up again, I stumble towards a standard hotel that caters to people working away from home.

Entering the bar area, I scout around and find my target. Straightening up as much as I can, I stride over and lift the suit jacket from the back of the chair, disappearing quickly as I slip it on and make my way to the front desk to get a room for a couple of nights where I can drink myself into oblivion and collapse until I wake up with a raging hangover, just to do it all over again while I heal up enough to move on.

SUMMER

I pace the length of the penthouse, my heartbeat pounding in my ears. Anxiety coils around me like a snake, tightening its grip with every step I take. Caden's sudden disappearance in the middle of the night weighs heavily on my mind, and I can't get rid of the feeling that something is terribly wrong. Why show up here stabbed and then do a runner in the night? It makes no sense.

"Fuck," I mutter, stopping to press my hands against the cool glass window, trying to steady myself and catch my breath.

Ciarán and Cathal stand across the room, seemingly unfazed by their brother's absence. They're huddled together, engaged in a deep conversation about business matters. Their casual demeanor sends a spark of annoyance through me; how can they be so unconcerned when Caden is missing?

"Look, Summer," Ciarán says without breaking eye contact with Cathal, "we know Caden better than anyone. He does this."

"Does this?" I snap, unable to hide my frustration.

"Caden's always been unpredictable. There's no need to worry." Cathal gives me a grim glare.

"Unpredictable? That's just an excuse for you not giving a damn!"

"Look," Cathal says, crossing his arms over his chest. "We know you're worried about Caden, but we've dealt with situations like this before. Trust us, he'll turn up."

“He’s hurt.”

“He’ll live. He’s a Gannon.”

“Fuck that. All you Gannons are a bunch of fucking pig-headed, stubborn assfaces that need a good fucking talking to.”

“Summer, we’ve known him our entire lives. This is Caden we’re talking about. He’s resourceful and can handle himself,” Ciarán insists, his eyes dark and resolute.

“Fine,” I grit out. “But if anything happens to him, I swear to God—“

“Nothing will happen to him,” Cathal cuts me off, his expression unyielding. “But what will you do?”

There is a tinge of amusement coming from my stoic Thal, who doesn’t usually crack a smile unless it’s when he’s slicing your guts open.

“Withhold sex,” I challenge.

“Whoa, hang on a fucking minute!” Ciarán snaps. “You’re not doing that over the little brother you don’t even know.”

“I know him. He’s exactly like you two, but sweeter.”

“She has us there,” Thal murmurs. “The baby of the family.”

“By a few minutes!” Ciarán is incredulous, but now I’m finding it funny, even though I’m worried about Caden. He was kebab’d and then he just walked out of here. He didn’t even take the painkillers I left for him on the nightstand.

It’s true. He is a Gannon through and through, from what I’ve seen. But that doesn’t mean I’ll stop worrying or hoping that he returns.

Running my fingers through my hair in frustration, Ciaran finally relents and comes over.

“Tinks, listen to me. Caden knows how to handle himself.”

“But there’s more at stake here than just Caden,” Cathal interrupts, his voice cold and deadly.

“Like what?” I demand.

“Business,” Ciarán replies curtly. He takes out his phone, scrolling through some messages before continuing. “We’ve got an issue with one of our loan clients who thinks he can just skip town without paying up. We need to go and collect. We were *supposed* to go last night, but we got sidetracked.”

“Plus, we’ve got a new racketeering operation starting up soon,” Cathal adds. “We need to lay the groundwork, make sure everything’s in place.”

“Is that all this is to you?” I ask bitterly, trying to swallow the hurt that rises like bile in my throat. “Just business?”

“Summer, this is our life,” Ciarán says with a sigh. “We don’t have the luxury of putting everything on hold just because Caden fucked off like he always does.”

“Even if we wanted to,” Cathal adds, his expression softening for a moment. “But like Ciarán said, he can handle himself. He always has.”

“Then why does it feel like there’s something... off?” I mumble, more to myself than to them.

“Because you are a loving, kind, gentle, sweet woman and you care about him,” Ciarán says quietly, and I can see the truth in his eyes. “And that’s not a bad thing, Summer.”

“Maybe,” I concede.

But deep down, I know they’re right—their world is a dangerous one, full of secrets and shadows, and I’m only just beginning to understand the weight of it all. I care about Caden, but I still have so much to learn about this life I’ve chosen with Ciarán and Cathal. Until then, all I can do is hope that Caden will find his way back to us and not in a body bag.

Trying not to think about this terrible feeling I’ve got, I grip the edge of the table, my eyes fixed on Ciarán and Cathal as they continue their conversation, animatedly discussing some loan they’re collecting tonight. My heart races with each passing second. Something about Caden’s absence feels wrong, like a crucial piece of a puzzle has gone missing. And despite all logic, I feel as though he needs me.

Cathal's phone beeps and he picks it up. "We're on," he says and replaces it on the table.

"On what?" I ask, not having a fucking clue what he's on about.

"We've got a safe house lined up," he replies, his words clipped with urgency. "It's not a luxury penthouse, but it's secure. We need to move—now."

The swiftness in his voice snaps me out of my emotional turmoil. If they're this serious about relocating, then it must be important. I nod. "Okay, what do I need to pack?"

"Good girl." Ciarán gives me a small, reassuring smile. "Pack light, only necessities. We can get everything else we need later."

I hurry to my room, tossing clothes, toiletries, and anything else I deem necessary into a small suitcase. My hands shake slightly as I zip it closed, thoughts of Caden still whirling in my head like a storm.

"You ready?" Cathal asks, coming up behind me and placing his hands on my hips.

"Yeah." I straighten up and lean back against him. I love how much he has come out of his shell with me. He can't stop touching me after his initial inability. It makes me smile and I push my ass back to his cock.

He chuckles and kisses the top of my head. "Let's leave that for christening the new place, okay?"

"Boo to you." Giving him a pout that makes him groan, I giggle, knowing he is sporting a massive hard-on now.

"Are we ready?" Ciarán asks as he and Cathal carry their packed bags, which causes me to frown.

"How are you already packed?"

"Go bags. It's part of the life, Tinks."

"Oh." Blinking, I figure when we get where we're going, maybe I should make a go bag. Just in case.

The tension between us has dissipated somewhat, replaced by a shared sense of purpose.

As we make our way out of the penthouse and into the bright morning, fear slices through me. The world we're part of is dangerous and uncertain, but I know I wouldn't have it any other way now. This is their life and now it's mine.

Ciarán leads the way to his car in the underground parking lot and we pile in after a quick bomb check.

Shaking my head at how casual that sounds, I inhale and exhale quickly, accepting it and going with the flow.

Setting off, we travel in silence until we reach an unassuming brick building tucked away in a quiet corner of the city.

"Come on, this way," Cathal says, as we get out and he leads up a few floors to a normal-looking apartment. He unlocks the door and ushers me inside. The apartment is barely furnished, but it doesn't bother me as long as I'm with my two guys.

"Time to make this place secure," Cathal announces, setting down his bag and pulling out an assortment of cameras and alarms. He and Ciarán move with efficiency, installing the devices around the room while I pace, my thoughts returning to Caden.

"Will he know where to find us?" I ask quietly, unable to keep the worry from my voice. "If he comes back, I mean."

Cathal pauses in his work, glancing at me before exchanging a look with Ciarán. "He'll find us," he assures me.

"I hope you're right," I mutter, running a hand through my hair.

For the next hour, Ciarán and Cathal expertly install the remaining security measures while I do what little I can to help, which is holding a chair steady and mundane tasks given to me so that I'm not pacing like a caged tiger. I know they're including me to distract me, but fuck if it's not working.

By the time we're done, the apartment feels like a fortress. Cold, unyielding, and impenetrable.

"Done," Cathal announces with satisfaction, stepping back to survey our handiwork. "No one's getting in here without us knowing about it."

"Good," I say, trying to sound confident even as my heart continues to race. "Now about that christening."

SUMMER

“Remember, Summer,” Ciarán says later, his voice low and commanding, “stay inside and don’t open the door for anyone. We’ll be back soon.”

“Be careful,” I murmur, my heart swelling with concern for them.

Cathal reaches out and squeezes my hand, his touch providing some reassurance. “Always,” he replies, kissing my forehead before they both head out, leaving me alone in the new secure safe house apartment.

The silence that follows is almost oppressive, a stark contrast to the near-constant activity I’ve grown used to since becoming part of their lives. As I pace the living room, anxiety gnaws at my insides, urging me to do something—anything—rather than wait helplessly.

A sudden knock at the door shatters the quiet, and I freeze, my heart hammering so hard, I feel it in my head. Remembering Cathal and Ciarán’s warning not to open the door for anyone, I hesitate, torn between curiosity and caution.

Taking a deep breath, I approach the door and check the set up for the doorbell camera. My blood runs cold at the sight of the man on the screen; the same man I’d seen at the warehouse meeting last week, the man who looks unsettlingly like my supposedly dead father.

“Shit,” I whisper, wringing my hands, my thoughts racing as I try to make sense of the situation. What could he possibly want from me? How did he find me? The questions pile up,

but there's only one way to get answers and the brothers are going to fucking kill me.

My fingers hover over the lock, my resolve wavering for a moment before I make a decision. With a determined exhale, I unlock the door and pull it open with the chain still on, ready to confront this stranger who has haunted my thoughts since that day at the warehouse.

“Who the hell are you?” I demand, my voice shaking despite my best efforts to sound strong. “And don't you dare fucking say, ‘Your dad’.”

The man who looks like my father regards me with a mixture of sadness and caution.

“Summer, it is me. Your father,” he mumbles.

My heart stutters.

Impossible.

It can't be him.

He's supposed to be dead, regardless of what that fucking Ronny said. Yet here he stands, looking exactly as I remember him, only twenty years older.

“Cut the crap,” I spit out. “My father is dead, and I don't have time for whatever the fuck this is.”

“Summer, please,” he pleads, his eyes filled with pain. “I know how hard this must be for you to accept, but I'm telling you the truth. Your mother and I faked our deaths to protect you.”

“Protect me?” I shout, anger coursing through me, as I shut the door and yank the chain off, hurting my hand in the process before I swing the door wide open. “You left me with your fucking bitch sister! She made my life a living hell, and you call that protection?”

He flinches at my words, guilt flashing across his face. Before he can respond, I notice Ronny standing behind him, looking uneasy.

“Can we talk inside?” my dad asks.

“No.”

“Summer, I’m sorry,” he sighs, running a hand through his hair. “I didn’t want you to find out like this. I’ve been working undercover in the Manchester mafia, trying to bring them down from the inside,” he whispers. “Ronny is your uncle, he works for—“

“I know who he works for.” I snap. “Or used to. Ciarán is *pissed* at you.” I point a finger at him like a child.

Ronny nods, a pained expression on his face. “I know it’s a lot to take in.”

“We’re here to help you. When Ronny told me you’d fallen in with the Gannons, I knew I had to break cover.”

“Help me?” I scoff, my anger returning full force. “You abandoned me! You let me think you were dead, and now you just show up out of nowhere, expecting me to believe you want to help?”

“Summer, we had no choice,” my father says desperately. “We couldn’t risk putting you in danger. Please, can we come inside?”

“Fuck that,” I snap, tears prickling at the corners of my eyes. “And fuck you. You don’t get to make those decisions for me. I deserved to know the truth.”

My father reaches out, as if to touch my arm, but I pull away. The weight of this revelation is crushing, and all I want to do is scream. I feel betrayed, heartbroken, and utterly lost.

“Summer,” Ronny says softly, “we’re here to make things right. We’ll do whatever it takes to protect you from the dangers you’re facing now. Please, let us help.”

The sincerity in his voice almost breaks me, but I refuse to let them see how much their actions have hurt me. With a deep breath, I wipe away my tears and harden my resolve. They may be family, but they have a lot to answer for. And I won’t let them off the hook so easily.

“Start talking,” I demand, my voice shaking with anger and confusion. “Why did you and Mom fake your deaths? And

where is my mother?”

My father’s face is a combination of guilt and determination. He takes a deep breath before speaking. “We got in deep with some dangerous people back in London. We owed a lot of money to a loan shark, and they were getting impatient for repayment. Your mother and I knew we couldn’t pay them back, and things were spiraling out of control. We had no choice but to fake our deaths, to get away from them and protect you. Our plan was to come back for you, but it didn’t work out as we’d hoped. We knew Margaret had you and would raise you.”

“That bitch ruined me!” I spit out the words bitterly. “You owe me a hell of a lot more than this fucked up story.”

“Summer, we never wanted it to be this way,” Dad interjects, his eyes filled with pain. “But every option we considered put you at risk. This was the only way we could ensure your safety.”

“Safety?” I scoff, thinking of the life I’ve led since they disappeared. “You have no idea what I’ve been through.”

“We were offered a chance to do something good—to go undercover in one of the city’s gangs and try to bring down the whole lot. We took it, hoping that one day, we could come back to you and make amends.”

As I listen to this explanation, a part of me wants to believe him, to accept that they did what they thought was best for me. But the hurt runs too deep, the betrayal too fresh.

“None of this makes it right,” I whisper, my voice raw with pain. “You left me alone to face the world without you.”

“Summer, we’re so sorry,” Dad says. “We can’t change the past, but we can help make sure your future is safe.”

“Safe?” I snort. “There’s no such thing as safe in this life. Not anymore.”

“Please, Summer,” my father pleads, desperation etched on his face. “Give us a chance to protect you, to make up for our mistakes. You need to get away from the Gannon brothers. This life, it’s dangerous. You don’t belong here.”

I stare at him, my head swimming. The mere thought of leaving Ciarán, Cathal, and even the idea of Caden behind, feels like a jagged knife tearing through my soul. But the fear in my father's eyes is all too real, and I can't deny that he might be right.

"Leave them?" I choke out, my voice shaking. "You want me to abandon the only people who've ever truly cared about me? The ones who protected me when no one else would?"

"Summer, please," *Uncle Ronny* interjects, his tone gentle yet firm. "We know how much they mean to you, but this life...it's going to destroy you if you stay."

"No. I won't leave them. They're my family now."

"Sum—" my father begins, but I cut him off.

"No!" I shout again, slamming my fists on the door so hard I think I break my bones. "You have no idea what I've been through since you left. They saved me. They love me. And I love them."

"Summer, we're just trying to keep you safe," my father pleads, reaching out to touch my arm, but I jerk away.

"After everything you did, you don't get to decide what's safe for me! I choose to stay with the Gannon brothers. They're my home, my life, and I won't abandon them."

"Even if it means putting yourself in danger?" Ronny asks quietly, his gaze steady as he searches my face for any sign of doubt.

"Even then," I whisper, my voice resolute. "I'm not afraid. I know the risks, but I choose to stay."

"Summer, please—" my father starts again, but I interrupt him once more.

"Enough!" I shout, tears streaming down my face. "This is my life, my decision! You lost the right to have a say when you faked your deaths and walked away from me!"

Everything falls silent, thick with tension and unsaid words. My father and Ronny exchange a pained look, but neither of them says anything more. They know they've lost

this battle, and no amount of pleading or warnings will change my mind.

“Goodbye,” I say softly, turning away from them. “Don’t come back. And tell that woman who doesn’t deserve to be called a mother to never try to come to me.” Slamming the door, I swallow back the lump in my throat before I choke on an ugly sob and drop to my knees in agony at this revelation.

“Something big is coming, and you’ll be caught in the crossfire if you stay,” Dad says through the door.

I clench my fists in my lap. “Go away!”

I’m still reeling from my father’s sudden appearance and his ominous warning when the front door swings open only a few minutes later. Ciarán and Cathal stride into the apartment, their faces serious and focused as they scan the apartment.

“Summer, who was here?” Ciarán asks immediately, his ice-blue eyes narrowing in concern as he takes in my tear-streaked face.

“My dad, or at least the man I thought was dead. And Ronny, too.”

Cathal’s dark brows furrow, and he exchanges a worried look with his brother. “Ronny? That fucker.”

“Something big is coming,” I say, repeating the words that have been haunting me. “They didn’t give me any details, but they warned me I need to be careful. They’re afraid I’ll get caught in the crossfire.”

“Fuck,” Ciarán curses under his breath, running a hand through his dark hair in frustration. “I’m going to fucking kill Ronny, that traitorous douchebag. Where are they?”

“They just left.”

“I mean, where are they hiding out?”

I shake my head. “I don’t know.”

Ciarán curses and stalks off to check the cameras. He will hear everything, but I don’t care.

“Whatever it is,” Cathal adds, his voice hard and determined, “we’ll protect you, Summerbell. That’s a promise.”

“I know,” I whisper, touched by their unwavering commitment to my safety. But deep down, my heart is breaking. Why didn’t my mother come to see me? Why didn’t she risk everything to see my face and talk to me like my dad did? I wonder if I’ll ever get the answers I need. And I wonder even more if I’ll ever be able to forgive the people who abandoned me.

SUMMER

The revelation that my father, my parents, are alive leaves my mind reeling. All these years thinking they were dead, only to find out it was all a ruse as part of their undercover operation to take down the mafia hundreds of miles away from where we lived.

It's sick and twisted and I don't understand, nor do I want to.

Curled up on a chair next to the window, my forehead pressed against the cool glass, I watch the city lights blink on against the darkening sky. My emotions churn like stormy seas. I'm keeping a secret and while I'm convinced they aren't telling me everything, I feel that this is too big to hold on to. I know without a doubt I can't keep this from them forever. The tangled web connecting all of us grows more complex by the day. I'm caught in the middle, pulled in multiple directions by loyalty, love, and longing for the childhood I missed out on.

With a weary sigh, I rise from my perch and prepare for bed, moving through the comforting routine mechanically. Sleep evades me most nights, anxiety and unanswered questions haunting my restless mind.

I've barely crawled under the covers when my phone rings, the sudden buzz piercing the quiet. Heart leaping into my throat, I fumble to answer it as Cathal comes barreling into the room. That man has the hearing of a fucking dog. The number is blocked.

"Don't answer that," he commands.

Too late.

“Hello?” My voice comes out high and breathless as I place the phone to my ear while he grimaces.

“Summer? It’s Ruby.” Hearing her voice does nothing to calm my racing pulse.

“Ruby, hey!” I sit up straighter, exchanging a stare with Cathal.

“Speaker!” he whispers.

Nodding, I switch.

“How are you?” she asks.

“Oh, same old,” I reply breezily and cringe. I’m not good at acting cool. “How’re you?”

“Me? I’m great.”

“I’m glad to hear that.”

Ruby pauses, hesitating. “Look, I was hoping we could meet up tomorrow. Just the two of us?”

My first instinct is to agree immediately. But Thal is shaking his head wildly.

“I’d love that, Ruby,” I answer carefully. “But I should check with Ciarán and Cathal first. Make sure it’s safe, you know?”

“Of course. I’ll text you a number, text me, and we’ll make an arrangement.”

“Okay.”

She hangs up and I blink.

Ciarán joins us and he and Thal exchange one of those silent, loaded looks that communicate a full conversation in seconds.

Cathal turns to me first, blue eyes gentle but vaguely troubled. “If it’s something you really want to do, we won’t stop you. But perhaps it would be best if Ciarán and I remained nearby, just in case.”

Ciarán frowns, clearly less enthusiastic about the idea, but nods. “We’ll be outside watching.”

“What do you think she wants?” Thal asks.

Shrugging, I reply, “You were here. She didn’t say.”

The phone buzzes, making me jump. It’s the text from Ruby.

“Well?”

Reading it out loud, I smile. “If you can make it for some girl talk, meet me at Greta’s coffeehouse at one.” Looking up, I add, “Sounds innocent enough.”

Another exchanged stare, they don’t seem too perturbed. “Okay,” Thal says. “But be careful.”

I breathe out a sigh of relief. “Of course, I’ll be extremely careful. Thank you for understanding—both of you.” Impulsively, I leap out of bed and hug them each in turn, overcome with gratitude for their support, even as nerves flutter in my stomach. I thought that would be a lot more difficult than it was.

Turning to my closet, I open the doors, suddenly excited. Choosing my outfit carefully as the guys disappear back to the living room, I invest myself in this activity, in the rituals from a different life, a different me.

Once I’ve settled on my outfit, I crawl back into bed, feeling lighter than I did earlier. Maybe it’s the anticipation of seeing Ruby, or maybe it’s the excitement of wearing something other than sweatpants for once and having a conversation that doesn’t revolve around who is trying to kill us now. Either way, I can feel my heart racing with anxiety and eagerness for tomorrow. Closing my eyes, I drift off to sleep with a smile on my face, the promise of some normalcy in the chaos of our lives providing a small glimmer of hope.

The next morning, I wake up early, unable to contain my excitement. I spend extra time getting ready, taking special care with my hair and makeup. The guys are brooding and moody as usual, but it doesn't affect me today. I have the weight of the world on my shoulders, but for a couple of hours, I plan to just be me, and not the mafia girlfriend, or whatever the hell it is I am.

Staring at myself in the mirror, I see Thal come up behind me. He wraps his arms around me and kisses the nape of my neck, which he has easy access to with my hair in a deliberately messy bun.

“Time for a quickie?”

“Should've asked before I got dressed.” I turn in his arms and smile up at him. “I love this side of you.”

He frowns. “What side?”

“The side that can't get enough of me.”

The side of his mouth lifts up into a half smile that practically makes me drool and swoon at the same time. “You've opened up the floodgates, Summerbell. I didn't know sex could be so perfect.”

“Only with the one you love.”

“Love.” He narrows his eyes. “Do you love me, Summer?”

“Yes. Do you love me?”

“Does love mean that I want my dick inside you every second of every day? Does it mean that I can't bear to be without you? Does it mean that if I lost you, I would die?”

Pressing my lips together, I nod slowly. “I hope so because that's how I feel about you and Ciarán.”

“Then I love you, Summer. No one will ever hurt you again. I promise on my life I will protect you.” He stoops to kiss me softly at first, but then more intensely. His hands skate down my sides and he fumbles with the zipper on my smart, black pants.

“Thal,” I pant when he pushes them down.

He slips his finger past my panty line and brushes them gently over my clit. “Who do you belong to?”

“You,” I say breathlessly.

He inserts a finger into my pussy and starts moving it in and out gently. “Are you going to come?”

“Fuck, yes!”

“Yeah?” His eyes glide up to meet mine. “Come on my fingers, Summerbell, so I can lick it off and have the taste of you on my tongue.”

Sliding another finger in, he thrusts his hand, fucking me with such vigor that my knees buckle.

“Come, baby,” Thal commands. “Come on my fingers. Are you close, Summerbell?”

“Yes,” I gasp, ready to come all over his hand.

He removes his fingers and inserts them into his mouth, swirling his tongue over them as I cry out in frustration at being edged so cruelly. The look on his face is wicked, and even though I didn’t think it was possible, he heightens my arousal with one word, “Foreplay.”

SUMMER

“I ’m not sure about this,” Thal says, glaring up at the coffee shop as if he expects it to blow up.

Shit. Why did I have to go and think that?

My dad has made me paranoid. Knowing that there are people actively working to bring down the entire Manchester mafia, of which there are many sectors, has me on edge. The Gannons don’t seem to give much of a fuck, but I guess it’s expected, and it’s why they don’t trust anyone except each other.

And me.

“I’ll be with Ruby.”

“And that is the *only* reason why I’m allowing this,” Thal grits out. “We will be waiting here, watching everything. You fart, we’re gonna know about it.”

“Eww.” I scrunch up my nose. “No one had better fucking fart while I’m having my coffee and cake.”

“What does she really want?” Ciarán asks, also glaring at the coffee shop like it kicked his puppy.

Shrugging, I gather my bag. “Who knows? She said she wanted some girl time.”

“I don’t like this.”

“She seems nice.”

“Oh, she will to your face, but that woman will gut you like a fucking fish and not think twice about it.”

“I don’t think she wants to gut me like a fish in the middle of a coffee shop.”

“You don’t know that. She’s brazen.”

“Look!” I snap, getting irritated at the overprotectiveness. “I get that you’re worried about my dad, or Ronny, or someone else showing up, but that’s why you’re staying outside, right?”

“Might come in,” Thal says, still giving the coffee shop the stink-eye.

“No! If this is really about girl time, I could do with some. I haven’t seen my friend in weeks because I don’t even know what to say to her. I don’t have any work colleagues to chat shit with anymore. I’ve got you two goons, so let me go and have some girl time with a perfectly lovely woman so we can talk dick sizes and the joys of DP. Hmm?”

“In the middle of a cafe?” Ciarán asks with a snort. “This I have to see.”

“Go away,” I growl and get out of the car.

“Be sure to tell her how huge our dicks are and how well they fit in your ass!” Ciarán winds down the window of his Hellcat and shouts after me with a sinful grin, causing the old couple passing to stop and stare in horror and my cheeks to burn as hot as the flames of hell.

Scurrying forward with Thal’s snort of pure amusement ringing in my ears, I step into the coffee shop. The scent of coffee hits me like a comforting embrace, intermingling with the gentle hum of conversation and soft jazz playing in the background. It’s an inviting haven from the cold, brutal world outside and I’m looking forward to taking a much-needed breather from the intensity of being involved with the Gannons. I scan the room and spot Ruby sitting by the window, her back to the wall, her raven hair loose around her shoulders.

Ruby waves enthusiastically, her smile as bright as the sun streaming through the window. Her energy is contagious, and I return her grin as I make my way over to her.

“Hey, Ruby,” I say as I settle into the plush armchair opposite her.

“Hey, Summer. How’s things? You holding up okay?”

Ruby’s outgoing nature puts me at ease, and I find myself opening up more than I usually would. “Yeah, I’m great. I mean, it’s intense and full on all the time, but never a dull moment.”

“Right?” She giggles but then goes serious. “But really?”

Sighing, I say, “But really, I’m exhausted.”

“Yeah,” she agrees softly. “Having two guys won’t help that.”

Smiling, I shake my head. “Nope. They’re outside.”

“So are mine. I have five,”

“Five?” My eyes widen so much I think they’re going to fall out of my head.

“Yep. It’s a party.”

“Nice.”

She smiles and we order our coffees from the hovering waitress before she turns back to me. “So, what do you enjoy doing with yourself?”

“Um, I enjoy reading, mostly mystery and romance novels.”

She nods. “Nothing like a bit of escapism, right?”

“Right,” I agree, smiling at her easy camaraderie.

As our coffees arrive and we continue chatting, I know that this is all surface stuff. Small talk. But I forget about who she is and simply enjoy the warm atmosphere and the chance to share a piece of my life with someone who seems eager to listen, even though her confidence and charisma are slightly intimidating, I genuinely like this woman who seems to have the world at her fingertips.

“Summer,” she says, her voice softening as she seems to sense my sudden unease as I get that bad feeling in my gut

again. “I know we’ve just met, but I want you to know that you can trust me. There’s no judgment here. We’re just two people sharing a coffee and some conversation.”

I nod, appreciating her effort to put me at ease, but still feeling the weight of my own insecurities, fidgeting with my coffee cup, betraying my anxiety.

“Hey,” Ruby says gently, reaching across the table to place a comforting hand on mine, halting my nervous movements. “I know.”

“Know what?”

“What you’re going through and if you ever need to vent or talk about it, I’m here.”

“So rather you than someone else, right?” The accusation is out there before I can stop it.

Her eyes narrow, but she smiles. “Well, yes. But I do mean it in a friendship sense, Summer. I know how hard it is, and I don’t want you to have to pretend if you’re feeling overwhelmed.”

“Sorry,” I murmur. “And thank you.”

“I can see it in your eyes, you know. The weight of everything you’re carrying.”

I blink, surprised by her perception. “What do you mean?”

“Your relationships with Ciarán and Cathal,” she continues gently. “The sacrifices you’ve made for them, the risks you’ve taken. It’s not easy being involved with people like them, especially when their world is so dangerous.”

I shift uncomfortably in my seat, unsure of how to respond. Ruby’s words resonate within me, making it difficult to breathe. She’s right; the life I’ve chosen isn’t an easy one, and the price I’ve paid for it has been steep.

“It takes incredible strength to face what you have,” Ruby adds earnestly, her gaze unwavering. “You should be proud of yourself, Summer. Not a lot of people could handle it.”

“Thanks, Ruby,” I reply, touched by her sincerity. “But sometimes I wonder if I’m strong enough, or if I’ll just end up dragging them down.”

“They’re lucky to have you,” Ruby insists, her tone fierce. “And don’t ever forget that you deserve happiness, too, even in the midst of all this chaos.”

Her words hit me hard, bringing tears to my eyes, which I blink back.

“You’ve got this, Summer. And you don’t have to face it alone.”

I feel a powerful surge of gratitude for Ruby’s unwavering support and understanding. Though my life with the Gannons is fraught with danger and uncertainty, having a friend like her to lean on gives me hope I can withstand the emotional and physical toll I know it’s already taking on me.

“Focus on the good, on the love you share with Ciarán and Cathal. That’s what will get you through this.”

“I’ll do my best to remember that.”

“Good,” she says, her eyes sparkling with determination. “Because I have no doubt that you’re strong enough to one day dip your toe into deeper waters.”

Frowning, I swallow as my mouth goes dry. “What do you mean?” Although I know exactly what she means, and it never even occurred to me.

She smiles innocently and takes a sip of her coffee. “Whatever you want, Summer, we’ll talk about it and make it happen.”

Snatching up my coffee, I take a sip, my mind swirling with what she has offered me. How do I respond to that? Thanks, but no thanks? Thanks, and yeah, we’ll talk? Do I tell Cathal and Ciarán what she’s offered?

“Just think about it. Nothing more, for now.”

Nodding, she lets me off the hook as she looks at her watch. “I need to get going, but I enjoyed our time together.”

“Same,” I say, replacing the cup and standing up as she does.

She leans in to give me a double air kiss and then she sweeps out on a cloud of expensive perfume.

After a moment, I follow her and slip into the car as Thal holds the door open for me. The heavy atmosphere hits me like a tidal wave as he gets in and slams it shut, and they both turn in their seats to face me.

“Hey,” I greet them, trying to sound casual despite the tension in the air.

“Well? What did she want?” Thal demands.

I bite my lip, contemplating how much to divulge about our conversation. The concern etched on their faces makes me hesitant to reveal the full extent of what we talked about.

“Just stuff. She’s worried about me and wanted to offer her support.”

“Support?” Cathal questions, his eyes narrowing slightly. “What kind of support?”

“Emotional, mostly,” I reply, avoiding his piercing gaze. “You know how things have been lately, and she wanted to make sure I’m doing okay.” I try to keep my expression neutral as I meet his stare. “I’m grateful for her concern, but I’ll keep my guard up.”

“Good,” Thal says with a nod, and I know I’ve done the right thing keeping Ruby’s offer quiet for now. They don’t need the extra worry of me being thrust into gang life in a way where they can’t protect me. Although, what exactly Ruby thinks I can do is a mystery to me. I don’t know the first thing about gangs. Okay, so that’s not entirely true, but close. As I look into the eyes of the men who’ve become my world, I know they would do anything to protect me. But can I fully trust Ruby or anyone else outside our tight-knit circle? I promise myself to tread carefully, knowing that one false move could put us all in danger.

CATHAL

The sight of Caden's battered form stirs a storm of emotions within me. Shock, concern, but most potently, distrust. Our history is too complicated for anything less.

Blood may be thicker than water, but years of bad blood and rivalry separate Caden and me now. Ever since he and I split from Ciarán to form rival gangs, our brotherly bond has been shattered.

So his sudden re-appearance raises my hackles. Sets old instincts on high alert. This could easily be a trap, a manipulation. Caden always excelled at spinning lies and playing on sympathies to get what he wanted.

Yet seeing him now, injured and in pain and hungover as fuck, ignites that innate drive to protect my own. He's still my youngest brother, though long estranged. The big brother in me wars with the wary gangster.

A sharp glance from Ciarán tells me he's just as skeptical, just as torn. Old habits die hard. But then I have to concede, as Summer pointed out, that Ciarán and I managed to put our differences aside and he offered me what I always wanted, so it was easy to brush the rest under the carpet. Maybe offering Caden the same will produce the same result.

Glowering at him hovering in the doorway as Summer's gentle heart prevails, as I knew it would. She fusses over Caden with such compassion, and her disapproving look when I hesitate tells me she expects me to show mercy, not vengeance.

With a sigh, I set aside my doubts and suspicions for now. There will be time later to unravel Caden's tangled web of lies, to get the actual truth from him. But seeing Summer's silently pleading gaze, I know she's right - now is not that time.

"Fine. You get to come in, but you skip out again and we're done," I mutter gruffly, helping him to the sofa.

Ciarán lingers nearby, radiating barely contained rage, but doesn't intervene. Yet. He wants answers and Caden will either cough them up or be kicked out on the street.

Up close, the damage looks even worse. He has clearly hit the bottle pretty damn hard to numb the pain of the stabbing and the rest.

Summer hands me the first aid kit and I work methodically, cleaning and disinfecting the wound, which doesn't look like it's been seen to properly since Summer patched him up a few days ago. Keeping my touch quick and clinical, I can't afford to let sympathy sway me. Caden remains uncharacteristically quiet, flinching occasionally as I probe the particularly nasty gash.

When I finish, he looks a bit less agonized at least. But the sight still stirs an unwelcome pang in my chest. I fight to keep my voice neutral, detached. "Right. You should rest up."

Caden's eyes brim with emotion. "Thanks."

I nod swiftly and I turn my back on him. "We'll talk later. For now, get some sleep."

I can feel Caden's gaze follow me as I walk away. So many unasked questions still linger between us. But right now, I need distance to regain perspective.

Summer offers me a small, grateful smile as I pass. In her eyes, I see understanding mingled with hope. She, better than anyone, knows my heart. Knows how deeply this wounds me, despite my outward stoicism.

Some bonds, it seems, cannot be completely severed. Even by violence, vengeance, and years of estrangement. The past always leaves its scars.

As I head towards the bedroom, Ciarán blocks my way. His eyes burn with intensity as he leans in close. “I don’t trust him.”

“I know,” I reply evenly. “But we can’t turn our backs on family, especially not when they’re in trouble.”

Ciarán sighs and steps aside, allowing me to leave. “Fine. But if he causes any trouble, it’s on you.”

I nod before disappearing into the small bedroom of this safehouse apartment. Doesn’t surprise me in the least that Caden knew where we were. It concerns me that this safehouse isn’t exactly safe right now with Summer’s dad showing up. We’re on the lookout for another place and in the meantime, Summer isn’t left alone for even a second. The cool night air from the open window washes over me, signifying the end of summer and momentarily distracting me from the conflicted thoughts racing through my mind.

Part of me wants to give Caden the benefit of the doubt. But another part of me remains wary, remembering all too well the lies and deceit that defined our past.

As I pace aimlessly around the room, lost in thought, I can’t shake the feeling that this is all just the beginning of something much bigger. Something that will tear apart everything Ciarán and I are in the process of building, rebuilding, building upon. Who even knows anymore? Only time will tell what’s really going on and where his loyalties lie. Until then, all I can do is watch and wait, knowing that whatever happens next could change everything forever. It’s clear he has a thing for Summer. But why I find myself surprised by that is anyone’s guess. She belongs with Ciarán and me, but does that also include Caden? He’s our triplet. He looks like us, talks like us, has our mannerisms, but he is lighter, more carefree, seemingly anyway, and I see the way Summer looks at him and the way she cares.

Sitting down heavily on the bed, my mind still races. The events of the last few days have been overwhelming, and this latest development with Caden only adds to the chaos.

Summer's soft footsteps enter the room, and I look up to see her watching me with a worried expression. "You okay?" she asks softly.

I give her a half-smile. "Yeah, just processing everything."

She moves to sit beside me, her hand taking mine. "I know him being here is weird for you guys and he's not telling us the truth, but I know you have to talk to him as an equal, give him the benefit of the doubt, and show him you love him, no matter what."

The warmth of her touch soothes me, just as it always does. "You know his soul."

It's a statement that I don't make lightly.

"I do. Like I know Ciarán and like I know you. He is in pain, and he needs his brothers."

"Have you spoken to Ciarán about this?"

"Not yet," she admits. "I figured you'd be the easier target."

Snickering as she giggles, I pull her closer. "You mean you can sway me with your wiles easier."

"Maybe."

I realize how much I need her by my side. How much she's become not just a lover or a friend, but a source of strength and comfort in this turbulent world we inhabit.

Wrapping my arm around her shoulders, I pull her close. "Do you want me to speak to Ciarán?" I whisper into her hair.

She leans into my embrace, and for a moment there's nothing else but us, lost in our own little world of shared affection.

But reality soon intrudes once more, and with a sigh, I release her when Ciarán barges into the room. "We need to keep an eye on Caden. See what he's up to."

I nod, knowing that Ciarán is right. We can't just let Caden roam free without knowing what he's doing. "Agreed. But we

have to be careful. We don't want to spook him and make him run again."

Ciarán grunts in agreement before taking a seat on the edge of the bed. Summer moves to sit beside him, leaning into his side as he wraps an arm around her shoulders.

"He's your brother," she says softly. "You have to give him a chance."

"I know," Ciarán replies quietly. "But we also have to protect ourselves and what we've built here."

There's a moment of heavy silence before I speak up. "We'll talk to him when he wakes. Try to get some answers out of him."

Ciarán nods, his expression serious.

Only time will tell about Caden's true motives, but one thing is clear - things are about to get even more complicated for all of us if he decides he wants Summer as well.

CATHAL

Sitting with Ciarán and Caden in the now cramped living room, the heavy curtains are drawn to keep the outside world at bay and eyes off Summer. The tension in the air is thick as Caden paces back and forth, his energy a stark contrast to our stillness, despite the pain he is still in. He gulps back half a bottle of water before replacing the cap, trying to cure his raging thirst that too much whiskey brings. He's been cryptic about why he's suddenly reappeared in our lives, but now it seems he's ready to spill the truth.

“Alright, look,” he begins, running a hand through his dark hair in frustration. “I didn't want to involve you guys in this shit, but I don't have a choice. There's a coup brewing in my gang—they want me out.”

Ciarán and I exchange shocked looks—though we've always known that Caden's attitude has always been less menacing than ours, we never imagined that his own people would turn against him.

“Are you fucking serious?” I ask.

Ciarán just stares at Caden, his face a mixture of disbelief and concern.

“Dead serious,” Caden replies, his expression grim. “I can't trust anyone over there anymore, and I need my brothers by my side.”

Ciarán leans forward, elbows on his knees, his fingers steepled in thought. It's clear that he's already strategizing, weighing the risks and consequences of getting involved in

Caden's mess. Meanwhile, I feel my heart rate quicken, my mind racing with fear and anger.

"Jesus Christ, Caden," I snap, unable to contain my emotions. "How the hell did this even happen?"

Caden stops pacing and turns to face us, his expression pained. "I fucked up, all right? I let my guard down, trusted the wrong people, and now they're trying to take everything I've worked for."

"Fuck," Ciarán swears under his breath, his fingers digging into his temples. His controlled demeanor is starting to crack, revealing the worry that he's been trying to hide.

"Can we even trust you?" I challenge Caden, my voice wavering with hurt and betrayal.

"Look, Cathal, I know I've been a little shit at times," he admits, his gaze never leaving mine. "But when it comes down to it, we're still family. I wouldn't come to you unless I had any other choice. Gannons together, always, right?"

"Fuck right off with that shite," I snarl, hearing those words tumble from his lips is like a punch to the gut. It was our dad's favorite saying and I know I'm not the only one who thinks Caden got off lighter than me and Ciarán when it came to our asshole father.

However, I know he's right—we are family, and that bond runs deep. As dangerous as this situation may be, there's no way we can turn our backs on him now.

"Fine," Ciarán finally says, his voice steady and resolute. "Let's figure out what we need to do."

Caden nods in agreement, the tension in his body dropping a fraction.

Forcing myself to focus on the task at hand instead of dwelling on the past, I clench my fists.

"First things first," I interject, trying to keep my anger in check. "We need to find out who's behind this coup and what their game plan is. Inside job?"

“Yeah, and I already fucking know,” Caden grits, pulling out his phone. He quickly scrolls through it before showing us a list of names. “These are the fuckers trying to take over my territory.”

“Any idea how they plan on doing it?” Ciarán asks, scanning the list with a furrowed brow.

“Rumors are flying about an assassination attempt,” Caden reveals, glancing around nervously. “But I don’t know when or where it’ll happen.”

“Shit,” I mutter, realizing the gravity of the situation. “So you come here where Summer is to lead them directly to us?”

“Not intentionally to drag Summer into this,” he says, his eyes softening as he says her name.

It makes me want to roll mine. He’s as lost to her as we are.

“Then we need to beef up security and lie low until we have more information,” Ciarán suggests, looking like his mind already racing with strategies.

“Right,” I agree, feeling a renewed determination to stand by my brothers. “We’ve got your back, Caden. We’ll figure this shit out, but you need to stay here, turn your phone off and lie low.”

He nods in agreement, his expression solemn as he realizes he has to play by our rules now. Ciarán is the strategist and I’m a born killer. Together, we’ll handle any threat. I just don’t like to think how far gone Caden is if he’s gotten himself into this mess.

“Caden, can you do us a favor and actually stick to this shit?” I ask, trying to keep my voice steady. “Summer is the most important thing in our life and if you’ve done or do anything to put her in harm’s way, I’ll slice your cock off and ram it down your throat to pull out of your ass. Do I make myself perfectly clear?”

“Of course,” he nods, seeming to have shaken off the shock of the news, his usual cocky attitude back in place. “She will be safe here, and I won’t leave her alone.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of,” Ciarán mutters, sharing my thought. I’m not even sure where he stands on Caden being with Summer. We’ve both avoided discussing it, hoping it would never come up. But it seems Caden isn’t going anywhere now. For all the mistrust of the past, I believe he is in danger, and he’s scared, even if he won’t admit it. I can see it in his eyes. Those puppy dog eyes that have swayed practically everyone he has ever come across into fawning all over him, Summer included.

“We’re here for you, man, but if you touch her without her consent, you are dead.”

“Who said anything about touching?” he asks, but I can see it written all over his face. He wants to fuck her. It’s obvious.

“Go and lie down in the guest room,” Ciarán mutters. “You look like shit.”

Caden nods, not arguing for once, and slips off.

“Why did you do that? You know Summer will be all over him in a matter of seconds.”

He sighs. “Yeah, I know. But we need to talk.”

“You don’t believe him?”

“No, trouble is, I do. I also know he wants Summer. So what do we do about that?”

Shrugging, I sit back with a scowl. “What can we do?”

“Tell him hands off.”

“Shouldn’t we ask her?”

He growls. “When did you get all enlightened, asshole?”

Giving him a smug smile, I say, “When she fell in love with my sorry ass and showed me that my life wasn’t just about cruelty and darkness. That there is some light to it as well.”

“Fucking hell, you sap. Get over yourself and give me my evil brother back.”

“Not sure he exists anymore.”

“Not even if Summer is in danger?”

“Oh, then all bets are off.”

“So he lurks.”

“He lurks, but I wanna be better.” Shrugging again, I feel like an idiot admitting all of this, but it’s how I feel.

My phone beeps, and I look at it, sitting upright and glaring at Ciarán. “Found that little punk if you want in?”

“Which punk?”

“The one who called Summer a slut.”

“Oh, ouch, yeah, figured that would wind you up like nothing else.”

Rising, I pocket my phone. “Coming?”

“Do you even have to ask?”

We share a menacing smile and shouting to Summer that we’ll be back shortly and to stay indoors with Caden of all fucking people, we leave our woman with the one man who will sweep her out from under us to get between her legs.

Weirdly, I find that I hope he does.

SUMMER

The afternoon sun struggles to find its way into the room through the heavy drapes, pulled tightly closed.

Caden and I are sitting awkwardly on the couch together after the guys left us alone to go and do whatever business came up suddenly. The not-so-safehouse apartment is smaller than the previous one, but it feels cozy and secure. We're tucked away from the dangers that lurk outside these walls, if only for a brief moment, or until my dad decides to swing by again.

"You know," Caden drawls, his thick Irish accent weaving its way through every syllable, "I never thought I'd see the day when those two would leave us all alone."

Lowering my gaze, I shift my body slightly to face him. "Guess that means they trust you."

"They shouldn't," he replies, his tone low and sexy.

I feel my face heating up at his words and I swallow hard, trying to will the blush away. Caden smirks at my reaction before moving closer to me, his hand reaching out to brush a strand of hair behind my ear. My heart pounds in my chest as his fingertips graze my skin.

"What's wrong, Summer? Cat got your tongue?" he teases, his voice low and husky.

I shake my head, unable to find the words to respond. Instead, I lean into him, needing to be closer to him.

Caden runs his fingers down the side of my neck, causing me to shiver in response. He leans forward and I can feel his warm breath against my cheek as he whispers in my ear.

“You know you’re not making this easy for me,” he says, his voice thick with desire.

I turn towards him, meeting his gaze and finding nothing but sincerity in his eyes. “What do you mean?”

Caden reaches out and takes my hand in his, lacing our fingers together. “I mean I want you, Summer. And it’s driving me crazy being this close to you and not being able to have you.”

My heart skips a beat at his words, and I feel a surge of desire deep within me. “That’s a conversation you need to have with your brothers.”

“Don’t you get a say?”

Blinking, I take that in. “Yes, obviously, but I would never do anything to hurt them.”

“Noted.” He lets go of my hands and sighs.

“Can we talk?”

“About what?”

“You, me, I don’t know, whatever.”

“You want to get to know me?”

“Is that okay?”

He grins. “Sure, I’m an open book.”

“Unlike your brothers then.”

He snorts. “Brooding assholes. What do you want to know?”

“I know about your childhood, your shared childhood, from what Ciarán and Cathal have mentioned.”

“Figured. And?”

“And I want you to know that I’m here for you if you want to talk.”

“Yeah, I get that. I honestly don’t have much to say. I mean, growing up, it felt like I was constantly walking on eggshells, trying not to set my dad off. And with my mom gone, there was no one to protect me or my brothers. We had to rely on each other to survive.”

“It sounds awful, and I can relate. Not to all of it, but I was raised by my aunt, and she was cruel and heartless.”

“I’m sorry to hear that, angel. You deserve so much better than some old bitch being a dick to you.”

His words are blunt, and they make me giggle despite myself. “Thanks. No one has ever put it quite that way, and I appreciate you for it.”

“Well, life dealt us a shitty hand, but I made the best of it,” he continues, matter of fact. “I did what I had to do to survive, and it paid off.”

“How do you mean?”

“I turned the tables and made it into a game. I went all in and gave those who paid for us the time of their lives. It was easy. I love sex, always have, still do.”

“Jesus, Caden,” I mutter, eyes wide as he reveals this to me.

“Yeah, it sounds crass and fucked up, but I was raised to be fucked up. Why not go all in? Ciarán and Cathal were different. They took it all as punishment. I chose the brighter side of life.”

“But you still ended up in the mafia. So not that bright,” I point out.

“Well, you got me there. It was just what I knew how to do.”

“You’re so strong, Caden. You’ve been through so much, and yet you still manage to be this incredibly optimistic person. It’s weird. You’re the exact opposite of your brothers.”

He huffs out a self-deprecating laugh. “I don’t know about incredibly optimistic, love. Just a realist, doin’ my best, same as anyone else.”

“Your best is more than enough,” I assure him, locking my gaze with his. “I just want you to know that I’m here for you too, Caden. Whatever you need, whenever you need it.”

“Thanks, angel,” he says, his eyes softening as they meet mine. “That means the world to me.”

We sit there for a moment, his heart laid bare, drawing strength from our mutual understanding. The darkness of our pasts may cast long shadows, but in this quiet moment, we find solace in each other’s company.

“I grew up thinking my parents were dead,” I blurt out. “Turns out they are alive and just abandoned me.”

“Oh, whoa. That’s harsh. I’m sorry.”

Shrugging, I don’t feel like I can make too big a deal out of this. I mean, I can’t tell him about my parents working undercover to bring down the mafia in this city. He will tell Ciarán and Cathal and they will kill my parents. I can’t let any of that happen. But it begs the question of *what* I’m going to do about it.

Caden’s grip returns on my hand, his knuckles turning white. His eyes flash with a fierce determination, and I know he’s about to reveal something significant. “You know, Summer,” he begins, his voice low and steady, “I’ve learned that life doesn’t give a fuck about fairness. But I refuse to let the shit that happened to me define who I am.”

“Go on,” I encourage him, my curiosity piqued.

“My brothers and I, we had a choice: become victims or fighters.” He pauses, swallowing hard. “I chose to fight. We all turned our pain into power. We all used it to get something back from this life.”

My heart swells with admiration as I watch Caden’s raw emotions play across his face. Glimmers of vulnerability peek through his tough exterior, only enhancing the strength I see in him. “I can’t believe how resilient you all are,” I breathe. “Most people would have given up, but not you three.”

He smirks, a spark of mischief dancing in his blue eyes. “Well, love, the Gannons have always been stubborn bastards.

Giving up just isn't in our nature."

"Good," I say with a smile. "I wouldn't want it any other way."

"Me neither," he agrees, his gaze holding mine captive. "But enough about the past. Let's focus on the present and the future."

As we sit there, our hands still entwined, I marvel at the man before me. Despite all the darkness he and his brothers have faced, they have all emerged stronger and more determined than ever. And as I look into Caden's eyes, I know without a doubt that together, we'll conquer whatever shit is thrown at us, because in this cruel, unforgiving world, we've found something rare and precious: a connection forged in the fires of adversity, tempered by love, and destined to endure.

Caden's gaze softens as he looks at me, and I can see his heart swelling with affection. "I'm falling for you, angel."

My breath catches in my throat, and my heart pounds wildly. As I search for the right words to respond, Caden places his hand on my cheek, and the warmth of his touch sends a thrill down my spine.

His gaze is open and earnest. "Are you falling for me?"

"Yes," I reply honestly. "And I'm scared shitless because I have no idea what that means for us. I don't know if Ciarán and Cathal will approve."

"Neither do I, angel," Caden confesses, his fingers gently brushing my hair behind my ear. "But I'm willing to face my brothers if it means having a chance with you."

The vulnerability in his voice tugs at my heartstrings, and I lean into his touch.

As his lips brush against mine, tender and passionate, I feel a connection that I've had twice before. It's as if our souls are intertwining, finding solace and warmth in each other's embrace. All my fears and doubts fade away, leaving only the raw emotions pulsing between us.

Our kiss deepens, the intensity of our connection making my head spin. Caden's arms encircle me, pulling me closer as our bodies press together in a heated embrace. I can feel his heart pounding, echoing the frantic beat of my own. It's as if we're two pieces of a puzzle that have found their match, fitting perfectly into one another.

"Summer," he murmurs against my lips, his voice husky and filled with longing.

"God, Caden," I gasp, overwhelmed by the sensations coursing through me. My hands find their way to his broad shoulders, fingers digging into the firm muscles beneath his shirt. His warmth envelops me, and I find myself drowning in the desire that sparks between us.

Suddenly, Caden pulls back, his forehead resting against mine as our breaths mingle in ragged gasps. Our eyes lock, emotions swirling through their depths like whirlpools. In this moment, the world around us ceases to exist, leaving only the raw vulnerability that lies at the heart of our connection.

"Fuck, Summer," Caden whispers, the corners of his mouth lifting in a wry smile. "I've never felt anything like this before."

The electricity between us crackles and hums, a tangible force that threatens to devour us. The promise of a future filled with passion and danger hovers in the air like a dark cloud, beckoning us to dive headfirst into its murky depths.

"Summer," Caden whispers, his intense gaze piercing through me. "Do you feel it too?"

I nod, unable to find my voice, lost in the depths of his blue eyes.

"Fuck, I can't wait to see where this goes," Caden grins, the excitement in his voice mirroring my own. "But I'm not taking this any further until those two have their say." He pulls away, and I feel lost, but he is right. This is wrong unless we have Ciarán's and Cathal's consent. I can only hope that they give it to us because, without him, I'm always going to know a piece of my puzzle is missing.

CIARÁN

The cacophony of laughter, chatter, and footsteps fills my ears as I step into the department store. My senses are alert as I blend in with the bustling crowd of shoppers. The smell of perfume mixed with the distant aroma of coffee from the café nearby hangs heavy in the air. My gaze skims the scene around me.

Slipping past a group of giddy teenagers, dodging their swinging shopping bags and the sharp elbows they thrust out in their excitement, I scan the faces of the employees and customers alike. Gary is here after taking several days off, probably hoping we'd forget about him. No such luck for Gazza. We're determined to find him and teach him a lesson for the way he's treated Summer.

"Gotcha, you prick," I whisper when I spot him on the other side of the store.

He's chatting with a coworker, a smug grin on his face as he gestures animatedly. I can almost hear his obnoxious voice boasting about something or other.

Man, I fucking hate him.

Time to show this fucker what happens when you mess with our woman.

I make my way through the throngs of people, my every movement calculated and deliberate. Closing the distance between Gary and me, my rage grows with every step. My hand slips into my jacket pocket, fingers wrapping around the cool metal of the knife I brought for this confrontation.

“Gary,” I say, my voice low and menacing as I grab his arm, spinning him away from his coworker who knows what’s good for her, and scurries off. His eyes widen in shock, but before he can react, I press the blade against his side. “We need to talk.”

“Wh-what do you want?” he stammers, sweat beading on his forehead as he tries to pull away from my grip. But I’m relentless, dragging him through the store to the back corridors, past storerooms, and break rooms until we reach the exit that leads to a narrow alleyway.

I shove him out into the alley, where Cathal emerges from the shadows, his imposing presence causing Gary to flinch. The fear in Gary’s eyes pleases me; he deserves to know what it feels like to be intimidated, just like how he made Summer feel.

“Please, I didn’t mean any harm,” Gary whimpers, desperation lacing his voice. But his pleas fall on deaf ears as I watch Cathal’s anger rise. “It was just a game, that’s all.”

“Didn’t mean any harm? You think we’re fucking stupid? You don’t get to hurt our girl and walk away, you piece of shit.”

As I hold him in place, Cathal takes a step forward, his fists clenched and ready for action. Gary’s eyes dart between the two of us, realizing the gravity of his situation.

“Please, I-I’m sorry,” he stammers, but it’s too late for apologies. We’re here to make sure he never dares to cross paths with Summer ever again.

“Sorry doesn’t cut it.”

“You’re a pathetic excuse for a man,” Cathal hisses, his voice like ice as he circles the trembling figure. “You think it’s okay to treat Summer like she’s worth nothing? To demean her and break her spirit?”

“Please, I didn’t mean to hurt her,” Gary stutters, fear twisting his face into a pitiful mask.

My heart races and my fists clench, ready to unleash my fury on this scumbag. Cathal’s eyes flare with anger, a storm

brewing just beneath the surface, and for one split second, I see our father in him. Cruel, calculated, and about to inflict some serious damage.

“Didn’t mean to? Every action has consequences, Gary. And now you’re going to feel the weight of yours.”

Cathal’s fist flies through the air, connecting with Gary’s jaw in a satisfying crack. I can practically feel the impact reverberate through my body, and it fuels my desire to see justice done. Gary stumbles back as I let him go, gasping in pain, but Cathal doesn’t let up. Blow after blow lands on Gary’s body, each one fueled by Cathal’s protective instincts.

“Does it feel good, Gary?” Cathal taunts between punches. “To know that your actions have led you here? That you’ve made an enemy out of the Gannon family?”

“Stop—please!” Gary begs, his voice choked with pain and fear.

But Cathal is relentless, his rage driving him forward.

“Did you show mercy to Summer when you called her a slut?” he growls, punching Gary again before he flicks his knife out. Leaning down over the battered man on the alley floor, he smirks. “You think you’re so fucking pretty, don’t you? You think that face will get you anyone you want to do whatever the fuck you like with them? Well, not anymore.”

I grimace as Cathal swipes the blade over Gary’s cheek, cutting him deep, scaring him for life as he slashes at the other side.

“Not so fucking pretty now, are you, fucking cunt?” Cathal kicks him and steps back, surveying the damage inflicted on Gary’s battered body. “Remember this moment, Gary. Remember what happens when you mess with our family.”

Gary whimpers in response, unable to form words amidst the onslaught.

A twisted sense of satisfaction washes over me, but this isn’t over. I haven’t had my say yet.

“Listen closely, you fucking coward,” I snarl, grabbing him by the collar and pulling him to his feet. “You ever come near our woman again, or so much as breathe her name, and I’ll make sure this beating feels like a goddamn dream compared to what I’ll do to you.”

“Please,” Gary whimpers, his voice trembling with fear. “I-I won’t... I swear.”

“Good,” I growl, releasing him with a shove. He stumbles back, barely managing to stay upright.

“Please... no more,” Gary whimpers, attempting to shield his battered body with trembling hands, but it’s a waste of breath.

Each blow is swift and brutal, fueled by my protective instincts and love for Summer. Gary crumples again under the onslaught, but I don’t relent until I’m certain he won’t get up anytime soon.

“Let’s go,” I say through gritted teeth, turning away from Gary’s broken, bloodied form. Cathal nods, and together we leave the alley behind, silent until we approach the apartment.

“Do you think we’ll find them shagging?” Cathal asks absently.

Snorting, I shake my head. “That little prick knows better than that. I have no doubt he told her he wants her, but he’ll wait to discuss it with us first. He knows how to play the fucking game.”

Grunting as we return to the apartment, he shoves the front door open.

We enter the living room to find Summer and Caden cozy on the couch, their heads bent close together as they speak in hushed tones.

“Are we interrupting?” I grit out, not even the slightest bit surprised or angry. I’ve decided I want this. I want Caden back in the circle, and if Summer will have him, he can be hers. I’m done fighting with my family when we are the only fuckers we’ve got. It’s time to join forces and show the fucking underworld the Gannons are a force to be reckoned with.

“Of course not!” Summer exclaims, her eyes lighting up when she sees us. “Whoa, what happened?” she adds, leaping up, concern on her face.

“Let’s just say Gary’s bad life choices caught up with him.”

“Oh,” she says, pulling a face. “Hope you made it hurt.”

“He won’t be able to look himself in the mirror anytime soon,” Cathal states, but leaves it at that. “But never mind that asshole. We have something else we want to say,” he adds, his voice low and steady, a stark contrast to his recent outburst. “We’ve been talking, and we want you to know that if you want to be with Caden as well…” His words trail off as he takes a moment to find the right words.

“We’re okay with it,” I finish for him, my eyes never leaving Summer’s face. Her happiness is all that matters to me, and I can tell Cathal shares the sentiment.

Her eyes widen in surprise, a hint of vulnerability flickering in their depths. “You really mean that?” she asks hesitantly, searching our faces for any sign of insincerity.

“*If* you want him, obviously,” I reply without hesitation, meeting her gaze head-on. “You’re our world, Summer, and if being with Caden too makes you happy, then we’re all for it.”

“Wow, okay, I wasn’t expecting that,” Summer whispers, her voice choked with emotion.

“I’m shocked,” Caden interjects, the playfulness returning to his voice. “And here I thought I was the outcast.”

“You made yourself the outcast,” Cathal growls, but there is no menace.

“Let’s not do this right now,” I say. “Just know you have our blessing to do whatever it is you want to do. Come here,” I murmur, extending my arms to her. She gratefully accepts my embrace, pressing herself against me as I wrap her in a tight hug.

“Thank you,” she murmurs. “For everything.”

“Anything for you, Tinks,” I whisper back, planting a tender kiss on her forehead. “Anything at all.”

CATHAL

C iarán drags Summer into the bedroom, and I follow, knowing that I can't resist her. Especially now after showing that Gary dick he messed with the wrong assholes.

They've already started tearing at each other's clothes. Summer's dress lies discarded on the floor, and she's pressed against Ciarán, half-naked and panting with desire.

"Fuck, Ciarán," she moans as his hands roam over her body, gripping her ass and pulling her closer. "I need you inside me."

"You want me, Tinks?" he asks, his voice strained with lust.

"Please," she begs, her eyes pleading.

"Christ, I can't resist you." With that, Ciarán unzips his pants and positions himself at her pussy. He thrusts into her without further hesitation, eliciting a gasp from both of them.

"Shit, Cathal," Summer whispers, noticing my presence in the room. "Don't just stand there."

Undoing my belt with a smile, I step out of my pants. As Ciarán continues to fuck her, I grab the lube from the nightstand and fall in behind Summer, pressing my dick against her ass.

"Is this okay?" I ask, seeking consent before going any further.

"God, yes," she breathes out, nodding her head vigorously.

With that confirmation, I lube up my fingers and slide them into her tight, welcoming ass, groaning at the sensation. Thrusting deeply, stretching her wide, preparing her for the cock invasion I'm desperate for.

"Please," she pants. "Now."

Removing my fingers, I grab my stiff cock and guide it into her ass with a low growl.

We move together, filling her completely as we share her between us, our rhythm syncing seamlessly.

The room is filled with the sounds of pleasure, as Summer's moans mingle with Ciarán's and my own heavy breathing. The sight of her body writhing between us, flushed and sweaty, stiffens my dick even more.

"Fuck, you two feel amazing," she gasps, arching her back to meet our thrusts. I glance over at the door, catching sight of Caden lingering in the shadows, watching the scene unfold. His eyes are dark, clouded with lust, as he takes in his triplet brothers sharing a woman.

"There's a sight you don't see every day," he murmurs. "Room for one more?"

"Summer?" I ask, wanting to ensure she's comfortable with the idea.

Her eyes lock onto Caden's as he steps forward, already unbuttoning his shirt. "You up for it? Your side..."

"I'll live," Caden mutters, quickly shedding his clothes before joining us. He leans over to kiss her while she is impaled on our cocks and her moan of lust nearly sends me over the edge.

The agony of having my cock denied release is unbearable, but we are both going to drag it out as long as possible.

"Fuck, Summerbell, your ass feels so good," I groan, driving myself into her deep with rapid thrusts. "You want me to come, beautiful?"

"Yes!"

With that, I pull out slightly and then bury myself deep inside her ass again. My release is imminent, and I succumb to the hyper-aroused state that being with all three of them brings me into. Fucking Summer together has pushed every single one of my buttons all at once as Ciarán hammers into her and Caden sucks her tongue into his mouth.

“Shit, yes,” she cries out, throwing her head back.

Her hoarse scream of pleasure pulls mine out of my throat, thrusting violently into her as I explode, releasing my cum into her ass until it spills back out.

“Jesus!” Ciarán roars and unloads in her pussy at the same time she climaxes all over him.

We let her go, settling her on the bed with cum dripping out of her holes. She is gorgeous.

“How do you want to do this?” she asks Caden.

“Sweet motherfucker,” Caden whispers reverently. “You’re a fucking goddess.”

She giggles and looks at him with a lustful look that reassures me we’re doing the right thing here.

Caden moves next to her on the bed, his lips attacking hers like a man on a mission.

His hands move to her breasts, pulling at her nipples and massaging them hard as she grips his hair with a needy whimper. He moves down her body, pulling her close to him and taking a hard nipple into his mouth. She arches into him with a moan, her expression torn between pleasure and pain.

“I love how you can take their cocks,” he murmurs against her skin. “Like they’re not even big enough for you.”

“They’re not,” she breathes out, her eyes glassy as she waits in anticipation for where he will touch her next. “I want you, Caden.”

“You want my dick in your pussy?” he asks, his lips against her ear as he settles himself. “You want me inside you, all the way to my balls?”

Her breathing comes in short pants as he thrusts into her, hard and deep.

Caden lifts himself over her, his cock still pulsing hard in her pussy as he meets her parted lips hungrily with his own. His hand moves down, and I watch as he slips a finger into Summer's tight ass. Her eyes roll back into her head as she arches with a keening cry of pleasure.

"Fuck, angel," he groans and hisses in a breath as the exertion is too much for him.

"You're going to pull your side badly," I point out. "Change positions. Let her do the work."

He nods and pulls out of her, laying back on the bed while she straddles him.

She lowers herself onto his hard cock and takes him as deep into her pussy as she can. She fucks him hard. Steadying herself with her hands on his chest. Grabbing her hips, he can't help himself and thrusts up into her deeply as she cries out his name.

"Fuck, your pussy feels so good, angel. I'm going to come," he groans.

"Come for me, baby."

Her words have their desired effect on him, and it hardens my cock all over again. Disappearing quickly to the bathroom as they crash over into an orgasm, I wash up, needing to dive into her pussy as soon as I'm able.

"Get on your hands and knees, love," I instruct her when I return, my voice husky with desire. She obeys without hesitation, presenting herself to me like a goddess of carnal pleasure.

Moving closer, I press the slick tip against her tight pussy, feeling her tremble with anticipation. Slowly, I push into her, savoring every second.

"Jesus Christ," I gasp, struggling to keep my composure.

Summer whimpers, overwhelmed by the sensations coursing through her body.

Ciarán kneels in front of her, offering his erect cock to her eager mouth. She takes him in without hesitation, her tongue swirling around the sensitive head.

We pump in unison, our combined efforts driving Summer wild with pleasure as Caden watches, breathing heavily, the wound on his side bleeding through the bandage.

“Tinks, are you ready for us to come inside you?” Ciarán asks, his control slipping as her mouth works its magic on him.

Together, we push ourselves to the brink, our bodies straining with effort until, finally, we shatter. Waves of ecstasy crash over us, leaving us breathless and spent.

“Fuck, that was...” I trail off, panting as I pull out of Summer’s dripping pussy.

“Intense,” Ciarán finishes for me.

We collapse in a heap, tangled together, basking in the aftermath of our shared passion.

“Fuck,” Caden murmurs, breaking the silence. “I never knew it could be this good.”

“Neither did I,” Ciarán admits, his voice soft and vulnerable. Something about the intimacy of this moment feels almost sacred.

“Summer, you’re incredible,” I murmur, pressing a tender kiss to her forehead. “What you’ve done here is...we owe you our thanks.”

She smiles sleepily, her eyes closing. “Fix Caden up, please. Again.”

We share a quiet laugh, and for a fleeting moment, everything seems perfect as my two brothers and I climb off the bed, leaving our woman to sleep off her exhaustion so we can pound her again later.

Pulling our clothes on loosely, we leave, shutting the door quietly behind us. Caden hobbles to the sofa and collapses, grunting with the effort. Trust him to hurt himself all for a fuck.

A sudden knock at the door shatters the fragile peace we've built.

"Who the fuck is that?" Ciarán asks, annoyance clear in his voice as he glares at the front door.

Crossing over to it, I stare at the screen with narrowed eyes. Whoever it is, knows there is a camera there and knows how to dodge it.

Glancing over my shoulder, I nod once and Ciarán picks up his weapon, handing one to Caden, still laid out on the couch.

I swing the door open, revealing the last person any of us ever expected to see standing on our doorstep.

"Fuck. Off," I grit out as the man lifts his head with a wicked smile.

"Hello, boys," our supposedly dead father says, his cold eyes boring into me. "Did you miss me?"

The final book in the Three Kings Series is [Fallen King](#) - Coming October 2023.

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SE Traynor is the pen name for USA Today Bestselling Author, Eve Newton.

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