



USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

# CAROLE MORTIMER



## KINGSTON'S OBSESSION

Kingston Security Book 6

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# KINGSTON'S OBSESSION

Kingston Security Book 6

**CAROLE  
MORTIMER**

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# DEDICATION

*My Family,  
As always.*

# WARNING

There is some violence on and off the page in this book.

# CHAPTER ONE

---

“No!”

It seemed to Brianna as if, having made that emphatic statement, she literally *felt* it as all the warm air left her small cottage, set beside the rugged coastline in the rolling hills of Southern Ireland, to be replaced by a frigid coldness.

Possibly because it had?

“What did you just say to me?” The iciness of her brother Connor’s voice confirmed as much.

No one, literally no one, said no to Connor. Not if they wanted to live.

But this was too important, affected Brianna’s life far too much, for her to simply accept her fate without protest. Not that defying Connor had ever gotten her anywhere in the past. Not when it didn’t involve his fists, at least.

He was Brianna’s half brother really, Connor having been ten years old and his brother Liam eight when their widowed father, Aiden Doyle, had taken Cora McBride as his second wife. Brianna had been born a year later.

The half siblings’ coloring was completely different.

Connor and Liam were what was called black Irish, with dark hair and, in Connor’s case, cold and glittering black eyes. Liam’s eyes, as he stood in front of the cottage door—as if blocking her from escaping—were equally as dark, but devoid of all the warmth of emotion he’d had as a child as he avoided her gaze and instead stared at the wall behind her.

Brianna's below-shoulder-length and gently wavy hair was the same color as her mother's had been, a mixture of red and gold, with a touch of cinnamon. Her eyes, surrounded by long dark auburn lashes, were the color of soft green moss. She had a sprinkling of freckles across her creamy cheeks.

No one looking at the three of them would ever think they were related. Which was something Brianna had always been grateful for.

From the first, Connor had resented his father remarrying only a year after Connor's own mother had died. It had taken no effort at all on his part to include Brianna, his baby half sister, in that resentment. Liam had reacted less viscerally, often taking the time to play with her if Connor wasn't there to see him. If he was, he tended to taunt Liam with being a sissy for playing with a girl. No young boy wanted to be called that.

Cora had done her best to protect Brianna from the worst of Connor's violent outbursts. But with her husband spending most of his time in London working as an underboss for the Irish Mob there, leaving Cora and the children safely at home in Southern Ireland, he hadn't always been at home to protect them from his own son.

Brianna had been twelve when her mother died of cancer. Afterward, with both his sons now fully grown, their father had taken them to London with him and done what he could to keep his daughter living in Ireland, away from the dangerous life he was forced to lead as a member of the hierarchy of the London Irish Mob. The most important of those things had been to arrange for Brianna to live in Dublin with his sister, her Aunt Bridget. Bridget had never married and chose to distance herself from the mob. Which wasn't to say she didn't know everything that happened within the different criminal factions, or how those events might affect her and Brianna.

Much as Brianna had enjoyed Dublin and appreciated Bridget looking out for her, when her father died shortly after her seventeenth birthday she'd been determined to move away from Dublin as soon as she was eighteen. Her father's death had meant that Connor, as the eldest son, had stepped up into his role within the Irish Mob.



Brianna used the money she inherited from her mother on her eighteen birthday to start over. She'd officially changed her name to her mother's maiden name of McBride, and then purchased this cottage situated along the remote coast of Southern Ireland, under that same name. Distancing herself, literally and figuratively, she'd thought, from everything to do with the Doyle family.

She should have known better.

Brianna drew in a deep breath in an attempt to center and settle her emotions before once again answering Connor. Because she knew that once she'd repeated her refusal, Connor's retribution would rain down on her. Probably with his fists.

Her eldest half brother's penchant for violence had been the torment of her childhood.

Three years ago, Connor hadn't hesitated to prove himself to the leader of the Irish Mob so that he could take Aiden's place.

Brianna gave a shudder, knowing that "proving himself" had meant Connor had to have killed at least once to protect the Family. She didn't doubt he had enjoyed every moment of carrying out that killing!

She had literally shaken in her shoes when her aunt telephoned her six months ago and told her that, after eliminating the boss, Connor had now taken over as head of the Irish Mob in England's capital and made Liam his second.

That coup had apparently been a bloodbath, with another half a dozen senior men, still loyal to the previous Irish boss, also having been shot and killed.

Not that the London authorities knew all those details. They only knew that seven of the top members of the Irish Mob had mysteriously disappeared. Nor had their bodies ever been found. Nor would they be. Brianna knew that they kept a pig farm for just that purpose, before burning and pulverizing the bones and using them as fertilizer on the adjoining farmland.

For weeks after the coup, Brianna had lived in fear of seeing her eldest half brother again.

Too late, she now realized that, as the weeks passed and then turned into six months, she'd allowed herself to become complacent. She'd mistakenly and stupidly believed Connor's silence meant she was of no further use or interest to him.

So much so that when she heard a car arriving ten minutes ago, she'd instantly thought it was Norah from the small shop in the village, coming a day earlier than usual to make the weekly delivery of Brianna's groceries.

She'd only realized her mistake when she heard the front door of the cottage being kicked open.

She'd immediately thrown open the back door, ready to run, but instead of making her escape she'd found two men already standing guard outside, preventing her from leaving. She had decided not to give them the satisfaction of dragging her through to the sitting room, and instead walked into that room unaccompanied.

"How did you find me?" She knew her Aunt Bridget wouldn't have told them where she was. Bridget didn't have a liking for her eldest nephew, and she could be as steely as her now-deceased brother when she needed to be. Connor's threats would have meant nothing to her.

Connor glanced at their surroundings. "I've known exactly where you were since the moment you bought this cottage under Cora's maiden name."

Connor had known where she was *for the past two years?*

"How?"

He eyed her pityingly. "Nothing happens in my family that I don't know about. Unfortunately, that family includes you," he derided.

Brianna no longer felt in the least safe.

As the now smugly smiling Connor no doubt intended she shouldn't.

"If I hadn't known then, I would have made it my business to find out after the book you wrote and published as B. C. McBride caused such a bloody fuss."

Brianna felt the color leach from her cheeks. “What book?”

Connor gave her a scathing glance. “I know it was you, Brianna.”

She eyed him pityingly. “Are you saying you actually read a book?” As far as she was aware, despite her mother’s best efforts, Connor was mostly illiterate, having played truant from school more often than he’d attended it.

“No, I haven’t read that fecking shite.”

“I have,” Liam put in softly. “But I didn’t share that knowledge with anyone else,” he added when Brianna gave him a reproachful glance.

“I told you, I have my own way of finding out what I need to know,” Connor said, dismissing them both. “Now stop changing the subject and accept you broke the rules when you wrote about your knowledge of the inner workings of the Irish Mob.”

She swallowed hard. “I don’t know what—” She broke off when the back of Connor’s hand made painful contact with her cheek. “You bastard!” She pressed her palm against the burning flesh as she glared at him.

“As if I haven’t heard that before.” Connor laughed, and so did his men.

Brianna continued to gaze at him, sure the hate she felt for him must be glittering in her eyes. “It’s a fictional book.” She gave up trying to pretend she hadn’t been the author. “It bears no resemblance to anyone actually in the Irish Mob, living or dead.” But every word she’d written had been done with Brianna’s own blood, sweat, and tears, along with that of both her parents.

She’d had to do something once she moved to the cottage, knowing her inheritance wouldn’t last forever.

Her decision to totally distance herself from the Doyle family, both physically and by name, meant she’d been unable to attend university for fear Connor would find her, so she wasn’t qualified to do very much. But after spending a few months alone in the cottage, so far away from any other inhabitants,

she'd known she had to do something with her time or go quietly insane.

She'd always loved to write stories in her head and in a little notebook she'd liked to carry around with her. She had even taken an evening course on fiction writing her last year in school.

*Write what you know*, her tutor had told her.

Which was exactly what Brianna had done. Her knowledge of the Irish Mob became the basis behind the thriller that had been snatched up by a publisher eighteen months ago. The book had been published six months ago.

She'd no idea it would become a number one bestseller. She'd even won awards for it, anonymously, of course. Because she'd believed keeping her identity as the author was far more important than personally accepting the accolades of reviewers and readers alike.

She gave a brief glance at her laptop sitting on the table beside the window looking out over the sea, where the sequel was already partly written.

Connor's humor faded as quickly as it had appeared. "You broke the rules," he repeated. "Now you're going to pay the price for doing that."

Brianna inwardly cringed at the deceptive mildness of Connor's tone. A mildness that was totally in contradiction to the glittering malice she could see in his eyes. A nerve also pulsed in the tightness of his jaw, and his hands were clenched into fists at his sides. As if he was barely containing that violent temper Brianna was unfortunately all too familiar with and her throbbing cheek attested to.

Outwardly she lifted her chin, hoping her inner turmoil wasn't obvious. The scornful expression in Connor's eyes said she hadn't been completely successful in that endeavor. "I said no," she nevertheless repeated defiantly.

Connor stilled. "She said it again," he echoed without any inflection in his tone.

She gave a firm shake of her head. “To be perfectly clear, I have no intention of accompanying you and Liam back to London. Nor will I let you marry me off to a member of some equally violent criminal faction in order to form an unholy alliance between the two of you.” She inwardly steeled herself for the reaction she knew was coming.

“You’re sure about that?” Connor growled.

“Yes.”

“Last chance,” he warned.

“I won’t do it—” Brianna didn’t get to finish that sentence.

Instead, she cried out as this time, the back of one of Connor’s hands hit her so hard across the side of her face, it actually knocked her to the floor.

The pain was excruciating, and she instantly felt the flood of the metallic taste of blood in her mouth from where her teeth had cut into the inside of her cheek.

“Leave her,” Connor instructed harshly as Liam would have stepped forward to assist her back onto her feet.

Brianna felt the tears tumble hotly down her cheeks as she glared up at her eldest brother. “I won’t ever willingly agree to be married off to some dirty old man just because that alliance will give you more power.”

“He’s the same age as me,” he told her smugly.

“Is he as sick you are too?” She gasped as Connor’s boot lashed out to make vicious contact with her rib cage. The pain that ensued was far worse than what he’d inflicted to her face. Enough so that she wondered if he hadn’t broken a rib or two.

“Maybe that’s something you should ask him at your wedding when he gets out of prison next week,” Connor scorned.

“Prison?” Brianna repeated hollowly. “The man you want me to marry is currently in prison?” Her voice rose higher with each word spoken.

“Yes.”

“What’s he in for?” But she knew.

She knew!

“Murder,” Connor confirmed. “It’s an occupational hazard in our line of work,” he dismissed as easily.

Brianna already knew Connor had killed in the past. But it was something else to be told that the man Connor had picked out for her to marry was also a killer.

“Admittedly, in this case, he beat his current mistress to death. But the bitch had it coming,” Connor stated uninterestedly.

The man Connor wanted Brianna to marry had beaten his mistress to death and *she* was the one who had it coming?

Brianna swallowed before speaking. “What did she do?”

Connor’s shrug was dismissive. “Terry and his father like to share their women, but then they found out this bitch had another man on the side she was also fucking.”

This situation just got worse and worse. “What happened to him?”

Connor grinned. “He was shot in the head and now he’s sleeping with the fishes. Which, in our case, means the pig farm, but I’ve always wanted the chance to say that quote about the fishes!” he added with relish.

Brianna was well aware of her brother’s obsession with the films and books about the famous fictional Italian Mafia family that quote had come from.

Brianna didn’t belong in that world. More importantly, she didn’t *want* to belong in that world. “You said this man is going to be released from prison?”

Connor grimaced. “Junior’s lawyer now has the means to go back to court and get the case against him dropped on a technicality.”

“Does that technicality include intimidation of the judge the retrial is being put before?”

He smirked. “I didn’t ask.”

In other words, yes it did. And Connor had made arrangements for her to *marry* this man? No, he was *insisting* upon it.

“Exactly who are these two men?”

“Anthony Bart and his son Terry.”

Brianna gasped. “The family at the head of the London Mob?”

“One and the same.”

Connor wanted her to marry the son of the London Mob boss known far and wide for his viciousness and cruelty?

A son who killed his last mistress.

A father and son who liked to share their women.

Did that mean they would share Brianna too?

She gave a fierce shake of her head. “I’m not going to marry a man I’ve never met and have no wish to ever meet!”

“He’s never met you either.” Her stepbrother’s gaze traveled slowly from her toes to the top of her fiery head. “But no doubt, having been in prison for several months, Terry will enjoy fucking you for at least as long as it takes for him and his father to impregnate you and produce an heir. Then he’ll get bored with you and go on the hunt for someone else to amuse them.”

“I’m not going to be fucked by him or his father!” She winced at having used the same profanity as Connor had to describe something she had always believed should be something beautiful between one man and one woman.

She may have wished, many times, that her mother had never married Aiden, but she had never doubted that the two of them were in love with each other. Or that, despite spending months away living in London, Aiden had remained faithful to his Cora, as she had to him.

“You’ll do as you’re fecking told and marry Bart’s son, forming an alliance between the London and Irish Mobs,” Connor growled as he loomed over her, obviously ready to strike again if she continued to argue with him. “There will be no more writing books once you’re his wife either,” he added with satisfaction before turning to Liam. “Get some of the men in here to tie and gag this bitch.”

“What about my things?” Everything Brianna owned was in this cottage.

“What about them?” Connor scorned. “Leave her shite here and put her in the trunk of the car once she’s gagged and tied. I don’t want to look at her or hear from her again until we reach the airport.”

Brianna panicked at the thought of being shut in the trunk of a car. “No! Please,” she begged. “You know I don’t like enclosed spaces...” She trailed off, realizing from the sadistic smile now curving Connor’s lips that he was well aware of her phobia. “Liam?” she appealed.

Liam had never been deliberately cruel to her in the way Connor had. But nor had he ever done anything to stop his brother bullying her or anyone else Connor perceived as being weaker than him. Which, as far as Connor was concerned, was everyone. Including Liam.

The apology in Liam’s expression as he grasped her arm to assist her back onto her feet said he wasn’t going to help her this time either. “Just do as he asks, okay?” he murmured as Connor stormed out of the cottage.

“But—”

“Just do it,” Liam hissed. “You really don’t want to make him any angrier than he already is.”

She shook her head. “You never used to be like him. Never as bad as Connor. What happened to change you into this?”

“More than you’ll ever want to know,” he answered her dully before releasing her to the rough ministrations of the two men who Connor had obviously ordered into cottage.

Right now, with no help from Liam forthcoming, Brianna knew it was wise not to try to balk against what was happening to her. There was no point when she was outnumbered eight to one, her ribs were bruised and possibly broken, and her cheek was swelling more with every passing second.

Surely there would be an opportunity—there had better be!—for her to make her escape somewhere between leaving Ireland



and reaching London?

## CHAPTER TWO

---

“Get a move on!”

Felix released a slow and measured breath. No point in letting the idiot behind him know how angry he was right now at having the barrel of a gun poking him intermittently in the back to make him go faster down the hallway of this London mansion.

But a little warning of the consequences might make the other man think twice about repeating the action. “If you poke me again, you can expect me to disarm you and for you to have a couple of fingers or your arm broken by the time I’ve done so,” he advised mildly.

“Oh yeah?” the thug behind him scoffed, his nasal London East End accent unmistakable.

Which was understandable when this man had told him he worked for the mob boss, Anthony Bart. Felix was currently being escorted through the other man’s London mansion, presumably on his way to see Bart himself.

According to Felix’s brother Casper, who liked to keep abreast of all matters that might impinge in any way upon the lives of anyone in the Kingston family, there were currently rumbles in the underworld that the Armenians and Romanians were at war with each other so that one of them could eventually take over the other’s turf.

If they ever realized how powerful they could be together, by uniting instead of fighting each other, London would never be the same again.

He'd heard nothing about Anthony Bart since his son had been arrested for murdering his mistress.

"You and whose fucking army, Nancyboy?" the man challenged.

There it was. That complete disregard for the possibility of Felix being anything more than the financial genius in the security company owned by his family. His appearance said that's exactly what he was, with his dark hair expertly and fashionably styled, wearing a bespoke black evening suit and a tailored white shirt with black silk bow tie, along with handmade Italian shoes.

What could Felix say? He liked nice things!

The heavysset man—as the man hadn't introduced himself, Felix decided to call him Beefy—behind him, poking him in the back with a gun, couldn't have made it any clearer that he considered Felix to just be a pretty boy in an expensive suit.

Felix was far more than that.

But he'd been curious enough earlier this evening, once he realized there was no imminent danger of his actually being shot, that he'd allowed himself to be brought to this house at gunpoint rather than press the alarm button on the cell phone the two men had sloppily failed to remove from the breast pocket of Felix's jacket. A button that would alert all five of his brothers and his cousin Adam to his exact location and the fact he was in some sort of trouble and in need of their assistance. Something Felix certainly hadn't felt to be true at the time of leaving the restaurant.

He wasn't particularly worried now either, but he was rapidly running out of patience with being underestimated.

Unfortunately, for the continued safety of Beefy's fingers or arm, Felix had just noticed something odd about the door on the right of the hallway he was being escorted down.

It was wooden, like the other five doors either side of the carpeted hallway of the second floor of this London townhouse. It was painted the same bright white as the others. And yet there was something about it that niggled.

Ah, he had it now. The key was in the lock on the *outside* of the door.

Causing Felix to ask why someone would leave a key on the outside rather than the inside.

*Obviously, it was to keep whoever was in the room locked inside it.*

Felix now very much wanted to know who Bart was holding as prisoner inside his home. In fact, he considered it his civic duty to find out. "I don't need an army," he told the man behind him dismissively. "Just intelligence and guile. Two things you obviously know absolutely nothing about," he bit out as he felt another vicious poke in his back. "Don't say I didn't warn you," he gritted.

Felix moved quickly, spinning round to wrap his fingers about the other man's wrist before twisting and lifting it up hard enough behind his back that the man cried out in pain as his shoulder dislocated and he lost his grip on the gun. Felix easily caught it before it fell to the floor. He released the other man after tapping the gun to the place on the side of thug's head where he knew it would be the most effective.

As expected, the man crashed to the floor with all the grace of a large boulder.

This really was not how Felix had anticipated his night proceeding when he left his penthouse apartment earlier this evening.

He'd been happily seated at a table at one of his favorite London restaurants, in the company of the beautiful woman he'd hoped to charm into his bed by the end of the evening. He certainly hadn't expected two thugs to push their way into the restaurant before striding over to their table and telling Felix, "Mr. Bart wants to talk to you. Now."

Felix knew exactly who Mr. Bart was.

The mob boss and the members of the Kingston family who co-owned Kingston Security together had briefly been on each other's radar a couple of months ago. Hence Casper's investigation into the man. But, as far as Felix was aware, they

hadn't heard anything more from or about Bart since their own briefly overlapping situation had been resolved.

It certainly didn't explain why the crime boss had chosen to send two of his armed thugs to interrupt Felix's dinner date.

The woman sitting at the table with Felix had given a frightened squeak—he really would have expected more from the well-known actress—before pushing her chair back from the table, rising to her feet, and rushing from the room. Probably the building. Maybe even the city.

Such a disappointment.

It was also irritating. But not a complete dampener to Felix's evening, when he had still believed he would shortly be enjoying the delicious food they had already ordered.

No, the complete ruination of his evening had come when Beefy here had insisted Felix accompany him and his associate out of the restaurant if he didn't want the two men to start randomly shooting the other diners.

Which, of course, Felix was never going to let happen.

He had carefully placed his unused napkin on the tabletop before rising to his feet and making his way to where the maître d' stood near the entrance of the restaurant. He'd given the other man his apologies for having to leave early, claiming a family emergency, before paying the bill and slipping the man a very large tip. Felix didn't want there to be any problem in acquiring a table the next time he wanted to dine there.

Once they arrived at the townhouse and been allowed to pass through the security at the front gates—Felix had counted several cameras and two armed men—only Beefy had climbed out of the car with Felix before the man behind the wheel had driven away. Obviously, the two of them felt completely confident that Beefy could manage to escort Felix inside on his own.

Underestimating a foe based solely on his appearance and the way he dressed could be a bitch!

Yes, on paper, Felix looked like the least harmful of the Kingston men, his role within the family-owned company that

of financial adviser and accountant rather than having any involvement in the protection side of it. But several of his five brothers, as well as their cousin, Adam, had been trained in the military, some in Special Forces.

Felix and their youngest brother, Casper, were the exception to that, Felix's preferring to get a degree in business and finance, Casper having always had mad computer skills. Casper had honed those skills as he'd gotten older, and he was now ranked as one of the top three hackers in the world.

But just because Felix and Casper hadn't been in the military didn't mean they couldn't look after themselves and anyone else who needed their protection.

Their eldest brother, Sinclair, had made very sure of that.

The three of them had spent many grueling hours together, during which Felix and Casper had initially received too many bruises to mention. Until their abilities became such that they could kick ass as well as the rest of the family.

Which was why the man who had brought Felix into Bart's house at gunpoint was now lying unconscious on the floor, his shoulder dislocated.

Allowing Felix, gun in hand, to unlock and then push open the door that had so piqued his curiosity, he'd decided it was time to put an end to the thug's bullying tactics.

The slender young woman who now rose slowly to her feet from the bed where she was sitting, her long and gorgeous red hair shot through with cinnamon and gold, her beautiful face dominated by the dark shadows beneath her bright green eyes, was the last thing he had expected to see.

A woman who made his chest tighten, his cock engorge, and words *mine mine mine* chant in a loop inside his head!

---

Brianna stared at the tall and armed man now standing in the open doorway of the room that had been her prison for the past three days and nights. A man she knew she hadn't seen before

during her captivity. She would have remembered if she had. He was absolutely nothing like the other muscle-bound bullies Anthony Bart employed.

This man was a couple of inches over six feet tall, his dark hair expertly cut into a tousled style. The black evening suit he was wearing had obviously been tailored to fit perfectly over those wide shoulders and muscular chest, narrow waist and long legs.

His chiseled, handsome features were dominated by high cheekbones beneath piercing blue eyes. He also had full and sensuous lips easily visible against the dark and fashionable scruff covering the sharpness of his jaw.

None of which meant he couldn't also be a cold-blooded killer, she reminded herself. The gun that he held certainly seemed to imply he had come to offer her a last chance to agree to marry Terry Bart, or risk being shot and disposed of in whatever manner the Bart family chose.

She had kept herself from hysteria during the journey in the trunk of her brothers' car by going through different scenarios of how she might manage to escape once the car stopped. Connor had to get her to England before any of what he had planned for her could take place, and he'd mentioned an airport, which meant they would be flying across the Irish Sea.

Brianna had reasoned there had to be a way, when they arrived at the airport, for her to alert someone to the fact she was being taken out of Ireland under duress.

The moment the trunk opened and her eyesight had adjusted to the sudden brightness, she'd seen the small jet sitting on the tarmac of the private airport surrounded by more of Connor's men and known all her hopes of escape had been in vain. No one here was going to help her.

It hadn't stopped her from struggling as Liam tried to help her out of the trunk.

A struggle that ended abruptly when she felt a sharp prick in the side of her neck and her legs gave out beneath her. As

darkness crashed down on her, she knew she'd been injected with something to knock her out.

She hadn't woken up again—with the worst headache she'd ever had in her life—until the car they were traveling in arrived outside what Brianna now knew to be Anthony Bart's London mansion.

Until then, a part of her really hadn't believed her stepbrothers would be callous enough to go through with Connor's threats.

They had done more than that.

The two of them had stood and watched unemotionally as she was locked in this room, which Bart had informed them had once been the servants' quarters on the ground floor at the back of the house. The bars on the windows were a later addition for security reasons, apparently. Those, and the locked door, made it the perfect place to keep Brianna locked away as his reluctant houseguest.

Connor had accepted, on his own and Liam's behalf, Bart's invitation for them all to go to the older man's study to enjoy a glass or two of brandy together to finalize their deal, as the older man locked the door from the outside.

None of them had seemed in the least concerned that Brianna knew perfectly well she was Connor's side of that deal!

Which didn't mean Brianna hadn't unlocked and opened the window as far as it would go. Which wasn't anywhere near wide enough for her to escape. But she could have broken the glass if the space between the bars on the outside of the window hadn't been too narrow for her to escape through. She'd even tried to shake the bars themselves loose. To no avail, the pieces of metal seeming to go deep into the concrete above and below the window. Shouting out of the open window had only resulted in one of Bart's men entering the room and locking the actual window before taking away the key.

Once she'd calmed down enough to properly take on her surroundings, Brianna had realized that there were security cameras in two corners of the room, placed at an angle that



gave them access to the whole of the bedroom. She hadn't been tall enough, even after moving a dressing table beneath one of the cameras, before standing on it, to actually reach high enough to disable the cameras.

She breathed a sigh of relief when a look around the bathroom revealed there were no cameras in that room. At least she had the privacy to go to the toilet or take a shower, secure in the knowledge that no one was watching her.

Even so, Brianna was in no doubt that she was well and truly Anthony Bart's prisoner, and completely at his mercy. Which she seriously doubted he knew the meaning of.

The last three days and nights had been...terrifying as Brianna kept a watch on the locked door in case Bart decided to pay her a visit. With the possible intention, remembering Connor's taunts about the older man's sex life, of enjoying Brianna himself before his son was released from prison.

Quite what Brianna would have done if he'd tried to do that, she had no idea.

Luckily, the only people to unlock and open the door in the last three days had been the nameless and silent men who refused to answer any of her questions when they delivered food and water to her three times a day and, on another occasion, several changes of clothes.

Not that Brianna had eaten the food or put on any of the clothes that, having briefly glanced at the size on the label on the top garment, had obviously been bought specifically for her.

She wasn't willing to take the risk of eating the food in case it was drugged, and the fact Anthony Bart had taken one look at her and guessed her clothing sizes made her skin crawl.

She had no idea who the man in front of her was, but she didn't intend to cower in front of him either, even if he did have a gun. "Being an assassin must pay well if you can afford to go to a fashionable salon to have your hair expertly cut and styled and wear bespoke evening suits." Her top lip curled up to show her contempt for his sartorial elegance.

“You’re Irish,” he admired.

“Wow, that’s so observant of you!”

His eyes narrowed at the sarcasm in her tone. “What’s your name?”

“I’m sure you already know that.”

“No, I really don’t,” he encouraged gently.

She snorted. “My name is Brianna. What’s yours?” she challenged.

“Felix,” he provided lightly.

“Like the cat?”

“Ooh and I really haven’t heard that one before,” he returned her sarcasm before adding warmly. “You have a very pretty accent.”

Her gaze swept over him scathingly. “And yours is refined and smooth, and obviously the result of attending a private school. Pity all that fancy education didn’t stop you from becoming an asshole and an assassin!”

“I’m pretty sure that role would have suited several of my psychopath school friends.” Blue eyes glittered with humor. “But I have to admit, it’s the first time I’ve been called either of those things.”

Brianna shrugged. “Do you prefer killer or cold-blooded murderer?”

His jaw tightened. “I *prefer* to be called a financial consultant. But that’s probably because I am one.”

Her brows rose. “Mob bosses are now employing financial consultants?” she scorned. “Is that so you can keep a tally of the number of bodies accumulated and disposed of each week, month, and year?”

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Felix gave this woman full credit for having the balls to challenge the armed man who had burst into her previously locked room.

She had to know she was a prisoner in Anthony Bart's home, making it highly likely Felix could be someone the other man had sent here to kill her.

Although why Bart would want this stunningly beautiful woman dead, Felix had no idea. She looked young, possibly in her late teens or early twenties. The bones were sharp above hollow cheeks, her nose pert, with cupid's bow lips. Those features were dominated by those long-lashed and shadowed green eyes.

But it was the softness of her edible lips that Felix couldn't seem to stop his gaze returning to again and again.

There was no mistaking this young woman looked a little the worse for wear right now. Her long hair was clean, but didn't look as if it had been brushed for several days. Her clothes were creased, as if she had been sleeping in them as well as wearing them during the day, despite the fact Felix could see a pile of what looked like clean clothes sitting on the top of the dressing table.

Her face was exquisitely beautiful, her complexion pale.

Except for the fading bruise Felix could see on one of her cheeks.

Inflicted by one of Bart's men?

Whoever he was, when Felix learned his name, he was going to be a dead man.

What the fuck...?

During his thirty-six years, twenty of them being sexually active, Felix had never made a secret of the fact he enjoyed women. All women. All shapes, sizes, and colors. All nationalities. He enjoyed them all.

But he'd never experienced any touch-her-and-you-die feelings for one of them the way he now did toward the beautiful woman standing in front of him.

Or heard the words *mine mine mine* that were still repeating over and over inside his head.

## CHAPTER THREE

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Maybe this unprecedented reaction to Brianna was because four of Felix's brothers, and their cousin Adam, had recently met and since married the women they had all fallen in love with more or less on sight?

Felix didn't believe he was in love. He was pretty certain you had to know more than her name and have spoken more than a couple of dozen words to a woman for that to happen. But he was definitely in lust right now and feeling more than a little possessive over the woman who had ignited those emotions.

Those feelings became murderous as his gaze returned to that bruising on her cheek. "Who hit you?"

Her jaw tightened. "Who do you think hit me!"

"Answering a question with a question is a good tactic," he admired. "Unfortunately, it doesn't provide me with the answer I require." His eyes narrowed. "Did you acquire the bruise before or after you were brought here under duress?" He was pretty sure a locked door meant that had to be the case.

She scowled. "You must already know all there is to know about your employer's nefarious dealings."

"If you're talking about Athony Bart, I don't work for him," he assured.

"Then what are you doing here?"

"I have no idea."

She looked at him searchingly for several minutes before shaking her head. "You're weird!"

It wasn't the worst thing he'd ever been called. Arsehole and assassin probably took that prize, he acknowledged ruefully. He might never have been emotionally available to any of the women he'd been intimate with over the years, but he was charming enough that none of them had ever resorted to calling him names either.

"When did you last eat?" The fact he couldn't take his eyes off her meant he couldn't help but notice the moss-green sweater and fitted low-rider jeans Brianna was wearing were hanging a little loose on her slender frame. As if she had recently lost weight. Very recently.

She grimaced. "Four days ago, when I was last able to prepare my own food. I had a headache to end all headaches when I woke up after the last time I was drugged, and I haven't eaten anything since in case they tried to drug me that way next. Now, could you please just state why you're here—"

"You were drugged?"

She released an impatient sigh. "One of my two half brothers instructed his men to give me something to knock me out after I became hysterical when they opened the trunk of the car so they could remove me and put me on the plane. I admit to being more than a little...upset at the time. I couldn't actually climb out of the trunk with my hands tied behind my back or shout for help with tape over my mouth. Also, we'd arrived at the private airport they obviously intended using to fly me out of Southern Ireland. Rather than the public transport I'd been expecting, and hoping, for," she added heavily.

Felix could see why those things would have caused her to struggle against being tied up. "You were driven to the airport in the *trunk* of your brothers' car?" he pushed for clarification, knowing that if the answer was yes, then he was going to put Brianna's brothers at the top his shit—hit?—list.

"Half brothers," she repeated emphatically. "They both know I hate enclosed spaces," she confirmed with a shudder. "But there were six other men there besides my half brothers, so presumably, there was no room for me inside either of the two

cars.” The haunted expression in her eyes gave lie to her attempt at derisive humor.

Yep, the half brothers had definitely gone to the top of Felix’s touch-her-and-you-die list.

His gaze remained fixed on her bruised cheek. “Did one of your half brothers hit you too?”

“Yes,” she bit out. “But the other one didn’t try to stop him.” The continued heaviness of her tone revealed how hurt she felt by her second sibling’s betrayal.

Which meant that before they died, these two bastards definitely needed to be taught the proper etiquette in how to treat a lady.

Felix frowned at the intensity of his protective feelings toward a woman he’d only just met. “I noticed you moved carefully when you stood as I came into the room...?” He was almost afraid to hear the answer to that question.

“The same brother who hit me decided my rib cage needed a little rearranging by his boot,” she admitted bitterly.

Felix’s breath left him in a relieved whoosh, to be followed by another far deeper anxiety. “Has... Did anyone... Did Bart...” He grimaced at not being able to say the actual word.

“No,” she assured him with a shudder. “Not that my brothers would have cared if he had,” she added bitterly.

“Who the hell *are* your brothers?” Felix demanded, the anger churning inside him needing a name to focus on.

Her jaw tightened. “Business associates of your employer.”

“I told you I don’t work for Anthony Bart.” But the fact Brianna had described her brother as an associate of the mob boss implied her half brothers were also a part of the criminal underworld.

Casper’s diligence meant Felix was kept informed regarding all of the London criminal gangs. They were even friends with Gregori Markovic and Nikolai Volkov, the *pakhan* and his second of the Russian *bratva*.

It was also the reason Felix was aware that six months ago, two brothers had taken over the Irish Mob in London. Connor and Liam Doyle had stepped up to become the new boss and his underboss after eliminating the previous regime.

But if those two men were Brianna's half brothers, why would the Irishmen have delivered her into the hands of a vicious bastard like Anthony Bart—

No!

Hell, no!

An alliance between Bart and the Doyles, the London and Irish contingent of the city's criminal underworld, would make those two families invincible against both the Armenians and Romanians, and possibly even the Russians too.

Felix would need to speak to Nikolai Volkov before knowing how much of a possibility that was.

Unfortunately, Nikolai and his wife and children, along with several of Felix's brothers and their wives, were currently in Wales visiting friends of Nikolai's. The Pendragon family, eight brothers and their wives and children, all lived together in Pendragon Castle in North Wales.

Felix had declined to join them after his twin, Darius, had told him he and his wife, Mia, were making the trip so soon after getting married because it was rumored the Pendragon brothers were dragon shifters.

His brother's comment was doubly ridiculous considering that, until recently, Darius was one of the most pragmatic men anyone was ever likely to meet. Darius had become that way after years of dealing with the bullshit served up by the military, which had ultimately left him deeply scarred on the inside as well as the outside.

The first time in years that his twin had shown the slightest inclination to believe in fairy tales, and it had to be over imaginary dragon shifters, for fuck's sake!

Well...that wasn't strictly true, Felix allowed with a smile. Darius had fallen in love with and married Mia before he'd started to completely lose his sense of reality enough to allow



for the existence of men who could change into mythical beasts.

“Why are you smiling?” that beautiful lilting Irish voice accused indignantly.

Felix hadn’t realized he had been. “I was thinking about my twin.”

Brianna’s eyes widened. “There are two of you?”

“We aren’t identical,” he warned.

“I suppose that’s something women should all be grateful for.”

“He also recently married,” he added abruptly, not happy with the interest in Darius that Brianna’s comment implied.

“I really don’t give a—”

“Would you care to explain, Kingston, why the man who brought you into my house at gunpoint is now unconscious in the hallway, minus his gun? An oversight on his part that has clearly allowed you to be alone in a bedroom for several minutes with my future daughter-in-law while wielding that same gun?”

Felix found these questions, spoken by an older man wearing a tailored suit and silk shirt and tie he instantly recognized as being Anthony Bart, the London Mob boss himself, to be far more unsettling than thinking of the reason his twin had traveled to North Wales two days ago.

Mainly, but not solely, because Felix now knew that Anthony Bart and the Irish Mob, now ruled over by the Doyle brothers, were intending to enter into an alliance.

Through marriage.

A marriage between the sister of the Doyle brothers and Anthony Bart’s psychotic son, Terry.

The same vulnerable young woman Felix already knew he wanted to claim for himself.

The fact Brianna had been drugged and brought here against her will by her brothers after she’d been beaten and kicked, then afterward kept locked in a room in Anthony Bart’s

London mansion, told Felix she was in no way in agreement with that plan.

Had she ever even met her proposed future husband?

Felix didn't see how she could have when, as far as he was aware, Bart junior had been incarcerated for the past few months awaiting trial for beating a woman to death.

## CHAPTER FOUR

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From the way in which Anthony Bart had asked his question, it became clear to Brianna that the man who had entered her bedroom, gun in hand, really didn't work for the mob boss.

Then who the hell was he?

He'd told her his name was Felix—Bart had also given him the surname of Kingston just now—and he'd claimed, of all things, to be a financial consultant.

She knew she'd made light of the latter at the time, but she really wanted to know why in hell a criminal like Anthony Bart would need the services of someone with Felix Kingston's qualifications.

She doubted it was so that Bart could submit his yearly tax accounts for review to the applicable government agency.

But even if Felix Kingston was telling the truth about his profession, he also seemed perfectly at home holding a gun in his hand.

“Well?” Bart snapped his impatience with their silence.

Brianna looked at Felix, then at Bart, easily noting the increasingly angry glitter in the latter's pale gray eyes.

Aged in his midfifties, Anthony Bart was still a handsome and muscular man in his perfectly tailored suit. His dark hair was liberally streaked with gray, his features hard and chiseled, giving him a dangerous attraction.

But Brianna had only to look into his remorseless pale eyes to know that he *was* a cold-blooded killer.

As she had also now belatedly realized that, although Anthony Bart might order one of his men to beat her for her continued resistance, she very much doubted he would have issued the order to have her killed.

She might not be close to Connor and Liam, but she was still their half sister and a Doyle, and killing her would bring the wrath of the Irish Mob down upon Anthony Bart and his men.

Her family connection to the Doyle brothers was, she had already surmised during her long hours of being locked in this room with nothing to do but think, the only leverage she currently had for remaining alive.

She also knew that whoever, or whatever, Felix Kingston was, Bart's question had revealed him as also having been brought here against his will.

As such, he was the first person she'd met since arriving in London who might want to help her escape from here.

With that in mind she was the one to answer Anthony Bart. "He's in here because I heard shouting out in the hallway and banged on the door for someone to let me out." She sensed Felix's surprise at the lie as he slowly turned to look at her.

"And your white knight magically knocked down the door and came to your rescue," Bart taunted.

"He unlocked the door, he didn't knock it down," she derided. "But it does tell me your other reluctant guest is suffering from rescue-the-damsel-in-distress syndrome."

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Felix had no idea what Brianna Doyle was doing by deliberately turning Bart's ire in her direction with her sarcasm, but he couldn't allow it to continue. "I disarmed and knocked your man out because I wanted to know who or what was behind the locked door," he answered the mob boss.

Bart raised a challenging brow. "And now that your curiosity has been satisfied?"

Felix was far from feeling satisfied with any of this situation.

But...it was too soon to alert Bart to the fact he wanted—and would—take Brianna out of here at the first opportunity.

There were too many of Bart's men outside and inside the house for him to just point the gun at the older man and demand he release Brianna. No, Felix needed an iron-clad plan to be able to do that successfully, one that would no doubt need the assistance of his family to succeed.

"I'm happy to leave the room and relock the door," he stated calmly, knowing he wasn't "happy" about a single damn thing Brianna Doyle had told him she'd been through in the last three days.

Nor, aware Brianna had been brought here and incarcerated against her will, did he have any intention of leaving her here any longer than he had to. Once Felix was able to leave here, he was going to get Casper to find out all that he could about Brianna Doyle, her half brothers, and this proposed marriage between her and Terry Bart.

Then he, Casper and Sinclair, the only brothers currently in England, were going to come up with a plan to safely extract Brianna from this situation.

If they could find a way to make it look as if the Doyle brothers had changed their minds and taken their little sister back, all the better. It would put the Irish and the London Mob at each other's throats, and so keep them too busy to look for Brianna.

Not that she would be anywhere they could get to her. Felix intended to make sure of that.

But first he knew he had to make himself leave Brianna here when every part of him was crying out for him to just throw her over his shoulder and carry her away from this situation.

"Then you'd better go ahead and do it, hadn't you," she snapped, the perfect bow of her top lip turned up in disgust.

"My, my, Kingston, you seem to have upset my future daughter-in-law with your lack of empathy for her situation,

when it had looked as if you might have come to her rescue,” Bart mocked, obviously falling for the ruse.

Felix could only hope that Brianna knew that was exactly what his words had been: a ruse.

As for Bart and his fucking mockery, Felix just wanted to knock the man’s perfect white teeth down his throat. Far down his throat. Far enough that the fucker ended up eating his own entrails.

Whoa.

The intensity of his emotions really was a revelation after a lifetime of easy charm that ensured he usually got what he wanted with little effort.

But he had never wanted anything as much as he wanted Brianna Doyle. Never felt this strongly about any woman before her. Or known this burning need inside him to not only protect but to claim her.

Now it, and she, was all he could think about.

He wanted to touch every single inch of her. To kiss and caress her and learn what gave her the most pleasure. He wanted to taste her. Her silky-smooth skin. The creamy nectar between her thighs. As much as he wanted to protect her so that she never knew another moment of pain at the hands of the callous Doyle brothers.

But before he could do any of that, Felix first had to sit and listen to why Bart wanted to talk to him.

Felix deliberately kept his expression a mask of apathy, when inwardly he felt angrier than he ever had before. He had always hated any form of violence toward women, and Brianna currently looked as if she might have gone a couple of rounds in the ring with a professional boxer.

And those bruises had been given to her by her own fucking half brother!

Not that Felix thought Bart and his men would have treated her at all gently either after she’d been delivered to them.

His fists clenched at his sides. The list of people who were going to feel his wrath once he'd secured Brianna's release and ensured she was safe was getting longer and longer.

"I think you should give me the gun now," Bart instructed.

"This gun?" Felix deliberately lifted the pistol and pointed it at the mob boss's chest, finger poised on the trigger.

The impulse to just pull that trigger and end this fucker's life was overwhelming!

A nerve pulsed in Bart's jaw. "You really don't want to piss me off, Kingston."

Felix's hand remained steady as he kept the gun leveled on the other man. "I don't?" At this point in time, with the signs of the brutality against Brianna evident on her face, he really didn't give a damn who he pissed off.

Scornful humor quirked the mobster's lips. "I can admire someone being ballsy, but stupid, not so much. Tell me, which one are you?"

Felix paused as if giving the question some thought.

This situation, being brought to Anthony Bart's house at gunpoint, along with discovering the battered and bruised Brianna being kept a prisoner here against her will, was as delicate as it was complicated.

As delicate as he sensed Brianna's emotional state was beneath all that bravado.

She looked so young. Yes, she'd been born into a high-ranking family of the Irish Mob, but she hadn't given the impression she'd been living with that family when she'd been taken captive and brought to England.

Underneath her defiant exterior, she must be terrified of the future her half brothers had planned for her.

As long as Felix didn't actually pull the trigger and end Bart, he wasn't too worried about his immediate safety. If Bart had wanted him dead, then he had no doubt the other man would already have issued the order. Felix was pretty sure, once Bart had told him the reason he'd been brought here, that at the

moment, the other man's plan was to release him at the end of the evening. Felix needed him to continue to feel that way.

Later, he would be able to speak to his brothers about this situation, and the three of them could put together a plan to end it.

Even if the thought of leaving Brianna here, even for the small amount of time Felix hoped it would take to formulate the plan to rescue her, made his stomach clench.

"I have an idea." He straightened, having made a decision he hoped might give him more time to help Brianna realize he wasn't the unfeeling bastard she must now think he was. "I'll hand over the gun if you'll have your chef prepare the dinner for us that I missed out on earlier this evening. Brianna will join us, of course," he added softly.

If Bart agreed, Brianna would be able to eat at last and the delay to Felix leaving might give him an opportunity to somehow convey to Brianna that he was coming back for her.

Win-win.

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Brianna stared at Felix Kingston, inwardly sharing Bart senior's opinion of not knowing if the other man was ballsy or just plain stupid.

His suggestion that the three of them sit down and eat dinner together implied the latter.

The shrewd and calculated glint she discerned in those piercing blue eyes assured he was the former.

She couldn't deny that the thought of eating again after days of not daring to do so made her stomach ache. But in the situation Felix had described, the two men would be eating exactly the same food she was, ensuring it wasn't drugged.

Deliberately so? To reassure her that the food was safe for her to eat?



If that was the case, she had no idea what could have prompted Felix Kingston to go head-to-head with a man who was known to be a cold and ruthless killer. Especially when, minutes ago, it had seemed as if Felix was more than happy to just abandon her here to her fate.

She might never have been a part of her father's and now her brothers' world, but her aunt had ensured she knew who all the players were. Anthony Bart was known for both his viciousness and cruelty. His son was known for being even more of both those things, because he was a psychopath. She also now knew—unfortunately—the two men liked to sexually share women.

Brianna gave an inward shudder at the thought of being at the mercy of two such cruel men.

She still had absolutely no idea where Felix Kingston fit into that violent world.

“You really don't want to miss out,” Felix encouraged as he obviously saw Brianna shudder and misunderstood the reason for it. “I've heard that Mr. Bart has a chef in his employ with two Michelin stars.”

“You heard correctly,” the older man drawled. “But that doesn't mean I'm going to waste his valuable time cooking for the two of you.”

“The three of us. Oh, come on,” Felix cajoled when the other man looked about to dismiss the idea of joining them. “Feeding us and playing host is the least you can do if, as I suspect, you brought me here with the intention of asking me to do something for you?”

“I don't ask, I tell,” Bart answered predictably.

Felix snorted. “I'm sure that approach works with most people you encounter, but I'm going to require a politeness you wouldn't normally think of using if I'm even going to *think* about considering your request.”

Felix's brain had been churning through scenario after scenario for the past few minutes. The only answer he'd been able to come up with for Anthony Bart having him brought

here was in relation to the situation his twin, Darius, had unwittingly found himself in with this same mobster a few weeks ago.

A situation that had included the death of Bart's previous financial advisor and accountant.

If that was the case, then Anthony Bart needed Felix far more than he needed to genuflect to the other man or be afraid of Bart's penchant for violence.

Besides, Felix wasn't in the habit of placating men who committed or turned a blind eye to brutality toward any woman or child.

"Well?" he challenged the older man.

Bart shook his head as he chuckled. "Whichever you are, ballsy or stupid, I also find you amusing. For the moment," he added in a hard voice. "Because of that, I'll grant your request for the three of us to have dinner together." His gaze became icy as he turned his critical gaze on Brianna. "Terry doesn't like his women scrawny, anyway."

"But I've heard he does like them battered and bruised," Felix taunted. "Which means he should be more than happy with the way Brianna looks right now."

"Neither I nor any of my men are responsible for that," Bart snapped.

"I don't give a fuck *who's* responsible," Felix rasped. "It should never have happened."

The older man gave him a pitying look. "The woman you were intending to have dinner with this evening...?"

"Yes?" Felix prompted warily.

"She likes being fucked by two men at the same time after being spanked and slapped about."

A wave of revulsion rose up in Felix's throat at the thought of so nearly having gone to bed with a woman who had obviously previously been shared by the two Bart men.

Although the fact she had gotten up from the table and left the restaurant after hearing Bart's name implied she hadn't been as willing a participant in that encounter as the older man was saying she had. Intimidation and threats were a great incentive for most things, including sex.

"Everyone is entitled to their sexual preferences," he dismissed, making a mental note to check in with the actress regarding her future safety. "But Brianna didn't choose to be hit by a member of her own family."

"My, my." Bart eyed him speculatively. "The two of you seem to have become very friendly in just the few minutes you were alone together if you're already swapping family secrets."

Too late, Felix realized he'd been goaded into sharing more than he'd meant to.

Fuck!

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Brianna saw Felix's expression of self-disgust when he realized he'd been tricked by the older man into saying too much. But he really shouldn't feel bad about that. If he hadn't volunteered the information, she was pretty sure Anthony Bart was more than capable of extracting it by less civilized means.

"Dinner sounds good," she said lightly.

Bart's nostrils flared, his gaze narrowed on both of them as he obviously rethought the pros and cons of allowing her out of this room to eat dinner with him and Felix Kingston. He had to be aware she might take advantage of that opportunity to share even more of her current situation with the younger man. That she might even ask him to help her escape.

Just the hope of that burst inside Brianna for a few brief seconds. Only for it to as quickly dissipate at the realization Felix Kingston, whoever he was and even if he should want to help her, which she had no guarantee he did, couldn't even begin to match the weight of Anthony Bart's power and influence.

Brianna knew that even if Felix did help her to get away from the mob boss and the forced marriage to his violent son, there wasn't a place on earth Felix would be able to hide where the Barts wouldn't find him and make him pay for daring to defy them.

She couldn't ask that of him, or anyone else.

Whatever Anthony Bart saw in her expression—defeat, probably—he now gave a satisfied nod. “The two of us can talk while Brianna is taking a shower and putting on clean clothes,” he told Felix.

“I'm pretty sure I already know what you want to ask me,” the younger man taunted. “Just as I'm also aware the last person who acted as your accountant and financial advisor fell from the tenth floor of her apartment building. I'm not sure if she was dead before going over the balcony, but she certainly was once she hit the sidewalk.”

Brianna stared at him in horror.

“She stole from me,” Bart dismissed.

“And if I were ever foolish enough to consider working for you, no doubt in time you would find some reason to decide the same thing should happen to me,” Felix derided.

The older man gave a smile that was all teeth. “Then the secret is not to betray me. In any way.” His critical gaze raked over Brianna for a second time. “Do as I said and take a shower and change into some of the new clothes you've been given while Kingston and I go to my study and...discuss my offer in greater detail. The clothes you're wearing are starting to smell,” he added nastily.

Brianna felt tears of humiliation sting her eyes as she gave a quick glance in Felix's direction. He wasn't looking at her, his narrowed and enigmatic gaze fixed on the older man.

Meaning that Brianna wasn't able to tell if Felix was angry at the older man's deliberate cruelty toward her or, more likely, he was belatedly annoyed with himself for putting himself in the position of having dinner with her and Bart rather than

with the woman who “liked to be fucked by two men after being spanked and slapped about.”

As Felix said, the woman was entitled to her sexual preferences. Brianna just couldn't relate when she still ached and hurt from being hit and kicked three days ago by her own brother. She couldn't even think of how uncomfortable it would be to have sex after that.

She lifted her chin. “I'd rather my clothes smell than wear an Armani suit yet be rotten through to my core like you are—” She broke off abruptly as two things happened at once.

Bart senior stepped toward her, his face twisted in fury as he raised his hand with the obvious intention of hitting her.

Felix stepped forward at the same time, his arm lifting to easily block the swinging arc of the other man's clenched fist. “Not happening in my presence,” he warned harshly.

Bart gave him a glowering glare for several seconds before the tension eased from his body and a mocking smile once again tilted his lips. “Then I'll just have to wait until after you've left later this evening, won't I?” He gave Brianna a scathing glance. “Terry will thank me for ensuring he isn't taking a rebellious bitch as his wife.”

It was the second time Brianna had been called a bitch in a matter of days, and by two different men, both of whom she utterly despised.

Her heart also sank at this stark reminder of the marriage she was being forced into with a man who obviously felt no qualms about hitting a woman. To death, if he felt it necessary.

She turned away. “Get out,” she instructed dully.

“You have fifteen minutes to shower and change your clothes before I send in one of my men to help you,” came Bart's warning shot as he stepped out into the hallway and gave the man lying there a kick. “Get up, you lazy bastard, and stand guard outside this room, and then escort Miss Doyle to the dining room once she's ready—I don't give a fuck about your arm. Do as you're fucking told, before I decide to shoot you

and put you out of your misery,” he threatened harshly. “You will come with me, Kingston,” Bart added coldly.

“Brianna—”

“Is none of your concern,” the other man warned.

She really wasn’t, Brianna acknowledged heavily.

Anthony Bart had also just made it very clear that Felix Kingston’s life would be in danger if he didn’t do exactly what Bart wanted him to. Even if Felix’s expression said he would rather beat the other man to a pulp.

“Just go,” she told Felix wearily. “I’ll shower and change and then *he* will bring me to the dining room,” she added with a contemptuous glance at the heavysset man slowly getting back onto his feet, one of his arms cradled against his chest as he glared his hatred at Felix.

Felix studied her for several seconds before giving a terse nod and following the other man out into the hallway. He paused in front of the man he had obviously knocked out earlier so he could unlock and enter Brianna’s room. He didn’t say a word, but whatever Bart’s man saw in his steely gaze caused the color to drain from his cheeks.

“Or maybe Mr. Kingston here will do the killing for me.” Anthony Bart laughed.

He fucking laughed!

As if this was all a game to him.

Maybe it was, the sick bastard.

“I don’t take orders from men like you,” Felix Kingston stated harshly.

Bart’s humor faded as quickly as it had appeared. “You will if you want Miss Doyle to continue breathing.”

Felix snorted. “How are you going to explain that to her bastard brothers?”

“Accidents happen,” the older man dismissed.

Brianna didn't hear Felix's answer as the door was closed, followed by the turning of the key in the lock seconds later.

Which was when she gave in to the sobs that burned in her chest wanting to be set free.

## CHAPTER FIVE

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“So, was I correct in my assumption as to why I was brought here?” Felix was deliberately less than respectful in tone, knowing how much it pissed the older man off. If nothing else, it ensured Bart’s attention was diverted from thinking about Brianna and fixed firmly on Felix for a while.

Bart, having sent instructions for dinner to be prepared for the three of them, now made himself comfortable in the chair behind the wide mahogany desk that dominated his wood-paneled-wall study. “It does if your assumption is that I no longer have anyone capable of laundering money for me.”

“Why would I even consider doing that for you?” Felix deliberately slouched in the chair opposite. “Neither I nor any of my brothers were acquainted with you or your now-deceased financial adviser and accountant when she fell to her death.”

“They were very much involved by the time her son died.”

“Because he was killed in a building owned by my brother Darius. By one of the two men acting under your instruction, I might add,” Felix stated firmly.

“And witnessed by the young woman who has since married your twin brother.”

This man knew altogether too much about Felix and his family for comfort. “Nikolai Volkov explained that situation to you when he returned the item you were looking for in Giles Fletcher’s apartment.”



“An occurrence which I didn’t then, and still don’t, appreciate,” Bart bit out. “The less I have to do with the Russian bratva, the better I like it. That bastard Nikolai Volkov in particular,” he added with distaste.

Felix filed away the knowledge for possible future use that Bart was wary of, possibly even feared, Nikolai. Which, knowing of Nikolai’s cold and ruthless reputation that had earned him the name on the streets as the Wolf, was very wise of the older man.

“Surely it was better than having all your financial dealings fall into the hands of the law?” he prompted.

“Only slightly,” the other man acknowledged grimly. “But we’ll move on from that for now,” he added as Felix would have spoken. “I’m obviously in need of the expert services of someone with your capabilities.”

Felix’s top lip curled. “I act within the law, not outside of it.”

“You did,” the mobster stated evenly.

“I still do,” Felix insisted.

The older man shrugged. “Perhaps you just need a little time to think about it.”

“No amount of *thinking* is going to change the fact that I have no desire to work for you. In any capacity.”

“That’s a pity.”

The other man’s calm expression gave Felix an uneasy feeling in the pit of his stomach. “Why?” he prompted warily.

“Because it means I’ll have to find someone else.” He grimaced. “After I’ve given my future daughter-in-law the beating she deserves for having talked to an outsider about the Family’s business, of course,” Bart added in a hard voice.

Fuck.

Fuck, fuck, *fuck!*

“You’re a bastard,” Felix bit out.

Bart smiled slightly. “It has been mentioned before.”

“I’ll just bet it has.” He sat up, his hands clenched into fists. “I’ll still need time to think about your offer.” Even a few hours away from here would give him the opportunity to talk to his brothers and come up with a plan to facilitate Brianna’s escape. Refusing to work for Bart would become superfluous once the mob boss discovered what he’d done.

“You have until this time tomorrow.” The older man smiled. “While I’m waiting for your answer, I’ll take great pleasure in punishing Brianna. I’ll probably be so aroused afterward that I’ll need to—”

“Okay, I’ll fucking do it!” Felix glared his frustration with giving this man what he wanted, even for a short time.

“Better,” Bart approved smugly.

“But I’m still leaving here tonight after we’ve eaten dinner.” He was only staying that long because he needed to see Brianna again. Hopefully, he would be able to find the opportunity to reassure her he was coming back for her.

“Of course.” Bart nodded. “But only after you’ve signed an NDA contract preventing you from discussing anything that happens within this household or any of my business dealings.”

Felix’s expression was one of complete disbelief as he stared at the other man. “You’re a criminal. A mobster. Why would a signed NDA between the two of us put me under any obligation not to reveal your secrets to the first member of the law I meet?”

Bart eyed him steadily for several seconds before he clearly enunciated, “Brianna.”

Felix’s nostrils flared. “You—”

“You really should know better than to reveal a weakness to your enemy,” the other man advised mildly.

That only applied until after Felix got Brianna away from here. After that, it was open season on Bart and the Doyle brothers.

“Although I advise you to keep your...interest in Brianna to yourself when you’re in the presence of my son,” the other

man added dryly. “He never learned to share his toys with anyone but me.”

“Brianna isn’t a toy!”

Bart gave a confident smile. “She will be.”

“Your son is currently in prison.”

“But he’ll be free in time for his wedding in four days’ time,” Bart senior informed him confidently.

The wedding was taking place *that* soon?

All the more reason for Felix to get the hell out of here and start making his own plans to extricate Brianna from this situation. Along with finding somewhere safe for her to stay once she was free. With the Irish and London Mobs looking for her, it would need to be somewhere safe. Impregnable.

Somewhere like Kingston Manor, the family home in Surrey, which had enough security, high tech, and men on the ground to keep out several mob bosses and all their men.

When that happened, Anthony Bart would learn exactly how weak Felix wasn’t.

He eyed Bart coldly. “I’d like to freshen up before dinner.”

“Trying to impress my daughter-in-law?” the other man mocked.

“Brianna can’t be called that until after she’s married to your son,” Felix challenged right back.

All humor left Bart’s expression. “Which she will shortly be, or there will be blood running in the streets. Including your own and your family’s.”

Felix calmly straightened the cuffs of his shirt beneath his jacket as he stood, that outer calmness hopefully revealing none of the inner fury he felt toward this man.

He knew without a doubt that his brothers and cousin would feel exactly the same way he did about teaching this arrogant bastard and his vicious son a lesson. Their own paths to a happily ever after hadn’t exactly been trouble-free.

“I’ll bear your threats in mind,” Felix dismissed. “Now, could you direct me to the nearest bathroom? I need to try to wash some of the dirt off my hands.”

The older man leaned back comfortably in his chair. “Your insults don’t bother me, Kingston.”

“Pity.”

Bart’s mouth quirked before he called out, “Danny!” He waited until the door opened and a man—obviously Danny—stood there waiting for instructions. “Show Mr. Kingston to a bathroom and then bring him to the dining room. But don’t let him out of your sight,” he continued in a hard voice. “I would hate for him to leave before I’ve had the opportunity to enjoy more of his company.”

“Strangely, I feel the exact opposite about spending more time in yours,” Felix dismissed before following Danny from the room.

His thoughts were already concentrated on looking for a way in which he might alert Brianna to the fact that he had no intention of simply abandoning her to a marriage with a man who enjoyed beating women.

A resolve which deepened after he’d given one glance at Brianna, when she was escorted into the dining room a few minutes later by Beefy. The man’s arm was now in a sling, the expression in his eyes malevolent when he looked at Felix.

Felix ignored him as he continued to look at Brianna, knowing from the redness of her eyes and the blotches on her cheeks that she’d been crying since he last saw her.

Because of something Beefy had done?

The continued mental anguish she must feel after the beating one of her brothers had given her?

Or because of the general helplessness she must feel over her situation?

Whichever it was, Felix had no intention of allowing her suffering to continue any longer than was absolutely necessary.

---

Brianna could feel the tension between Anthony Bart and Felix Kingston the moment she entered the dining room. The older man was seated at the head of the table, Felix to his right.

That tension seemed to consist of a simmering anger on Felix's part, and a smug satisfaction on the older man's.

She'd felt refreshed after taking a shower and washing her hair, but finding something clean to wear hadn't been as easy. A more thorough look at the clothes Bart had provided for her showed they were all skimpy shirts and figure-hugging tops. The only clothes Brianna could even consider wearing were those that had obviously been provided for her to sleep in: a pair of gray sweats and a black T-shirt. She'd also found a hairbrush beneath the pile of clothing she hadn't realized was there, so she was finally able to brush her hair too.

She still felt more exposed than was comfortable, but being able to wear clean clothes proved more tempting than stubbornly continuing to wear the clothes she had been wearing when they brought her here from Ireland.

"Sit the fuck down," Bart instructed impatiently as she hovered near the doorway.

Brianna's jaw tightened. "I'm a person, not your fecking pet," she shot back resentfully as she crossed the room.

Pale eyes narrowed. "You should be aware I'm noting down even the slightest impertinence on your part toward me."

Her chin rose. "I wouldn't have expected anything less. But perhaps *you* should bear in mind the fact that even though both my brothers are scum, my surname is still Doyle, and I'm the only daughter of Aiden Doyle." She pulled out the high-backed dining room chair.

"Here, let me." Felix stood to move round the table and pull back the chair on Bart's left for her to sit in.

“Your father is dead, and apart from you being a pawn in our little game, neither of your brothers gives a fuck about you,” Bart scorned.

“But the rest of my family do. Aiden has a sister, and she doesn’t like or trust Connor,” she challenged before giving Felix a tight smile as she stepped in front of the chair. “Thank you.”

“No problem,” he assured as he bent to place his hands where Brianna had grasped the sides of the chair.

“Aiden’s sister wisely doesn’t interfere in mob politics,” Bart dismissed.

He was right, of course. Although Brianna thought her Aunt Bridget might have something to say once she learned what Connor and Liam had done to her. “Time will tell if that’s true,” she answered Bart enigmatically as Felix pushed the chair forward so she was sitting closer to the table.

Which was when Brianna felt something being pressed into her hand.

It only took a second or two, but Brianna had to physically stop herself from tensing at the feel of something small and square being pressed against her palm. Her fingers instinctively closed about it.

Only for her to stiffen warily, her heart feeling as if it had jumped into her throat, when she looked up and saw how intensely Anthony Bart was now watching the two of them. As if suspected—

“I trust you’re going to try a little of all the different foods before expecting me to do the same?” She deliberately drew the older man’s attention away from Felix as he straightened behind her chair and onto her and the half-dozen covered dishes in the center of the table.

The older man gave a snort. “Don’t make the mistake of thinking Kingston’s presence will in any way protect you from my punishment. I assure you, it’s only being delayed.”

Brianna believed—hoped—that the folded piece of paper she was able to slip inside the pocket of the sweats indicated the

opposite. That perhaps Felix Kingston could find some way to help her before she was forced to marry Terry Bart in four days' time.

That thought was immediately followed by the question: why would Felix want to help her when doing so would mean bringing down the wrath of both the Irish and London Mobs on him and his family?

## CHAPTER SIX

---

“So let me see if I’ve understood this situation correctly,” Casper said. “This evening, you went out to dinner with the actress Anthea Sloane, and two armed men entered the restaurant and forced you into accompanying them to the home of their employer, the mob boss Anthony Bart—”

“Yes,” Felix confirmed impatiently.

Casper raised one dark brow over equally dark eyes. “I believe we both know I hadn’t finished,” he drawled. “Once you arrived at Anthony Bart’s home, you disarmed your guard because you’d seen a key was in the wrong side of a door and wanted to know who they had locked away in that room.”

“You’re starting to piss me off, Casper,” he warned through gritted teeth.

“I haven’t even gotten to the best bit yet,” his younger brother taunted. “The moment you unlocked the door, you took one look at the young woman obviously being held captive there and knew she was The One for you?”

Felix bared his teeth. “Yes.”

“She then told you enough about herself for you to realize she’s Brianna Doyle, the younger sister of Connor and Liam Doyle, head of the Irish Mob? Do I have the details correct so far?” Casper’s gaze was deceptively innocent.

Damn it, Felix *knew* how this sounded. How unbelievable. Far-fetched. But that didn’t make it any less the truth.



Because he knew, without a single doubt, that Brianna was the woman with whom he was going to spend the rest of his life.

He also knew how this must sound to Casper and Sinclair. Because although Felix always ensured the women he dated had a good time, he had never taken a single one of those brief relationships seriously.

Now he was telling two of his brothers that he'd known the moment he looked at Brianna that she was his soul mate.

Convincing Brianna of his intentions wasn't going to be easy either after the trauma she'd gone through these past three days and nights.

It would be up to him to convince her that, although he might appear easygoing, he had never quit on anything in his life. He certainly wasn't about to start doing so with the woman he was already halfway in love with.

Leaving her as a prisoner in Bart's house earlier this evening had been the hardest thing Felix had ever done in his life. But he'd had no choice, knowing he needed to discuss the situation with his brothers to ensure rescuing Brianna was a success.

Eating dinner with Anthony Bart had been...unpleasant, to say the least. So much so, Felix couldn't remember a single thing that he'd put on his plate, let alone whether or not he'd eaten any of it.

All he'd been able to think about the whole time they were seated at the table was how he was going to have to leave Brianna once dinner was over, possibly to the punishment Anthony Bart had threatened.

Despite not having eaten for three days, Brianna hadn't eaten much of the dinner either, probably for the same reason.

In sharp contrast to Felix's tension and Brianna's apprehension, Anthony Bart had kept up a flow of banal conversation which really hadn't required any input from Felix or Brianna.

By the time the meal came to an end and Bart instructed Beefy to take Brianna back to her room, Felix had wanted to strangle the older man. No, not just strangle him, but make him pay for

that haunted despair he could see in Brianna's green eyes and the deathly pallor of her cheeks.

He'd arrived at the Kingston family estate ten minutes ago, having stopped by his London apartment only long enough to collect his car keys after two of Bart's men had more or less thrown him out of their car outside the building.

Felix didn't remember the drive here, his thoughts a tumble of images of the desperation in Brianna's eyes earlier and her lack of fight as Beefy escorted her from Bart's dining room. She'd looked...broken. As if she believed that, once he'd gone, he wouldn't come back and her fate was already sealed.

Over Felix's dead body!

Luckily, Casper and Sinclair were still awake when he arrived at the family estate. Casper had been working as usual, Sinclair in the kitchen getting ice cream for his pregnant wife. Well...ice cream and pickled onions. Together. In the same bowl. A combination that had made Felix shudder just to look at it.

Thankfully, Sinclair had delivered the concoction to Remy before returning to the kitchen, where Casper had just finished making a pot of coffee.

Mugs of the rich brew in their hands, the three men had moved to sit either side of the table in the breakfast nook before Felix had set about telling them of the events of his evening. Some of which Casper was now questioning.

Along with Felix's sanity!

He released a shuddering breath. "Yes, you have the details correct, Casper. But I don't give a fuck who Brianna's family is or who the Doyle brothers want her to marry, she's going to be *my* wife and the mother of our children," he stated without a single doubt.

"Does she feel the same way about you?"

"Not yet," he allowed grudgingly. "But she will."

"That's a commendable ambition, Felix, and if that's what you truly want, I really hope that it works out for you," Sinclair,

the eldest of the Kingston brothers, put in softly. “But before you can even think of doing any of those things, there seems to be the obstacle of freeing Brianna from Anthony Bart’s very well guarded London home.”

“Which I am more than happy to help you with, I assure you.” Casper gave a grimace of distaste. “I had the misfortune to attend the same party as Terry Bart a few months ago. He’s crude and has absolutely no respect for women. He also has an entitled and brutish attitude that doesn’t allow for anyone saying no to him. Under any circumstances.”

Felix winced. “Was he alone?”

Casper scowled. “The woman he had with him was the same one he’s been charged with beating to death just weeks later. She looked fucking terrified of him then,” he recalled with a wince. “If I’d known what was going to happen to her... Damn it.” His scowl darkened with frustration.

“No one knows what a psychopath will do next,” Sinclair sympathized.

“Maybe not,” Casper allowed. “But I don’t have a single doubt that the bastard killed her.”

“Neither did the jury, which is why he’s in a high-security prison,” Sinclair murmured. “But now you’re saying that Bart’s lawyer has come up with a way of having the charges dismissed because of a *technicality*?” he prompted disgustedly.

“Yes.”

“Fuck.”

“That bastard is *never* getting his hands on Brianna!” Felix stated fiercely.

“Her own brothers really just handed her over to Bart senior, knowing that both he and his son are vicious killers?” Sinclair scowled.

“The Doyle brothers are also vicious killers,” Felix reminded.

“Hmm.” Sinclair frowned. “I think we need to bring Nikolai Volkov in on this.”

“He’s off dragon hunting, remember?” Felix said. “Besides, I don’t have the time to wait for him to get back from Wales. We need to take Brianna out of there as soon as possible.”

The thought of what Anthony Bart would do to her, *was* possibly doing to her right now—the smug bastard—made Felix’s blood boil.

He needed to get Brianna out of there as soon as possible.

Damn it, he’d told her he was going to do exactly that, and he wasn’t about to start their relationship by breaking his very first promise to her.

“I don’t need to hunt dragons when I already know exactly where they are,” an all-too-familiar voice cut in on his thoughts.

Felix turned his head sharply to look at the tall and blond-haired Nikolai Volkov as he strolled into their kitchen as if he had a perfect right to do so. The Russian shouldn’t even have been able to get onto the estate without their security system alerting them of his presence, let alone enter the house itself as if he fucking owned it.

Yet here he was, as arrogantly imperious as always in a dark bespoke suit with a white silk shirt and plain blue tie.

Casper stood. “How the hell did you get in here?” he demanded to know.

Pale eyes were leveled on him. “You appear to have a glitch in your security system which allows a helicopter to land within the perimeter.”

“There’s no glitch,” Casper insisted.

Felix glanced up at the kitchen ceiling. “Didn’t one of your *friends* fly you here?”

“That would have been fun, wouldn’t it?” Nikolai drawled, well aware of Felix’s skepticism regarding the existence of dragons. “But no, Darius very kindly allowed me to take one of the Kingston helicopters and fly myself here. Which, incidentally, is how I managed to land on the helipad without your alarms going off.” He glanced at Casper. “Perhaps a

slight adjustment to your security where you demand to know who is piloting any Kingston craft might be in order?"

"I'll fix that," Casper assured Sinclair as their eldest brother looked at him.

Felix's eyes narrowed on the Russian. "I think the real question is why are you here?"

Nikolai's jaw tightened. "I've had men watching Anthony Bart and his men since your family's little...run-in with him last month." His mouth twisted. "Imagine my surprise when my men reported to me earlier this evening that Felix Kingston was escorted from a restaurant by two of Bart's men, and then driven to and taken inside the Bart mansion. I am happy to see that you managed to leave several hours later without my assistance."

Felix scowled. "Not before the bastard told me he wants me to launder money for him."

Nikolai grimaced. "I trust you refused."

"Not exactly."

"Why not?"

"Because he has a fucking hostage!"

"Felix's soul mate," Casper put in softly.

"Shut the—" Felix broke off to turn and glare at the Russian. "Did you say you've had men watching Anthony Bart and his men for the past month?"

Blond brows rose at the aggression in his tone. "Yes."

"And that surveillance includes his home?"

"Yes."

"Then your men will also have reported to you that Brianna Doyle was taken to Anthony Bart's house three days ago, under the escort of her brothers, and that her brothers then left without her?"

Nikolai shrugged. "It would seem that Bart and the Irish Mob intend to form an alliance through the marriage of Miss Doyle

and Terry Bart.”

“And that’s okay with you?” Felix grated.

Nikolai eyed him steadily. “No, it is not okay with me,” he repeated harshly. “Any more than I intend allowing either the Armenians or the Romanians to take over my city once the outcome of their little battle against each other comes to an end.”

“You sound very certain of that.”

Nikolai gave his feral smile. “Even as we speak, those two factions are weakening each other by killing so many of their men. The outcome will be that the victor isn’t strong enough to attempt a successful attack on us.”

“You wily bastard,” Sinclair admired.

Nikolai gave an acknowledging nod before returning his attention to Felix. “The alliance between the London and Irish Mobs will not take place either.”

Felix’s hands tightened at his sides. “How can you be so sure?”

“Because Terry Bart will not be released from prison.”

Felix snorted at the Russian’s arrogance. “His father seems pretty certain that he will.”

“That is because Anthony lives under the mistaken belief that his power is omnipotent.”

“And it isn’t?”

Nikolai gave a humorless smile before sobering. “Terry Bart will die tomorrow morning. He will be killed by a fellow inmate, a man already serving a life sentence, with a spoon that’s had the handle honed into a shiv.”

Felix eyes widened. “And you know this how?”

The Russian shrugged wide shoulders. “The man who will kill him has been promised a more...comfortable existence once the job is successful and he continues to spend the rest of his life in prison.”

“Promised by you?”

Nikolai’s nostrils flared. “There was no hurry to permanently remove Terry Bart when we had believed he would remain in prison for several years. Now that his release is imminent, followed by this proposed marriage to the Doyle girl, the decision has been made to eliminate him now. Along with implementing several other contingency plans we had on standby.”

“Made by whom?”

“Gregori Markovic and myself.” He grimaced. “We have known for some time that Bart junior is no more than an animal and cannot be allowed the opportunity to procreate. With his death, there is the added bonus that Anthony’s grief for his son, his natural successor, will not only weaken his command over the London Mob, but also cause rivalry within his own ranks as to who his successor will now be.”

“If you know all this, then you must also have known Brianna is being forced into the marriage?”

“A marriage I have told you will not take place.”

“She’ll still be the prisoner of Anthony Bart.”

“The fate of Miss Doyle is not my concern.”

“Would you feel the same way if it was Daisy or one of your children who was being held prisoner in the home of that sadistic bastard?” Felix was aware, as was anyone who knew Nikolai, that the Russian’s love for his wife and children was absolute, and that they were all off-limits in any fight within the London criminal underworld. A dictate all obeyed. Nikolai’s reputation for cold and swift retaliation was legendary, both here and in Russia.

As was the chill of the lethal gaze he now focused on Felix. “You will not bring my wife and children into this conversation.”

“Would you feel the same way?” Felix persisted.

“Obviously not,” Nikolai bit out. “But, as that is not the case, I must reiterate, Miss Doyle means nothing to me.”

“You *must*, hmm...?”

“Yes.”

“Felix, what the hell are you doing...?”

Felix ignored Sinclair’s cry of alarm as he swung his fist in the direction of Nikolai Volkov’s face.

At last, he had a solid target he could vent his anger and frustration on!

---

Brianna stared at the words written on the thin piece of card she held in her trembling hand.

*I promise I’m coming back for you. Be ready.*

They were the same words she’d already read dozens of times over.

Words written by Felix Kingston on the back of a business card, bearing his name and cell phone number, before he’d folded it into eight pieces so that it was small enough to press into the palm of her hand without Anthony Bart seeing him do it.

How she’d even gotten through dinner, in the company of the smug London Mob boss and the obviously impatient Felix Kingston, was a miracle. Especially when she was aware of, and could feel, this small, folded piece of card in her pocket.

The moment she was alone, she’d gone into the bathroom and locked the door behind her before unfolding the card to read the words written on the back of it.

Those words were a wonderful sentiment, and for a few brief minutes, Brianna’s heart had soared as she’d wanted to believe him. Until the truth of her situation once again crashed down on her, making her fully aware of how improbable it was that Felix would ever succeed in keeping such a promise. There was the possibility that he might not even want to once he had really thought about the danger he would be bringing down upon himself and his family if he acted on his promise.



It was now fourteen hours since Felix had left Bart's house, and this morning, Brianna was back to not eating the breakfast that had been brought to her and only drinking water straight from the tap in the bathroom.

The night before, after returning to her room, she'd lain down on the bed, but kept the sweats and top on. Not only because of Felix's advice she be ready when he came for her, she'd also been terrified that Bart would come to her room and carry out the punishment he'd threatened. If he did, she had no intention of being undressed.

She must have eventually fallen asleep sometime during the night, because when she woke up, she could tell it was morning by the weak sunlight shining in through the locked and barred windows. A glance at her watch told her it was shortly after seven o'clock.

No doubt Bart, knowing she would be on edge as she waited to see if he intended coming to her room, would have enjoyed seeing her agitation on the images from the security cameras in her room, before going to his own bedroom to sleep like the proverbial baby.

Bastard!

Not that she wanted to be punished by him, far from it, but she didn't like his mind games either.

She felt terrible as she sat up and made her way into the bathroom. She looked even worse when she bothered to glance at herself in the mirror of the bathroom cabinet.

Unlike other mornings, Brianna had sorted through the clothes on the dresser, taking the ones she'd chosen and carrying them into the bathroom to change into after taking her shower. She was now wearing a pair of low-rider skinny jeans and a light blue sweater.

If, and it was a big if, Felix did somehow manage to come back for her, she wanted to be dressed and ready to get out of there.

Brianna lost hope of that happening as the minutes and hours passed by with no sign of Felix or his rescue party.

Three *more* days and Terry Bart would be released from prison. Their wedding had been arranged to take place immediately afterward.

Would Connor and Liam be there?

A part of her doubted they had any interest in attending her wedding. But another part of her knew it would be disrespectful to the Barts if Connor and Liam weren't present for the formality that was the beginning of the alliance between the two families.

Brianna's anger returned every time she thought about the possibility of seeing her brothers again.

Connor was a heartless thug through and through, but she had clung to the hope Liam still had some of that sweet boy she had once known deep inside him. His behavior, overseeing her being put into the trunk of a car and standing silently at Connor's side when they delivered her to Bart's home, made a nonsense of that hope. Brianna now had no doubt Liam had become just as much of a cold and cruel bastard as Connor.

Damn it, she didn't care whether Felix Kingston rescued her or not.

Because even if Terry Bart was released from prison...

Even if the wedding actually took place...

No one could force her to say the words "I do."

She—

Brianna tensed, standing up slowly, her heart pounding as she heard the sound of raised voices somewhere else in the large house.

In response to Felix coming to rescue her, as he'd promised?

Or something else...?

## CHAPTER SEVEN

---

“*This* is your plan for extracting Brianna from that bastard’s Bart’s clutches?” Felix grumbled as he sat in the passenger seat next to Nikolai. The Russian sat behind the wheel of his black SUV. “To just drive up to the front gate and ask to see him?”

Nikolai gave him a chilling glance. “Gregori and I agreed that getting through the initial security—the opening of the gates—without alerting anyone to the presence of your brothers and our other men, is far more crucial to ensuring Miss Doyle’s safety than smashing through the gates and then being instantly attacked by Bart’s men.”

“And this is the way you and Markovic decided to do that?” It had annoyed Felix intensely the previous night when Nikolai, having spoken on the telephone with his *pakhan* for over an hour, had returned to relate that the two of them had decided on a plan that would cause the fewest fatalities to Nikolai and his men and the Kingston brothers and their men.

“That would be Mr. Markovic to you.” Nikolai’s tone was frosty in warning. “And I believe we have already had the... conversation where we established that Miss Doyle’s safety is of paramount importance to you,” he added with a glance at the livid bruise on Felix’s cheek.

Felix, in turn, gave a pointed glance at the discoloration on the other man’s jaw. Both men had gotten in a single hit against the other before Casper and Sinclair pulled them apart. “I believe we *established* that Brianna’s safety is *all* that matters to me.”

Last night, Felix had physically attacked the second of the *pakhan* of the Russian bratva. After Nikolai had delivered his retaliatory hit, Felix had been excused further retribution with a warning never to even attempt such a thing again. Clearly letting him know Nikolai wouldn't be as understanding a second time.

Once tempers had cooled somewhat, Nikolai had informed them he needed to talk to Gregori Markovic before they decided to do anything that might exacerbate the uneasy truce that currently existed in the criminal underworld.

Felix had been furious when Nikolai refused to share the full content of the long conversation he'd had with the head of the London bratva. Even more so when, afterward, Nikolai had called a halt to their own discussion and informed the Kingston brothers that he and Markovic had decided how they would proceed.

Nikolai nodded. "Then I advise you to accept I know exactly what I'm doing. That I and my personal bodyguard—which is currently you," he added with a derisive twist of his lips, "will be allowed admittance to the estate because Bart will believe I'm here to offer my condolences on the death of his son earlier today."

Felix couldn't deny being stunned when they heard on the radio this morning that Terry Bart had been killed in prison, in exactly the manner Nikolai had said he would.

"Bart senior will agree to see me because he knows his position has been weakened by the fact that, with his son's death, not only does he not have a natural successor, but he no longer has the ability to form an alliance with the Irish," Nikolai stated as fact.

Wily bastard.

"Unless *he* decides to marry Brianna himself." That unpleasant thought had occurred to Felix in the middle of his already sleepless night.

Bart had claimed he and Terry liked to share women anyway, so why shouldn't Anthony Bart marry the sister of the Doyle

brothers and form the alliance that way?

“Gregori and I considered that as a possibility, of course,” the Russian acknowledged evenly. “But hopefully, we have arrived before that has been allowed to happen.”

They had *considered* it as a possibility?

But *hopefully* it hadn't happened yet?

Felix wouldn't be held responsible for his actions if Brianna had been married off to Anthony Bart before they were able to remove her from the other man's home today.

For the moment, he had no choice but to follow the course Nikolai had decided upon.

The news of Terry Bart's death had heralded the start of that plan.

Felix just hadn't expected the next part, after they had all piled into the half a dozen SUVs full of some of Nikolai's men and Felix's brothers and some of the Kingston Security employees, that the first thing the Russian would do was to actually drive up to the security gates of the Bart mansion and ask to see the other man.

They had left the other five SUVs, and the twenty or so men inside them, parked out of sight of the gates. The vehicles' engines were idling, ready for a fast response once the gates into the Bart mansion were opened.

“Ready?” Nikolai prompted softly as the guards at the gate gave the go-ahead for him to drive up to the house.

Felix had been *ready* since he'd had to abandon Brianna here the evening before.

“I'm ready.” He took out the long knife from its sheath strapped to his back between his shoulder blades, taking care to keep it out of sight of anyone looking inside the vehicle. The knife was his weapon of choice in close combat, which this promised to be once they were inside the house.

Nikolai eyed the ten-inch-long blade. “A man after my own heart, it would seem,” he drawled. “I hope you know what to do with that,” he added as he pressed his foot down on the

accelerator and the SUV began to creep forward through the open gates, deliberately so, to allow the other vehicles and men to join them.

“I do,” Felix assured him grimly.

Sinclair had taught Felix how to fight in hand-to-hand combat, as well as instructing him on how to use all the weapons in the arsenal at Kingston Manor. But from the first, Felix had proved more adept with a knife than any of the other weapons. He could use all of them with precision, but the moment he held a knife, it became like another part of him and was completely at his command.

Felix considered this weapon to be more personal than the others he had practiced with, allowing him to look into his victim’s eyes as he thrust the knife inside them to its hilt.

The first person he was going to prove that to today was Beefy. The other man wouldn’t be calling him Nancyboy again once he had.

He wouldn’t be calling him anything at all...

The second person to feel his fury would be Anthony Bart himself. The other man might not have physically harmed Brianna during her captivity. At least, Felix hoped that was still true and the bastard had chosen to continue to mentally terrorize her with his threats and innuendos of what *might* or *would* happen to her if she didn’t do as she was told, rather than actually harming her.

A part of Felix wished he had the time to demonstrate to both those men exactly how adept he was with a knife. How a man could be kept alive for hours, in excruciating pain and balanced on the edge of death, but not be allowed to succumb to its blissful, pain-free arms.

But he didn’t have time for any of that today. Getting to Brianna and taking her out of there was far more important than Felix’s need for vengeance.

Freeing Brianna, as he’d told Nikolai, was all that mattered to him.

---

Brianna trembled slightly, the blood thundering through her veins, her chest quickly rising and falling as she stared warily at the locked door.

The shouting had ceased a short time ago, but the shooting had started immediately after that.

Brianna had placed her hands over her ears rather than listen to the echoing sounds of gunfire and the cries and groans of pain that followed. She'd only removed her hands once she realized an eerie silence had now fallen over the whole house.

Well...not a complete silence. She could still hear the occasional groan from an injured man or men, but at least the shooting had stopped.

She was now absolutely terrified of exactly who would be coming through the door to her room.

Would it be Felix? Surely it had to be Felix who was attacking the house so soon after promising her he was coming back for her?

Or would it be Anthony Bart, come to gloat some more about the fate that awaited her after he'd fought off whoever had dared to enter his lair.

Her breath caught in her throat as she heard the key turn in the lock, her eyes wide as she watched the handle slowly turning before the door was pushed open.

She screamed the moment she saw the apparition standing in the doorway.

An apparition she quickly realized was actually a man.

But a man whose face and clothes were covered in so much blood, it had been difficult to know that initially. There even seemed to be some of the viscous red fluid matted in the darkness of his hair. His bare arms, beneath the tight black T-shirt, were also covered in rivulets of the stuff, as was the hand wielding the long knife he carried.

For a few brief seconds, Brianna's instinct was to run and hide from the man who looked every inch a murderous madman.

To do what she should have done the moment she heard the shouts and gun shots, which was to lock herself in the bathroom and curl up into a ball in the cupboard beneath the vanity sink until someone told her it was safe to come out. If it ever was.

The two of them now stared at each other, neither of them moving or saying anything.

Then Brianna released a shaky breath as she recognized the deep blue of the man's eyes. Instead of locking herself in the bathroom, she ran toward him rather than away.

The moment she reached him, she threw herself at him, her arms clinging tightly about his neck, her legs secured about his waist as she buried her face against his blood-smeared throat.

"You came for me," she sobbed against his skin. "Felix, you came for me, just as you promised you would!" She lifted her head, staring into the deep blue of his eyes before pressing her lips fiercely against his.

---

Whatever Felix had been expecting when he saw Brianna again—relieved tears, probably—it wasn't to have her kiss him.

Especially when he probably currently looked like a Viking warrior returning from a bloody battle. He felt a little like one too, the adrenaline still pumping hotly through his veins from fighting and dispensing with the men who stood in the way of his reaching Brianna. Those men had included Beefy and Anthony Bart, as he had hoped it would.

But Felix wasn't about to question Brianna's kiss either, when it was what he'd wanted to do from the moment he first saw her. He slipped the knife into its sheath at his back before both his arms moved about Brianna to grasp the globes of her



bottom in his hands and hold her tightly to him as he hungrily returned the kiss.

He devoured the soft lips beneath his own. Over and over again, before his tongue licked between those soft pillows to thrust into the heat of Brianna's mouth. He was instantly assaulted by the heady taste of her, nectar and heat.

Her natural perfume invaded his senses at the same time, a mixture of roses, lemons, and a feminine spice Felix was sure was unique to her.

Brianna was the one to break the kiss long enough to look at him, her hands cradling either side of his face. "Is he gone? Please tell me Anthony Bart is dead?" She shuddered.

He nodded. "They both are. Your intended future husband was also killed in prison this morning by another inmate," he explained when she frowned her confusion.

She blinked. "Did you arrange for that to happen?"

"Not me, a friend."

She swallowed. "What sort of friend can have a man killed inside a prison?"

"A very powerful one." He inwardly acknowledged that Nikolai Volkov had more than lived up to his reputation as a vicious and cold-blooded fighter today.

Several of the Russian's men had acted as a vanguard, shooting their way into the house before Nikolai, and Felix and his brothers had taken out the rest of Bart's men.

Casper and Sinclair were expert marksmen, every one of their shots hitting its target. Bart's men felled like nine pins. But Nikolai, like Felix, preferred to fight with a long, curved knife. Felix had watched in awe as the Russian had used that blade to dice and slice the members of the Bart gang with a precision that surpassed even Felix's own.

He'd like to go blade to blade with the Russian one day. Not to see which of them was the most adept, because he was pretty sure that would be Nikolai. No, Felix wanted that to happen

because he believed it would be something they would both enjoy.

Brianna blinked. “More powerful than Anthony Bart or my brothers?”

“Much more,” Felix answered without hesitation. “You’ll meet him in a minute or two.” He grinned at the thought.

Brianna looked worried. “Who is he?”

“My name is Nikolai Volkov.” The Russian appeared in the doorway behind them.

There was nowhere near as much blood on the other man. Some blood on his hands, yes, which was inevitable when attacking with a knife. But otherwise, dressed as he was in his preference for a perfectly tailored three-piece suit and silk shirt and tie, Nikolai looked as if he was on his way to a day at the office.

The Russian’s eyes widened, and he shook his head in disapproval as he stared at Felix. “*Yebat*, could you not have tidied your appearance before presenting yourself to Miss Doyle?”

“Well, excuse me,” Felix answered sarcastically. “But I was too busy fighting my way to Brianna’s room to get her out of here to think of taking a shower first.”

The other man muttered several more Russian swear words under his breath before looking at Brianna. “I apologize for Felix’s appearance. I also apologize for calling you Miss Doyle, when I believe you prefer to be addressed as Miss McBride. Or possibly B. C. McBride?”

Felix frowned. “The author...?”

Brianna gave a low groan. “There seem to be an awful lot of people who are aware of my pseudonym considering I’ve been so insistent that no one knows my real name. Connor assured me he knew it was me all along,” she explained at Felix’s questioning look. “And now it seems Mr. Volkov is aware of it too.”

Felix shot the other man a censorious glance. “As Nikolai is fond of saying, nothing goes on in his city that he doesn’t know about.”

Brianna frowned. “But I don’t live in his city.”

“Your brothers do, however,” Nikolai drawled. “I do not like surprises and prefer to know all I need to about anything that might affect my *pakhan* or our *bratva*.” He glanced at her. “On another occasion, I will gladly express my pleasure in meeting you, as well as tell you how much I enjoyed reading your book. At this moment, however, it is imperative that we all remove ourselves as far away from this house as possible, before the police arrive. No doubt in response to having received several reports from Bart’s neighbors of having heard shots fired.” He grimaced. “Unfortunately, there isn’t enough time for us to clean up this situation.”

Felix frowned. “Is this going to cause trouble for you and Gregori Markovic?”

“*Nyet*.” The Russian gave a hard smile. “My men will remain behind long enough to leave enough clues that the Romanians were responsible for the attack.” He gave a dismissive shrug. “It isn’t a perfect explanation, but it will suffice for now.”

“That’s really Nikolai Volkov?” Brianna murmured incredulously against Felix’s throat.

“You’re really B. C. McBride?” Felix had read the bestselling novel about the Irish Mob and thoroughly enjoyed it. He seemed to recall that when it was published, the speculation in the media about its mysterious author had been overwhelming.

“I am,” Brianna acknowledged shyly.

“I am very much looking forward to reading the sequel,” Nikolai told her.

She grimaced. “I’ve only written about a third of it so far, and that’s on the laptop I had to leave behind in my cottage. Along with everything else I own,” she added sadly.

The Russian nodded. “I will see what I can do to have those things returned to you.”

Her eyes widened. “You will?”

“Of course.”

Brianna turned to Felix. “Can he do that?”

“Nikolai can do anything he chooses to,” he acknowledged dryly.

“And the two of you really are friends?”

“I believe it would be truer to say we are acquaintances,” Nikolai drawled in answer to her whispered comments, his hearing obviously as acute as his other senses.

“Oh, come on, Nikolai,” Felix said. “We just fought together. That has to make us brothers-in-arms, at least.”

“Yes, we did.” The Russian acknowledged. “And in future, I would ask that you keep your involvement with members of the criminal underworld, *my* world, to a minimum.”

“Including you?”

“Especially me.” Nikolai grimaced. “We need to go,” he insisted as the sound of police sirens could be heard in the distance, but coming rapidly closer.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

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“Comfortable?”

Brianna snuggled closer to Felix. “Very.”

The two of them were seated in the back of a black SUV being driven by the man who minutes ago had identified himself to her as Nikolai Volkov.

Well...both of them being seated was stretching it a bit, Brianna allowed ruefully.

Felix was sitting on the leather seat with Brianna’s legs straddling his hips, her chest molded against his, her arms still entwined tightly about his neck. She had adamantly refused to be put down onto her own feet, even though Felix had assured her Anthony Bart and his son really were both dead.

“Don’t look,” Felix had warned as they left the room that had been her prison. He’d pressed his hand against the back of her head as he carried her through the hallways of the house, out the front door, and into the waiting SUV.

If Felix’s bloodied appearance was any indication, then the Bart house was full of dead bodies and the walls and floors were covered in their blood too.

Felix was right. Brianna hadn’t needed to see that to know it was so.

Nikolai had climbed behind the wheel of the vehicle seconds later and then driven rapidly out of the gates and into the flow of the London traffic.

Brianna was still in awe of the man behind the wheel being Nikolai Volkov.

The Wolf.

Brianna had known him as the bogeyman when she was growing up. Used, she believed, to frighten all children of the different criminal factions into behaving, in England and Ireland, possibly even his native Russia too.

*The Wolf will come for you if you don't do as you're told.*

*The Wolf will find you if you don't come in and go to bed.*

*The Wolf will gobble you up if you don't eat your food.*

The list of misdemeanors that would bring the Wolf to your door had been endless.

Brianna turned her head slightly to look at the man driving them so capably through the busy London streets.

He didn't look like a bogeyman. He was tall and imposing, yes, but otherwise, he looked like any other handsome man aged in his midforties and wearing a bespoke suit.

He'd also been very kind to her since they met a short time ago, causing Brianna to wonder if perhaps his reputation had been exaggerated.

Until, obviously sensing her stare, he glanced at her in the driving mirror with the palest and deadliest gray eyes she had ever seen.

Brianna felt a shiver run down the length of her spine, warning her this man was like an iceberg, where only ten per cent of him was visible. That beneath his calm demeanor there lurked the ruthless killer who had *earned* himself the title of the Wolf in both Russia and Europe.

She gave a shiver as she turned back to Felix. "I'm really glad he's on our side."

Volkov gave a hard chuckle, as evidence he had heard her remark. "I am always on the side of maintaining order within the world in which my *pakhan* rules."

In other words, he wouldn't have lifted a finger to help Felix or her if it had been in conflict with his own interests or those of his *pakhan*. No doubt those interests were a dislike of an alliance between the Barts and the Irish Mob.

"Don't let him fool you with that tough-guy exterior," Felix whispered, deliberately loud enough for the other man to be able to hear him perfectly. "Last month, I actually witnessed him petting a dog."

"I had an ulterior motive, if you recall," Volkov derided.

"Now don't go spoiling the moment," Felix taunted. "You petted the dog, and you also reunited my now sister-in-law, Mia, with her father."

The Russian sobered. "I did the latter for Mia because I am well aware of how hard it is to grow up without parents who give a fuck about you," Nikolai bit out. "Please, excuse my language." He gave Brianna an apologetic glance.

"He also claims to have several men as friends who can turn into dragons," Felix confided in Brianna with a skeptical glance at the other man. "So you have to ask yourself, how dangerous can he really be?"

"Very dangerous," the Russian assured in a hard voice. "And let us hope that your twin can be more discreet when he returns from Wales than you are being right now."

"Hey, it's dragons," Felix reasoned.

One blond eyebrow arched. "You believe me now?"

"Well, the precision and accuracy of your plan and behavior just now proves you aren't delusional or mad, so for the moment, I've decided to give you the benefit of the doubt."

"Very magnanimous of you," the Russian mocked.

"I thought so."

Brianna didn't understand what the two men were even talking about, nor did she care. All that mattered to her, here in Felix's strong arms, was that she felt completely safe for the first time since her father died. Which, considering Felix's bloody

appearance and the dead bodies they had left in the Bart mansion, was pretty screwed up of her.

As screwed up as it was that Felix's erection was pressing so intimately against her abdomen. The same hardness that had been pressing against her since the moment she launched herself into Felix's arms and his hands instinctively gripped the cheeks of her bottom to keep her from falling.

Brianna told herself not to read too much into this obvious physical reaction, knowing it often happened to men who had fought a battle and triumphed.

A triumph Brianna had now started to worry might be short-lived.

Her brothers would not react well once they learned how thoroughly their alliance with Anthony Bart through her marriage to Terry Bart had been so utterly destroyed now that both of the Bart men were dead.

She knew Connor and Liam well enough not to even begin to think those deaths would be the end of her brothers' intention to use her to further their alliances within the criminal underworld.

A criminal underworld which Brianna now had no doubt was actually ruled over and orchestrated by the powerful Nikolai Volkov on behalf of his *pakhan*.

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“What are you thinking about?” Felix prompted as he felt Brianna trembling against him.

She shook her head. “It doesn't matter.”

His arms tightened about her. “It matters to me.”

“Why does it?” Brianna glanced up at him. “Why does any of this matter to you? Obviously, you aren't the sort of man who appreciates seeing a woman being held against her will, or being forced into a marriage she doesn't want. But most men would have just walked away and told themselves it was none



of their business, especially when it involved someone as ruthless as Anthony Bart. I don't understand why you not only came back but actually killed him and his men in order to free me."

He sensed, and ignored, Nikolai's mocking gaze on him in the driving mirror for several second before the Russian turned his attention back to the task of navigating the vehicle out of the capital, putting distance between them and the carnage they had left behind in the Bart mansion.

Felix grimaced, his physical discomfort added to as the blood dried on his skin and clothes. God knows what he looked like. Something from a horror film, would be his guess, and Nikolai had inferred as much earlier.

"Nikolai was the one who had the complete pleasure of organizing Terry's demise," Felix said, avoiding answering Brianna's question. He doubted she was ready or that this was the right time or place to tell her he'd fallen in love with her on sight.

Brianna turned to Nikolai. "Thank you."

"You're welcome," the Russian dismissed.

"And please thank your men for today for me too."

"They weren't all mine." Nikolai shrugged. "There was an equal number of my men to those from Kingston Security. Plus two of Felix's brothers."

Brianna's eyes widened. "Two of your brothers are here?"

"In the SUV directly behind us." Felix nodded. "As a family, we have zero tolerance toward bullying or cruelty toward women, children, and animals."

"They all have what might be called a white knight complex," Nikolai mocked.

"That certainly isn't something you could ever be accused of, that's for sure," Felix snapped.

"And yet here I am," the Russian said.

“I’m sure that’s because Bart’s demise coincides with what *you* and your *pakhan* wanted too.”

“Do you really believe I value your family’s friendship so shallowly?” Nikolai’s voice was silky soft.

“No, of course not,” Felix acknowledged heavily. “I apologize. Those remarks were uncalled for.”

“We’re both very grateful for your assistance,” Brianna stated warmly.

Felix felt a burning in his chest at hearing Brianna use the word *we* rather than *I*.

“Who killed Anthony Bart?” she prompted curiously.

Felix avoided meeting her gaze. “It was all a blur after the first few minutes. I’m not sure—”

“Felix did,” Nikolai stated evenly. “I believe his words as he pushed his knife into the other man’s throat were ‘Die, motherfucker.’”

Felix shot Nikolai a silencing glare and received a mocking smile in return that clearly stated *payback!*

Bastard!

“Once you meet all the Kingston family, you will realize that these men all have a history of having saved their future wives from someone who wished to do them harm.” Double payback, Nikolai’s gaze in the mirror taunted.

“Then I’m very grateful they felt motivated into helping rescue me today,” Brianna said warmly.

Totally missing—thank God—Nikolai’s implication that Felix had just saved *his* future wife. These were not the circumstances under which Felix wished to tell Brianna the main reason why he had felt compelled to rescue her.

Although she surely had to be aware of his physical reaction to being close to her, most especially his hard and throbbing cock between them pressing against her abdomen?

He was covered in blood, on an adrenaline high from the fight, and his cock hadn’t hesitated to stand up, his brain once again

shouting *mine, mine, mine* inside his head the moment he held Brianna in his arms.

“I— Where are we going?” She frowned as she stared out the tinted window beside them at the rapidly passing countryside.

Felix’s arms tightened about her, unsure whether or not Brianna was going to like his answer. “My family’s home in Surrey. Don’t worry,” he assured when he felt her stiffen. “You’ll be completely safe there.”

Brianna shook her head. “I’m not worried about me, I’m worried about you involving your family any more than they already have been.” She gave a shudder. “Once my brothers realize what happened today and my body isn’t found amongst the dead, they’re going to start looking for me. They certainly aren’t going to let me just walk away without a fight when they could use me for their own gain. I don’t want that fight to be brought anywhere near you or your family.”

Felix didn’t want that either, but he was also sure that once all of his family realized how important Brianna was to him, they wouldn’t allow her to be anywhere else but behind the walls of their highly secure family estate.

Brianna sighed. “Now that Anthony Bart is dead, they’re probably going to try to marry me off and form an alliance with whichever faction wins the fight between the Armenians or the Romanians.”

“You know about that?” Nikolai prompted sharply.

Brianna shrugged. “Only what I heard my brother Connor say to Liam on the day they kidnapped me and brought me to England. I know he was hoping that an alliance through marriage with the Bart family would give him more power. With that possibility now gone, he’s probably going to approach the Armenians or Romanians with an offer for the same alliance.”

Felix glanced at Nikolai, knowing Brianna had just confirmed what the other man had already suspected.

“Don’t think about any of that for now,” Felix dismissed. “You’ll be completely safe at Kingston Manor.” He smiled.

“My sisters-in-law are going to love you.”

Her eyes widened. “I’m going to meet them today too?”

“One of them initially, but the rest will be returning from Wales...” He glanced at Nikolai, receiving a nod of confirmation from the other man. “I believe my other brothers and their wives will all be back on the estate very soon.”

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“I don’t understand...” Brianna frowned her confusion as she pulled out of his arms to slide off his muscular thighs and onto the seat beside him.

“What are you doing?” Felix demanded.

“Sitting beside you rather than on you.” And instantly feeling the loss of his warmth and the reassurance his closeness gave her. Although she could have done without the blood that had soaked into her sweater and jeans. No doubt there were smears of it on her face and hands too. “I had assumed your family lived in London.”

“We all have apartments in London, but our main home is the family estate in Surrey,” Felix explained, still looking far from happy at their new seating arrangement.

“How big is this estate?” An estate to Brianna was a group of houses sitting so close to each other the inhabitants could reach out the window and touch the wall of the neighboring house. She had a feeling that wasn’t the same thing Felix was talking about.

“About twenty acres, including the stables, tennis courts, and medical wing with its helicopter pad on the roof,” Felix confirmed. “The house itself is an old manor house built in the sixteenth century for a loyal follower of Elizabeth I. It’s gone through a lot of renovations over the years, but currently has a large communal kitchen, a main area for all the family to gather for meals, and a sitting room and movie theater where we can all be together too. But my five brothers and I and our cousin, Adam, all have individual suites there so we can be

completely private if we want to. The suites all have a bedroom, ensuite bathroom, and a sitting area. My parents have a suite there too, even though they currently prefer to live in the South of France.”

Until five days ago, Brianna had been living in a two-up, two-down cottage on the southern coast of Ireland. Before that, she had lived in Dublin with Aunt Bridget in a house that was a little bigger than that, but not by much. Brianna tried really hard not to think about the house she'd lived in and been bullied by Connor in when she was a child. Even when her mother had been alive, it hadn't been a happy place for Brianna, and her father's visits had been too infrequent for him to know what Connor's behavior to his second wife and daughter was really like.

Yes, Brianna had a lot more money now from the sale of her book, and she could have bought herself a bigger house anywhere in the world that wasn't Ireland. She hadn't done so because apart from her privacy and wanting to feel safe, which she thought she'd had at the cottage, she hadn't wanted to leave what was familiar.

She had a feeling it wouldn't have mattered if she had. Connor would have still found her, regardless of where she tried to hide from him.

Felix's description of his family estate told her it was enormous. Not that she thought Felix was boasting, he was simply stating facts and logistics.

Nevertheless, it emphasized how much from totally different worlds the two of them were.

Her world was one of hiding and living a quiet life in a small cottage by the Irish Sea, hoping her brothers would eventually forget she even existed.

And look how successful that had been!

Felix came from a background of wealth and privilege. A world which also included him being friends with a man like the Wolf and living on a huge estate in Surrey with the rest of his obviously very wealthy family.

The same man Brianna blushed to remember she had kissed so passionately just a short time ago.

A man she knew she wanted to kiss again.

And again and again.

Kissing Felix made her feel alive. Being with him made her pulse race, her heart pound, and her body become sensitized to his every touch.

All feelings and emotions she couldn't allow herself to feel.

Not because of their different backgrounds, wealth, and status. But because she was absolutely certain her psychopath of a brother would come for her with guns blazing once he discovered where she was hiding.

Brianna would have to leave the Kingston estate before that ever happened.

Not just the estate, but Felix too...

## CHAPTER NINE

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Everything became a kaleidoscope of new surroundings and faces once they arrived at the Kingston estate, too much so for Brianna to be able to take it all in as she stood beside Felix in the huge entrance hall of the main house.

She was pretty sure delayed shock had begun to set in as she'd sat beside Felix in silence while Nikolai drove the SUV onto the estate through huge open iron gates.

The Russian had handed Brianna a business card, waited for her and Felix to get out of the vehicle, and then driven off again. No doubt he was now well on his way back to London to report on the situation to his *pakhan*.

A glance at the card showed her it only had Nikolai's name on it and a mobile telephone number. She'd ignored Felix's scowl as she slipped the card into the back pocket of her jeans. She might need to ask for Nikolai's help again before this was all over.

She now clung to Felix's hand for reassurance as she was introduced to two of the Kingston brothers, the tall and distinguished Sinclair, and the long-haired and mischievous-looking Casper. These were the two brothers who had taken part in her rescue, although their black tactical gear and slightly disheveled appearance didn't look anything like the bloody mess that covered Felix.

She did manage a small smile when she was introduced to Sinclair's wife, the glowingly lovely Remy, that glow no doubt due to her obvious baby bump.

Brianna became lost in her own thoughts as the four members of the Kingston family talked softly together. She only forced herself to rejoin the conversation when she heard them discussing Felix escorting her upstairs to one of the guest bedrooms.

“I want to stay with Felix,” she told them abruptly, unable to even bear the thought of being on her own right now.

She had just spent three days and nights with nothing for company but the tortuous thoughts of what her future held. She didn’t want to be alone with only those for company again now.

“I think that’s probably for the best,” Felix told his family after a brief glance at the stubborn determination on her face.

“Of course,” Remy agreed softly. “I’ll have more towels brought up so you can both take a shower.”

Which, Brianna realized slightly hysterically, was probably Remy Kingston’s polite way of saying they both needed to take off their bloody clothing and then wash the blood off themselves. Brianna had to admit, the other woman sounded very calm about it if that was the case.

“I think the clothing is unsalvageable.” Remy’s next comment confirmed that was exactly what she’d meant. “If you’d like to throw it all out into the hallway, I’ll arrange to have them taken away and burned. I’ll find you some things to wear from my wardrobe.” She glanced down at herself. “They obviously aren’t going to fit me for a while,” she added dryly.

Brianna was sure they were all aware that by destroying her own and Felix’s clothes, it would also get rid of the evidence connecting them to the bloodbath the police had no doubt found by now at Bart’s home.

She attempted another smile. “Thank you. Although thanks really aren’t enough for what you’ve all done for me today.” Her gaze encompassed all the Kingston men.

“It’s what family does,” Casper, the youngest brother assured lightly.

“But I’m not—”



“Time for that shower,” Felix announced brightly. “If either of you feel like bringing us some coffee and toast, I’d appreciate it.” He looked expectantly at his two brothers.

“Yes, Master. Of course, Master,” Casper lisped in an over-the-top obsequious manner. “It’s not enough we just fought with him,” he announced to no one in particular. “Now we have to bring him coffee and toast while *he* gets to shower with the beautiful woman we just rescued!”

Brianna felt her cheeks burning at the compliment, although she was pretty sure she looked a complete mess right now rather than beautiful. “I did remember to say thank you,” she teased back.

“And because you did, *you* will be brought coffee and toast.” Casper gave her a courtly bow. “I’ll need to think about whether or not Felix deserves some too.”

“I think he does,” Brianna encouraged huskily.

Casper glanced at Felix. “Wow, no wonder you fell so hard, big brother”

“Sorry?” Brianna frowned as she felt Felix’s sudden tension in the way his fingers tightened about hers.

“Your smile along with that sexy accent are impossible to resist,” Casper complimented.

“Behave.” Sinclair gave Casper a slight smack to the back of his head.

One that Brianna recognized as a gesture of affection rather than containing any real heat or reprimand behind it.

Something else that was different between herself and Felix; when her brother Connor hit her, he did it with the intention of inflicting as much pain as possible, a pain he enjoyed bestowing.

---

“Yes, behave,” Felix’s warning to his youngest brother was accompanied by a silencing glare. The last thing he wanted

was for Casper to reveal Felix's feelings for Brianna before he had the opportunity to do so himself.

Although quite when that would be, he had no idea. Right now, Brianna was very grateful to him and his brothers for removing her from an unacceptable situation. But gratitude wasn't love, and Felix very much wanted Brianna to learn to love him in the same way he already loved her.

"Coffee and toast for two," he reiterated firmly to Casper before turning on his heel, keeping Brianna's hand still securely in his own as he took the stairs two at a time until he reached the top landing.

From there, he marched them down the hallway to where his suite of rooms was situated. He'd slept in clean sheets last night, but he couldn't remember what state he'd left the bathroom in this morning in his rush to get out of the house and rescue Brianna.

Not that he'd be sleeping in the bed tonight. He'd already decided Brianna would be the one to sleep there. She deserved so much more than a comfortable bed after the betrayal of her own brothers had landed her in such a dangerous situation. Even thinking of her being married to a monster like Terry Bart, of being forced to live her life with him, brought back Felix's need for violence.

"Would you like a shower or a bath?" he prompted once they'd entered his very tidy bathroom. The cleaning lady must have been in after he left this morning.

"Which are you having?" Brianna asked.

"A shower." The last thing he wanted was to have to sit in the same water he'd used to wash the blood off his body and from his hair. "But I'll happily run a bath for you."

She shook her head. "If you're having a shower, then I am too."

"Brianna...?" He studied her closely, worried by the flatness of her tone and the way she continued to avoid his gaze.

He placed his hand under her chin so he could see all of her face. His concern deepened when he saw her pupils were

blown, leaving only a thin surrounding ring of green. Her cheeks were pale beneath the streaks of blood she'd acquired from his clothing when he held her. The grip he had maintained on her hand told him she was also trembling.

Giving every indication she was going into shock.

Which wasn't surprising after what Brianna had been through since she was abducted from Ireland just days ago.

Felix didn't hesitate before lowering his head and claiming her lips with his own. The second he did, the rest of the world and its problems faded away. All that mattered in that moment was the softness and taste of Brianna's lips beneath his own.

---

This kiss was just as all-consuming and fierce as the first time.

It centered Brianna to a place where nothing else existed but the two of them. Not for her, at least, and she was pretty sure Felix felt the same way as his lips fiercely devoured hers and his heated arousal pressed against her.

Brianna admitted that she'd thought he was just a charming and very handsome man in a bespoke suit when she'd first met him. But she'd learned since that he couldn't ever be anything so bland and without depth.

He'd already proven that he wasn't when he had completely held his own at dinner the previous evening with Anthony Bart.

Then kept his promise and came back for her the following day, bringing several of his brothers and their men with him, along with the legendary Russian Wolf and a group of his men from the *bratva*.

According to Nikolai Volkov, Felix was actually responsible for *killing* Anthony Bart!

All making Felix an enigma within a puzzle inside a labyrinth.

One that was now kissing her as if she was the only other person in the world. The only person who mattered to him, at

least.

She gave a murmur of encouragement as she entwined her arms about his neck and held on as he easily lifted her into his arms and carried her across the room before laying her on the bed. She groaned her encouragement as he followed her down to support his weight on his elbows as he lay between her parted thighs. The evidence of his arousal throbbed long and hard against her, pressing against her clit, igniting bursts of fiery need.

She felt wild, primitive, that feeling added to by the evidence of a battle fought on their clothes and faces.

Felix's hands cradled each side of her face, his gaze holding hers as he lowered his head to once again take possession of her mouth with his lips and tongue.

Kissing.

Possessing.

Claiming.

Brianna twined her fingers in the hair at his nape as she kissed him back just as passionately. Wanting, needing to lose herself in the wild desire raging inside and through her, from her fingertips to her toes.

Nothing else existed in this moment but Felix and the surge of pleasure that coursed through her as one of his hands began to slowly caress downward, lighting a fire wherever he touched. The vulnerability of her throat. The sensitivity of her breast. The dip of her waist. The curve of her hip.

"Please!" Brianna moved his hand to the fastening at the waistband her jeans as she rubbed up against the throbbing hardness pressing against her clit. "Touch me," she pleaded. "Please."

---

Felix raised his head to look at her. "I'm going to touch you everywhere," he promised. "Claim you everywhere," he added

huskily.

“Then do it,” she encouraged huskily.

Much as it pained him to do so, Felix shook his head. “Believe me, I want that too. So much. But we both need to shower, then you need to hydrate and have something to eat before we can think of doing anything else.”

“But—”

“Brianna, I don’t ever want you to look back on us being together and regret that it happened.”

She frowned. “What do you mean?”

“I mean that whether you choose to be with me or not, you will always be completely safe here,” he assured gruffly. “No one can get through our high-tech security.”

Except Nikolai Volkov, it seemed.

But Felix was starting to think that Nikolai was a law unto himself. A ghost in an Armani suit. A legend. A man as mystical as the creatures who lived in the wilds of Wales whom he claimed as friends. He was, Felix acknowledged with admiration, the man who stood behind the curtain pulling the strings.

Gregori Markovic was lucky to have him as his friend and loyal second.

Brianna gave a shake of her head. “I thought I was safe in my little cottage in Southern Ireland, but Connor knew where I was all the time. I have no doubt he enjoyed letting me think that he didn’t,” she added bitterly. “Once he discovers I’m here—and he will find out, believe me—he’s going to come looking for me. And I very much doubt he’s going to just politely knock on the front door.”

“Let him come.” Felix looked forward to meeting the other man face-to-face. He *relished* the idea of then making Connor Doyle pay for what he’d put Brianna through.

She gave a shudder. “I shouldn’t have brought my troubles here to your family home.”

“You didn’t. I did.” Felix’s arms tightened about her. “You’re going to continue to stay right here. With me,” he added firmly.

Something in his voice seemed to puzzle Brianna as she blinked up at him. “I am...?”

Felix weighed his options. Mainly, he tried to decide whether telling Brianna the truth about his feelings for her would encourage her to stay or make her even more determined to leave.

Considering how she had been treated by her brothers and then Anthony Bart, he didn’t think lying to her was an option. But he didn’t want to talk to her about this when they both looked as if they had been inside an abattoir.

“We’re going to both take a shower, separately,” he stated. “Have something to eat and drink. And then you’re going to come and lie back down on the bed with me.”

A blush colored her cheeks. “I am?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Because we need to talk.”

“Just talk?”

“For now.”

“About?”

“What happens next.”

“I already know what happens next,” she assured bleakly.

“And what is that?”

“Connor will threaten your family, not giving you a choice when he demands you hand me over. Then he’s going to marry me off to someone else who’s in a position to give him the power he craves. I’m nothing more than a bargaining chip to him,” she acknowledged heavily.

“I assure you that isn’t what’s going to happen,” Felix stated firmly.

“I know you mean well, Felix, but I doubt you would be able to stop him. He—he’s cruel and vicious, and he hates anyone who even attempts to thwart him.” There were tears in her eyes as she gave a shake of her head. “If I try to stay here, he’ll kill me and then he’ll kill you and your family. Or perhaps the other way around, so that he can hurt me as much as possible before putting me out of my misery. Either way, we would all be dead.”

Felix smiled slightly. “I don’t intend letting him anywhere near you, and today should have shown you I’m really not that easy to kill.”

“I doubt my father thought so either.”

His gaze sharpened. “What do you mean?”

She winced. “I’ve always believed Connor killed him. Or at the very least, arranged to have him killed.”

“What?” Felix stared at her incredulously.

Brianna avoided meeting his gaze. “I’ve thought about it so much since it happened. When Da died, Connor stepped into his position as an underboss to Ronan Murphy. Which took him a step closer to the top position. Six months ago, he killed Ronan Murphy, along with anyone who opposed his coup, before taking his place at the head of the Irish Mob in London.”

“You really think he killed his own father to start that process?”

She nodded. “Da was totally loyal to Ronan Murphy. He would never have gone along with Connor killing him before taking over.”

Felix had heard some fucked-up things about Connor Doyle in the past few days, but adding committing patricide to his tally of crimes took things to a whole new, and sick, level. Had Liam Doyle been involved in their father’s death too? Did Nikolai know about this?

Of course he fucking did. The Russian knew everything. No doubt Nikolai hadn’t done anything about the killings at the

time because the uncertainty it had produced in the leadership of the Irish Mob had suited his own purposes.

Felix scowled. “How did your father die?”

Brianna swallowed. “The official story was that my father walked into a shop to buy some cigarettes at the same time as it was being robbed. Da was shot and killed. The shopkeeper was shot too, but he had the good sense to disappear after he was released from hospital.” She shrugged. “If Connor has found him since then, he’ll be dead too by now.”

“What happened to the man who was robbing the shop and did the shooting?”

“His body was later found in a dumpster.”

This really didn’t sound good. In fact, it sounded as if Connor Doyle had eliminated the one person who could confirm he was the one who had ordered the hit. “What makes you think Connor is responsible?”

“Two things. One, my father rarely smoked.”

Felix frowned. “But he could have just felt the need for a cigarette that day.”

“He could have, yes.”

“But you don’t think so.”

“No.” Brianna chewed on her bottom lip. “Da had made me a promise, you see, the last time we’d seen each other. It was that he would stop smoking. I don’t believe he would have broken that promise to me.”

“You and he were close?”

Her expression softened. “I know what he was and the things he had to do, but to me, he was always just my Da who I loved and who loved me.”

“Did anyone else know about his promise to you?”

“Not as far as I’m aware, no.”

It was starting to sound as if Brianna’s suspicion had substance. “Your second reason?”



“Da wouldn’t have gone into the shop on his own. He would have had his bodyguards with him.”

“Where are those bodyguards now? Perhaps you could ask them what happened?”

She shook her head. “They disappeared the same night, and neither they nor their bodies have ever been found. But I’m pretty sure Connor had the two of them killed and disposed of at the pig farm.”

Felix had heard from Casper how the different factions of the criminal underworld liked to dispose of the bodies of the people they killed. The Irish Mob favored a pig farm. “Didn’t Ronan Murphy investigate the murder of his second and the disappearance of Aiden’s two bodyguards?”

“I’m sure he did, but no doubt Connor had already eliminated anyone who knew the truth. I don’t *know* any of this for certain, Felix,” she said, her voice trembling. “But I can take a pretty accurate guess on Connor being responsible, even if he didn’t pull the trigger himself, for at least three people’s deaths that day. Including our father.”

Felix had already known what a bastard Connor Doyle was for having traded his own sister off to the Barts in order to form an alliance between the two criminal factions. Adding the death of Aiden Doyle, Connor’s own father, to his crimes, needed further discussion with Nikolai Volkov.

As the man was fond of saying, “Nothing happens in my city that I don’t know about.” If Connor had killed Aiden and his bodyguards, then Nikolai had definitely known about it, but hadn’t felt it necessary to share that knowledge.

Brianna pulled out of his arms. “I think I’d like to go and take that shower now.”

“But—”

“I just need some time alone.” She hurried into the bathroom to close and lock the door behind her.

As far as Felix was concerned, Brianna had already been alone for far too long, with or without her thoughts.

Kissing her had only confirmed what he already knew.  
Brianna was his.

She might not realize it yet, or be willing to acknowledge it  
once she did, but he now belonged to her too.

She would always have Felix.

Always.

## CHAPTER TEN

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Brianna leaned back heavily against the bathroom door. She was shaking so badly, it felt as if her teeth were rattling inside her head.

She'd been rescued.

For the moment, she was safe behind the high walls and security, both human and technical, on the Kingston family estate.

She'd been kissed by Felix to within an inch of her life.

Terry and Anthony Bart were both dead—Brianna still found it difficult to absorb that as being fact. Just yesterday, those two men had been a threat not just to her happiness but to her very existence. Both of them had been psychopaths, ones who wouldn't have hesitated to kill her if they decided she was no longer of use to them. Today, they were the ones who were dead.

But she didn't fool herself, and neither should Felix, into thinking that was the end of this situation as far as Connor and Liam were concerned.

Because it wasn't.

If there was one thing Connor hated more than hearing the word no, then it was not being able to punish the person who had dared to say it to him.

He would come.

Brianna just had to ensure she was no longer here and a danger to the Kingston family when he did.

Just?

Hah!

Felix had made it very clear he didn't intend to let her leave the estate, or him.

Brianna already knew, from the few times they had been together, that she didn't want to leave him either. That she wanted to explore whatever was between them. Maybe discover she could have a future with Felix.

But what she wanted and what actually happened had usually been two completely different things.

As she had no doubt they would be this time too.

---

“Coffee?” Felix poured some of the brew into two mugs when Brianna emerged from the bathroom clean and dressed in some of Remy's clothes. The clothes had been delivered with the coffee, and Felix left them outside the bathroom door for her.

He'd also stripped and remade the bed in Brianna's absence after realizing they had smeared the duvet cover with blood when they laid on top of it earlier.

Seeing the resolve in Brianna's expression now and the way she refused to meet his gaze, Felix had a feeling there wasn't going to be any more kissing or touching in their immediate future.

He tamped down his disappointment, wanting to give Brianna whatever she needed. “There's toast too under the silver dome,” he encouraged.

Sinclair had been the one to bring up the tray of coffee and toast and Remy's clothes.

His eldest brother had stayed long enough to put forward a suggestion that, although radical, would also mean Connor Doyle wouldn't be able to come knocking on the front gate

demanding they hand over his sister or accusing them of keeping her here against her will.

Despite the passion of their kisses earlier, Felix didn't think Brianna was ready yet to hear a marriage proposal from him.

He was even more convinced of it when she still wouldn't meet his gaze as he handed her one of the mugs of coffee. "Milk and sugar are on the tray."

Brianna added some of the former before taking an obviously welcome sip of the unsweetened brew.

Felix had showered after replacing the bedclothes, using the bathroom in Darius's suite, before putting on clean clothes and returning to his own suite to wait for Brianna.

"You said we need to talk."

Fuck, had any man ever heard those six words and not felt a lurch of apprehension in his chest? Somehow, Felix doubted it.

Except, Brianna was right. In this case *he* was the one who had made that statement earlier.

"I also said we were going to lie down on the bed together again while we did it," he reminded.

A delicate blush colored her cheeks as she made a point of sitting on the couch before drawing her legs up beneath her. "I think we already covered that part, don't you." It was a dismissive statement, not a question.

Felix didn't *think* that at all. Mainly because if he didn't hold Brianna in his arms again very soon, make love to her, he was going to implode from the need to be close to her. To hold her softness in his arms and breathe in her unique combination of citrus and spice and Brianna.

"Sinclair thinks the two of us should get married."

*What the fuck—!*

It was the last thing Felix had meant to say next. He could see by the way Brianna's face paled as she carefully placed her mug of coffee on the tabletop before rising abruptly to her feet that it wasn't something she had wanted to hear either.

*Okay, Felix*, he cautioned himself, *it's time to pull back and regroup.*

“Sorry.” He gave her a bland smile. “That didn’t quite come out the way it was meant to.”

She eyed him warily. “How did you mean it to sound?”

He shrugged. “Sinclair suggested it as an option. One where if you were married to me, then Connor wouldn’t be able to insist you leave with him. You wouldn’t be free to be married off to someone else if he forced the situation.”

She grimaced. “He would if he made me a widow first.”

“I hadn’t thought of that,” Felix allowed ruefully.

Brianna nodded. “Besides, from what you’ve told me and what I heard when you talked to Anthony Bart at dinner, you enjoy being the eligible bachelor. You like the freedom it gives you to be with any woman you choose.” She shook her head. “Why on earth would Sinclair think you would ever want to give all that up to marry someone you barely know?”

It was one of those rare moments of truth again. A truth Felix couldn’t keep avoiding. A truth he didn’t *want* to avoid.

He lifted his chin, his gaze deliberately catching and holding Brianna’s. “Probably because Sinclair knows I’m in love with you.”

---

Brianna couldn’t talk. Couldn’t move. Couldn’t *breathe*.

Did Felix just say—

Telling her Sinclair’s suggestion that the two of them marry to protect her from Connor had seemed wild enough, but having Felix now tell her he was in love with her was insane!

Felix didn’t know her.

He knew absolutely nothing about her, except what she’d told him this past night and day.

She didn't know him either.

Dear God, they had met each other a matter of *hours* ago!

“Brianna—”

“No.” She held her hand up as he would have reached out for her. “I know this is your suite, but you need to leave me alone right now. I can't— I can't even... Would you please go,” she choked.

“Brianna, I know how this sounds, but looking at a particular woman and knowing you're in love with her, want to spend the rest of your life with her, seems to be what happens to the men in my family. I thought it was all a load of nonsense too, until yesterday evening. But it happened to Max and Adam, to Sinclair, to Malachi, to Darius, and now it's happened to me.” His smile was rueful. “I'm not saying they all gave up without a fight, but I am. I love you, Brianna, and no one, *no one*,” he repeated for emphasis, “is going to hurt you while I'm here to prevent it from happening. That includes unhinged Irish Mob bosses,” he added grimly.

Brianna couldn't doubt the sincerity of his words and expression.

Or the way he was looking at her with such warmth in his eyes.

But she also knew emotions were running high after the shooting and killing this morning.

Nikolai Volkov had claimed that Felix was a white knight. It appeared he had been right about all the Kingston brothers. They obviously all felt the same need to rescue the fair maiden.

But Brianna didn't want to be a damsel in distress. She refused to be one. She was determined to be a survivor, not a victim.

Lord knows she was grateful to Felix, his brothers, and Nikolai Volkov for liberating her from Anthony Bart's clutches and having to marry his insane son. But she had been looking after herself for a long time now, ever since she moved out of her aunt's house and into her own cottage two years ago.

Okay, so she now knew that Connor had known where she was all the time, that he had simply been biding his time until she could be of use to him. Which also meant she couldn't go back to Ireland.

But she still had a lot of money in the bank, some left to her by her mother, the rest earned from royalties on her book.

She now knew she had no choice but to start anew somewhere else. Then again, and yet again, if Connor found her. She would not become a victim, nor would she live the rest of her life as if she was one.

Nor did she have any intention of forcing someone else, namely Felix, to live that precarious life with her...

Having the time to think while she showered and washed her hair had allowed her to realize Connor probably hadn't had the time to discover where she was yet. But she had no doubt it was a very small window of opportunity before he did. Which meant she had to leave the Kingston estate sooner rather than later.

She straightened her spine. "I've changed my mind. I would like my own bedroom after all."

Felix's expression was pained, as if she had physically struck him rather than made a reasonable request. "I can arrange that, if you're sure it's what you really want..."

Brianna turned away from looking at the hurt expression in his eyes. Felix would thank her one day. In all probability when he met the woman he really fell in love with and wanted to marry.

"I'm sure," she stated firmly.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

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“Who the hell pooped on your parade— Whoa!” Casper put his arm up defensively in front of his face as Felix turned toward him swinging his fist. “Bro,” he chided.

Felix lowered his hand. “Then stop being such a fucking bastard—”

“Hey, lady present,” Sinclair cautioned from the breakfast nook where he and Remy were eating a late lunch together.

“Sorry, Remy,” Felix muttered moodily. “But I’m glad you’re here. Which guest bedroom do you think would be most suitable for Brianna?”

Remy stood up to hug him. “It sounds as if Brianna is feeling better?”

“Enough so that she’s decided she doesn’t want to share living space with me.” It hurt like hell that Felix had told Brianna he was in love with her and her reaction had been to ask for her own bedroom.

“I’m sure that isn’t the reason she wants a room of her own,” Remy soothed. “She was upset when she arrived here and needed to feel safe. Now that she does, she just wants to have her own space. Think of it from her point of view. Her own brothers betrayed her. She was kept a prisoner for several days and nights by one of the most dangerous men in London,” she reminded. “She was also supposed to marry his son in a few days.” Remy grimaced. “I can’t even begin to imagine how scared she must have felt for every single minute of that time.”

Felix felt some of his tension starting to ease from his shoulders. Remy was right. Brianna had been through a terrible ordeal. Telling her he was in love with her had been a bad idea when Brianna was still trying to process that she was now free of both her brother and the Barts' immediate plans for her.

"You're right." Felix managed a tight smile. "Sorry, Casper. I'm a little on edge."

His brother shrugged. "And I'm not the most tactful of people."

"No," he conceded dryly.

"She'll come around, bro." Casper draped his arm across Felix's shoulders. "As Remy said, it's all been a bit much for Brianna to take in since her brothers drugged her and flew her out of Ireland. She's going to need a few days to fully believe she's safe now."

"Give her time," Sinclair agreed.

Time seemed to be what Felix had a lot of now that Brianna had said she would rather be alone than with him.

But if that's what it took, that's what he would give her.

---

"And to think, I assured Felix you just needed time to come to terms with your new situation."

The overhead lights came on in the kitchen as Brianna spun on her heel to turn and face the owner of that voice.

Sinclair Kingston!

"You startled me!" she accused.

He stood up from where he had been seated at the breakfast nook, his open tablet on the table in front of him. Sinclair was over six feet tall, his dark hair liberally sprinkled with gray at his temples as indication he was the eldest of the Kingston brothers.

He eyed her ruefully. “I’m just sitting in the kitchen of my own home enjoying a cup of coffee while my pregnant wife catches up on some much-needed sleep. Can you claim your own actions to be as innocent?”

Brianna glared as a guilty blush heated her cheeks. Felix had organized having the family doctor come here to examine her. Luckily, he had confirmed that neither her ribs or cheekbone were broken, just badly bruised.

After the doctor left, Brianna had waited, and then waited some more, before even attempting to leave the guest bedroom Remy had shown her to earlier today. She hadn’t bothered to change into the cotton shorts and camisole Remy had provided for her to sleep in. She still wore the blue sweater and skinny jeans from earlier.

Her efforts to creep through the house without alerting any of the Kingston family had been completely wasted, it seemed. Because even though it was two o’clock in the morning and the house was completely silent, Sinclair had still been up to ambush her as she made her way through the kitchen to make her escape through the back door.

Intentionally?

His opening comment would seem to indicate the answer to that question was yes.

Brianna had remained in the guest bedroom for the rest of the day and evening, claiming tiredness as her excuse for doing so. Felix had brought dinner up to her on a tray, but their brief conversation when he delivered it and when he returned to take the tray of barely touched food away had been stilted, to say the least.

She knew she’d hurt him by asking for her own bedroom. But she also knew it was for the best. Not just for him, but for all the Kingston family—

“For future reference, none of the family suites have security cameras in them, but all the hallways and main rooms in the house are monitored with cameras. Movement sensors too, once everyone is in their suites. The alarm on the movement

sensor came on the moment you left your bedroom.” He nodded in the direction of his tablet. “The cameras then tracked you as you walked along the hallway, down the stairs, and then into the kitchen.”

Brianna had reasoned earlier that the security at the Kingston estate was to keep people on the other side of the high wall out, not to keep anyone *inside* it. Obviously, she had been wrong. “Isn’t that a bit of overkill?”

“No.”

Brianna looked at Sinclair closely when he didn’t add anything to that. His expression was now hard and unyielding. “Someone once got onto the estate and hurt someone in the family.” It was a statement, not a question.

“Yes.” He seemed to force the tension from his shoulders with effort. “But several years later, Max and Rosie met when she climbed over the wall and approached the house. She then somehow managed to calmly sit on the grass and befriend Adam’s two guard dogs, so that to this day, they still follow her around when she’s at home,” he recalled with obvious admiration.

“I’m guessing Max is another brother and Rosie is his wife?”

“Yes.”

“Why did she break in?”

“She wanted to ask for Max’s assistance in finding her sister, who had gone missing.”

“Couldn’t she have just— Never mind.” She shook her head, determined not to become sidetracked into doing what she knew was the right thing to do.

Sinclair straightened. “Whatever reason you’ve given yourself for attempting to sneak out of the house like a thief in the night, it isn’t good enough,” he bit out. “Nor is it fair to my brother not to even show him the courtesy of saying goodbye to him.”

Brianna’s mouth went dry at the deserved rebuke. “I’m trying to protect Felix!”

“From your brothers?” Sinclair scorned. “Connor is nothing but a bully, and Liam is his lapdog.”

She knew that, had known it all her life. “They can still both shoot and kill you and all the members of your family.” They could shoot and kill *Felix*.

She might not have made any declaration of love to him, but that didn't mean she didn't feel the emotion. Or the beginning of it. Too much had happened to her in the past thirty hours since she'd first met Felix for her to be able to clearly sort out what she was feeling about anything.

Except fear.

That she recognized all too easily. Not for herself this time, but for Felix and his family. And it was coming from the same direction that fear always came. Her brother Connor.

“We're more than capable of looking after ourselves,” Sinclair dismissed. “I thought we'd more than proved that during our visit to Anthony Bart's house yesterday. Which apparently, as Nikolai predicted, has been attributed to being fallout from the fight between the Armenians and the Romanians. The man who murdered Bart's son in prison has been charged, and it's believed he'll have another life sentence added to the one he's already serving. I'm sure Nikolai used a deft hand in both those satisfying conclusions.”

“He's a very powerful man.”

“And a friend.”

Sinclair didn't say it, but it was obvious he meant her to realize by that remark that the Kingston family was also powerful in their own right.

“I can't stay here, Sinclair.” Brianna looked at him pleadingly. “You have to realize why I can't?”

“He might, but I don't,” rasped an all too familiar voice.

Brianna spun round to face Felix as he stood in the doorway into the kitchen. His hair was disheveled, and he was dressed in the black T-shirt and loose gray sweats he'd obviously worn to bed.

He looked...furious.

Brianna had seen Felix in all manner of moods. Lazily charming, dismissive and mocking in turn during his dinner with Anthony Bart. Ruthlessly unconcerned after he dispatched the mobster yesterday. Gentle and caring when he removed her from the Bart house and brought her to his family home. A quiver ran through her body, even all these hours later, when she thought of the passionate intensity of the kisses they had shared.

But the man now standing across the room was none of those things.

This man was cold and yet blazingly furious at the same time. "Would you leave us, please." His jaw was tight, his blue eyes glittering like blue chips of ice as he spoke to Sinclair but kept that furious gaze fixed on Brianna.

"No problem." Sinclair paused beside Brianna to add, "*This* Felix is why you have no reason to be in the least worried about him ever falling foul of your brothers and not emerging as the victor."

The icy quiver that now ran the length of Brianna's spine was one of apprehension rather than arousal.

Because right now, Felix looked every bit as coldly lethal as her eldest brother, but without that edge of insanity she was sure ran through Connor.

She shivered "You really aren't just an accountant and financial adviser, are you?"

He huffed. "I would have thought that was obvious from what Nikolai told you happened at the Bart mansion."

"When you stabbed Anthony Bart in the throat?"

He nodded. "What Nikolai didn't tell you is that I then twisted that blade, and kept twisting it, until his blood stopped pumping over my hand and I was absolutely sure he was dead."

Sinclair said she had no reason to fear for Felix's safety if it came to a face-to-face meeting between him and her brothers.

The coldness she could see in Felix's eyes and his tightly clenched jaw told her that anyone who got in Felix's way should be afraid *of* him.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

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“Well?” Felix bit out harshly.

Brianna’s throat moved as she swallowed. “I’m trying to protect you and your family.”

His hands clenched at his sides as he took in her appearance in a sweater, jeans, and thick jacket. “By sneaking out of here without so much as a thank-you, let alone a fucking goodbye?”

She winced at the accusation. “You’re being as willfully blind as Sinclair.”

“I am?” he prompted in a deceptively mild tone. He was furious, couldn’t remember the last time he’d felt this angry, if he ever had. “How, pray tell?”

She sighed heavily at his unmistakable sarcasm. “Can’t you see? It will be a matter of pride to Connor now to retrieve me and take me back to his home until he manages to make another deal to form an alliance by marrying me off to another one of his rivals. Probably the victor between the Armenians and Romanians.” She winced. “My brothers will look for me, Felix, they will come after me, not because they want me, but because I represent an alliance between them and the Bart family. When they get here, they aren’t going to care who they need to kill to get to me. It will have become a matter of pride to Connor now,” she repeated.

Felix was aware of all that. All his family was.

But having Brianna sneak away in the middle of the night wasn’t the way to deal with the problem. Because he believed the Connor Doyle who Brianna suspected had killed his own



father, and then the other top members of the Irish Mob, all so he could take it over, was more than capable of making it his life's mission to find his errant sister and make her pay. In blood, if necessary, for ruining the alliance he'd made with the Bart family and making him appear weak to his men by doing so.

Felix had brought Brianna to the family estate earlier because it was the only way he could be sure she was safe.

Since then, called Anthea Stone on her cell phone to inform her that Anthony and Terry Bart were both dead and of no further danger to her. The relief he'd heard in her voice had confirmed his suspicion the actress was terrified of the Barts.

Felix had had to do something to occupy his time during the long hours Brianna had spent shut away in the guest bedroom.

His blood had run cold in his veins when he went to Brianna's bedroom a short time ago to check that she was okay and found the door wide open and the bed not slept in.

The seconds it had taken him to run down the stairs before pausing in the hallway to listen and then follow the murmur of voices had been some of the worst of his life. But once he realized it was Sinclair talking to Brianna, his fear for Brianna had left him and he'd become consumed with anger instead.

He narrowed his gaze on her. "Let them come," he derided harshly. "If you think we aren't prepared for that, then *you're* being willfully naive. We have some of our men and some of Nikolai's patrolling outside the walls around the estate. There are infrared and movement sensors inside the grounds, along with cameras. We have the same inside the house."

Yes, he knew Nikolai had managed to infiltrate all those precautions the previous evening, but the same rules that affected mere mortals obviously couldn't be applied to Nikolai.

The man was smoke, a wraith, with the ability, it seemed, to flow between one world and another.

His reputation as the Wolf was well deserved.

"Connor will come, Felix," Brianna insisted.

“Then let him fucking come!” Felix bit out angrily. “I’ll relish the chance to make him pay for every hit, punch, and kick the bastard has ever given you.”

Tears glistened in Brianna’s eyes. “Why are you being so stubborn, when all I’m trying to do is prevent anyone in your family being hurt?”

Felix strode across the kitchen. “Tomorrow, you can ask my family if they *want* you to prevent that possibility.”

He already knew they wouldn’t.

“But right now, we’re both going to my bedroom. Because you can’t be trusted to stay in your own room,” he added as she would have protested. “Then I’m going to demonstrate, for however long it takes, how *I* feel about you attempting to sneak away from me!” He reached out to grasp her wrist and pull her forward before placing his other arm at the back of her knees and lifting her until she was secured in a fireman’s lift over his shoulder.

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Brianna had no doubts that Felix was now too angry to be reasoned with.

In fact, she knew he was as, once they were back in his bedroom, he slid her off his shoulder and began to pull off her clothes as if they actually offended him by existing.

Maybe they did?

He certainly feasted his eyes on her naked body for several long seconds as he threw off his own clothes, his eyes dark and intense and totally focused on her.

She moistened her lips with the tip of her tongue. “Felix—”

“I don’t want to hear it.”

“But—”

“No more protests, please.” He wrapped an arm about her waist, lifting her and placing her on top of the bed before

joining her.

Brianna instinctively parted her legs so that he could slide in between her thighs, the long length of his aroused cock immediately pressing against her clit. “Felix, I know you’re angry—”

“I’m not angry, Brianna...I’m fucking furious. You were going to leave me.” He took the bulk of his weight onto his elbows as his hands cradled either side of her face. “Even the thought of that makes it difficult for me to breathe.” He closed his eyes before once again staring down at her intently. “I want to make love to you. Want to *show* you how much you mean to me. Are you going to let me do that?”

Was she?

There was no denying she relished the fact their bodies were entwined so intimately together. Or that her senses were filled with Felix’s heat and the pure masculinity of him. How his body and scent surrounded her, holding her a willing captive.

She reached up to coil her arms about his shoulders, and her fingers became entangled in the silky softness of his hair. “I’ve never done this before.”

His breathing hitched, his gaze becoming darker still. “You’re a virgin?”

Her cheeks warmed. “When I was younger, I was very aware that I was the daughter of Aiden Doyle, and that anyone I became close to could use that connection to either get to him or curry favor with him. When I left Dublin and moved into my cottage, I was too afraid to let anyone close to me, in case they discovered who I was and told Connor.” She shuddered. “I decided I would rather be alone for the rest of my life than suffer that fate.”

“And now?”

Brianna stared up at him, able to see that the earlier anger had been replaced with a desire that made his eyes glitter. She could feel the silky throb of his cock pressing against her and the wet heat between her thighs. “Now I believe I should very much like for you to be my first lover.”

“And your last,” he growled.

She laughed softly. “And possibly my last.”

His eyes narrowed. “You’re going to regret teasing me,” he promised as his head lowered and his lips claimed hers.

They kissed deeply, desperately, as their tongues became entwined, searching, claiming.

Brianna’s hands caressed restlessly down Felix’s back before cupping the muscular globes of his arse.

She gasped and arched her body as his lips now trailed down her throat and across her collarbone. Before moving lower still and capturing and sucking one of her nipples into the warm cavern of his mouth.

She was so wet, her juices gushing between her thighs, becoming even more so as one of Felix’s hands slid between them and his fingers began to stroke her clit, that erect and sensitive bundle of flesh, in the same rhythm as he sucked on her nipple.

Her lids flew open, and she was assaulted with several sensations at once when she felt one of his fingers press slowly inside her while the soft pad of his thumb continued that merciless strumming of her clit. His mouth moved to suck her other nipple, leaving the abandoned nipple wet and pebbling in response to the brush of the cooler air.

“You’re so tight,” Felix groaned. “So hot. So wet. So *mine*.”

Brianna knew in that moment that was exactly what she was. Just as Felix was now hers.

Her acceptance of the rightness of their claim on each other pushed her over the edge of the pleasure that had been building higher and higher inside her.

Felix pushed a second finger inside her channel as her muscles contracted and wave after wave of delicious hot pleasure radiated from her core to the rest of her body.

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Felix became merciless after that, possessed with a burning need to claim every part of her.

He took her to that pinnacle of release again and again, unrelenting in that desire even when she begged to be filled by his cock instead of his fingers.

He wanted to stretch her. Loosen the muscles inside her. The last thing he wanted was to hurt her beyond what he hoped would only be an initial pinch of discomfort as he pushed his cock deep inside her.

“Do I need a condom?”

She blinked dazed eyes up at him. “I don’t—”

“You’re a virgin, and I was clean in the physical I had last month.”

“I— What do you think?”

“I think I want to be inside you without anything preventing me from feeling how hot and tight you are.”

Her cheeks bloomed with color. “I want that too.”

“Sure?”

“Yes.”

“Hold on to my shoulders,” he encouraged as he removed his fingers to press his cockhead to her entrance. “Dig your nails into me if you need to. Hurt me if I hurt you,” he encouraged gruffly as he pushed slowly inside her tempting heat.

She gave a brief groan, her fingers tightening on his shoulders when his cock breached the barrier of her innocence.

“Mine.” Felix stilled once he was fully seated, allowing Brianna time to become accustomed to having him inside her.

He felt euphoric. Totally overwhelmed with the happiness their new physical closeness gave him.

He’d been with many other women, but he’d never before felt anything close to the joy being inside Brianna now gave him.

The caress of her hands on his back exhilarated him.

The intimate entwining of their bodies gave him pleasure.

But being inside Brianna's heat, being a part of her, completed him in a way he had never imagined until now.

It was all consuming, filling him with so much euphoria that if he died at this moment, Felix knew he would die a happy man. *The happiest man.*

Thankfully, no bolt of lightning came down from on high.

No half brother burst into the room seeking vengeance.

There was only the two of them here. Brianna and Felix. Intimately joined. The other half of each other's soul.

A closeness that deepened as they began to move together. Their mouths fused, taking, hungry, as Brianna welcomed and met each of his shallow thrusts.

"Harder," she pleaded minutes later, fingers digging into the flesh of his back. "Please, Felix, if I belong to you, then give me all of you."

The dam of caution that had been holding him back in case he hurt her now broke, and he began to thrust deeply and fiercely inside her.

He waited until he felt her channel tighten about his cock, then heard her cry out as her climax hit. Her inner walls tightened, stroked, pushing Felix over the edge of his own release.

He came harder than he ever had in his life, thrusting each pulse of his release inside her until he was utterly spent and he could feel how full Brianna now was of his cum.

A part of him hoped their lovemaking would result in Brianna becoming pregnant.

He could imagine nothing more erotic than watching Brianna as she grew round with their child. Than the pleasure they would both feel as he made love to that ripe and burgeoning body.

God, he really hoped she'd become pregnant.

He made love to her twice more during the night with that same hope at the back of his mind.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

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“Brianna, your brother is outside the main gate asking to be allowed in,” Casper called through the closed bedroom door. “He claims he just wants to reassure himself that you’re alive and not being kept here against your will.”

Brianna tried, and failed, to tamp down the absolute panic she felt at hearing Connor had found her so quickly, let alone that he was now actually here, at the Kingston estate. And she very much doubted Connor had *asked* to do anything, least of all being allowed in to speak to her.

She’d woken at the sound of someone knocking on the door, then been disorientated for several moments as to which door it was. The weight of the arm about her waist, the heat of a naked body spooning behind her own, and the warmth of breath against her nape told her precisely where she was and who she was with.

Felix.

Her lover.

He had taken her not once, but three times, and each time had felt more intimate than the last.

What Casper was now saying made complete nonsense of her previous claim that her brother wasn’t going to just drive up to the front gate of the estate and ask to see her.

The fact that he had done exactly that banished even the thought of Brianna feeling any of the embarrassment she might have suffered at Casper knowing she was currently in Felix’s bed with him.

She had also been right about it not taking long for Connor to discover where she was. If she'd left last night, as she'd intended, she would have been far away from here by now.

Far away from Felix too.

A thought that now filled her with so much unhappiness, she doubted she would have survived the separation.

The arm tightened about her waist as proof that Felix was also awake. "You don't have to speak to him," he reassured softly.

Brianna turned in his arms. Felix's hair was disheveled and there was a light dusting of stubble on his jaw. His lips looked as kiss-bruised as hers felt. There was also a bruise at the base of his throat where Brianna remembered biting and sucking during their second round of lovemaking.

Their naked bodies were now so closely aligned, Brianna could feel the hard heat of his erection pressing against her, telling her that he'd had similar plans for the two of them this morning.

Her cheeks bloomed with heat as she recalled all of their shared intimacies of the night before. A physical ecstasy she had never even dreamed might one day be hers. An emotional closeness that she had thought to be even more elusive. Felix hadn't said anything about loving her, and neither had Brianna, but she now had absolutely no doubt that she loved him to the very depths of her soul.

She lifted her hand to cradle the side of his face. "Thank you for last night."

His brow lowered. "Why does that sound like goodbye?"

Probably because it was. "You heard Casper. My brother is outside asking to see me."

"Doesn't mean you have to agree to it," Felix grated.

She sighed heavily. "Connor is asking right now, but I have no doubt that will turn into a full-on demand if I refuse. It won't end well for anyone, if I don't agree to—"

"It's the youngest Doyle brother, by the way," Casper informed them.



Brianna frowned. "Liam?"

"That's the one," Casper confirmed lightly.

Brianna was instantly overwhelmed by that same sense of betrayal she'd had at her cottage the previous week. When Liam had assisted in putting her into the trunk of the car for the drive to the airport, despite her begging him not to do so.

"Did he say why he wants to see me?" She had absolutely no doubt that Liam was here now because her eldest brother knew she was more likely to be amenable to the idea of leaving here with Liam than she would be with Connor.

Even if the end result would be the same. Which would either be Brianna's demise for defying Connor and being involved in the deaths of the Barts, or being bargained off to another faction of the criminal underworld that would be of benefit to Connor.

"He said he'd only explain the situation to you," Casper answered.

It didn't take a genius to know what that situation was.

Brianna felt the sting of tears in her eyes. She felt safe here. Last night with Felix had been a happiness, an emotional and physical closeness, beyond her imagining.

If she agreed to leave with Liam, she doubted she would ever see Felix again. Ever feel that closeness again.

If she didn't leave with Liam, she risked putting all of the Kingston family in danger. She risked putting *Felix* in danger.

From the size of Remy Kingston's baby bump, the other woman was about five months pregnant. No matter what Sinclair had said to Brianna last night, she doubted he wanted to put the lives of his wife and unborn baby in danger.

"The other bros, the coz, and all their wives arrived home early this morning," Casper continued the conversation as if he wasn't still on the other side of the bedroom door.

Which meant there were now even more Kingstons in residence to be put in danger!

“Nikolai also had a package delivered for Brianna,” Casper drawled.

“What the fuck does that mean?” Felix demanded as he rolled over onto his back to glare at the door.

“Well, obviously I haven’t opened it, because it’s addressed to Brianna,” Casper derided. “But the guy who dropped it off said he’d just flown back from Southern Ireland.”

Southern Ireland. Where Brianna’s cottage was. Where her laptop and all her personal belongings still were. Ones she’d resigned herself to never seeing again, even though Nikolai had said she would.

She really, really hoped the box contained her things from Ireland, most especially her laptop with a third of her next book written on it. A book she was now even more determined to write, after Connor’s threats.

“You know, much as I’m enjoying talking to you through this plank of wood”—Casper didn’t even attempt to hide his sarcasm—“the two of you should get your lazy arses out of bed and come and deal with the Liam situation yourself.”

Brianna sighed heavily. “You’re right. I’m sorry you’ve even had to talk to him. I was hoping for a little more time before Connor discovered where I was, but it isn’t to be.”

She gave Felix a regretful glance as she threw back the duvet to sit up and swing her feet down onto the carpeted floor. It seemed a little ridiculous after last night to be concerned about her nakedness. Instead, she stood before picking up the sleep T-shirt Felix had worn the night before and pulled it on over her head.

“Would you please tell Liam I’ll be ready to speak to him in ten minutes?” she called out to Casper, the increasing sense of helplessness heavy on her shoulders.

“I’ll leave the box from Nikolai out here in the hallway.”

Brianna waited for the sound of Casper departing before she turned to Felix. His scowl had developed into what looked to be a fully grown hurricane just waiting to explode into the atmosphere. “Felix—”

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“No.” Felix stood. “Abso-fucking-lutely no. I don’t give a fuck what your reasoning is, you aren’t going anywhere near the psycho who is your eldest brother again.”

“But—”

“Last night made you mine,” he growled as he took her into his arms and pulled her body tightly against his.

“That was beyond sexy when you said it last night in the heat of the moment. But in the clear light of day—”

“It’s even more true,” he rasped. “And I didn’t say it in the heat of the moment, I said it because it’s true. You’re mine, and I’m yours. That’s how it’s going to be from now on.”

The perfection of last night’s lovemaking had only consolidated Felix’s belief that he and Brianna belonged together. He wasn’t going to give her or that up by relinquishing her to the untender mercies of the madman who was her eldest brother. Liam might be the one waiting to talk to her, but Felix had no doubt the Irishman was here at the behest of his elder brother.

Which didn’t mean Felix didn’t intend paying Connor a visit of his own once he was able to get away without alerting Brianna to his intention. The bruises he’d seen over her ribs last night were almost a week old and should have been fading by now. But like the discoloration on her cheek, they were still black shot through with a burst of sickly yellow.

That bastard had really gone to town on Brianna when she’d been totally unable to defend herself. Felix wanted to see how the bastard felt about being put in the same position, when Felix was the one wearing the boots.

Brianna’s cheeks were pale as her gaze avoided meeting his. “I haven’t said that’s what I want.”

Felix’s chest tightened painfully. He knew exactly why Brianna was trying to push him away, but whether she decided

to stay with him or not, he wasn't going to just give her up to the Doyle brothers.

"We aren't discussing this right now," he dismissed. "Not when we have the more immediate problem of Liam waiting at the gates." Felix cupped and lifted her chin until her gaze met his. "He, and he alone, will be allowed in, and then we'll both go downstairs and talk to him."

"But—" The press of two of Felix's fingers against her lips prevented her from continuing.

"Liam will talk, and we'll listen to what he has to say. Then he can get the hell out of my home!" he added grimly. Liam might not have hit or kicked Brianna, but he was certainly guilty of standing by and watching his brother do it.

Brianna swallowed. "I am so sor—"

"Don't you dare apologize for your brothers again," Felix cut in harshly. "They are what they are, and they chose to become bullies and cold-blooded killers. They need to own any repercussions for their behavior."

She looked alarmed. "What do you mean?"

Felix forced the rising tension from his body. He even managed to give her a reassuring smile as he released her. "Let's not keep him waiting any longer than we have to, hm?"

"Felix..."

"Hmm?"

---

What was she *doing*? She wouldn't, couldn't tell Felix how she felt about him when it would only make their parting so much harder.

"Nothing." She gave a dismissive shake of her head.

He nodded. "I'll get the parcel from Nikolai."

Brianna watched unashamedly as Felix crossed the room naked and unlocked the door before bending down to pick up

the large box in the hallway. He really was the most gorgeous man she had ever set eyes on, not just in looks, but in that lithe body, his muscles flexing every time he moved. As for his glutes... She could probably bounce a penny off those muscles if she felt so inclined. It was...

“Like what you see?” Felix teased when he turned and caught her staring.

Her cheeks heated as she admitted, “I like it very much. I like you very much.” She hated seeing the humor fade from Felix’s eyes, had to bite her bottom lip to stop herself from blurting out how she more than liked him. “Do you want to use the bathroom first?”

Felix gave a hard smile as he placed the large box on top of the duvet. “I’m not going to use the bathroom at all.”

She pulled off the tape fastening the top of the box before peering inside. As she’d hoped, her laptop sat on the top of layers of her clothes. The piece of paper on the laptop simply had an italic capital N written on it. Nikolai.

Something else she needed to thank the Russian man for. “Why aren’t you?”

Felix’s smile had become one of grim satisfaction. “I’m going to put on a clean T-shirt and joggers, but other than that, I’m going downstairs exactly as I am.”

*Just as he was* was Felix smelling of au de sex and looking debauched in all his sexy dishevelment and muscular glory. There was also that visible love bite at the base of his throat.

It wasn’t quite him beating his fists against his chest and shouting *she’s mine now*, but Brianna knew it amounted to the same thing.

She wasn’t about to argue with him, about that or anything else, knowing she was going to need all the assistance available to her to get through a conversation with Liam.

Grateful as Brianna was to Remy Kingston for allowing her to borrow some of her clothes, being able to wear her own clothes again would help Brianna’s confidence for the ordeal ahead.

At least, she hoped it would.

Ten minutes later, one look at the grimness of Liam's expression when he turned to look at her as she entered the sitting room at Felix's side, and she knew being comfortable in her own clothes wasn't going to be enough to withstand the onslaught of bad memories whirling like a kaleidoscope inside her head.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

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Felix entwined his fingers tightly with Brianna's trembling ones as the two of them entered the small sitting room where Liam Doyle paced. Sinclair was also in the room, leaning against the wall beside one of the windows, but the sizzling tension made it obvious he hadn't attempted to speak to or put the younger man at ease.

"He's unarmed," Sinclair stated evenly. "The guys searched him at the gates before letting him onto the grounds, and I searched him again before allowing him inside the house."

In other words, Sinclair had no intention of allowing one of the Doyle brothers to bring a weapon anywhere near his family, most especially his pregnant wife.

Felix had only ever seen photographs of Liam Doyle in the updates Casper liked to give them on the criminal factions operating within London.

As he'd known from those photographs, Brianna's youngest half brother looked absolutely nothing like her. His hair was black as night, where hers was that gorgeous mixture of red, cinnamon, and gold. His eyes were a dark and piercing blue to her warm green ones. And his face was thin and almost gaunt, hard, whereas Brianna's was creamy smooth and warm.

Brianna's fingers still trembled against Felix's as she stepped into the room behind him and came face-to-face with her youngest brother for the first time since he and Connor had abandoned her to whatever Anthony and Terry Bart decided her future was going to be.

The tension in the room increased exponentially as brother and sister stared at each other.

“I’m staying,” Sinclair informed Felix softly.

He gave an acknowledging nod. Not because he needed his brother’s physical help to control this situation—he and Liam Doyle might be similar in build, but Felix’s incentive of protecting Brianna to the death was far higher than Doyle’s could ever be. He had no doubt he could take the other man, if he had to. After all, he also had absolute fury at the Doyle brothers’ mistreatment of Brianna to prod him along.

No, he wanted Sinclair here for Brianna’s sake. If things should turn ugly between Felix and Liam, then Sinclair knew to get her out of the room as quickly as possible.

The Irishman’s gaze now moved down to where Brianna’s and Felix’s fingers were tightly entwined, before moving up to meet the challenge of Felix’s gaze and stance. “You must be Felix Kingston.”

“Must I?” he challenged.

The other man nodded. “If my information is correct and you’re responsible for helping my sister to escape the Bart household, after first killing Anthony Bart and all his men?” His Irish accent was much harder than Brianna’s soft brogue.

“You forgot to mention the simultaneous demise of Terry Bart in prison,” Felix taunted.

Liam smiled slightly. “That one was a surprise. You must have some very powerful allies.”

“The Wolf,” Brianna told him with satisfaction. “Nikolai was already a legend during our childhood,” she explained to Felix before turning her defiant gaze back to her brother. “His reputation is very much deserved.”

Liam’s mouth twisted into a half smile, his eyes wide with appreciation. “Powerful friends indeed.”

“What do you want, Doyle?” Felix was out of patience with this situation. “As you can see, Brianna is perfectly happy where she is.”



Doyle gave another glance at their entwined fingers. “The two of you are...together?”

“Yes,” Felix answered before Brianna had a chance to. Whatever she ultimately decided to do with her life, and whether or not it was with him or without him, Felix would always be hers. Always love her. Always protect her.

“It seems my sister has found herself a worthy champion,” the other man drawled.

Felix scowled. “I wish to hell everyone would stop calling me that!”

One black brow rose over deep blue eyes. “Does that mean you aren’t her knight?”

Felix’s nostrils flared. “Definitely not a white one, and at last count, there were eight of us in that role. Including the Wolf.” The fact Nikolai had sent one of his men to Ireland to collect Brianna’s personal things spoke to how highly he thought of her and that he had already accepted her into his small inner circle of friends. Felix wished he’d thought of doing that for her himself when he saw how much happier Brianna looked dressed in her own soft green sweater and black low-rider jeans.

Liam continued to look at Felix for several long seconds before he nodded in acknowledgment of the challenge just laid down. His expression softened as it returned to Brianna. “Are you okay? Did Bart hurt you?”

“Are you fucking blind?” Felix’s calm snapped. “Look at her. Does she look okay? The doctor I had examine her said she was lucky not to have several broken ribs. Or are you just so used to seeing her battered and bruised you’re immune to it by now, you chicken shit?”

“Felix...”

“No, Brianna, this needs to be said.” He released her hand to step forward until he and Liam Doyle were standing nearly nose to nose. “I’m available the next time you think of hurting Brianna.”

“I didn’t hurt her—”

“But you didn’t stop your psycho brother from doing so either. Or from locking her in the trunk of a car despite knowing she doesn’t like enclosed spaces. Which makes you every bit as bad as him in my book.” Felix spat the words out.

“You’re right.” The younger man released a heavy sigh, his gaze lowering. “I should have— There are extenuating circumstances— I never wanted to see Brianna hurt.”

Felix snorted. “Then you’re on the wrong side of this war. And it is now a war,” he warned.

“I understand.”

“Do you?”

“I do.” Liam nodded. “Except you’re wrong about which side I’m on.”

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Brianna eyed her brother warily. “What do you mean?”

Liam sighed. “I’m in the process of bringing Connor down.”

She frowned. “You’re affecting a coup of your own?”

His mouth twisted. “Not exactly.”

Brianna had no idea what he meant by that. “Did he kill Da?”

Liam drew in a sharp breath. “I believe so, yes.”

“You *believe* your psycho brother committed patricide?” Felix stared at them incredulously.

“I wasn’t there when it happened but...yes, I *know* that’s what happened.” He glared at Felix.

“How?” Felix demanded.

“I have a witness who’s willing to swear as much in a court of law.”

“Who?” Felix demanded.

“The shopkeeper. Connor thinks I hunted him down and then killed him and disposed of the body, when he’s actually safe

and hidden in Scotland until he's needed."

"Needed for what?" Felix pressed.

"I told you, to take Connor down."

"And you couldn't have done that *before* he kicked and beat the shit out of your sister?" Felix accused.

Liam frowned. "Could we take the tension in here down a notch or two? I still have things to say and not a lot of time in which to say them. Connor believes I'm currently at the farm checking that there's nothing there that could incriminate us in the coup six months ago."

"No dead bodies waiting to have their bones picked clean by the ravenous pigs before they're used as fertilizer, you mean?" Brianna accused, feeling nauseous thinking of how many bodies Connor must have had disposed of that way.

Liam's expression was pained. "I had hoped we'd kept all that from you."

"Aunt Bridget told me." She shrugged. "She thought I needed to know exactly what sort of men my father and brothers were. She was right," she added grimly.

"Fair enough," Liam accepted heavily. "What I'm trying to say is that Connor currently has no idea I've already discovered where you are or that I've come here to speak with you. For the moment, I'd like it to remain that way."

Brianna still had absolutely no idea why, if Liam wasn't here on Connor's instruction, which he claimed he wasn't, he was here at all.

"Maybe we could all sit down and have a cup of coffee?"

Brianna glanced at Sinclair as he made the suggestion. The fury still burning in Felix's gaze as he continued to glare at Liam told her he would never have made such a hospitable suggestion. She had no doubt it was Sinclair's way of attempting to "take the tension in here down a notch," as Liam had asked.

She knew it was probably stupid of her, and was no doubt due to a lingering affection from a less than happy childhood, but

there was still that small hope lingering inside her that the Liam she had once loved hadn't turned into the same monster Connor had always been. It might be naïve of her, and a waste of her emotions, but she needed to be certain before she dismissed Liam from her life completely.

Besides, she knew from experience that everything looked better once she'd had her first cup of coffee in the morning.

Sinclair looked up from typing on his cell phone. "I've asked Casper to organize that for us." He looked up as he put the cell phone away, his narrowed gaze on their visitor. "I think I should tell you, Doyle, that all my brothers and cousin are now back in residence. Five of our wives are also here. If even one of us thinks you represent a danger to Brianna, our wives, or any of us, then you will find yourself looking down the wrong end of a gun barrel. I believe what happened yesterday is enough to tell you that I mean what I say," he added in a hard voice.

"I assure you I couldn't be more pleased that my sister now has all of you and, apparently Nikolai Volkov, in her life." He looked at Brianna. "I know I should have been there for you more when we were growing up. And I'm sorry about what happened to you a week ago. I really am so very sorry." He looked pained.

"And you think that makes everything all right again, do you?" Felix grated.

"I know it doesn't." Liam sighed. "But that doesn't mean it shouldn't be said."

"Brianna has bruises on her bruises," Felix continued. "She lived in mortal fear for her future for three days and nights as a prisoner in Anthony Bart's house. Backed up by the knowledge she was being forced into a marriage with that killer Terry Bart once he was released from prison."

Brianna still didn't believe absolutely in Liam's sincerity either, but for the moment, she was willing—no, she needed—to hear what else he had to say.

She placed her hand on Felix's forearm. "It's okay," she assured when he glanced at her.

"No, it's not okay," he flared. "This bastard's indifference to the pain and unhappiness Connor inflicted on you makes him just as responsible for what happened to you—"

"I'm working with the authorities to bring Connor down!"

The room fell silent as everyone stilled before turning to look at Liam following his forceful announcement.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

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Brianna stared at her youngest brother in disbelief. She could see Felix and Sinclair were just as dumbstruck.

Liam gave a pained wince when, seconds later, no one had responded to his statement. “A man from Special Branch approached me not long after Connor took over control in London.” He grimaced. “I listened to what he had to say because since Connor took over, he’s taken us back to the dark days of bombings and shootings that also take the lives of innocent civilians who have the misfortune to get in his way. All in his desire to settle what he believes to be old scores.” He shook his head. “I don’t agree with any of that.”

“Of course, you don’t,” Felix scorned.

Liam’s jaw tightened. “Hoping to prove my own innocence isn’t the reason I’ve been helping the authorities gather information against Connor that will bring him down for good and lock him away for the rest of his life.”

“Then what is?” Felix wasn’t even trying to hide his continued skepticism.

“I already had the shopkeeper’s word that Connor was involved with our Da’s death, but something else happened to consolidate the belief he had to go.” He swallowed before continuing. “Una Murphy was the daughter of Ronan Murphy, the previous boss.” A nerve pulsed in Liam’s throat. “I was in love with her. We were in love with each other. Connor knew this. But that didn’t stop him from having her killed, along with the rest of the family, when he took over.” His eyes

glittered with anger. “I wanted to kill him there and then, but instead, I was persuaded to begin gathering evidence against him.”

Felix snorted. “You’re seriously expecting us to believe you’re in the process of betraying your brother because he killed the woman you were in love with?”

Cold blue eyes were turned in his direction. “Isn’t your own current aggressive behavior and threats toward me because you’re in love with my sister?”

A nerve pulsed in Felix’s tightly clenched jaw. “Your most recent callous behavior toward Brianna means you no longer have the right to even voice that familial connection.”

Liam’s chin lifted. “Brianna will be the one to decide that, not you.”

Brianna was still trying to process something Liam had said. “Connor killed Una?”

She had met Una and the rest of the Murphy family when her own mother was alive and they were still invited to attend social occasions. Even preteen, Una’s promise of being a dark-haired beauty had been there in her bone structure and sparkling blue eyes.

For some reason, it hadn’t ever occurred to Brianna that the killing of the families of the previous regime her Aunt Bridget had told her about had included the women. The children too?

“And her mother and two sisters.” Liam confirmed that was exactly what had happened. “I never agreed with any of that.”

“Are you buying any of this ‘poor innocent me’ crap?” Felix turned to prompt Brianna.

Was she? The bleakness she could see in Liam’s eyes told her that he was telling the truth. In regard to Una, at least. “I believe I would like to hear more, yes.”

“Ah, coffee.” Sinclair moved to make room so that Casper could put the coffee tray on the table in front of the couch.

“Shall I stay and be mother?” Casper shot Brianna a wink as he immediately began to pour coffee into the five mugs on the

tray. The fact there were five mugs told Brianna he had intended remaining in the room no matter what anyone else had to say about it.

Felix stepped forward so that he and Liam were once again only inches apart. “You hurt Brianna again, by word or deed, and you’re a dead man.”

“I won’t,” Liam stated flatly. “A few more days and this will all be over.”

“How do you know that?” Sinclair prompted.

Liam glanced at him. “Because the demise of Anthony and Terry Bart has brought forward the plan to end Connor’s bloody reign.”

“So, what do you want from Brianna?” Felix challenged. “A fucking medal for finally doing the right thing?”

“No medal.” Liam steadily met her gaze instead of looking at Felix. “But I would like to beg her forgiveness, for Da’s death, and for all she’s gone through at Connor’s hands over the years.”

“And yours by complacency,” Felix accused.

“And mine through complacency,” Liam acknowledged heavily.

Felix glowered. “I’m not convinced by anything you’ve told us.”

“Could I interject?” Casper asked as he made himself comfortable on the couch before putting his feet up on the coffee table.

“You already did.” Sinclair scowled. “And take your fucking feet off the furniture.”

“Big brothers can be such a pain in the arse, can’t they,” Casper told Liam, at the same time making no effort to comply. “Problem is, I love my big bros and my cousin, Adam, and will do everything in my power to keep them in my life. But I can quite understand why you might think the world would be a better place without your own brother in it.” He grimaced.



“You weren’t in the room when Liam told us that’s what he’s attempting to do,” Sinclair said slowly before glancing up at the security cameras in the corners of the room. “Were you watching us?”

“We all were.” Casper gave a dismissive shrug. “The moment I heard Liam say he was working with a government agency to bring his brother down, I went through some of my surveillance on the DoYLES for the past six months. There were already a couple of anomalies that didn’t make sense, but once I started looking at Liam’s actions from a different angle, those anomalies fell nicely into place.” He looked at his two brothers. “Mr. Doyle is telling the truth. He is working with a government agency to dethrone his brother. And risking his own life by doing so, I might add.”

Brianna’s brow furrowed as she studied her brother.

She easily noted the sincerity in Liam’s eyes.

The abject apology in his expression.

The heaviness in the way he stood, as if there were a heavy weight pressing down on his shoulders.

Her breath caught in her throat at the realization the latter was caused by the real reason for Liam coming here today and confessing all and asking her forgiveness: he didn’t think he was going to survive taking Connor down, and he wanted to apologize to her before he was no longer able to do so. That his comment, “in a few more days this will all be over,” was his way of saying he probably wouldn’t be here once the dust settled following Connor’s arrest.

Brianna didn’t hesitate to cross the room and throw her arms about his waist before pressing her cheek against his chest. “I forgive you, Liam,” she told him huskily.

“Thank feck for that!” His arms tightly encircled her waist as he held her against him. “I’m so sorry, Brianna. So fucking sorry. For everything. For years, I lived under the false hope Connor would change. That he would outgrow the vicious ambition that tempered everything he did and said.”

“He never did,” Brianna murmured.

“He grew worse.” Liam shuddered. “When he killed Da, I realized Connor was never going to change. I should have got out then, but I knew Connor was never going to just let me walk away. I needed a way to end his bloody rule that didn’t result in me also being dead at the end of it. When he killed Una and then boasted about it to me, I knew I didn’t care anymore whether I survived walking away or not. I was all but ready to just put a bullet in his head. But before I could do that, I was approached, and then agreed to help lawfully bring Connor down. Starting with telling them where I’d hidden the shopkeeper who’d witnessed Connor killing Da.”

“He did it himself?”

“He insisted on it.”

“Oh, Liam.”

“I know.” He sighed heavily. “The guy I’m working with from the agency persuaded me into seeing that death is too fucking easy for Connor. He needs to suffer first. I need him to sit in that prison cell for the rest of his life and know that I’m the one who helped put him there. For him to be alone, and powerless, and have nothing else to think about but the brother who betrayed him and all the innocent people he killed, including Da, just so he could step up into being boss of the Irish Mob.”

“An Irish Mob that will have you as its leader after Connor’s arrest?” Sinclair prompted.

“That hasn’t been decided yet,” Liam said.

Brianna knew exactly why he was avoiding making a definitive answer.

She lifted her head to turn and look at all three of the Kingston brothers in the room. “The reason Liam won’t confirm he’ll take Connor’s place is because he thinks Connor will kill him before he’s taken down. I know it’s a lot to ask.” She looked at them pleadingly. “But I would very much appreciate it if all of you, perhaps even Nikolai too, would help keep Liam alive through and immediately after Connor’s downfall?”

---

It was a lot to ask, Felix inwardly acknowledged, when what he really wanted to do was wipe both the Doyle brothers off the face of the earth.

But there was no doubting the pain in Liam's expression when he'd told them Connor killed their father and later ordered the death of the woman he knew Liam was in love with. Felix was probably going to look equally as heartbroken if Brianna decided not to stay with him when all this was over.

Besides, there was no missing the love Brianna still felt toward Liam, despite what he had been complicit in doing to her and others.

Felix glanced across the room to where Sinclair stood, knowing by the question in his eldest brother's eyes that he would go along with whatever Felix decided.

He glanced at Casper next. His youngest brother gave an encouraging smile as confirmation he was definitely up for another fight.

Felix drew in a deep breath before releasing it. "Okay, it looks as if we're going to offer our support."

"Would Nikolai help too?" Brianna pressed hopefully.

"We'll ask him." Felix nodded.

"Thank you." Brianna pulled out of her brother's arms to run to Felix. "Thank you, thank you," she repeated as she threw her arms about his neck before pressing her lips hard against his.

Felix's arms instinctively moved about her waist to hold her closer as he deepened the kiss.

This, right here, was all he wanted for the rest of his life.

He just wasn't sure he was what Brianna wanted for the rest of her own life.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

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“Okay, would someone like to tell me why I’m out here freezing my butt off instead of sitting comfortably in my apartment with a glass of whisky in my hand and someone to keep me company?” Casper muttered.

“You are here, my young friend”—Nikolai was the one to drawl an answer as he leaned back against the wall of the warehouse, amazingly still dressed in one of those bespoke three-piece suits he favored—“because your brother fell in love with an Irish Mob *printsessa*.”

“I don’t think Brianna has ever thought of herself that way,” Felix protested on her behalf, but he made no comment about whether or not he was in love with her.

Probably because none of his family could possibly be in any doubt about his feelings for Brianna after the past twenty-four hours of him throwing out—mainly unwanted—instructions and orders. Unnecessary, because the commander of the Special Forces team had already designated exactly what part any of them were going to be allowed to play in assisting Liam in taking down Connor Doyle.

As long as Felix got the chance to speak to a very much alive Connor Doyle, he would be happy.

Nikolai Volkov hadn’t needed asking twice—probably because Brianna had been the one doing the asking—to throw his own considerable influence behind the endeavor. His only provisos had been that neither he nor any of the men he brought with him would have anything to do with the government agency

Liam was involved with, nor would there be any repercussions to him or his men in regard to who lived or died during the incursion.

It had very quickly become obvious, during the preliminary talks with Nikolai, that Brianna absolutely adored the Russian.

Which meant Felix had to tolerate his presence too, whether he wanted to or not.

There was no doubting the other man possessed a dangerous charisma it was difficult for anyone, male or female, to resist if Nikolai should decide to focus his attention on them.

It had taken two days of patiently waiting before Liam had let them know where and when Connor had made the arrangements to meet with the head of the Albanian mafia.

Unbeknown to the Albanians, he had another meeting arranged with the Romanians the following evening. In other words, Connor was hedging his bets as to who would lose that particular turf war.

Whichever one emerged victorious, Connor intended to offer Brianna to them as a way of uniting their two factions now that Anthony and Terry Bart were dead. Felix knew that most of the Bart operation had already been gathered up into Gregori Markovic's *bratva*. Nikolai's doing, no doubt.

Connor Doyle's determination to give his sister to one ruthless criminal gang or another was reason enough for Felix to want to take the Irishman's head off. Maybe not literally. He wasn't that much of an animal. But he definitely wanted Connor Doyle's ability to influence Brianna's future gone forever.

Which was why they were now all stationed behind two abandoned warehouses near a now-unused railway siding, the Kingstons and the Russians behind one, the Special Forces guys behind another.

It had been a case of *déjà vu* when the twelve-man tactical team arrived, and a man named Coleman introduced himself as being in command. He was an old colleague of Max and Adam from their years in Special Forces.

The Kingston family had last met Coleman and his men almost a year ago. They had been waiting outside a warehouse then too. Except that time, they had been sent on a wild-goose chase and the real purpose of luring the Kingston men from the family estate had been to give Rosie and Cara false information so that they also left the estate and found themselves kidnapped by the same madman Max and Adam had thought was inside the warehouse.

It had been a shit show for a while there, but they were finally able to secure Rosie's and Cara's safe release.

Today there were a little over thirty men waiting for the order to enter the warehouse opposite, which Connor and Liam Doyle and several of their men had entered a short time ago. The Albanian contingent had arrived shortly after. Both factions had left guards outside the building, but those four men were too busy watching each other to be aware of the thirty men waiting to take them all down.

There were the dozen men from Special Forces, all armed and in tactical gear. Ten Russians, as well as Nikolai. And the seven male members of the Kingston family.

Brianna hadn't been at all happy when she was told she couldn't go with them. Felix couldn't exactly blame her, but at the same time, he didn't want her anywhere near when or if the fighting began. He was pretty sure it was going to be a when.

"A *printsessa* who, it seems, does not like being told what to do," Nikolai murmured appreciatively.

"What...?" Felix turned to look at the other man.

Nikolai wasn't looking at him, but at something over Felix's shoulder. "You are a lucky man, Kingston. She is as much a warrior as my own wife," Nikolai admired.

"Fuck!" he rasped when he saw Brianna, dressed all in black, moving from the shadowed safety of building after building as she steadily made her way to where they were hiding.

Felix didn't wait for her to reach them, but went to her instead.

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“What the fuck are you doing here?”

Brianna flinched at the aggression in Felix’s hissed tone and the painful grip he now had of the tops of her arms as he pushed her into the shadows of a warehouse. “This is my fight, Felix—”

“It’s everyone’s fight when monsters like Connor Doyle are allowed to roam free,” he bit out.

Connor Doyle.

Brianna’s half brother.

Did that make Brianna half a monster? Because she definitely wanted to *see* Connor in handcuffs before he was taken away, locked in a cell, and the key thrown away, rather than be told about it after it had happened.

Which was why she had left the Kingston estate to come here.

Not because she felt uncomfortable there. The Kingston wives were all nice and very friendly, and none of them seemed to blame her for the fact their husbands had gone off to bring down the head of a criminal gang who also happened to be Brianna’s half brother. Adam’s wife, Cara, had even gone so far as to dismiss her apology with the comment this was what their husband’s did and were trained for.

Unlike those other women, Brianna hadn’t been able to wait patiently for the men to return.

Instead, she’d excused herself to go up to the suite she’d been sharing with Felix for the past two days and nights.

The bedroom she’d been sharing with him.

The bed where they made love together every night and every morning.

There had been no more declarations of love from Felix. During their lovemaking or otherwise. It was as if he no longer trusted her enough to tell her how he felt about her. Or that

maybe he had changed his mind about the depth of those feelings.

Contrarily, Brianna now knew exactly how she felt about Felix.

She had fallen in love with this beautifully complex and deeply caring man.

Which was why she hadn't been able to just sit in Felix's family home and wait for news of the outcome of the battle she knew would take place once Connor realized he'd been betrayed.

Felix was wrong. This was very much Brianna's fight too.

Getting off the Kingston estate had proved impossible, with men patrolling the grounds inside and outside the property, along with the many alarms and cameras strategically located in the garden and house.

In the end, Brianna had been forced to appeal to Rosie Kingston for help. Rosie in turn had included her sister Cara, Adam's wife, who in turn had invited Mia to join in, Mia had invited Remy, then Remy had invited Lara.

In the end, all five of the Kingston wives had assisted Brianna in leaving the estate by causing a diversion while Brianna took Rosie's car and drove to where she knew the meeting between Connor and the Albanians was to take place.

"I'm staying," Brianna now told Felix stubbornly.

She pulled out of his grasp before ducking down to quickly make her way across to where the other men were watching them.

Adam studied her from between narrowed lids. "How did you get here?"

"I drove," she answered defensively.

"I meant, what form of transport did you use to arrive here," he said between clenched teeth.

Ah. "I borrowed Rosie's car." She grimaced as she made the reply.



“With or without her permission?”

“Is it going to do any good for me to say without?”

“No,” Adam bit out.

She winced. “With.”

“And can I take a guess on all the wives having had a hand in helping you leave the estate?” Max, Rosie’s husband, put in dryly. He pursed his lips when Brianna’s guilty expression gave him the answer to his question. “I believe a few smacked arses might be in order when we return home,” he told Adam.

Brianna grinned at Max and the often gruff but very likeable cousin of the six Kingston brothers. “I think the wives might be disappointed if there aren’t.”

Sinclair snorted. “You’re probably right.”

“Good times,” Mal murmured.

Max nodded. “Looking forward to it.”

“Oh yeah,” Darius agreed.

“You know them so well already,” Casper admired.

“Am I the only sane one here?” Felix’s frustration with Brianna’s actions was palpable. “Am I the only one who can see that Brianna having left the safety of the Kingston estate, with or without the help of your wives, has put her directly in the line of her psychotic brother’s fire?”

“None of us are blind,” Nikolai assured him. “I believe your family is just in awe at how much Brianna is like the other rebellious Kingston ladies.”

Except Brianna wasn’t a Kingston lady, and from the fierceness of the anger she could see on Felix’s face, she doubted she ever would be. That he would ever want her to be.

Which in no way took anything away from the reason she was here. “I had to come—”

Brianna didn’t get to finish stating the reason why she’d felt compelled to join them. Instead, she froze at the sound of a gun being fired inside the warehouse.

That single gunshot was followed by the sound of at least a dozen more.

Brianna stared in horror as the four guards outside the warehouse then turned their guns on each other and fired before they all dropped to the ground, either badly injured or dead.

---

*Another fucking shit show*, was Felix's first thought as he saw the other men who had been hidden with him were now making their way toward the warehouse where the meeting between the Irish and Albanians was taking place.

He had no idea who had fired that first shot, only that hearing the immediate retaliation of another dozen or so guns being fired, surely had to mean that there were a lot of dead members of the criminal underworld inside that building as well as the four now outside it.

"Is asking you to stay here going to be a waste of my breath?" He glared in frustration at Brianna.

"Yes," she didn't even hesitate to confirm.

"Consider yourself on notice that *you* will also be on the receiving end of a warmed arse as soon as we get back to the estate!" Felix winced the moment he'd made the threat when he also remembered that Brianna had grown up with a physically abusive brother.

"Warning received." She grinned. "Don't look so worried, Felix. I'm perfectly aware it's a sexual spanking you're talking about, not the brutality Connor dishes out." Her mouth twisted.

Felix breathed heavily through his nose. "I think you've spent too much time with my female in-laws."

"Probably," she dismissed.

"Are you armed?"

She nodded. “Rosie thought it best that I was. She got me this from the armory.” She retrieved a gun from where it was nestled in the waistband at the back of her black jeans.

Bloody Rosie. Of course she did.

“Stay behind me.” Felix knew, even as he threw out the instruction, that she wasn’t listening to him.

Predictably, instead of doing as he’d asked, Brianna ran out in front of him and directly toward where he could still hear the sound of shots being fired inside the warehouse, her own gun raised defensively.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

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Brianna's nose was assailed by the smell of gunfire and blood the moment she burst through the double doors into the large open area of the abandoned warehouse.

She came to a halt when she saw that the Kingston men, the tactical team, and Nikolai and his men already encircled the few mobsters who were capable of getting on their knees. The rest of the Irish and Armenian gangs were either dead or too badly injured to be of any threat.

Only one man remained standing.

Connor.

He stood tall and defiant, even with his hands secured behind his back and a member of the tactical team standing either side of him.

"I think you should move aside, gentlemen," Brianna advised softly, her gaze fixed on Connor. "I wouldn't want to shoot one of you by mistake."

Both men glanced at someone behind her, obviously for instruction, before stepping away from Connor.

Brianna's top lip curled up as she walked straight toward her brother, her raised gun pointed directly between his eyes.

"Well, well," Connor drawled. "I should have known you were involved in this too. You and that fucking traitor Liam." His eyes gleamed with a wild fury.

Liam!

Dear God, she had forgotten about Liam!

She quickly glanced at all the men lying on the ground.

“You won’t find him amongst the dead,” Connor dismissed scathingly. “Little shite ran out the back of the building immediately after firing the first shot, like the cowardly pussy he is.”

“I didn’t run anywhere. I simply stepped outside while you idiots shot the hell out of each other.” Liam stood in the open doorway at the back of the warehouse before striding across to join them in the center of the room. “Gentlemen.” He nodded to the special forces team. “Volkov.” He shook the Russian’s hand. “Kingston.” He nodded at Felix and his family before turning to where Brianna was still pointing a gun at their brother. “I want to kill him too,” he told her softly. “But I want to see him suffer more, for having killed Da and Una.”

“Men like him don’t feel a moment’s anguish over the people they’ve killed,” she scorned.

“Connor will,” Liam assured grimly. “I’ll make sure of it.”

Brianna wavered in her resolve.

A part of her just wanted to shoot Connor and rid the world of the monster he was.

Another part of her wanted to respect Liam’s wishes and let the law punish Connor. He was already looking at two life sentences, for killing Da and Una. He had also killed Ronan Murphy and the rest of his family, along with all the leading figures in the previous Irish hierarchy and their families.

Brianna had no doubt there were many more people Connor was responsible for killing or having killed. People who had been loved and were now missed. Hopefully their relatives, once they realized the monster Connor Doyle had been contained and replaced as head of the Irish Mob, would happily testify against him.

Once incarcerated, Connor would never taste freedom again.

---

“Brianna.”

Felix smiled when she turned to look at him, relieved when he saw some the tension ease from her shoulders. “He isn’t worth it,” he encouraged.

“She doesn’t have the guts to shoot me,” Connor announced confidently. “Or the ability.”

She eyed him pityingly. “Remember all those hours Da spent teaching me to shoot once I hit my teens? Well, none of them were wasted,” she assured. “In fact,” she added with deliberation, “Da said I was a better shot than you’ll ever be.”

Connor lurched toward her. “You little—”

“Ah-ah.” Liam’s hand shot out to grip about Connor’s throat, holding him immobile.

Brianna gave a humorless smile. “All I have to do is pull the trigger and it will be as if you were never here at all,” she taunted Connor.

He sneered. “Do it, then.”

She turned so that both Liam and Nikolai were included in her gaze. “Do you promise me he’ll be locked in prison for the rest of his life?”

“My superiors will ensure that happens.” The commander of the tactical unit was the one to answer her.

“And Liam will go free?”

The man gave a rueful smile. “Mr. Doyle has already negotiated his own freedom in exchange for testifying against Connor Doyle. I believe Mr. Liam Doyle and Mr. Volkov have also negotiated an agreement regarding their individual... business interests within the city.”

“Brianna, please,” Felix repeated softly after she’d looked pleadingly at Nikolai and the Russian had nodded confirmation of that new alliance.

Brianna's fingers tightened momentarily about the grip of the gun she was pointing at the still-sneering Connor before she slowly lowered her arm until the gun lay harmless against her thigh. "You're right. He isn't worth it."

"Thank fuck!" Felix rasped, taking the gun out of Brianna's hand and passing it to Malachi before Felix gathered her into his arms and carried her away from whatever was going to happen next inside the warehouse.

He didn't stop until they reached where several of the Kingston's black SUVs were parked behind another building. Even then he only threw open one of the back doors before bundling her inside and then following her.

His hands moved up to frame either side of her face as he stared at her intently. "You almost gave me a heart attack when I thought you were actually going to shoot the bastard."

"I *wanted* to shoot him," she admitted.

Felix had seen that in her eyes. "I'm so glad you didn't, otherwise we would be dealing with a completely different scenario right now." He held her gaze captive with his as he lowered his head and his lips claimed hers.

The adrenaline pumping through both their veins meant that things quickly spiraled out of control and their kisses became hungry and demanding.

"Could you wait until we get home before taking that any further," Casper pleaded minutes later as he opened the driver's door of the SUV and climbed inside.

Brianna's face was ablaze with embarrassed heat as she pulled away from Felix to glance at where Malachi was now climbing into the passenger seat next to Casper as the youngest Kingston brother turned on the ignition. "What about Rosie's car?"

"Max is driving it back," Casper dismissed. "And considering he's well over six feet tall, and wears size fifteen boots, it's going to be a very uncomfortable drive."

"I could—"

“Which means,” Casper continued with a glance in the driver’s mirror, “he’s going to be doubly pissed by the time he’s driven all the way back to the estate.”

And, Felix knew, Rosie would get twice the spanking.

Much as Felix wanted to do some spanking of his own, he knew, once he’d done that, hopefully to Brianna’s bare arse, that he wouldn’t be able to let her go. Not that he wanted to do that anyway, but emotions were running too high right now for Brianna to be able to make any sort of rational decision about her future.

With that in mind, Felix thrust open the door beside him. “I’m going back inside to help with the cleanup.” His gaze didn’t quite meet Brianna’s as he straightened.

“But we’ll talk when you get home?” she called out as he stepped down from the vehicle.

“Of course,” he answered noncommittally before slamming the door closed and striding away.

---

Brianna watched Felix until he’d disappeared inside the warehouse without so much as a single backward glance in her direction. She turned back to the two men seated in front of her as Casper accelerated the SUV down the track leading to the road. “What just happened?”

“I’m not sure—”

“Felix just gave you the brush-off,” the always bluntly honest Malachi answered at the same time that Casper attempted to placate her.

She tensed. “What? Why?”

Malachi shrugged. “You really pissed him off by turning up here and putting yourself in danger.”

“He’ll come around,” Casper assured.

But Felix didn’t come around.



Not that day.

Felix hadn't immediately come back to the Kingston estate with the rest of his family, nor did he do so in the six days that followed.

When she asked Rosie where he was, the other woman told her that Felix had stayed in London to "help the police with their enquiries." Not as a suspect, but to assist Liam in helping to put Connor safely behind bars until all the evidence had been gathered and his trial could take place.

Brianna hadn't known what to do. She knew she should leave the Kingston estate, to either stay in a hotel or find somewhere of her own to live. That with Felix's absence and Connor under arrest, there was no reason for her to continue to stay. But still, another part of her kept hoping Felix would come home.

He didn't.

Nor did he call her.

Or send her a message through a member of his family.

At first, Brianna had tried calling him on his cell phone, but every time it was answered with "I can't take your call right now, so please leave a message after the beep and I'll get back to you."

The first half dozen times she called, Brianna had duly left a message asking Felix to call her back.

He hadn't.

Not once.

The times she called him after that, she didn't bother leaving a message, but knew he would be able to tell from his missed calls that she had tried to contact him.

He made no effort to return any of those calls either.

To all intents and purposes, Felix was just...gone.

As if he had never been in Brianna's life at all.

Never told her he loved her.

Never made love with her.

Never threatened to spank her arse for going to the warehouse where Connor was meeting with the Albanians.

Brianna had stopped calling him two days ago. What was the point in humiliating herself further when she knew he was just going to ignore those calls?

But still, instead of leaving, she'd continued to stay in Felix's suite on the Kingston estate. She worked on her book in the sitting room during the day and slept in his bed at night, clutching Felix's pillow to her chest so she could breathe in his warmth and the aftershave he wore.

She had never felt so lonely in her life, despite the members of the Kingston family insisting she at least join them for dinner in the evenings.

"Are you doing okay?" Cara prompted softly when she joined Brianna in the huge kitchen on the morning of the seventh day of Felix's absence.

Salty tears instantly stung Brianna's eyes. "Yes, I— No," she angrily corrected her pride-saving answer. "I'm not doing okay at all. Where the hell is Felix? Why isn't he here? And please don't tell me he's busy helping to put Connor away for several lifetimes, because it's been a week now and I know that's no longer the case."

She had spoken to Liam several times during the past week. His new alliance with the Russians was still in place, the two factions having divided up the assets and men of the Bart gang. So seamlessly, it was almost as if the Bart family had never existed.

Brianna was more than happy with that outcome.

She also knew the case against Connor was now ironclad. In regard, at least, to there being an eyewitness to his having killed their father. Liam was standing as witness to Connor having killed Ronan Murphy and his family. The murder of the other members of the previous regime was still ongoing.

But the murders of Aiden Doyle and the Murphy family would be enough to put Connor away for the rest of his life.

She'd been too embarrassed by Felix's wall of silence toward her during those calls to Liam to ask him if he'd seen or spoken to the other man.

"He has been helping to do that," Cara answered slowly. "But you're right, I don't believe that's what he's doing now."

"Then what *is* he doing?"

Cara gave a rueful smile. "Adam has a theory that Felix is behaving the gentleman. That everything happened so fast that he's now giving you time and space away from him. So that you have time to think and can make a measured decision about your feelings and your future without his presence or influence."

"Without his...?" She gave a fierce shake of her head. "I wasn't Felix's prisoner. I don't have bloody Stockholm Syndrome." Her Irish accent deepened in her anger.

"No," Cara confirmed dryly. "Do you love him?"

"Overwhelmingly and completely," she answered without hesitation.

Cara nodded. "Then you need to tell him that."

"That's a little hard for me to do when he isn't even here and won't take or return my calls!" She glared. "Do you know where he is?" she demanded, her cheeks hot with humiliation now that she knew Felix's family had obviously discussed his odd behavior when she wasn't around.

"His apartment in London."

"The address?"

"Brianna..."

"The address?" she repeated through gritted teeth.

Cara grinned. "That a girl," she admired before crossing the room to open a locked cabinet beside the kitchen door. "Here, take my car." She held out a set of car keys at the same time that she told Brianna the building and address of where Felix had his apartment. "You'll need the code to get into his private lift too." She recited the eight numbers before shaking her

head. “The Kingston men can be such arrogant asses at times. Give him hell when you get there.”

That was exactly what Brianna intended to do.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

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Felix strode up and down the hallway of his apartment—stomped might be a better description—for what had to be the thousandth time since he'd come here a week ago to lick his wounds.

Not physical wounds, because he didn't have any.

But the emotional uncertainty of not knowing when or if he would ever see Brianna again certainly felt as if it was ripping his heart out of his chest a piece at a time.

All his brothers and Adam had phoned him to tell him he was behaving like an arse. His twin, Darius, had said more than that. The emotional connection the two of them had had since birth allowed Darius to sense some of the pain Felix was going through by forcing himself to stay away from Brianna.

All Felix had been interested in during all those calls was hearing how Brianna was. Each time he was told she was busy writing her book, but that she seemed well enough when she joined the rest of his family in the evenings for dinner.

He could have found that out himself, of course, by taking or returning just one of her many calls. He'd just been too apprehensive at what she might have to say to him to be able to do that.

Cowardly, yes, but even that was better than hearing Brianna tell him he wouldn't see her again after she went back to Ireland.

There hadn't been a single call from her in the past two days.

Confirming what he had been dreading: that their closeness had been a result of the life-or-death situation Brianna found herself in and not any lasting feelings she had for him.

He had no idea how he was going to exist—

He scowled darkly at he heard the ascent of the private elevator up to his penthouse apartment.

His family were the only ones who had the code to open the private elevator or use it to come up to his apartment. Much as he loved his family, he really didn't want to deal with any of them right now.

“There you are!”

Felix took a step back as, instead of being confronted by one of his family, a furious virago with blazing red hair and glittering green eyes stepped out of the elevator into the entrance hallway in front of him.

Brianna.

Felix's hungry gaze drank in every inch of her. From her fiery hair, her beautiful face, those currently furious eyes, and her slender curves in a black sweater and low-rider black denims.

Those beautiful green eyes continued to glare at him. “Well, do you have anything to say for yourself?”

Felix was at a loss to know what to say. Mainly because he wasn't sure why Brianna was here. Whatever the reason, a member of his family had to have given her the code to come up to his apartment.

Had Brianna come here on her way back to her cottage in Ireland to upbraid him for ignoring her this past week?

Or was she here to tell him she had feelings for him?

Either way, one word out of place and Felix knew he was likely to be at the receiving end of the full force of the fury blazing in her eyes.

---

Brianna knew from a single glance that Felix had fared no better than she had during the long week since she'd last seen him.

His dark hair was tousled and overlong.

There were dark shadows beneath his eyes.

His cheeks were hollow above his clenched jaw.

He still looked as muscular in a black T-shirt and faded denims but there was a new leanness to him that said he'd lost weight.

Because he'd longed to see her again as much as she'd longed for him?

Or was it for some other reason?

It certainly couldn't have been easy walking the narrow pathway between the authorities and several criminal gangs this past week.

Even so...

Her chin rose. "I'm waiting for an explanation."

He flinched. "In regard to what?"

Her eyes widened. "In regard to the fact that the man who made love to me, who told me he loved me and that I was *his*, has been hiding out in his apartment for the past week!"

"I was trying to be noble—"

She snorted. "Cara guessed that might be the reason. I don't want you to be *noble*, Felix. I want you to be the arrogant arse you've always been."

"Thanks."

She shrugged. "You're the one behaving like an idiot, not me."

"I thought you needed time—"

"Did you ask me if I needed time?"

"No, but—"

"Did I say I *wanted* time?"

"No, but—"

“Did it occur to you that was because *I didn’t need or want any time at all to know I’ve fallen in love with you?*”

“I— You—” Felix swallowed. “You love me...?”

“I’m *in* love with you,” she corrected angrily. “I love Liam. I love Aunt Bridget. I love my cottage. I love my career. But I’m not *in* love with any of those things.”

“But you’re *in* love with me?”

She glared. “Yes!”

Felix didn’t need telling twice. Instead, he marched over to her, bent slightly at the waist to put one of his arms about the back of her thighs and his shoulder against her abdomen before lifting her up and over his shoulder.

“What the hell...!” Brianna’s fists pummeled the base of his back. “What are you doing?”

“Taking you to bed.” Felix walked down the hallway and kicked open his bedroom door. “Stripping you naked.” He placed her back on her feet to begin quickly peeling the clothes from her body before lifting her again and laying her down on top of the bed and crawling between her parted thighs. “Now I’m going to eat your pussy and taste your cream over and over until you scream for mercy.”

“You’ll be waiting a long time, if that’s your plan,” Brianna assured him huskily as she threaded her fingers through his hair.

“I’ve missed you so much,” he groaned. “Longed, hungered for you so much that I can’t eat or sleep.”

“Felix.”

He looked up at her.

She gazed directly into his eyes. “I love you very much.”

Now his previously sore and bruised heart was expanding to a degree it felt as if it might leap out of his chest. “I love you too.”

She smiled. “Then make love to me.”



He blinked. “Are you staying with me?”

“Would it matter if I said no?”

“Would it matter...?” Felix sat back on his heels. “Of course it would fucking matter. You’re *mine*, damn it. Mine!” His hands tightly gripped her thighs.

“I am,” she confirmed, obviously pleased with that answer.

He realized now what an idiot he’d been to stay away from her for so long. That their heartache could have been over so much quicker if he hadn’t assumed Brianna needed time. In this case, that assumption had definitely made an arse out of him!

“And you’re mine,” Brianna told him firmly.

“Until I breathe my last breath,” he vowed.

“Until we both breathe our last breath.” Brianna returned that vow.

“Marry me.”

“Yes.”

He blinked. “Yes?”

“Felix, I’ve told you I love you. That I always will. I’ve said yes to your marriage proposal, such as it was,” she teased. “Will you please make love to me now?”

He didn’t need to be asked again.

---

Brianna had ached for this man for the past week. Soaked his pillow with her tears every night as she cried with her need to be with him.

All that longing and pain dissipated the moment the warmth of Felix’s lips claimed hers as if he was never going to let her out of his sight again. The throbbing hardness between him between her thighs was indication he felt the same.

Which was good, because Brianna didn’t intend to be parted from him again either. Not for any reason.

Their kisses grew wilder, Brianna's movements desperate as she pulled off Felix's T-shirt so that she could touch and caress his warm and silky flesh beneath.

He *was* leaner, but those defined abs were just as hard. As if he had spent hours in the gym in an effort to burn off the excess energy caused by the hungry desire that coursed as unceasingly through his body as it did hers.

The hardness of his arousal pressed perfectly against Brianna's clit through the denim that was all that separated them. She undulated her hips up to meet his every thrust, her breathing growing choppy as she felt the desire rising higher and higher as each second passed.

Felix lifted his lips from hers. "Uh-huh." His stormy gaze held hers as he began to slide down her body. "Your climaxes all belong to me now," he stated gruffly. "All of you belongs to me now. In the same way *I* belong to you now."

She gasped and arched her back as Felix pinched her sensitive nipples. Over and over again, until his mouth closed over one turgid peak, the heat engulfing her as he began to suck. Slow and hard. Soft and rapid. Igniting sparks of fire between Brianna's thighs and causing her clit to throb with the need for friction there too.

"Please," she begged. "Felix, please!"

"Tell me what you need," he encouraged huskily. "I'll give you anything you want if you ask me for it."

Brianna was shaking, aching, the juices between her thighs feeling like liquid fire. "Bastard," she choked out without force or rancor.

He grinned unrepentantly. "Tell me."

"I need to come," she pleaded.

He slid farther down her body, his gaze hot as he looked between her legs. "You're so wet for me," he groaned before his head lowered and the heat of his tongue began to lap up those juices. "So ready for me," he murmured with satisfaction as he pushed one of his fingers inside the moist heat of her

channel. “I want you to come. Now,” he ordered fiercely before sucking her clit into the heat of his mouth.

Brianna gasped as his finger began to thrust inside her channel in the same rhythm, before it was quickly joined by another.

The heat of his tongue rasped against the throb of her clit as his fingers thrust hard, curling slightly to stroke against those sensitive nerves inside her.

Brianna’s fingers dug into his bare shoulders. “I can’t— I’m going to—”

“Do it,” Felix rasped. “Fucking do it. Give me that cream I crave tasting.” His gaze was dark as he looked down to where two of his fingers were buried deep inside her.

Brianna met those thrusts, taking his fingers deeper, crying out and coming the moment his thumb pressed down on her clit.

She could feel her juices gushing with each spasm of her release, crying out when Felix lowered his head and began to lap up every drop.

His gaze glittered as he glanced up at her before once again feasting his eyes on the juices between her thighs. “Again,” he demanded as his mouth claimed her clit once more.

Brianna lost count of the number of times Felix took her to that explosive pinnacle. Over and over. Again and again.

Until she knew she needed more. “I want to feel you inside me, Felix,” she encouraged achingly. “Please.”

---

It was the moment Felix had been waiting for as he pleased Brianna with his mouth, tongue, and fingers to bring her to climax after climax.

He didn’t even undress completely, just pushed down his sweatpants before releasing his leaking cock from the dampness of his boxers.

Brianna parted her legs wider in invitation as his cockhead breached the entrance to her hot, wet channel. Felix accepted that invitation as he pushed his cock deeper, then deeper still, until he had invaded every delicious inch of her and the tip of his cock was touching her cervix.

“When you’re ready, I’m going to fill you here one day too.” The thrust of his cockhead against that second entrance caused them both to groan. “A son or a daughter, I don’t care which, as long as they look like you.” His eyes burned with the feelings of possession, obsession, burning deep inside him as he looked down to where their bodies were joined.

“Yes,” Brianna agreed longingly. “Except I want them to look like you.”

“Okay, the boys can look like me as long as the girls look exactly like their beautiful mother. But not yet. I want you to myself for a while before I have to share you. Even with our children,” Felix groaned as he slowly began to thrust his cock inside her before fierce desire took over and his thrusts became wild and erratic.

---

Minutes later, the two of them cried out their love for each other as they reached that pinnacle of release together.

Brianna instinctively knew that the first of those children was now taking up residence inside her womb.

But, as they both quickly realized after the first trimester had passed, Brianna’s hormones went into overdrive. For the next six months, her sexual appetite was insatiable and demanding. So much so that they were making love—again—when her water broke and her contractions began minutes later.

Their daughter was born just three hours later.

With the same dark hair and bright blue eyes as her father.

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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carole Mortimer is a USA Today Bestselling Author and recipient of the RWA Nora Roberts Lifetime Achievement Award 2015, RT Career Achievement Award 2017, RT Pioneer for Romance Award 2014. She was also recognized by Queen Elizabeth II in 2012 for her 'outstanding service to literature'. Carole has written over 280 contemporary, Regency and paranormal romance novels.

She is happily married to Peter. They have 6 sons, and live on the beautiful Isle of Man. She also loves to hear from Readers!

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