

**BAD BOYS  
OF BOSTON**  
The Irish

**BAD  
LUCK**

**K.S. Ellis**

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## Connor

I'm not always as "Lucky" as my nickname suggests. I've managed to breeze through life with my family name, charm in spades, and an Irish accent all the ladies love. But after my mammy's untimely departure back to Ireland, I have lost the one thing that keeps me grounded and the one person who keeps the darkness at bay.

## Andie

I can't seem to catch a lucky break. I found myself single, unemployed, and homeless in less than a week. So, when I hear about a live-in housekeeping position where the only prerequisite is absolute discretion, it finally feels like my luck has turned. Too bad my new employer is too yummy to ignore.

Connor knows Andie isn't cut out for a life involving the Boston Irish Mafia, but he's never been much good at resisting temptation, and Andie Halpern is temptation itself. A brief fling seems just the thing until Andie is dragged into Connor's dark world. It's sink or swim, and, as luck would have it, there's a storm coming.

# Bad Luck

Bad Boys of Boston

The Irish

Book Four

k.s. Ellis

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For everyone who ever held a secret because they were afraid  
of sharing the burden.

# More by K.S. Ellis

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The first thank you, as always, is to Cameron. I would never have gotten this book edited if you hadn't done the lion's share of parenting over the Easter break. You are amazing! Thank you, always.

Thank you for everyone who read, edited, and loved this book. Connor and Andie almost lost their way, but you helped guide them back to where they needed to be!

I loved writing this book, it was a little lighter in some aspects than the previous three books, but I think I, and the characters, needed some brevity! I hope you agree, and that you enjoy reading it as much as I loved writing it.

Love has nothing to do with what you are expecting to get –  
only with what you are expecting to give – which is  
everything.

- Katharine Hepburn

# Chapter One

## CONNOR

The tow-haired frat boy on table three is on a winning streak. With every hand he wins, he gets louder and more obnoxious. If he keeps it up, I will have to get Niall or Paddy up here to sort him out. The lad's on a hell of a hot streak, but all streaks eventually end. The house always wins. It's my job to make sure of it.

I'm standing in the middle of the largest room on the top level of Oracle, the strip club here in West Boston run by the Irish, and my cousin, Seamus Fitzpatrick.

It was an empty storage room when I first stood in this space. Now, it's a proper gambling den. The dark wood-paneled walls are polished and shining, contrasting well with the rich burgundy plush carpet, matching the felt tops of the five gleaming poker tables scattered around the room.

Each oval table seats eight gamblers and a dealer. Padded, striped chairs ring the tables, comfortable enough for a gambler to sit for hours. I know as I've sat for many hours around these tables.

Large, lampshade-style chandelier light fixtures hang from the ceiling, illuminating the space. Heavy brocade drapes hang over the windows overlooking the street below. They are always drawn when this room is occupied. There is a car of undercover Vice cops which sits outside twenty-four-seven. We don't want them catching a glimpse at our occupants.

Seamus suggested installing a bar, but that would encourage hangers-on to stand around. The high rollers, in particular, wouldn't like that. Instead, I have a bar in one of the smaller rooms and offer table service from the waitresses moving about in their sleek black trousers, crisp white button-down shirts, and black satin vests. The dealers are dressed the same, except they wear black satin ties.

Striding across the room, I nod to a few regulars, tapping one of the frat boy's table companions on the shoulder.

"A spot has opened up on table one."

The Russian nods gratefully, gathering his chips and moving to the other side of the room. I sink into his chair, rapping my knuckles on the felt table to get the dealer's attention.

Ryan nods, dealing me into the game as a pile of chips lands on the table in front of me, courtesy of one of the waitresses.

Because of how cocky he is, it only takes about six hands to significantly deplete the frat boy's pile of chips. He gets rowdier and angrier the more he loses.

He drinks more too. That's an amateur move. Alcohol numbs your senses and makes it harder for you to hide your tells. It also makes it harder to read other people's tells. A drunk mind is a dull mind.

I've seen the likes of this frat boy before. Harvard, by the looks of his preppy polo shirt. He's come to West Boston to slum it with the Irish Mafia.

Lads like him think they're untouchable because of who their daddy is. Like we give a fuck who their daddies are. Their daddies are more scared of us than we are of them. Especially when Niall gets involved. I've yet to see some suited businessman willing to go toe to toe with the Irish Reaper.

It takes another twenty minutes for the frat boy to lose his head. His final hand is a bust. He drops the cards onto the table, spouting curses, and throws his drink in Ryan's face.

Fucking unacceptable. Our staff is off limits. In an instant, I'm on my feet and around the table, hauling frat boy to his by his throat while his preppy mates all jump up, holding their hands out in front of them yelling, "whoa, whoa, whoa," like I'm a bucking bronco or some shit. Do they think they're fucking cowboys or something?

I haul the preppy prick through the door to the small landing at the top of the stairs. We don't discipline where the tables are. Downstairs, the dull thudding of the music from the VIP room is audible.

Shoving the fucker against the wall, I pin him there with my forearm to his throat, sinking a fist into his gut. He slumps against my arm, gasping for breath. His mates have followed us out, as has a vodka-soaked Ryan.

"Fetch the Reaper," I growl at Ryan, who disappears instantly.

Frat boy's eyes widen as he starts gasping out protests. "Please. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have thrown my drink. It won't happen again."

He's damn right. It won't. They're barred. I'll not have anyone in here disrespecting my dealers.

“Are you fucking crazy, man?”

“Let him go. It was a fucking drink. We're leaving!”

“You can't just assault people!”

His posse is now making their feelings known. Yet none of them has the balls to try to wrestle me off their friend. Fucking pussies.

Niall comes striding up the stairs within minutes. He will have been down in the VIP room with his wife. Mellie Byrne was one of our bartenders until Niall whisked her off to the courthouse and married her on the spot.

No matter how good she was at her job or how popular with the partons, we can't have the Reaper's wife serving drinks for tips. She's now in charge of the bar staff, liquor orders, the lot.

Sometimes she likes to come in and keep an eye on new hires, which is why she and Niall were downstairs tonight rather than ten minutes away at their apartment.

Niall looks at the frat boy, a truly sinister smile tugging at the corners of his lips. At least two lads surrounding me shudder and inch away while the frat boy almost pisses himself.

I step back, my forearm dropping away as Niall grabs the lad's collar, hauling him down the stairs. His four friends trail them, half-heartedly voicing words of protest.

I don't know what they're bitching about. The Reaper isn't going to kill their friend. He's going to fuck him up a bit and

warn him to stay away.

It'll be enough. Those lads are only here because they think they want a bit of danger in their lives. I guess they found out how much trouble was too much for them. After this little excursion, they'll hightail it back to Cambridge and won't set foot outside their ivory towers for a while.

"You all right?" I ask Ryan, who is still dripping.

"Yeah," he sighs, wrinkling his nose as he gets a whiff of his smell. "Just glad it was me and not one of the girls."

I'm glad about that too. If it had been one of our female dealers on the receiving end of the frat boy's antics, he wouldn't have left with Niall with an intact face.

"Clean up, then get back inside." I nod to the back room where the staff have lockers.

"Will do, boss." Ryan disappears through the nondescript wooden door. Running a hand through my ash blonde hair, I head back inside the gambling hall.

Another dealer has taken the spot at Ryan's table, and the waitress has collected my chips to deposit in the back safe. No one else acts like they noticed the disappearance. The frat boy's table only has three poker players remaining.

I prowl between the other three tables – ignoring the high rollers at table five – carefully selecting another three players for table two. The job done, I accept a whiskey from a passing waitress and continue to move around the room, chatting to a few of the regulars.

Christ. It's Thursday tomorrow. My new housekeeper is moving in. Shit. Did I organize the cleaning service to come

before she gets there? I'll have to check on that.



## ANDIE

I stare at the house openmouthed as Paddy Flynn pulls the SUV into the driveway beside it. Lauren, Paddy's wife, and my old neighbor from Dot, twists from her seat in the front of the vehicle, beaming at me.

“Wicked nice, huh?” she laughs, scrunching her freckled nose.

Paddy glances across the car at her with a soft smile. I don't think I'll ever get used to seeing these Irish mobsters looking so tender, but it's funny. Less funny is how those two got together.

Lauren's brother got whacked by the Italian Mafia, and she ran to Paddy Flynn for protection. Paddy is an enforcer in the Irish Mafia, so the Italians couldn't get to Lauren. Instead, they smashed up her apartment back in Dot. The one across the hall from mine.

I bite back a sigh. I miss my apartment. It was a nice little two-bedder, and I kept it tidy. But I mistakenly thought the sun rose and set out of Hamish MacLauchlan's ass and let him on my lease.



Not a month later, the prick was tossing me out on *my* ass, and I've been couch surfing ever since. Low keeps trying to get me to move in with her and Paddy, but they only *just* got married.

Being around their sappiness twenty-four-seven would have me slashing at my wrists. I'm happy for the girl, but no, thank you.

She's come through for me now. I needed a job and a place to live. My boss was best friends with Hamish, so I got my pink slip the day after Hamish dumped me. Good times.

But Low found me this *amazing* gig. Live in housekeeper. West Roxbury. Apparently, I even get to run around in a nice little sedan, all part of the employment package. The only catch is that he's in the Irish Mafia, and I need to keep my trap shut. Can do. I grew up in Dot. Keeping my mouth shut is second nature to me.

The three of us slide out of the SUV, and Paddy moves to the trunk to unload my bags. I look up at the house again. It is a gorgeous Victorian, landscaped to sit high off the street, three stories in dark siding with deep-red trim.

I sigh over the huge bay windows off the side of the first two stories. I'm moving into a fairytale. There's even a cute little single-story cottage out the back, separate from the house, next to the drive, made to match the main house.

Paddy's voice cuts across me as I smile at it, wondering if it is a man-cave or something. He might be syrupy sweet with Low, but his voice is dark and hard with me.

“That’s off-limits,” he says stiffly. “You don’t go in there. Ever.”

I nod jerkily to him, casting an uneasy glance over at Low, who shrugs at me.

“Mafia business,” she mouths. I swallow roughly. Good to know. I will be pretending there is nothing but empty space out here.

When Hamish kicked me out, he graciously gave me enough time to shove most of my belongings into three mid-sized suitcases and an overnight bag, which Paddy is unloading now.

He slings the overnight bag over his shoulder, and we each grab a suitcase as he lets us into the house, handing me the set of keys.

“I’ll give you a quick tour,” he tells me gruffly. “Then we’ll leave to let you get settled in. Connor will be home later. He’s off running errands.”

Low shudders a little on the word “errands.” I guess it means more Mafia business. I suppose it’s best if I don’t think about it.

Leaving the suitcases in the front entranceway, at the base of the twisting staircase, next to a white stone fireplace, Paddy leads us through a sitting room, flowing into a dining room, and through an archway into the kitchen.

Paddy’s SUV is visible from the kitchen windows, parked next to a neat little blue sedan – which I think might be my new car – and the “it’s not really there” cottage.

The house is exactly the opposite of what I imagined when Low told me one of her Irish mobsters needed a live-in housekeeper.

It's all gorgeous hardwood parquet floors and block-painted walls with white trim. The place is *spotless*, and the furniture style matches the Victorian exterior and feel of the house.

I think most of the furniture is antique. There are even internal French folding glass doors between some of the rooms. And chandeliers. Cute, old-school chandeliers without being over the top.

Freaking *fairytale*. Beauty and the Beast on a smaller scale. I feel like this walk-through should be accompanied by piping orchestra music. Oh my God, there's a cute little wooden upright piano!

The kitchen has Laura Ashley sprigged wallpaper. The whole space is turn of the century with little alcoves. I'm never leaving. I will be the best housekeeper in Massachusetts, so my mobster can't bear to let me go. Then I can stay and bake in this kitchen *forever*.

The laundry has a stained glass window looking out over the spacious backyard. A *stained glass window*. It might only be a half-hour drive, but I am officially a world away from Dot.

The main staircase leads up to the second story, with three bedrooms, a bathroom, and a cozy sitting room with more comfortable-looking sofas than the fancy antiques in the parlor downstairs.

“This is your floor.” Paddy quickly brings my suitcases up and places them in one of the bedrooms, with a four-poster double bed and gorgeous dark hardwood matching bureau and closet set.

“This way.” He leads me back down the main staircase and up the second staircase hidden behind it, which leads directly to the third story. The separate staircase is a newer addition than the rest of the building. This looks like it was once an attic space but is now a fully functional third floor. I wonder why they didn’t simply put a staircase from the second floor. It would make more sense to me.

“This is Connor’s space.”

Connor is my new boss. I look around with interest, peeking through open doors. It’s very masculine. There’s a larger master bedroom with an ensuite bathroom, a small den with a comfortable-looking leather sofa, and a large flat-screen TV. The fourth room has a small gym with a treadmill, a weights machine, and a boxing bag.

“You’ll only come up here to clean, and only when Connor says it’s okay.” Paddy’s tone makes me shiver, and I nod quickly.

“Call me! I want to hear how you’re settling in!” Low exclaims, wrapping me into a tight hug. Paddy glowers at me over her shoulder.

“You’ll not be talking about any of Connor’s personal business, lass. Even to us.”

“Of course not!” I squeak, my eyes wide as I swallow painfully. “I’ll talk to Low about chores and stuff. Cleaning.

Baking. That stuff.”

Paddy nods slowly, sliding his hand into Low’s, squeezing her fingers as they leave. Blowing out a slow breath, I turn with wide eyes, drinking in the sight again.

Slowly walking back up to the second story, my eyes sweep over my new digs to unpack my suitcases. The bathroom across the hall from me has a huge shower/bathtub combo, which I am *so* trying out some time.

Once I’ve unpacked and stowed my suitcases under the bed, I wander back down to the kitchen to check out what’s in the fridge and cupboards.

The whole place looks like it was deep cleaned yesterday. It’s very tidy for a mobster. Apart from Paddy, I’ve never spent much time with any mobsters. I only met a few of the briefly at Low’s wedding. I may have encountered Connor, but I can’t put a face to the name.

As I close the stainless steel refrigerator door and turn around, I jump and give a small scream, pressing my hands to my heart. A man is standing in the doorway of the hall.

He is leaning against the doorjamb with his hands shoved into his pockets while silently staring at me. Oh, I hope this is Connor because otherwise, that’s just *creepy*.

He has thick ashy blonde hair, a strong jaw, and smoldering gray bedroom eyes. He’s wearing a dark gray suit with a crisp white button-down shirt, open at the neck, and his black dress shoes are shined to the max.

Even though he’s dressed all slick, his broad shoulders, narrow waist, and powerful build scream *danger*. He’s plain

yummy.

“I-I’m Andie Halpern,” I stammer, still clasping my hands over my heart.

“Connor Fitzpatrick,” he rumbles back in a deep, gravelly voice that has my stomach clenching.

Of course, I’ve gone and gotten a live-in job with the world’s most gorgeous man. It’s exactly my freaking luck.

# Chapter Two

## CONNOR

When I walk into the kitchen searching for coffee, I am confronted with the mouthwatering sight of perhaps the world's most perfectly shaped arse. It's clad in tight jeans, sticking out of my fridge. Is it my birthday?

Leaning my shoulder against the doorjamb, I shove my hands into my pockets and drink in the sight. I think this might be my new housekeeper. Remind me to buy Paddy the world's best bottle of whiskey. The lad has truly come through for me.

When he said he had found me the perfect solution to the problem of my mammy's leaving these shores, I scoffed at him. Apparently, one of Lauren's little friends was down on her luck.

She needed a place to live and a job to pay her keep. Paddy thought the perfect solution would be for her to move into my mammy's old space on the second floor and be my housekeeper.

I wasn't sold on the idea of having a strange lass in my house on the sole reference of her being Lauren's friend and needing a helping hand, but I'm quickly reassessing my former stance.

I've had cleaners come in since my mammy left for Ireland and a life without organized crime in it. Plus, my dry cleaning

place presses my shirts, and I paid the cleaners extra to keep my fridge stocked.

Something about having a single stranger in my house appealed to me. Now I know the stranger has a backside like this; it's even more appealing.

She finally straightens, turning around, and her cornflower blue eyes widen in shock when they land on me. The lass jumps, pressing her hands to her heart as she squeals. I'm surprised she hasn't fainted dead away. She looks like she'd collapse if someone said boo to her.

Recovering quickly, her eyes boldly roam all over me, so I return the favor. The rest of her matches her mouthwatering arse. Long, silky dark blonde hair is pulled back loosely into a ponytail, and her face wouldn't be out of place in a fashion magazine selling skincare products.

She's drowning in an oversized woolen sweater, but if her arse and legs are anything to go by, she's hiding a banging body.

The lass's eyes move back to mine, and she stammers out her name. Andie Halpern. When I introduce myself, she shivers, and I frown. I'm not sure what that's all about.

“P-Paddy gave me the keys when he brought me here.”

I nod again. That's what I asked him to do. I was taking a delivery at the club – Mellie might order the liquor for the bars, but only I pick what gets served in my domain, so I couldn't be here when the lass arrived.

“Did he give ye a tour, lass?” I ask, biting the inside of my cheek almost immediately.



I've gone and fucking turned on my Irish accent. It happens almost automatically when I'm confronted with a pretty face, and this lass is one of the prettiest. I can't help but turn on the charm.

It's seen me through life rather well so far, but I probably shouldn't be trying to charm my housekeeper.

"He did." Andie offers me a small smile. At least she's stopped stammering. Maybe the charm offensive was the right move. "You have a lovely home."

I smirk at her. That's what everyone says. Seamus's wife, Tiggy, is always in raptures when she's here.

"Thank ye, lass. Can't say I've much to take credit for. My mammy's responsible for the décor. I only picked out the top floor."

Her eyes dart around the room like she's expecting someone else to pop out from behind the furniture.

"Oh, I see. Is your mother here?"

"No. She left for Ireland three weeks ago." I shrug, fighting a wince as I remember her tears, threats, and guilt-tripping.

Jesus fuck. She claimed I was breaking her heart by not leaving with her. The woman was crazy if she ever thought that was happening. I'm thirty years old. I'm not about to leave my home because my mammy wants a sea change.

Plus, even if Sean Fitzpatrick had allowed it, his son Seamus would never have been so understanding. And since I'm in Seamus's crew, I do what he says. For the most part. He's also my cousin, so I get away with more than the others.

“She used to keep your house for you?”

I shrug and nod. A small, mischievous smirk tugs at the corners of her mouth.

“That explains the wallpaper,” she quips. I blink at her in surprise. The lass is joking with me. All her shock at my surprising her seems to have disappeared.

I suppose she is from Dot, and she agreed to come and live with a mobster. No matter what she looks like, I was never going to end up with a shrinking violet sharing my space. Lauren is a bit the same. Looks like she’d faint dead away at the first sign of a fright but can look Paddy dead in the eye and tell him she loves him when he’s covered in blood after a hit.

I shove away from the doorjamb, making my way into the kitchen to set the coffee maker going.

“The blue sedan is yours.” I nod through the window, pointing to the car my mammy used to run around Boston before she left.

It’s parked beside my dark SUV. My lips tighten as they trail over my car. I used to have the sleekest BMW. It drove like a dream and roared like a lion when I put my foot to the floor. Fucking Bulgarians.

I will never forgive those bastards for ramming my precious car. Of course, they had to do it when Tiggy was inside, and if there’s one thing guaranteed to drive Seamus over the top protective, it’s going after his little wife. Now I’m stuck with a ridiculous SUV. It steers like a fucking bull. I hate it.

The lass is still silently watching me. Right. The little blue sedan.

“The keys should be in the drawer over there.” I jerk my chin at the top drawer under the microwave. “I’ve organized for ye to access the checking account for groceries and the like. There’s a card in the drawer there for that too. Ye can put yer gas on the card while ye’re at it.”

The lass blinks at me in surprise, smiling gently and nodding as she points to the fridge.

“Thanks. Uh, are there any foods you particularly like or don’t like? I was going to make a beef stir fry for dinner and apple pie for dessert?”

My mouth is watering. My mammy, bless her soul, she tried, but she was *not* a cook.

“As long as it’s not burnt to shite, lass, I’ll eat it,” I smirk at her, handing her the mug of coffee I was making and grabbing another one.

Staring at me, she takes it, her long, slender fingers brushing against mine. I bite the inside of my cheek again. Jesus fuck, couldn’t Lauren have a dog ugly friend to send my way? This is going to be torture. The lass has been in the same house as me for less than half an hour, and I’m already hard.

Saluting her with my mug of coffee, I turn to head out the back door to the small outbuilding where I run our online gambling operations.

“Oh, and lass, this building,” I gesture to it as she cuts me off.

“Off-limits. Paddy mentioned. Oh!” she calls me back as I nod, moving to leave again. “I’m not supposed to clean the

third floor unless you say it's okay. So just let me know, I suppose. Thanks for the coffee.”

She sips it, turning and opening the fridge again. I pause, staring hard at her arse. Shaking my head, I walk outside.

Michael, one of the two young computer whizzes we inducted to run these online operations, flicks his gaze at me when I come in. He nods, turning back to the screens.

“How're the takings today, lad?” I ask him, sipping my coffee as my eyes drift over the ten screens he has on the wall.

“Poker's doing alright.” He nods at it. My gaze flickers over, but it doesn't hold much interest to me.

I'm a purist. I hate online poker. It's all guessing and bids. There's no real skill there. Poker isn't about odds. It's about faces. The worst thing to ever happen to it is the rise in online gambling.

“Blackjack is a big earner at the moment.” Michael points to another screen. Now there's a game that's all about odds. It's harder to count cards online, so we usually make a tidy profit off that one.

“And the bookie business?” I nod to the screens showing the horses, the dogs, and various ball sports.

“Booming,” Michael grunts. “People will bet on just about anything these days. Hell, I had to work the odds on the fucking royal baby's hair color the other day.”

He snorts, shaking his head and draining his Red Bull can.

“There are some absolute suckers for a good bet out there.”

Of course there are. Where does Michael think his wages come from? Those people are our bread and butter.



## ANDIE

My delicious new employer didn't object to my dinner idea, so I cooked up a batch of stir fry, and I have a warm apple pie cooling on the bench.

I enjoy cooking, but baking is where my real talents lie. I always wanted to open up my own bakery when I was little. Of course, the real world came knocking, and I discovered that broke-ass bitches from Dot don't get business loans to follow their dreams. They end up working for sleazy nobodies, date their boss's friends, and get cheated out of their rent-controlled apartments.

I set the table for Connor in the dining room, and when he comes back from his little Mafia office out the back and washes up in the laundry, I gesture through.

"Dinner's ready. I'll bring it through in a moment."

"Smells good, lass."

My stomach flutters, and I throw him a small smile. It's super inconvenient to have the world's biggest crush on my brand new boss. Can I be any more cliché?

Grabbing a cold beer from the fridge, I open it, spooning some beef stir fry and rice into a bowl, taking them both to the dining room where he is sitting at the head of the table, scrolling through something on his phone.

“Thanks, lass.”

Nodding, I place the bowl and beer before him, retreating to the quiet kitchen. There’s a small table here, so I serve up my own meal. I hesitate but shrug, grabbing a beer for myself as I drop into one of the three chairs at the small table, looking out the window across the driveway at the flowering hedge.

I’m about three bites in when Connor’s bowl lands on the table across from me, and he drops into the other chair, flashing me a grin.

“I got lonely,” he smirks, digging into his meal. “This is amazing, by the way.”

He makes a little sound of contentment in his throat as I blush with pleasure. How sad is it that I’m getting all happy because someone who is literally paying me to cook for him is complimenting my work?

Wow, it’s been too long since someone who wasn’t Low was nice to me.

“And that apple pie smells *incredible*.”

I flash him a grin. “Baking is my jam.”

Connor’s smirk widens into an actual smile, and my breath catches. Holy smokes, he’s handsome.

“Be still my racing heart,” he drawls. I roll my eyes at him.

“Did your mother like to bake?” I tip my head at the kitchen cabinets. “There’s a lot of baking paraphernalia here. It’s a bit like going to a grown-up’s playground.”

Connor twists his mouth into a grin as he lets out a low, rumbling laugh that strokes over my skin, peaking my nipples. I’m so thankful I am wearing a thick sweater right now. Holy hell.

“My mammy could make this place shine.” He gestures with his fork to the room. “But cook, that woman could not.”

A fond look crosses his face. I wonder if he misses her.

“Did she move back to Ireland to be closer to family?”

It’s probably not the right thing to ask, a dark look crossing his face.

He shrugs after a beat of silence. “I’m her only family. She moved back to Ireland to get away from....”

He pauses, clearing his throat. Oh, shit. I catch what he’s implying. His mother moved back across the world to get away from the Mafia.

“Certain lifestyle factors?” I suggest helping him out of his awkward pickle. He chuckles again, eyeing me appreciatively.

“Aye, lass. Certain lifestyle factors.”

When I serve the apple pie, he points his spoon at me. “What about your parents?”

I shrug one shoulder, focusing on my pie. “My mother was a prostitute.” I keep my voice even, my eyes on my plate. “She did it to support a drug habit. OD’d a few years ago, just after I turned twenty-one. My father took off when I was little.”

There's a beat of silence as his fingers brush lightly over the back of my hand. My breath catches, goosebumps erupting over my skin. Again, I'm thankful my sweater hides them.

"Sure, and I'm sorry to hear that, lass," he murmurs. I nod, keeping my eyes fixed on the table. The rest of the meal is conducted in silence, staring at our plates.



# Chapter Three

## CONNOR

My knuckles protest as I flex my hand, accepting the tumbler of whiskey Seamus is handing me. Paddy notices the movement, frowning from where he's perched against the windowsill in Seamus's den.

"Who've you been hitting then, Lucky?" he rumbles, nodding at my raw knuckles. Seamus does a double-take, his eyes darting down and narrowing.

"No one," I grunt, shrugging and taking a sip of whiskey while Seamus glares at me.

"Clearly, you've been hitting something."

I sigh, looking down at my poor, abused knuckles. Yeah, I have. Hard. A lot.

"Just my punching bag."

Suddenly, a knowing smirk crosses Paddy's face. The prick.

"Frustrated by your new housekeeper, perhaps?" he snickers, capturing the attention of the room. Bastard. I flip him off. He knows what he's doing. Niggling people is my fucking job. I liked him better when he was a gloomy bastard. He's too... happy these days. It's sickening.

"Fuck off, cunt. It's not even fucking like that. The woman likes to *bake*."

Seamus is staring nonplussed at me while Ronan and Niall exchange raised eyebrows on the other side of the room.

“What’s that got to do with her being sexy as fuck?” Liam drawls. Ronan reaches out, slapping the younger lad upside the head with a nod to me as my eyes whip around to narrow at him.

“How do you know what she looks like?” I ask him stiffly.

Andie is sexy as fuck, but that’s beside the point. She’s my housekeeper, so she’s fucking hands-off. For everyone. Including me. Liam shrugs.

“She was at Paddy’s wedding.” He rolls his eyes at me. “She sat beside Niall at the church.”

Frowning, I try to picture who was sitting near Niall at Paddy’s wedding, but for the life of me, I can’t. I was rather preoccupied that day.

Mammy dropped her bombshell on me in the car to the church. Then I was on duty driving Lauren and the lasses from their hotel, and I stayed at the back of the church, keeping an eye out for any problems.

Seamus had been a little distrusting the Italians wouldn’t show up to ruin the day. Everything ran smoothly in the end. I got nice and drunk at the reception and took someone else’s date home.

I don’t remember much about that lass either. In fact, almost everything from the moment I arrived at the reception is rather blurry. The whiskey was flowing and delicious.

“I still don’t see what her being a baker has to do with anything,” Liam mutters petulantly, bringing me back to the

present.

“I’ve had homemade pie every night for a week.” I raise my eyebrows at him. Seamus and Paddy cop on and start snorting with mirth.

“You’re working out, so you don’t get fat off the lasses baking?” Paddy guesses. I flip the bastard off again. I knew the prick would seize the opportunity to tease me since I pile on him every chance.

“So you’re happy with her then?” Paddy asks, squinting at me. I nod sharply at him.

“I’m living with a woman who can cook for the first time in my life.” I roll my eyes at him. “I’m happier than a pig in shite.”

Seamus snorts again, lounging at his desk as Paddy nods.

“Thank fuck for that. Lauren would have been pissy if you didn’t let the lass stay on.” He grimaces. “Plus, she’ll stop trying to move Andie into our place.”

“If the woman needed a place to live so badly, she would have been more than welcome at mine,” Liam drawls.

Ronan doesn’t even look at me this time when he smacks his head. But there’s something in his words that has Seamus looking suspicious.

“Why did the lass need some place to live so badly?”

He’s eyeing Paddy off now. I turn with interest. Besides telling me her mammy’s sad story, Andie hasn’t been forthcoming about her life. Then again, neither have I. Paddy shrugs, scratching the back of his head.

“I don’t right know,” he admits. “Lauren only said the lass had run into a bit of trouble. Ended up homeless and jobless. Possibly there was a lad involved in the whole mess.” He shrugs again. “It’s all for the best.” He gestures to me with his tumbler of whiskey. “Lucky got a housekeeper that *bakes*.”

Seamus laughs, turning his attention to Ronan, who gives a rundown of the goings-on at Oracle, which he manages now.

I half-listen to his report, but now I’m wondering what happened to leave Andie homeless before she came to live with me. If a lad is involved, he’d better watch his back if he doesn’t want his features rearranged.



## ANDIE

It’s been a week since I started keeping house for Connor Fitzpatrick, and I have established what will hopefully be a good routine.

Today is dusting day. I’m going to have to dust once a week. This place is so enormous and the first floor, in particular, has so many knick-knacks.

I’m not sure why his “mammy” didn’t take them with her, but maybe she wanted to leave them here to remind Connor about her. It must have been hard for her to leave her son. Her only family. She must have felt wicked strong about the mafia just to up and go.

Humming to myself – I’m still not game to play music, even though Connor isn’t here – I wipe down the upright piano, straightening cushions as I go. This room is growing on me. No one uses it, but it’s fancy, and I don’t mind strolling through it.

I sat on one of the antique sofas the other day – no wonder no one uses the room. Pretty to look at, wicked uncomfortable to sit on.

Still humming, I move to the dining room, wiping down the large table. Connor hasn’t used it again. He is only home for dinner but always eats with me in the kitchen. It’s kind of nice. I’ve never really had family dinner before. Even Hamish wasn’t interested in eating anywhere but in front of the TV, never talking.

Connor and I don’t talk much about ourselves after the first night. Mainly we give abbreviated versions of our day and chat about Boston in general.

My dusting is interrupted by an insistent ringing of the doorbell. Connor didn’t mention guests. I’m not sure if I’m supposed to invite people in. Maybe it’s doorknockers. I’ll inform them we’re not interested.

I leave my dust cloth in the dining room and walk through the house. Twitching the curtains, I blink in surprise, opening the front door to a handsome dark-haired man around my age and a heavily pregnant, stunning brunette with enviable smoky eyes.

“I’m Tiggy Fitzpatrick,” she beams as she introduces herself, holding out her hand. Fitzpatrick. Like Connor. I should invite them in. Shouldn’t I?

“And we’re too exposed,” the young man snaps, chivvying us both inside, closing the door with a snap.

“Fitzpatrick.” I blink at her. “Are you related to Connor?”

Tiggy beams at me again, her eyes getting a soft, dewy look.

“I’m married to his cousin, Seamus,” she explains, throwing a glare over her shoulder, and gesturing at the young man. He glares back. “This rude person is Liam Kelly. The world’s most annoying shadow.”

“I wouldn’t be so annoying if you weren’t so frustrating,” he snaps back at her. I stand here, blinking at them as they proceed to bicker like siblings for a minute or so.

“Ah, should I make some tea?” I mumble awkwardly. Tiggy remembers herself, turning to me with another wide smile, her hands resting on her bulky stomach.

“That sounds heavenly.”

“Come through to the kitchen. I’ll get you a stool to put your feet up.”

Smiling gratefully, Tiggy follows me through the house, Liam trailing her, his eyes darting around.

For all his sniping and glaring, Liam fusses around Tiggy once we’re in the kitchen like he’s her granny or something. He makes sure she’s comfortably seated, with her feet up, furnished with a cup of tea and one of the cinnamon scrolls I baked this morning.

Once he’s content Tiggy is comfortably settled, Liam snatches up one of the scrolls and stuffs it in his mouth, a look

of wonder crossing his face.

“No wonder Lucky’s hitting the gym so hard,” he mutters.

Tiggy and I turn to look at him in surprise. I have to bite back a grin as the meaning of his words hits me. “Lucky” must be Connor.

I remember the Irish charm he turned on when he first met me to put me at ease after he startled me. Yeah, “Lucky” suits him.

Connor seems to enjoy my cooking, and he absolutely *devours* my baking. He must be putting additional hours into his workout to work off all the extra calories I’m feeding him. He mentioned his mother wasn’t a good cook, and now I feel warm and fuzzy.

“So, have you met anyone apart from us, Paddy and Lauren?” Tiggy asks, sipping her tea. I sink into the chair across from her, wrapping my hands around my mug and leaning forward on my forearms.

“No. I didn’t realize there were more people to meet.”

Tiggy waves her hand airily. “There’s Niall and Mellie, and also Ronan. Niall and Ronan are also members of my husband’s crew.”

Crew. As in, mafia crew. I blink rapidly, shaking my head and taking a sip of tea to hide my reaction.

“Uh. Niall. He’s blonde, right?”

Tiggy’s eyebrow quirks, and her eyes narrow on me. “That’s right.”

“And he’s with the brunette lady? Who was one of Lauren’s bridesmaids?”

Tiggy’s shoulders relax, and she nods happily. “That’s Mellie.”

“I have met Niall. I sat next to him at Lauren and Paddy’s wedding.”

Something weird flashes across Tiggy’s face, but she launches into different gossip before I can ask about it.

It suddenly hits me why Tiggy looks so familiar. She was one of Lauren’s bridesmaids. The one with the sexy best man as her husband and the cute baby bump. It’s more of a balloon bump now.

“Mellie is from Southie.”

I recall Lauren’s words at her wedding; *the brunette’s from Southie*. That must be Mellie. But there was a third bridesmaid.

“What about the blonde from Roxbury?”

Tiggy blinks at me in surprise, a slow grin lighting up her face. Liam snorts, plucking up another cinnamon scroll, shaking his head, though he doesn’t speak.

“That’s Fiona. She’s one of the strippers at Oracle,” Tiggy supplies. “Ronan likes her, but she won’t have a bar of him.”

Liam snorts again but says nothing, eating his new scroll. Tiggy rolls her eyes at him, turning back to me with a smile.

“You must feel like you’re world’s away from Dot.”

“A little. I like it out here. It’s peaceful.” I glance around with a smile. “After all Lauren’s whining, I thought I’d hate



it.”

Tiggy’s eyebrows shoot up, and she wrinkles her nose. “Lauren complains about West Roxbury?”

Shrugging, I laugh, setting down my teacup and running my fingers around the rim.

“She says sometimes she misses Dot because it’s so boring out here.”

Tiggy shrugs, but a dark look crosses Liam’s face. “And it better stay fucking boring out here,” he mutters. “West Roxbury’s seen enough excitement.”

I have no idea what that means, but Tiggy rubs her right shoulder, so I offer her some more tea. It must be uncomfortable to be so pregnant.

# Chapter FOUR

## ANDIE

I glance out the window at the rumble of a car on the driveway. Connor slides out of the SUV, sticking his head into the cottage for a moment before walking to the back steps. My eyes drink in the smooth lines of his suit.

He always dresses in a sharp suit. I've never seen him in a T-shirt or even jeans. He doesn't need to wear a T-shirt or jeans. He wears the *hell* out of a suit.

Shaking my head, I turn my back firmly on the window, continuing to lay the table. I shouldn't be thinking about how well my boss wears his suit. I shouldn't be thinking anything about my boss further than how he likes his shirts pressed and what he wants to eat for dinner.

The backdoor creaks softly as he steps inside, closing it behind him and nodding to me as he slides into the laundry to wash up.

Moving across the room, I open the oven, lifting the casserole dish. Placing it on the kitchen island, I grab a spoon from the drawer to start serving.

Connor eyes the plate of cinnamon scrolls eagerly as he comes out of the laundry, removing his suit jacket and laying it over the back of one of the bar stools along the far side of the island.

“They look good.” His eyes are still glued to them as he works the knot of his tie loose. I bite my lip, dropping my eyes away from the sight. It should be illegal to look that good in shirtsleeves and a loosened tie.

“There was more, but Liam kept eating them.”

Connor’s eyebrows rise so fast that they almost hit his hairline.

“Liam?” he growls. “What the fuck was he doing here?”

I blink in surprise, my hands freezing where they’re serving the chicken casserole. I don’t think I’ve ever heard Connor angry, but he sounds wicked angry now.

Tiggy didn’t mention Connor and Liam having issues with each other, and Liam didn’t indicate anything. Shit. I hope I haven’t screwed things up wicked bad. I *knew* I shouldn’t have let people into his house without clearing it first.

“T-Tiggy came to visit me. Liam was with her.” I eye him carefully, my fingers pressing against the smooth, cool countertop on either side of the casserole dish. “I hope it was okay to invite her in. She said that she’s married to your cousin?”

The stiffness in Connor’s shoulders lessens as he offers me a tight smile.

“Of course, lass.” He nods, opening the fridge and pulling out two beers. “Did you like Tiggy?”

His voice is way less growly now. Thank goodness. He might have been growling because he was annoyed, but it was doing *things* to my insides. My *lower* insides.

Picking the spoon back up, I drop my eyes, resuming serving the casserole. As I carry the two plates to the small kitchen table, Connor takes his seat, placing a beer in front of my plate.

As I sink into my seat, Connor's eyebrows raise like he's asking a question. Right. Tiggy Fitzpatrick. I smile, picking up my fork.

"She's very lovely. And very pregnant."

Connor snorts, nodding as he dives into his meal, a smile tugging at his lips.

I have been getting better at recognizing Connor's moods. Over the week I have been here, I have seen that same smile many times. I think it means he likes what he's eating. I'll add casserole to the growing list of foods on rotation.

We eat in silence for a while. Sometimes we chat about our day, but most of the time... this silence is normal.

Oh my god! A foot brushes against mine under the table, my breath catching. When I look up, his sleepy gray eyes burn into my face.

"Is everything okay?" I ask, feeling all squirmy. The brushing foot didn't help. At least he is withdrawing it now. If I'm not careful, I will have a cold shower and wake up blushing to a sexy dream about my *boss*.

Connor doesn't immediately reply, studying my face with pursed lips like he's trying to decide what to say.

"Why did you accept this job?"

I sigh, fiddling with my fork. I don't want to pour out my embarrassment to my boss. Even if he didn't look like...*this*... I wouldn't want to admit the whole thing.

"I needed a job," I settle on at last. "And a place to live. This fixed both those problems."

His burning gaze doesn't lessen as he waits to see if I'm going to elaborate. When I don't, he speaks again, sounding curious.

"Why did you need a job and a place to live?"

I chew on my lower lip, shrugging when I can't think of a good lie. The truth might be best. Connor is a mobster. He could probably easily find out if I'm lying.

"I got fired and dumped." I laugh wryly. "It was a hell of a week."

Understatement of the century, but I'm going to have to put the memory of my lovely apartment out of my mind. It's gone. I'm never going to live there again. It's time I moved on. This place is much nicer. I've landed on my feet.

Connor studies me carefully for a moment longer, a tension I didn't even realize was there draining out of him. His stiff shoulders relax, and I fight the urge to let my eyes flutter closed in relief.

He was obviously expecting a wicked sad tale. Thank goodness I didn't tell him the whole story. I don't want my boss to pity me.

His foot brushes against mine again as he returns to eating his meal in silence. I grip my fork, thankful that my breathing doesn't hitch this time. *Out loud.*

“My pa was killed when I was a little lad,” Connor says offhandedly. I blink at him, my fingers frozen on my fork. What the hell am I supposed to say to that? He’s never talked about his life before.

“When I was eight, me and my mammy moved from Ireland with Sean Fitzpatrick and his family. My pa was Sean’s brother.”

Everyone in Boston knows who Sean Fitzpatrick is. He’s the head of the Irish Mafia here and was sitting across the aisle from me at Lauren’s wedding. There was something about his ice-blue eyes that were wicked unnerving. Wait. He’s Connor’s *uncle*. I’m not just in any mobster’s house. This is... a lot to process.

“I’m sorry to hear about your father,” I murmur, unsure what else I’m supposed to say to his random tidbit of information.

Clearly, his father was killed in some mafia *incident* in Ireland before they all came here. I didn’t know Sean Fitzpatrick wasn’t originally from Boston. It makes sense he came from Ireland, but the head of the Bianchi Crime Family, Gianni Manchetti, is from Boston. That’s common knowledge.

I know more about the Italian mafia than the Irish one. I’m from Dot and the Italian mafia control Dot. The Italians have an alliance with the Irish. Well, they did. I’m not sure how that’s all going after everything to do with Lauren and Paddy Flynn.

“Thank ye, lass,” Connor mutters, the Irish tingeing his tone in a way that has my stomach clenching. Yeah, my stomach. I’ll keep telling myself that.

My stomach is churning with all this new knowledge. I push my food around my plate until Connor places his fork on his cleared plate.

Throwing him an absent smile, I stand and clear away our plates, bringing over the cinnamon scrolls and another beer for Connor.

His eyes light up, eagerly reaching for a pastry as I take my seat again.

“I’ve been waiting for this since I walked in that door.”

My lips press together. It’s nice having someone who shows their appreciation of my baking. Hamish always took it for granted. He never thanked me and never told me if it was nice.

When Connor bites into the scroll, his eyes flutter closed as he lets out a moan of appreciation, shoving Hamish as far as possible from my mind.

It’s definitely not my *stomach* clenching at the sight and sound.

“Feck, these are good, lass,” he breathes between bites. My stomach is churning again, but for a completely different reason as I smile proudly, reaching for a scroll myself.



## CONNOR

My hand fists my dick, a groan ripping from my throat as I jack myself off, the hot water cascading over my back. I shouldn't have played footsies with the lass, but her breathing hitched after I did it the first time, which left me rock fucking hard.

The second time, she swallowed the sound, but I could see her pupils dilate, which had the blood singing in my veins. It's been a week, and Paddy was partially right today. Andie's baking isn't the only reason I'm working over my punching bag daily.

The sound of her breath hitching and how her pupils dilated and her cheeks pinked floats through my mind as another groan rumbles out, and I come, breathing heavily.

The water washes away the evidence as I lift my head to soak in the spray. Shutting off the shower, I step out, toweling myself dry and moving into my bedroom to select a navy suit. I have to head back to Oracle to watch over the tables.

My fingers deftly tie my tie as I stare at my reflection in the mirror. Seamus will be home with Tiggy tonight. They'll probably be curled up on the sofa watching a movie. Paddy will be at home with Lauren. He watches the lass read. He's a weird bastard, but it seems to make him happy.

I've never minded working the tables most nights, but a small part of me wonders what Andie does when I'm not here. Does she watch movies? Listen to music? Read books?

Shaking my head, I turn away from the mirror, shrugging into my jacket, and head downstairs into the kitchen. I shouldn't be wondering what the lass does with her time. It's none of my business. Apart from her cooking and cleaning,



nothing about the lass is my business, as much as I'm intrigued by her story.

When I move through the kitchen to leave, Andie has already cleaned up and gone upstairs. I can hear her moving around above me in her sitting room. It was my mammy's sitting room, and she decorated it.

I'll have to let Andie know she can buy some different furniture and put it on her checking account card if she wants. That level is her home, and I want her to be able to dress it up the way she likes.

Anthony, the other computer whiz, who does the night shift, is taking over from Michael when I stick my head in for a rundown.

"The usual, boss," Michael says as he collects his coat. Anthony slides into his chair, tapping on the keyboard, bringing up a box of random symbols. Code means nothing to me.

Nodding, I leave the cottage. Michael turns to give Anthony some more specific information as I slide into my SUV and head to West Boston.

I spot the unmarked Crown Vic out the front of the club, the two vice cops sitting in it, like always. Nosy bastards.

Flipping them off, I jog up the front steps and inside, straight upstairs to oversee the tables being set. We're expecting a large crowd tonight.

The Russians contacted me to say they have some guests from the motherland who want a night of drinking and gambling. With that in mind, we've arranged for extra security

on the club's front and back doors, two men for the bottom of the stairs, and another two for the door up here.

The Russians have requested Casey, one of our female dealers, for their table. She's setting up on the far side of the room, closest to the back room and the concealed exit.

The paneling in the wall opens to a hidden door leading to a confined staircase that finishes at an underground tunnel. The tunnel comes up two blocks away in the basement of an office building with an underground parking garage where we keep two getaway cars. In case those fucking vice cops ever grow a set of balls and try to come in here.

Our high rollers and most of the Russians usually use the tunnel as their entry and exit. They and their guests will be using it tonight.

I have a security guard standing beside it, and we have men waiting in the underground parking garage to meet them and escort them in. They will drop a lot of cash on the tables tonight, so I'm happy to roll out the executive service.

The extra security knows it is regulars only tonight, no tourists. We want to showcase the best for the Russians and their guests, especially since things with the Italians are fraught.

Speaking of Italians, I nod as Matteo De Luca strolls into the room, smiling as he accepts a whiskey from one of the waitresses.

"You wanted me to come early tonight, Fitzpatrick?" He raises an eyebrow, sipping his whiskey as he comes to a halt beside me.

Matteo De Luca is one of the youngest capos in the Bianchi Crime Family. He has played my tables for at least ten years.

“There’s going to be a large contingent of Russians tonight.”

Matteo sighs as he shrugs, taking another sip of his whiskey. “So you need me to be a good boy and fuck off?”

A smirk tugs at my lips. “That wouldn’t be very sporting of me.”

“No. It wouldn’t.”

“I also wouldn’t make you come over to West Boston to tell you to stay away. I could have told you that over the phone.”

His eyebrows raise again in a question. I gesture toward a table near the door to the staircase, the farthest from where Casey lays out the chips on her table. De Luca’s eyes drift over it, and he grimaces.

“Table two. Really? Should I be insulted?”

“No tourists tonight. Only regulars.”

“I suppose it’s table two or leave?”

“They do say you’re a clever guy.”

Snorting, he takes his whiskey, handing a stack of cash to the dealer, who shunts a stack of chips toward him. Sinking into his seat, De Luca’s eyes dance back over me.

“You owe me for this, Lucky.”

“Your co-operation is noted and much appreciated.”

Grunting, he sips his whiskey, turning to the door where some Irish lads walk in, dropping down onto the table with

him. Well. That's one disaster averted.

It would make things easier if the Italians and Russians got along. Sean was all for De Luca being barred tonight, but he's a cool, collected guy, a good gambler, and I like the lad.

There is a knock on the panel across the room, and I move across as the security guard opens the concealed door, stepping back to let the large group through.

The first through the door is one of the Bratoks – the Russian version of a made man. His eyes flicker around the room, and he steps out of the doorway, allowing Alexei Yahontov, the Avtoritet who contacted me about tonight, and the guests into the room.

Alexei steps through, his eyes moving around, stopping on De Luca. The two exchange a nod as Alexei turns back to me. Alexei is the equivalent of a capo, and the two are polite when they cross paths in this room. We don't allow people to bring their friction in here. You set that shite aside, or you stay out.

De Luca turns back to his table, saying something to one of the Irish lads seated there. They laugh, and Alexei draws my attention back to him, introducing his guests.

They spread out around the table, eyeing Casey appreciatively. I don't speak Russian, but I am a man, so I have little doubt about what they're saying to each other.

Casey deals the first hand as I stride through the space, stopping to talk to some of the regulars. Everything is going smoothly so far. Hopefully, it stays that way.

Things go well for about half the night, but things go to fucking shite around midnight. One of the Russian guests

starts getting handsy with Casey, which isn't fucking okay. You can look at our dealers – hell, you can say whatever shite you want about them in a language they don't understand – but touching them is out of the question.

Striding across the room, I tap her sharply on the shoulder. Her head snaps around as I jerk my head to the back room. Casey throws me a relieved look as she rises.

Jimmy, one of our male dealers, slides into her seat as I nod to Alexei. He nods back. He's a regular here. He knows why Casey was removed from the table.

Turning to his guest, his face twists as he spits out a lengthy diatribe in Russian. His guest spits something back at him, and Alexei's face darkens.

He flicks his finger where it's lying on the table next to his chips, and the Bratok sitting beside the guest pulls out a knife, slashing at his throat. The guest makes a horrible gurgling noise and slumps forward on the table. Jesus fuck. That's the last thing I needed tonight.

Jimmy is frozen on the spot, a few drops of blood spattered on his face. The waitress servicing the table, Lisa, screams, dropping her tray as the room erupts.

Pulling my phone out of my pocket, I hit the emergency call button to alert the rest of my crew to get the fuck up here. The two security guards from outside the door burst in. One of them must call down to the two at the bottom of the stairs because they also appear.

De Luca is still seated at table two, looking amused as he continues to drink whiskey slowly. I shoot him a look, and he

sighs, draining his glass, and shoving his chips into his pocket. He will be able to cash them out at the VIP bar downstairs.

I clamp my hand over Lisa's mouth, the screaming finally muffled. Ryan crosses to me from table three, taking her and dragging her off to the back room. He's managed to herd most of the other waitresses and dealers. Hopefully, he can calm them down easily.

Ronan and Niall burst into the room, take one look at the chaos and start shepherding regulars out of the room and down the stairs. Finally, everything calms down, and it's only the Russian contingent left who are yelling at each other.

Jimmy is still seated, blinking in shock. The specks of blood on his face have started to slide down his cheek.

Seamus has arrived by this time, and I leave him and Paddy to calm things down with the Russians. I run the poker tables. I don't deal with maintaining alliances when people fuck up like Alexei just did.

Gripping Jimmy's shoulder, I haul him up, steering him downstairs and through to Seamus's office.

"Mellie," I call to her where she's washing a coffee mug in the kitchenette. She hurries after me, closing the office door firmly behind us. She sinks to her knees in front of Jimmy, where he is seated, reaching up with a tissue to wipe the blood spots off his face.

I force a tumbler of brandy into his hand, and he mechanically lifts it to his mouth and downs the whole thing in one swallow.

After three more glasses, he's at least regained some color and stopped staring into the distance.

"I've never seen someone die before," he whispers. Mellie looks up, raising an eyebrow at me.

I shake my head at her. I'm sure Niall will tell his wife everything when they get home. Speaking of home, tonight has been a fucking shit show. I can't wait to get home to Andie's calming presence.

# Chapter FIVE

## ANDIE

Connor is awake earlier than usual this morning. He's wandering through the house when I get back from my morning jog, blinking at me in surprise when I come through the front door.

Pulling out my headphones, I go to greet him, but the words stick in my throat as his eyes heat up and lazily trail down my body.

I've never given much thought to what I wear when I run. Yoga pants and a cropped sports top with a built-in bra work well. But right now, as Connor's eyes linger over my breasts and my exposed midriff, I swallow convulsively.

"I wondered where ye were, lass," he speaks at last, his eyes glued to my stomach.

"I-I run in the mornings."

His gaze flits back up to meet mine, his eyes hot and hungry.

"I find it's a great way to start the day...." I trail off as we stare at each other in heated silence. My cheeks are heating as much as my...*thighs*... and I fight the urge to fan myself.

Finally, Connor clears his throat, turning away. "I'll make coffee while ye shower, lass."



Thankfully he turns away, moving toward the kitchen because my breathing hitches at his husky tone. Connor freezes mid-step for the briefest moment like he heard it. How mortifying. Luckily, he keeps walking into the kitchen.

My face on fire, I sprint upstairs to have the world's fastest shower, tugging on jeans and an oversized sweater to be safe. Staring at my reflection in the full-length mirror of the closet door, my eyes linger on my flushed cheeks and too-bright eyes.

“Get it together, girl,” I tell myself sternly. “He’s your boss. Stop being so thirsty!”

With one last glare at myself, I take a deep breath, striding out of the bedroom and taking the stairs slowly.

When I walk into the kitchen, Connor is seated at the small table, staring unseeing out the window, two mugs of coffee on the table in front of him. Wow. I don’t think anyone has ever made me coffee in the morning unless I’ve paid the cashier for it.

My heart thuds as I slide into the seat across from him. I pick up the coffee and offer him a small smile.

“Thanks.”

He glances at me, blinking in surprise like he didn’t notice I was there.

“For the coffee,” I clarify, holding the mug up. Connor nods, his fingers stroking the top of his cup thoughtfully as he watches me take a sip.

He looks out the window over the driveway along the side of the house, his eyes distant, and when he speaks, it’s almost

absently.

“I was six the first time I saw someone die.”

Holy shit. My eyes flare wide, and I mechanically raise my mug to my mouth, taking a sip, not tasting the coffee. My mind is racing. Is he supposed to tell me this stuff? Is it to make sure I can keep my mouth shut. I’m not supposed to talk about what Connor does or says to anyone, not even Lauren. Is he testing me?

“He was an associate of my pa’s,” Connor continues, still stroking his mug, staring out the window at the neighbor’s trees. “But he must have done something wrong because my pa shot him.”

The air at my nostrils feels cold, and I force myself to keep lifting my mug to my mouth and taking sips. Poor little baby Connor. Poor grown-up Connor that he can talk so...matter-of-factly about watching a man die when he was tiny.

“I hid underneath my bed. That’s where my mammy found me.” Connor’s Irish burr is soft, barely present. Like his childhood accent is warring with his adult speech.

Sighing, Connor glances over at me, his eyes flickering over my face as he turns back to the window. His fingers leave the mug, and he hesitates before flipping my hand over where it lies on the table, his fingers stroking ever so gently over my palm.

“She told me to come out from underneath the bed. Told me there was nothing to be scared about. That my pa didn’t always do the right thing, but he’d always do the right thing by us.”

I'm half wondering what brought this on, why he's telling me these things. Surely he shouldn't be telling me these things? The other half of me is trying not to squirm because his lightly stroking fingers on my palm are driving me crazy.

"Does it still scare you to see someone die?" I whisper, my voice jarringly loud in the silent room.

Connor's fingers stop stroking, his eyes snapping back to mine. Sighing, he withdraws his hand, picking up his mug as he shakes his head.

"No, lass. I don't feel anything at all. Maybe that fact should scare me."

Maybe that fact should scare *me*. Nodding, I finish my coffee and stand, moving to make Connor bacon and eggs for breakfast, the way he likes them.



## CONNOR

I should not have told Andie any of that shite before breakfast. What the fuck was I thinking? Jesus fuck, I clearly wasn't thinking. I shouldn't have stroked her hand like that either.

She's my housekeeper. I shouldn't be thinking about her the way I do. I shouldn't be thinking about how I want to tangle my fingers in her silky hair as I finally taste that sweet mouth.

I shouldn't think about how I want to fuck her up against the kitchen wall.

Instead of heading out to the back cottage after breakfast, as I usually do, I go back upstairs to work out my sexual frustrations on my punching bag.

When I woke up early this morning – no fucking idea why – and searched for Andie. She wasn't anywhere in the house, and her sedan was still here.

Just when I was about to lose my shit and see if she was in the back cottage, where I fucking *told* her not to go, she let herself in through the front door, looking gorgeous and sweaty and half-dressed.

It was simultaneously the best and worst morning of my life. Once my brain restarted – after frying momentarily when confronted with all that smooth, glorious flesh – I wanted to snap at her that she was to wear more clothing when she ran. But I stopped just in time because that's none of my business.

She's not my woman. I have no right to tell her what she should and shouldn't be wearing. I also had to stop myself from fucking her senseless against the accent table in the entranceway, but it was a close thing.

Andie disappeared to her level to shower and thankfully came back downstairs in one of the baggy sweaters she loves so much.

It's a crying shame to cover up such a glorious body, but it's for the best. But Andie sat across from me, and I could smell the mango and honey scent that always seems to cling to her,

and it was like my tongue had a mind of its own, blabbing shite I've never told anyone. Not even Seamus.

Slamming my fists repeatedly into the punching bag, I grunt and contemplate her reaction to my confessions. I don't know what I expected, but it wasn't what I got. She didn't run screaming for the hills. She didn't even move her hand away when I started stroking it. I'm not sure why I did that, but fuck me, it felt nice.

I'm finishing up my warm-down run when Seamus calls. Snatching my phone from the cradle on the treadmill. I hit the stop button, slowing to a halt as I answer the phone.

“Yeah?”

He sounds tired on the other end of the phone. “We managed to fucking sort everything with the Russians. Yahontov apologized. He said it won't happen again, and he'll remove his guests and discipline them outside the club next time.”

Well, thank fuck they defused the situation. I'm sick of all the tension, and fighting clearing out the Romanians brought us. I don't want more friction fucking up the status quo of my tables.

I snort at Seamus's update. “Of course he fucking did. Yahontov is at the tables every week. He doesn't want to be blacklisted.”

“Yahontov's a good ally to have. He'd have to do much more than that to get blacklisted.”

“I'll stop by his place today and chat with him.” Stepping off the treadmill, I make my way to my bathroom. “I'll make

sure he knows a table will be reserved for him next week on his usual night.”

“Thanks, Lucky.” Seamus sighs again, and I can hear Tiggy talking to him in the background. “You’ll need to stop by the dealer’s place as well.”

“Yeah.” I rub my eyes. Fucking Jimmy. He’s one of our best dealers. He better not lose it over this. “And Lisa’s.”

“Tell Lisa that if she needs time away from the tables, she’s welcome to some shifts in the VIP room.”

I know that offer will appeal to the woman. She’ll probably get better tips down there. Ringing off, I throw my phone onto my bed, pick out a dark gray suit, and move into the shower.

Niall glowers up at Yahontov’s stately Jamaica Plain home. Sighing, I shoot him a glare.

“What?” he demands, arching an eyebrow.

“I don’t know why Seamus sent you. Ronan or Paddy would have been perfectly suitable. Hell, I’d have taken Liam.”

“Well, ye got me.”

“I’m here for a friendly chat. Walking in with the fucking Reaper isn’t being friendly.”

Niall shrugs, crossing his arms over his chest. “I’m not here to be friendly. I’m here to watch yer back.”

“Well, watch it with less of a sour puss.”

“I’m not sour.”

“Sociopath.”

“I told ye, I’m not.”

Rolling my eyes, I ignore him, striding up to the two-level, red brick home with tall white columns flanking the white door. A Bratok answers my knock, nodding and gesturing for us to enter, his eyes lingering on Niall, who is flanking me.

“I’ll let Yahontov know you’re here.”

“Much obliged.”

I sit on the brown leather sofa in the lounge while Niall stands ominously to the side, his eyes darting everywhere. We don’t have to wait long before a suited man slides into the room. It’s not Yahontov or one of his men. It’s Mikhail fucking Petrov.

“Petrov,” Niall grunts. The Russian’s dark eyes flicker over Niall as he smirks, looking amused.

“Reaper.”

Nial glowers silently, but Petrov turns to me with a nod.

“To what do I owe the pleasure of a meeting with a second Fitzpatrick for the day?”

“I’m just here to see Yahontov. I’m sure you’ve had your fill of Fitzpatricks after spending the night dealing with Seamus.”

Petrov chuckles, leaning against the fireplace, his hands buried in his suit pockets. Niall doesn’t trust Petrov’s causal stance, shifting his own to move closer to me.

I don’t blame Niall’s twitchiness. Petrov might be barely thirty, but he’s a lethal bastard. I don’t know his history, but he

made waves in the Boston Underworld when he was named one of Igor Andreyev's Two Spies. As the Obskchak, a part of his job is to keep the peace between the Boston Bratva and the other underworld organizations.

"I'm here to see Yahontov. It's a meeting that doesn't concern you."

Amusement flits across Petrov's face. "If a Fitzpatrick is here to see one of the Avoritets, it concerns me."

Arrogant shite. "It's about the poker tables."

He waves his hand dismissively. "My whole night was about the fucking poker tables. I have no idea what grown men see in a card game."

Well. That's insulting. "Just because you have no skill."

A smirk appears. "I have great skill. It makes it much less fun when you look around, and all you see are people's hands written across their faces in large numbers."

"I've always found that the most fun part."

"You would. That's all you Irish seem to want to do. Drink whiskey, play cards, and throw fists."

"It's a nice way to approach life."

Niall stiffens as Yahontov walks in through the archway from the dining room.

"Lucky." He nods to me, standing beside Petrov, who casts him a lazy glance. "My apologies for last night. I should have disciplined outside the gambling hall."

Shoving to my feet, I wave his apologies away. "You've already made your apologies to Seamus. I don't need to hear



them too. I'm here about next Wednesday."

Yahontov hesitates, sighing as a look of resignation crosses his face. "I will stay away for as long as you require."

"Not at all. I'm here to offer a dedicated table for you at your usual time."

Petrov looks impressed before he tucks the sentiment away behind his usual deadpan demeanor. Yahontov is more emotive, relief flooding his face as a smile tugs at his lips.

"You are too good to me, Lucky."

"I'll expect you to remember this when the time comes."

Both Russians offer sharp nods, Petrov straightening out of his slouch. "Consider it noted."

Nodding, I hold out my hand, Yahontov and then Petrov shaking it. Niall walks sideways as we leave the room, his eyes never ceasing their sweep of the area until we are buckled into his SUV, pulling away from the curb.

"See, that wasn't so bad. Was it?"

Niall glowers across the car at me. "Feck off, Lucky."

Smirking, I turn my eyes to the road out the windshield. I mostly enjoy winding Seamus and Paddy up, but the Reaper is a fun target too.

# Chapter SIX

## CONNOR

Standing from the table, I collect my breakfast dishes, crossing and placing them in the sink as Andie is washing up the pan she used to make the eggs.

“It was delicious, lass,” I rumble. A hint of pink touches her cheeks – as it often does when I compliment her cooking or baking – I’m a sucker for punishment, so I enjoy putting it there, even if it’s torture to walk away.

Andie continues to wash the dishes, picking up my plate. I head out through the back door and into the cottage with a suppressed sigh. It’s just my luck that the only lass who piques my interest these days is the one completely off-limits.

Stepping into the cottage, I close the door, firmly turning my mind away from Andie, standing a handful of yards away washing dishes and focusing on the room in front of me.

The wall of screens is flashing with code, pictures, and games happening in real-time, and the computer bank is neat, with a sole occupant seated in one of the two comfortable leather-backed gaming chairs.

Michael is drinking a red bull, alternatively watching the screen, typing in some code, or scribbling on a piece of paper with a 2B pencil to work out the odds.

Digging my phone out of my pocket, I read through the nightly report Anthony sent before he went home, my eyes

occasionally darting to the screens or where Michael is absently working at the desk.

That is until he loses his shit, shoving the paper aside. His drink can tips and hits the ground, sticky sweet soda spraying anywhere, but he doesn't even notice.

“Call Anthony in!” he yells over his shoulder at me. “We’re getting fucking hacked!”

My phone is at my ear instantly.

“Hello?” Anthony mumbles sleepily.

“We’re getting fucking hacked. Get your arse down here now,” I snap. Immediately, Anthony is more alert.

“I’m on my fucking way!” he yells down the phone. It goes dead, and I shove my phone back into my pocket, my eyes trained on the back of Michael’s head.

His fingers are flying across the keyboard, and code appears on the screen almost impossibly fast. I can’t read it, so I watch his face, which is tense and alert. Not a great combination.

There’s a screeching sound within ten minutes while Michael’s fingers furiously fly over his keyboard, and the door slams open with a crash, Anthony sprinting in. His glasses are askew, his T-shirt is inside out, and he’s wearing loose cotton boxer shorts, which he probably sleeps in. At least the lad sensed the urgency in my demand he gets here.

Ignoring me, Anthony runs straight over to one of the keyboards, slinging himself into the chair, and starts typing as furiously as Michael.

Their faces aren't telling me much about the situation beyond the fact it is still worrying, so I pull my phone out again.

**CONNOR: We're getting hacked. The lads are on it.**

There is no reply, so either Seamus is busy or on his way. Pocketing my phone again, I stand behind the lads, staring at the meaningless numbers, letters, and symbols they are typing.

I get my answer to Seamus's lack of response in another ten minutes as he strides in, looking fucking furious.

"What's going on?" he asks quietly, his voice tinged with Irish in his fury. Neither of the lads looks around, but Michael starts to speak.

"We're being hacked," he spits out. "I'm trying to stop them. Anthony's trying to find them."

Because he knows as much as I do about computers, Seamus stands next to me, a tower of silent rage. Finally, after about an hour, Anthony stops typing, slumping back in his chair with a grin.

"Fucking got the prick. He's in Chicago."

Well, thank fuck it's not local. We've got enough problems without someone here trying to fuck with our online business.

"Shut him the fuck down," Seamus growls. Anthony cracks his knuckles with another grin.

"With pleasure," he drawls.

From what he and Michael mutter to each other, I gather Anthony is sending some virus of something into the hacker's

software. It takes another thirty minutes before they both stop typing.

“It’s over,” Michael confirms, dropping back in his chair, looking relieved.

Seamus is anything but relieved. Stalking over, he grabs Michael by the collar, jerking him out of his chair, hauling him up until they are nose to nose. I take a step closer in case I have to pull him off the lad. Seamus is six foot two, and Michael is only about five-ten, standing on his tiptoes, his eyes wide with fear.

“What kind of weak, pussy-arse security do you have that we can get hacked?” he hisses.

Michael pales, swallowing roughly as Anthony shrinks down in his chair, trying to make himself small. That’s enough now. These are my lads. Seamus needs to calm the fuck down.

I stride across the room, tugging Michael out of Seamus’s grasp.

“Fitzy,” I say quietly, a thread of steel in my tone, “that’s enough.”

Seamus glares at me, but his fingers release Michael’s collar.

“We’ll be doing a full review of security protocols, but Michael copped on to it immediately and made sure that the only thing we lost was two hours of earnings, isn’t that right?”

I arch a brow at Michael and Anthony, who both nod frantically. Seamus says nothing, but he offers one last glare at both programmers before stalking out. The tires of his SUV squeal as he leaves, the room around us silent.

Michael stumbles outside while Anthony and I watch him go.

“We’re getting big enough to need a full-time security consultant,” I tell Anthony. “Do you know anyone who’d be down for it and can keep their mouth shut?”

Anthony blinks and nods. “I’ll get you a list by tomorrow.”

“Good. We’ll need you to stick around until Michael’s back.”

Anthony glances over at the door that Michael shoved through and nods again. I stalk outside to make sure the lad is alright.



## ANDIE

I’m not sure what happened in the little mafia business cottage this morning, but something did. Connor disappeared out there after breakfast like he always does, and after about an hour, there was a squealing of tires.

I ran to the windows as some skinny young man with his T-shirt on inside out, his glasses askew, wearing cotton boxer shorts and no shoes, threw himself out of the battered Honda that tore up the drive and rushed in.

About ten minutes later, an SUV like Connor’s squealed up, and a seriously good-looking but furious brunette man stalked

into the cottage. I have no idea what it was about that guy, but he gave me the heebie-jeebies.

It is about another hour while I meticulously fold laundry, keeping an eye on the cottage door, until the good-looking brunette walks out, still looking furious. He slings himself into his SUV, the tires squealing as he drives off. Definite heebie-jeebies.

The cottage door opens again. I shrink back, but they can't see me. I'm standing in the laundry, watching through the cute little stained glass window as I stretch out the folding. I may have folded this fitted sheet five times. To get it perfect.

A different young man stumbles out. This one is sandy blonde, wearing jeans, sneakers, and a T-shirt. He leans against the side of the cottage with his hands on his knees, keeping his head down. Should I go out and offer him a glass of water? He looks wicked pale.

Before I can move from my sentinel position, Connor emerges, rubbing a weary hand over his eyes as he claps his hand on the young man's back, saying something to him.

The young man nods, and Connor says something else, striding across the small space and up into the house.

"Andie? Lass?" he calls out when he's in the kitchen. Oops. Shit, and I hurry out to where he is standing in the middle of the kitchen, his hands shoved into the pockets of his suit pants.

When he sees I'm coming out of the laundry, his eyes dip to my hands, which are still holding the pillow case I was in the process of folding.

“Is everything all right?” I ask quietly. “I heard all the cars?”

He sighs, rubbing his eyes again. “Aye, lass. Everything’s grand. Can you make some coffee and get something sweet to eat together? Two coffees?”

“O-of course.” I turn to drop the pillowcase on the countertop in the laundry, hurrying across the room to turn on the coffee maker.

I made chocolate chip muffins earlier, so I carefully and quickly place them in a cute basket I found in the pantry, handing them to Connor. He watches me silently as I hurry back to the coffee maker, snatching the jug up as it beeps, pouring two coffees and adding cream.

He takes the coffee mugs and the basket of muffins, disappearing back through the door out to the driveway and the cottage.

I move back into the laundry, surreptitiously watching as he disappears into the cottage. He’s only in there for a few minutes before he emerges again.

When he comes back and into the house, he doesn’t call out again, walking straight into the laundry, perching against the countertop, watching as I fold the rest of the sheets.

“Is the young blonde man going to be okay?”

I glance over, swallowing as his eyebrows raise. Tipping my head to the small stained glass window, I give him an apologetic shrug. Thankfully, Connor doesn’t look angry. He actually chuckles.



“He’ll be fine. He was excited about the muffins. How’d you get so good at baking anyway?”

“There was this lady in our building, Mrs. Dawkins....” I start to explain, cutting off when Connor frowns at me.

“The lady who got murdered by the Italians?”

My heart thuds in my chest, bile churning in my stomach. Poor, poor Mrs. Dawkins. She didn’t deserve what they did to her. I don’t know if Connor has much to do with Marco Lastra – the Italian capo who killed Mrs. Dawkins personally – but I hope he doesn’t. That man was nothing short of awful.

“Y-you know about that?”

Connor shrugs, sighing as he shoves his hands into his pockets again. “Lauren was very upset about it.”

I nod mechanically. We were all upset about it, but I can see how it would affect Low deeply. Mrs. Dawkins practically raised her.

“She was kind of the surrogate grandmother for all the kids in our building. When Mom was off hooking, or just off her face on drugs, Mrs. Dawkins used to let me hang out in her apartment.”

I shrug, my hands stopping their movement on top of the fresh laundry as I stare unseeing at the wall in front of me, a small smile tugging at my lips.

“She didn’t have a TV, just a radio that only ever played this Jesus channel. So I used to play in her kitchen. She taught me how to bake. Told me that if I ever got to open up my bakery, she’d be my first customer.”

I don't notice Connor move, but suddenly he is right next to me, his long fingers brushing at my cheeks. My wet cheeks. He's brushing away tears. How embarrassing.

"Sorry," I mutter, raising my hand and dashing away some more tears as they fall. "What they did to her...."

The bile from my stomach rises in my throat as I remember. Connor turns me slowly, hesitating for the briefest moment before he draws me to his chest, his arms coming around me as he hugs me.

"There's nothing to apologize for, *leannán*," he murmurs, his fingers stroking through my hair. Closing my eyes, I let go of the need to be tough and sob like a child into his chest. It's been so long since I've been able to let go of my emotions and let someone else take care of me.

His cheek presses against the top of my head, and I wrap my arms around his waist. I'm unsure how long I cry, but Connor doesn't speak or move. He holds me, his cheek resting on top of my head, one of his hands stroking through my hair at the nape of my neck. I didn't know how badly I needed this. Just this.

Eventually, my tears dry up, and I step away from him. My face is probably swollen and splotchy, but Connor looks at me tenderly, stroking my face for a moment, smoothing away the tear tracks.

His eyes dip to my mouth, and his lips part. I don't know if he's about to say something or kiss me. I really, really want him to kiss me, but when he simply stares at me for a long moment and leaves, heading upstairs, no doubt to change out of his tear-soaked shirt, I know it's for the best.

He might be sex on legs, but he's my boss. It would be bad to get involved, especially because I live here. As bad an idea as it is, it's a wicked tempting thought.

No, Andie. Don't even *think* about going there. Scrubbing my face with my hands, I hear Connor's tread on the stairs as he leaves the house and goes back into the cottage while I return to my chores.

# Chapter SEVEN

## Andie

I'm not entirely sure what Connor's "job" is. I mean, he's a mobster, so based on what I've seen in movies, he goes around cutting off horses heads and putting them in the beds of movie executives?

I'm about ninety-nine percent sure he's never done that, but he always disappears after dinner. He insists on eating with me in the kitchen whenever he's home for a meal, which is nice. I suppose he was used to eating with his mother. I wonder what that was like.

We've fallen into a pattern the month I've been here. I get up and eat, map out my meals and chores for the day and go for a jog.

When I get back and have showered, he usually emerges, has breakfast, and wanders out the back to the cottage by mid-morning.

In the afternoon, he works out in his gym upstairs before disappearing. He's typically home for dinner, leaving again as I clean up and go to bed. Rinse and repeat. It's not an exhausting routine. Lauren hooked me up with a wicked sweet deal here.

Speaking of Lauren, she wants to go for a girl's night out. I've cleared it with Connor. He said he's going to be elsewhere

for dinner anyway, so Paddy will take Lauren and me to Oracle, the club the Irish own in West Boston.

A strip club isn't exactly my first choice of venue for a girl's night, but I guess when you've married into the Irish Mafia, your options are limited. At least if I'm with Low, the service should be good.

I look around as Paddy pulls into a parking lot beside the club, past a sign on a gate reading *Staff Only*. He helps Lauren out of the front seat, keeping a hand on her back as he closes my door for me.

I jump when his hand lands on the middle of my back, but when I glance up at him, he's not looking at me, his eyes darting around, lingering on a white car across the road. When I glance at it, I notice the two guys sitting in it, watching the club's front door.

Maybe they're PI's, scoping the place out to catch husbands. I'm about to giggle about it to Lauren when she catches my eye, shaking her head, her eyes flickering to Paddy's stiff jaw.

Because he's so aware of Lauren at all times, Paddy's eyes move down to meet hers, a bit of the tightness disappearing as his eyes soften.

“Let's get ye inside, *mo chroí*.”

Paddy hustles us through the busy main bar with strippers hanging from poles and giving lap dances on the main floor and into a smaller, more intimate, *quieter* space.

“This is the VIP room,” Low whispers into my ear.

With a meaningful glare, she pokes Paddy. He sighs like the most put upon man in the world, pulling an envelope out of his jacket pocket. Low squeals excitedly, pulling his head down to make out with him. I stand beside them, awkward as Paddy eagerly clutches Lauren to him, devouring her mouth.

Finally, he lifts his head, stroking his thumb over Lauren's lower lip. For some reason, it's a more intimate gesture than all their kissing.

"Now go away," Lauren tells him bossily. "This is a girl's night. You're not invited."

I'm surprised at how she's talking to him, but Paddy only winks at me, striding off to a "Staff Only" door and disappearing.

Low steers me to a table across the room when he's out of sight. It's right in front of the stage where a stripper is wearing nothing more than heels, a thong, and her dignity, shaking her shit around a pole.

The table is already occupied by a beautiful woman with tanned skin, thick brown hair, and vibrantly blue eyes.

"Just in time," the woman drawls as I recognize her as one of Low's bridesmaids. "Fi's up next."

Lauren and I drop into the other seats at the table, and a waitress magically appears with a whole bottle of top-shelf whiskey and three tumblers. I thought service would be good if I were here with Low, but this is next level.

"Okay. I could get used to this kind of treatment," I murmur, pulling out my purse. The blue-eyed bridesmaid waves her hand dismissively.

“Get used to not paying. I ordered this stuff specially for us.”

Low winks as I blink in surprise. “Mellie’s in charge of ordering for the club.”

Turning her attention back to the stage, she tears Paddy’s envelope, ones and fives sliding out. A *lot* of ones and fives.

“Get ready to spend big on the blonde up next.” Low grins at me, and Mellie also pulls out a wad of ones and fives, dropping them on the table.

“Let’s make it rain over her,” she suggests excitedly. “I’ve always wanted to do that.”

Giggling, Mellie pours out three shots. Lauren grabs one, pushing the other toward me as Mellie lifts hers high.

“To a man-free girl’s night!”

My eyebrows raise at the strange toast as Lauren cheers. “Finally!”

Placing the shot glass against my lips, I tip my head back, wincing as the whiskey burns its way down my throat. Hoo boy! As I set the glass back on the table, the stripper on stage climbs down, moving around the room, collecting her tips.

One of the men at a table near ours says something as she giggles, flipping her hair over her shoulder. A waitress appears holding a lockbox, which the stripper places her tips into. The guy stands, and the stripper laughs and beckons him over to what looks like a small private room behind the tables.

“Lap dances in here are private. Otherwise, they distract from the stripper on stage,” Mellie explains distractedly,

shoving two fingers into her mouth and whistling piercingly at the stage.

A new stripper struts out, looking like a girl next door turned into a wet dream. She has honey-blonde hair tinted with lighter shades, blue eyes, and the plumpest, pinkest lips imaginable.

She's slender but stacked like all get out, and unlike the last stripper, she's not topless. She might as well be because her lacy lingerie brassiere is completely see-through, and her panties are barely there, but she's still "fully clothed."

My eyes are glued to her as she sways her hips in time with the music. I wish I had that kind of confidence. As we watch, she does some wicked impressive moves on the pole and a little floor show, contorting herself and flaunting some awesome abs muscle control.

The floor show is happening right in front of our table. Mellie and Low climb onto their chairs to make it rain dollar bills over her. I thought they were kidding about that. A giggle bursts out of me as they start wolf-whistling.

"Yeah, shake it, Fi!" Mellie yells, whistling again as she showers the woman with dollar bills.

"Get it, girl!" Low screams, wobbling, righting herself, sweeping cash from the pile in her hand onto the woman writhing on the stage.

Low's eyes find mine, and she jerks her head at the stage. Oh. Right. *I'm* supposed to get up there too. What the hell. I pound back another shot of whiskey and snatch up a pile of



money from the table. Climbing onto my chair, I start whistling and making it rain money on her too.



## Connor

Andie asked if she could have the night off to catch up with friends, so I muttered some bullshit about having other dinner plans.

I didn't actually have plans because why would I make plans to eat somewhere else when Andie is the world's best cook? I've not eaten this well in my entire life. I've had to start working out daily so I don't morph into a contented, well-fed blob of a man.

Ronan was available to eat, so I met him at the diner run by McMahan's crew near the club. The man ate ridiculously quickly, and now he's hurrying me along as we stride toward Oracle.

"You got places to be, Ronan?" I snicker as he shoots me a glare.

"Aye, I do, Lucky. Move yer arse."

Smirking, I keep pace with him. He turns down the back alley, and my eyebrows shoot up.

"What's wrong with the front door?"

"We're late."

Late for what? It's a fucking strip club. It's my night off the tables, so I have nowhere to be. Surely the club isn't going to fall into ruin if Ronan is away for a few hours to have dinner?

I'm going to take a wild guess that this is about the fact he doesn't like it when he isn't here to see his little blonde stripper perform and glare at all the other men who might so much as glance in her direction.

“What, have you missed the start of Fiona's set?”

Ronan shoots me a nasty look, picking up the pace as my lips twitch. Yeah. He's missed the start of her set. No wonder we've come in the back entrance to get there quicker.

Stepping through the back door, it swings shut behind us as we stride along the corridor, making for the entrance to the VIP room, where Ronan's eyes are laser-focused. When we get there, we can't walk through as there's a traffic jam. Paddy and Niall are standing at the door, peeking out it. That's strange enough for comment.

“Hiding from someone, lads?” I smirk at them. Paddy flashes me a grin that says we caught them in the act.

“We've been banned from girl's night,” he grumbles, turning his attention back through the crack in the door. That makes sense. It's *girl's* night. The clue's in the name. These two are clingy bastards.

“And so ye're standing here spying on them?” Ronan snaps. “Meanwhile, I'm missing Fiona's set, so, if ye don't mind....”

He gestures to the door, but neither of them moves.

“Aye, I don’t think ye need to worry about glaring at men looking at her tonight,” Niall rumbles, his eyes still glued on whatever they’re watching. “I think any other lad is too scared to get close. Jaysus feck, what’re they doing now?”

He shoves his head closer to the door.

“I think they’re making it rain on her,” Paddy replies, squinting into the lounge. “The lass has about two minutes to get off that chair before she hurts herself, or I’m going to fetch her off it myself.”

I have no idea what the fuck they’re talking about. I don’t get a chance to ask because Ronan takes matters into his own hands. Reaching past them, he jerks the door open so we can see through.

Niall and Paddy snap their heads back just in time to not get clocked in the faces, and we all stare into the VIP room. What the fuck?

Their wives, Lauren and Mellie, are dressed for a night out, standing on top of their chairs, showering Ronan’s little blonde stripper with dollar bills while she writhes on the stage floor.

They’re not the only two at the table. My eyes drop to Andie, seated on one of the gold and black brocade chairs.

She pounds back a glass of whiskey like a fucking pro, climbing onto her chair as I watch. My brain malfunctions. Jesus fuck. The lass is wearing the tightest little black dress known to man, with cutouts on the sides showcasing creamy flesh, tits on display, and a skirt finishing right below her ass cheeks.

My mouth is drier than the Sahara Desert. The lass has legs for days. She shouldn't be dressed like that at a strip club, especially not *this* strip club. It's asking for the wrong kind of attention.

She's with Lauren, which means Paddy knew what she was wearing before she arrived. My fingers itch, and I clench them into fists. Did he not think to mention she should dress more carefully to come here?

I understand immediately what Paddy meant about the chair. In her sky-high black stilettos, Andie wobbles on the chair as she gets up. Christ. I'm ready to stride in, pluck her off the damn thing, and set her back on solid ground where it's fucking safer.

Finding her balance, Andie raises the stack of cash she's holding and also starts to make it rain.

"What're they doing?" Ronan asks, looking completely nonplussed.

"Spending all my money," Paddy grumbles, his arms crossed over his chest while he eyes his wife carefully. His muscles are coiled like he's ready to spring and sprint into the room to snatch her off the chair if she even wobbles.

"And mine," Niall grunts, edging almost infinitesimally slowly into the lounge. Ronan doesn't seem happy to hear it.

"Jaysus feck," he groans. "Sure, and why on earth would you give them money to spend on Fiona's dancing?"

"Because Mellie won't shut up about how Fiona isn't making enough to pay her rent since ye've put her on one set a night, banned lap dances, and won't let her take her top off,"

Niall replies, his fingers flexing as he moves into the room another small step.

“Aye, this is all your fault,” Paddy snaps at Ronan. “If you weren’t so hung up on the lass, my wife wouldn’t be balancing on a chair in heels right now, risking her fucking neck.”

Ronan shrugs, shoving his hands in his pockets, his eyes glued on Fiona on the stage.

“I’ve a plan for the lass,” he mutters, his eyes narrowing. “One that doesn’t involve yer wives cashing her up. When she couldn’t make rent, she would have come and asked if there was something else she could be doing around the club. I *intended* to move her to bartending or waitressing. Ye’re messing with my plans, and I don’t like it.”

As interesting as Ronan’s conversation is, I don’t give a fuck about the plan for his little stripper, who won’t have a bar of him. My eyes are glued to the lasses. Of the three of them, it’s Andie who wobbles first.

Jesus fuck. I shove past Paddy and Niall, sprinting across the room as she overbalances, her arms wind-milling, and she shrieks, toppling off the chair.

As I move across the room, my heart is in my mouth, but she falls away from the table and other chairs. Thank Christ for small mercies. I catch her before she hits the ground, the other two erupting into cheers.

“Good catch,” Andie giggles as I set her on her feet. She’s steady as she stands upright, but she’s definitely tipsy. I keep a hand splayed across her lower back, though she doesn’t seem about to fall again.

Sliding my lips up the outer shell of her ear, Andie shivers lightly.

“No more standing on chairs, *leannán*,” I murmur. Her beautiful blue eyes turn to me, wide and trusting.

“Not even when you’re here to catch me?” She waggles her eyebrows, and I can’t catch my smirk in time.

I brush my hand over her legs, my fingertips trailing over the bare flesh exposed by her very short skirt and her breathing hitches, her eyelids drooping. I think I’ve changed my mind about her attire. She should definitely wear it here.

“I’ve nothing against catching ye, *leannán*,” I breathe into her ear. “But are ye ready for what happens once I do?”

My gaze dips to Andie’s mouth as her tongue darts out, running along her lower lip. A growl rumbles out of my chest at the sight. Christ, she’s sexy.

“This is girl’s night,” Lauren grumbles from behind me. “You’re not a girl, so you’re not invited.”

Is the lass seriously telling me off for saving Andie’s neck? I turn to give her a piece of my mind, but Paddy speaks first. Making it clear the lass was talking to her husband, not me.

“Connor interrupted first. With a world-class catch, I might add. If you lot are going to be risking your necks balancing on chairs, you’re not allowed to have girl’s night without us.”

“You wouldn’t have noticed us on the chairs if you had been in Seamus’s office where you belong,” Mellie points out.

“Andie would be in a world of pain if we had been doing that,” Paddy counters. Mellie opens her mouth to argue when

Niall's voice cuts through the conversation.

“Ye'll not be standing on chairs again, lass,” he tells his wife, using the tone he usually reserves for when he's fucking cunts up.

The rest of us turn to him in surprise, but his wife doesn't shrink away from the tone. Instead, she looks fucking *turned on*. What the fuck? They're a strange pair.

“And if I do?” she asks, all breathy.

Jesus fuck, we really shouldn't be privy to this conversation. Niall doesn't reply, picking her up, throwing her over his shoulder, striding out of the room, and heading for the back door.

Mellie lifts her head and waves happily to the other two, looking smug as all shit.

“It looks like girl's night is over,” Lauren sighs, tangling her fingers with Paddy's. “I suppose you can take me home.”

He doesn't waste any time tugging her out of the room. Ronan wandered off as his little stripper finished and returned to the dressing room.

Only Andie and I remain. I turn my eyes to meet her gaze, where she is looking at me curiously.

“Interesting dinner plans you have.” Her eyes dart around the room, lingering on the new stripper taking the stage. I smirk at her.

“Dinner is finished. I'm here to work.”

She blinks slowly, tearing her eyes away from the stripper and staring at me.

“This is where you come each night?”

I’m not entirely sure I like the look in her eye.

“To watch strippers?”

There it is. I smirk, beckoning and jerking my head to the corridor out of the lounge.

“Not quite, lass. I’ll show you.”



# Chapter EIGHT

## Andie

The wolf-whistles signal that the stripper replacing Fi on the stage has lost her top as Connor tangles his fingers with mine and leads me out of the VIP room.

He doesn't lead me back to the main bar area or outside. Turning right as we exit the private bar, he nods to a random security guy standing in the corridor at a dead end. The guy nods back, knocking on the paneled wall, which opens like a door.

I gasp in surprise, blushing as Connor snickers at my reaction. That was wicked cool. It's a secret door. I'm only disappointed it wasn't hidden behind a bookshelf. I suppose it's more impressive that I didn't know it was a door when it's a plain wall.

Another security guy, who opened the door from the inside, nods to us as we step through. Still holding my hand, Connor escorts me up a narrow, hidden back staircase onto a bare landing and through a nondescript door.

There's a low hum in the room, and it smells faintly of whiskey and cigar smoke. There's no music here, though you can kind of hear the music drifting up from the VIP bar downstairs.

It's like a mini-casino, down to the sumptuously carpeted floor. There are five oval, burgundy-felt topped tables, each

seating nine people. Eight gamblers and a dealer dressed in black slacks, a white button-down shirt, and a shiny black vest with a tie.

They're all playing poker, and waitresses, dressed the same as the dealers, only without the ties, move around the space, collecting empty glasses and depositing fresh ones.

I look around with interest, but there's no bar in here. They all keep disappearing through a swinging door off to the side. They must keep the liquor in there. I wonder why.

Almost all the gamblers are men. I can see two women gamblers scattered around, though the waitresses are all women and the dealers are an even mix.

A few of the men seated around the tables nod to Connor, and he returns the gesture. The only people standing are the waitresses moving around and a guy in a sharp dark suit.

He is roaming the room, though he crosses to us when he spots Connor, speaking in a low voice. I can't hear what they say and don't want to be accused of eavesdropping.

I would move away to give them some privacy, but Connor keeps his fingers tangled with mine, giving his full attention to this new guy. Determined to appear disinterested, I let my eyes wander around the room.

Most of the tables are playing with poker chips, but at least one table, furthest from the door, where they are playing with real money. Stacks of real money bound with rubber bands. Wicked big piles of real money bound with rubber bands.

Holy shit. This is an illegal gambling den. No wonder it's all hidden with the staircase and secret door. I'm so distracted

staring at all the cash I don't notice Connor finishing his conversation until his lips slide over my ear, my breath catching.

He's close enough that I can smell cloves and pinewood clinging to his skin above the faint whiskey and cigar smoke scent. Heat floods between my thighs. What a yummy scent. He's simply mouth-watering all over. I'm just drunk enough to ignore that part of my brain whispering, *he's your boss, don't think like that.*

"I need to take care of something for a moment," Connor murmurs, walking me over to one of the tables with an empty gambler's seat. Guiding me into the chair with his hands on my shoulder and back, Connor turns and gestures. The rest of the table – including the dealer – are all men, watching me with interest, their eyes darting to Connor.

A waitress appears and places a small stack of chips in front of me. Two of the men smirk, and one raises his eyebrows. I bet they think I'm going to be useless at this because I'm a *girl*. Huh. I'll show them.

"Ryan," Connor addresses the dealer, whose eyes snap from me to him. "This is Andie; take care of my lass for me."

The dealer nods as pleasure shoots through me. Connor called me "his lass." We are so out of boss territory here.

Connor brushes a kiss against my temple, my heart thudding loud enough that I'm surprised the rest of the table can't hear it, and he strides across the room. I watch as he moves to talk to some of the men at the big money table.

“You’re Lucky Fitzpatrick’s woman?” a gruff voice sounds out. I blink across at the grizzly-looking graying man with the heavy Russian accent. *Lucky*. That’s Connor’s nickname.

My eyes slide around the room. Holy shit. Connor must *run* this illegal gambling den. No wonder he comes here most nights. I guess the name Lucky suits him more than I realized.

I don’t know how to respond. Connor called me his lass, but *I’m* not about to say it without permission. I shrug at the Russian bear of a man who nods to me. That’s vague enough.

“Let’s see if some of the luck of the Irish has rubbed off on you then,” he smirks, chuckles rumbling out around the table.

I swallow, feeling uneasy. I think I might be about to lose all these chips. It’s a bit much to suppose they are only pretend money. I hope they’re not worth much. I can’t afford to pay them back.

The game ends, and when Ryan does a cool throw to make cards slide and stop with unerring accuracy in front of everyone, I get two. I put in two chips, just like the men on either side of me, and stare at my cards.

A six and a four. Six of hearts, four of clubs. So I have ten then. I wonder if ten is a good number in poker. Ryan flips three cards into the middle of the table. Ace of diamonds, six of spades, six of diamonds.

Ohh, three sixes, that’s eighteen. But with my four, I have twenty-two, so I guess that’s blackjack then. Wait. No. Different game, I frown down at my cards.

Following the lead of the sharply suited guy on my right, I push another two chips towards the center. Ryan flips over a

fourth card in the middle. Two of clubs.

Okay, well, if I take my twenty-two and minus two, that's twenty, so I'm still under twenty-one. Does the Ace mean one point? Am I at twenty-one? A smug smile tugs at my lips as I peer into the middle. Two men groan, throwing their cards down onto the table, face down. What does that mean? Did they quit? Why? Should *I* quit?

The guy next to me is eyeing me carefully as he throws four chips into the middle. I'm not quitting! I push four chips in too. Once everyone has pushed all their chips in, Ryan flips over the fifth card, and it's a four of diamonds.

Does that affect my twenty-one? I frown at the new card, darting a glance back at my cards. Sharp Suit looks smug. Around the table, everyone apart from the two men who threw away their cards starts laying their cards down, face-up on the table one at a time.

Ryan moves the cards in the middle up and down as various people show their cards and curse or grin. Sharp Suit seems *very* happy with the cards Ryan moves for him, and two other people at the table curse.

Ryan motions to me, and I put my cards down. There's a sharp intake of breath.

"Fuck," Sharp Suit groans and mutters. There is some general chuckling at the table at his annoyance.

"Did you honestly think you could read the tells of Lucky's lady?" the Russian mocks Sharp Suit, who glares at him. Ryan pushes the other two sixes and the other four up.

"Full house," Ryan drawls, "the lady wins."

I have no idea why he's commenting on how many people are here tonight, but I'm the only lady at this table, so I think that means I get all the chips. Yay me! Ha. I showed them and their misogyny!

"How're you going over here?" Connor's voice slides over me as his hand brushes against the nape of my neck. I tip my head back to beam up at him.

"I got Blackjack, so I won!" I tell him excitedly.

There is some confused murmuring around the table, and Connor looks bemused. His eyes take in the table, and all the chips pushed toward me. His lips curl into a smile.

"You mean, you got a full house." He points at my cards. What? I frown down at them.

"No, twenty-one," I clarify, pointing at each card. "Three sixes are eighteen, plus four is twenty-two, less the ace, that's one, so that's twenty-one. I'm not sure about the other four...."

I frown at the last card Ryan flipped over as at least three men at the table choke on their drinks, Sharp Suit looks sour as all get out, and the Russian is laughing.

"That's...." Connor looks like he's trying wicked hard not to laugh. "That's not how ye play poker, *leannán*."

"But I won." I pout at him, jabbing my finger at Ryan. "*He* just said, 'the lady wins,' so I won."

"And so ye did, *leannán*," Connor agrees with me, pointing to my cards. "Three sixes and a pair of fours is a hand called a 'full house.' That's why ye won." He studies me for a beat, amusement writ large across his face. "Ye have no idea how to play poker. D'ye lass?"

I shrug, muttering under my breath, “I still won.”

Four men at the table openly laugh, and Connor grins at me.

“Let’s get ye home, lass.” He holds out a hand to help me up. “Before ye give someone a stroke.”

His eyes linger over Sharp Suit, who looks slightly grey in the face. A waitress comes to collect my chips. Oh, right. Real money. Thank god I did win. Can you imagine?

“How much did I win?” I ask Connor excitedly as he pulls me to my feet.

“About twenty-four hundred.” He smiles, and my mouth falls open in shock. Holy shit. Holy *fucking* shit.



## CONNOR

A waitress takes away the chips, handing me a paper bag full of cash for Andie’s winnings. Taking her hand, my fingers stroke hers as I lead her back downstairs. I shouldn’t be touching her like this, but I can’t help myself. She’s not objecting, so I’ll try my luck. When we pass Kent, the manager I leave in charge when I’m not around, I offer him a nod, which is returned.

Andie seems dazed after learning how much she won. I’m tickled pink she managed to win, even though she had no fucking clue as to what game she was playing. I’m struck by

the sudden urge to teach her. I wonder if she'll let me teach her by playing strip poker with her.

I suppose it all depends on how the rest of the night plays out. Right now, I want to get her home, so I'm the only one looking at her in this mouthwatering dress. I'm going to kiss her tonight. I've spent an entire month resisting the temptation of Andie Halpern, and I'm *done*.

I've never been one for delayed gratification, and the lass seems to react favorably to me, so I'm fucking kissing her. If it goes down as well as I'm hoping it will, kissing her won't be the only thing I do to her tonight.

When we get into my SUV, I hand her the paper bag as I help her inside. Closing the door, I round the hood, my fingers brushing against it. I hated this SUV when I got it. I've hated it ever since. I missed my sleek BMW sedan.

My eyes linger on Andie, buckled in, sitting in the passenger seat, peeking into the paper bag of cash with wide eyes. I don't hate the SUV right now. Andie is safest in an SUV. Maybe I should replace her little blue sedan with an SUV. I'll look into it tomorrow.

Climbing into my seat, I start the engine and reverse out of the parking space.

"Uh, what is this?" Andie asks, holding up the bag. I smirk over at her as I pull out of the parking lot.

"Yer winnings, lass. Don't spend it all at once."

Andie opens the bag and peeks in again, her mouth falling open in shock.



“I don’t think I’ve ever seen so much money in my *life*,” she breathes.

A frown pulls my eyebrows down at her words. Never? Jesus fuck. It’s only twenty-four hundred.

“Ye can put it towards yer bakery.” I nod to the bag, and she blinks at me, her eyes fluttering like she’s distressed. Jesus fuck. Was that the wrong thing to say? She looks like she’s blinking back tears.

Suddenly, a beaming smile lights up her face, my doubts melting away. Andie tunes the radio to some pop music station and proceeds to sing along, very loudly and out of tune, to a succession of pop hits from the eighties.

By the time we arrive home, I’m surprised my ears aren’t ringing from her horrible, enthusiastic singing, but I’m struggling not to grin from ear to ear. She’s so fucking *adorable*.

Helping her out of the SUV, I lead her inside. Taking her bag of cash and her purse, I drop them on the kitchen table. Not bothering to turn the lights on, I flip the lock on the kitchen door and turn to her, my hands sliding through her hair.

Andie’s breath catches, and mine answers it, my eyes burning into hers in the moonlight filtering through the window. Jesus fuck, the lass is so beautiful. Cupping the sides of her head, I tip it back, my mouth coming down on hers. This moment is everything I fantasized it would be.

Andie moans as I lick into her mouth, tasting her. She tastes as sweet as she looks, and I inhale deeply through my nose,

reveling in the mango and honey scent filling my lungs as I deepen the kiss. I'd be okay with it never ending.

Andie's hands slide up my sides, underneath my suit jacket, coming to rest on my pecs as she presses herself closer. I break the kiss but keep our mouths fused.

"I want ye, lass," I groan against her lips. She nods frantically, making noises of agreement. Thank fuck for that.

Kissing her deeply again, I move my hands down her back, gripping her shapely ass and pressing her against my hard dick, which has her moaning into my mouth again. It's a sound that makes my dick ache. I lift her underneath her thighs, her legs coming about my waist as I carry her up the stairs to my bedroom.

Tipping Andie onto my king-sized bed, I stare down, my eyes burning into her cornflower blue ones, pinning her in place while I slowly strip off my tie, jacket, and belt. I'm going to take my time to savor this event.

Kicking off my shoes, I unbutton my shirt at the wrists and up the front, slipping it off and dropping it onto the floor. Though I unbutton my trousers, I leave them on. Stripping off my socks, I kneel on the bed at her feet, unbuckling Andie's stiletto heels and removing them, crawling over her on the bed.

Andie's pupils dilate as I hover over her. Her lipstick is slightly smeared from our long make-out session downstairs. It's a good look on her.

"Ye're so fucking sexy, *leannán*," I growl, kissing up her neck, my tongue swirling across her sweet-tasting skin as she

moans, her hands sliding up my arms and moving to caress the skin of my back. I need her naked beneath me. Now.

Sliding a hand underneath her, I find the zipper of her sexy little black dress and lower it slowly as she arches her back to make it easier. The action has her breasts pressing against my bare chest. The material of her dress caresses me, eliciting another groan. This dress needs to be on my floor, A.S.A.P.

Easing the dress over her hips, I tug it over her head, almost achieving my aim. Andie is lying under me, clad only in lacy black lingerie. A fucking wet dream.

“Feck, lass,” I breathe, my eyes flitting down her form, drinking it in. Screw having her naked. I like seeing *this*.

My mouth comes down on hers again, tasting her, devouring her. One of my hands slides down over her smooth skin until it brushes against the lace of her panties. Andie is panting against my mouth as I curl my fingers around the lace, groaning when my fingers brush against her damp folds. Christ.

“Ye’re already wet for me, lass.”

I almost moan at the thought. Andie’s hips push up, pressing her core against my fingers. That’s enough of an invitation for me. Parting her folds, I lazily brush her clit until her hips surge, sliding a finger into her wet heat.

It’s going to be a fucking tight fit. I can’t wait to be inside her.

Andie whimpers softly when I withdraw my hand from her panties. That’s my lass. So eager. I smirk against her lips.

“Patience, *leannán*,” I chuckle. “I’ll be inside ye soon enough.”

“Connor,” she breathes. My dick hardens further, a feat I didn’t think possible. “*Please.*”

Jesus fuck. I definitely can’t wait any longer. Snapping her bra clasp open, I tug her panties down, clambering off the bed to shuck my trousers and boxer briefs. As I open the nightstand drawer to retrieve a condom, Andie watches me with heated eyes.

I have it open and on in no time, crawling back onto the bed, my body covering her as I spread her legs with my hips. Fucking *finally*. My mouth moves up her neck as I sink into her. I get less than halfway before it’s too tight. Fuck, *yes*.

Rising onto my forearms, I stare at Andie’s face as her eyes flutter closed, her mouth falling open in wonder while I slowly withdraw and slide back in. It takes about a minute of slow rocking, in and out, until I’m buried balls deep. Jesus fuck, the lass feels *amazing*.

“Oh, *Connor*,” she moans, her eyes still closed, her head tipped back, and her fingers pressing against my shoulder blades at my back.

Growling at her moaned words, I lower my forehead to the bed beside her, gritting my teeth as I set a torturously slow pace, rocking in and out. Her mango and honey scent fills my nostrils as I inhale deeply, my nose against the side of her neck. So fucking incredible.

Andie bends her knees, setting her feet flat on the bed on either side of my waist and her hips straining up as I rock in.

Her inner muscles, already tight, are starting to clench, pulling at my dick each time I withdraw.

Jesus fuck. I need her to come. Immediately, so I can fucking speed things up. Running my thumb over her mouth, I press it inside.

“Suck,” I order her, groaning when she obeys instantly, her mouth pulling at my digit.

Withdrawing my thumb, I move it down and find her clit, rolling my thumb around it until she moans, long and breathy, her muscles clenching down on my dick like a vice as she tenses and comes. That’s it, lass. So perfect.

I don’t let up the motion of my thumb on her clit until she’s ridden out her orgasm, bracing my forearm against the mattress again when she’s relaxed and glowing.

Now Andie is more accustomed to my size, and she’s come, I pick up the pace, reaching down and hooking one of her legs over my arm to deepen the angle.

I find her sweet spot because fuck moaning, she’s panting and mewling now, like a contented cat, her head tipped back, her face a vision of ecstasy.

When she comes for the second time, the clenching of her muscles is too much, and I come too, groaning and sucking her earlobe into my mouth, biting down lightly on it.

# Chapter NINE

## Andie

I had three shots of whiskey last night and fucked my boss, and you know what? #YOLO #NOREGRETS.

I have no idea what time it is when I wake up, but a goofy grin tugs at my lips as I turn my head to see Connor fast asleep beside me in his giant king-sized bed.

We're both naked, and one of his legs is draped over both of mine, his arm is wrapped loosely around my waist, and his face is snuggled in against my neck. Every time he breathes, his breath tickles me. I never knew how nice waking up could be.

No sunlight is coming in through the windows yet, so it must still be the middle of the night. I feel lazy and relaxed from the two intense orgasms Connor delivered last night. I can count on one hand the number of times I've come during penetrative sex, and last night, I came twice! Talk about incredible.

Not only that, I can still *feel* him between my legs. I have no idea of the protocol for this situation. Do I sneak out? Tomorrow, when he fronts for breakfast, do I pretend this never happened? Are we having a one-night stand? A fling? Shit. I'm definitely overthinking this.

I squirm around in my confusion and indecision, making Connor stir, his nose nuzzling against my neck in a way that is

doing funny things to my below-the-waist regions.

As he blinks awake, his lips press against my neck, and his tongue darts out, tasting me, swirling against my flesh, like he did before we fell asleep.

I open my mouth in a lazy sigh as Connor kisses his way down my body, stopping to lavish attention and his tongue on my nipples, nipping and sucking until I'm practically breathless.

Only once I'm almost crying with need does he continue his downward path, trailing hot kisses until he's between my legs, lying on his stomach. Oh. *Yes*. Sliding his hands over my thighs, Connor parts them, hooking them over his shoulders. I shiver in anticipation as his breath blows against my core. I want this wicked bad.

My hands fist the coverlet on either side of my body as Connor's tongue touches me *there*. It finds my clit, and I either lose all rational thought or blackout. There's no other way to describe the sensation of time passing when I don't even notice it.

I'm too busy thrashing my head, making frankly embarrassing sounds that only seem to spur his magical lips and tongue until I press my hips upward, thrusting my core at his mouth. I tumble over the precipice, coming hard, moaning his name while he eats at me like I'm his favorite meal.

"Holy shit, Connor," I breathe as he removes my trembling legs from his shoulders, smirking up. I haven't had anyone do that to me before. I have been missing out.

I'm a languid, sated noodle as he kisses his way back up my body, his lips latching onto a particularly sensitive spot on my neck, drawing out moans as he manipulates my legs to hug his thighs.

A small squeal slips out of me as he rolls us over so I'm straddling him. My giggle cuts off quickly as I realize the perfection of this position. The hard ridge of his dick presses at my core. I push up until I'm sitting upright, and Connor looks up at me, the smug smirk still plastered across his face.

"Are ye going to ride me then, lass?" he asks, raising a single eyebrow.

It's such a cocky look, and *damn* if he doesn't have every right to be cocky. His lips and tongue and dick are pure magic and his *body*....

I trail my eyes over the magnificence displayed before me. His entire body is hard ridges and planes. His six-pack could possibly be an eight-pack. I knew he would be impressive underneath the suits he always wears. I just didn't think he would look like *this*. He may have spoilt me for all other men.

I smirk back at him, hoping I look as smolderingly sexy as he does while I adjust until he's fully sheathed. Holy shit. I have to pause for a moment because I've never felt so damn *full* in my entire *life*.

A small moan rips from my throat, and Connor shifts, making the moan louder. His cocky grin is solidifying in place. I take a moment to become accustomed to this incredible feeling. So, so good.



I start rolling my hips and realize I have all the power here. It's a heady feeling. Connor's hands grip my waist, but I'm controlling the speed, and as I find my rhythm, continuously rolling my hips, his head tips back, his eyes fluttering closed, his mouth open.

It's a look of complete abandon, and I'm so damn close based on the look on his face alone.

"Oh feck, *leannán*," he gasps. "Don't fecking stop. Jaysus *feck*, just like that."

My hands slide up his chest, resting on his incredibly defined pecs as I roll my hips faster and faster, my own breath coming out in short, sharp pants. I'm so, so, *so close*. Nearly there.

"Connor," I whimper, losing my rhythm as I grind down, my orgasm crashing over me while his hips buck as he comes.

That was amazing. Slumping forward, the waves of euphoria crashing over me, my eyes flutter closed as my cheek rests against his chest. His arms wrap around me, and his lips press against the top of my head.

After a long moment of warm, comfortable snuggling, he rolls me off him, freezing immediately.

"Fuck, fuck, *feck!*" he mutters fiercely. I stiffen. What's wrong?

"Connor?" My voice is small and wobbly. We shared an amazing moment, and now he sounds angry and horrified.

He groans into my hair. "I'm so fecking sorry, *leannán*. I forgot to use a fecking condom. We'll get some Plan B in the morning."

“You’re worried about me getting... pregnant?” I ask in a small voice. That’s better than all the horrid things my mind was imagining. It’s almost...sweet.

Connor presses another kiss into my hair, his hand rubbing my arm comfortingly. “There’s nothing to worry about. I’ll sort it out before ye get up in the morning.”

Suddenly, I’m seized with uncontrollable giggles. I stuff my fist into my mouth, but it doesn’t stop the sound. Connor rolls onto his back, tucking a hand up behind his head as he watches me with a bemused expression.

“Ye find it... funny?”

I look at the confused expression on his face, dissolving into giggles again.

“I’m on birth control,” I manage to get out between heaving breaths. “I got my shot right before I moved in here.”

“Thank feck for that,” he murmurs into the darkness, rolling onto his side as his hand curls around my neck, his lips crashing down on mine. “It’s going to save a fecking lot of money on condoms then.”

Connor deepens the kiss as I feel a fluttering in my stomach. He effectively confirmed we are having a fling, not a one-night stand. That puts some of my anxiety to rest.

At least now I’ll know how to act around him. Rolling away from me, Connor tugs me against him, so he’s spooning me, his lips brushing against the back of my neck until he falls asleep.



## CONNOR

Andie is gone when I wake up, as evidenced by my empty arms and my fucking empty bed. Shoving the coverlet away, I snag a T-shirt and a pair of sweats, padding my way downstairs.

It's the first time I have appeared in front of her in anything less than a suit. But I figure there's no point acting all professional now. Not when we've crossed that very pleasurable line.

Andie is in the kitchen, baking brownies, as I discover when I enter. Striding across the room, I press against her back, sliding my hands up her thighs until they're pressed against her stomach while I drop a light kiss in her hair.

"Morning," I rumble. Andie tips her head back to look up at me.

"Morning," she replies with a slight smile, turning her attention to her brownies. "I'll finish cutting these up and then make you breakfast. There's coffee in the machine."

Stepping away, I slap at her ass, stealing one of the cut brownies. Andie swats at my hand as I dance out of her reach, shoving the delicious treat into my mouth, grinning, and moving to the coffee machine.

The smell of cooking bacon fills the kitchen as I pour my mug of coffee. I take my cup and drop into my seat at the small table in the breakfast nook. My eyes follow her gorgeous arse as she cooks and plates up my food. Maybe I should make an effort to wake up earlier. This is nice.

With a smile, Andie slides the plate of bacon, eggs, and toast in front of me, moving around the kitchen, and cleaning up. I don't want her on the other side of the room, doing chores while I eat. I want her here with me.

"Come and sit with me while I eat, *leannán*," I call out to her.

I know she usually eats breakfast when I'm asleep, but she can still sit here. Andie starts in surprise, glancing over her shoulder at me with wide eyes.

After a beat, she crosses the room, grabbing a mug of coffee on her way. She slides into the chair across from me, curling her feet under her.

"How come your Irish accent comes and goes?" Andie asks after a long silence while I eat, and she drinks coffee.

Looking up at her, she has tipped her head to the side while studying me. I swallow my mouthful of bacon and grin wolfishly at her.

"People, women," I amend, and she flashes me a grin, "find it charming, so if I'm trying to be charming, I turn it on."

"Like my first day here," she points out. I shift in my seat. That was unintentional. I was just horny for her.

"Uh, kind of," I hedge. Andie's eyebrows shoot up at my awkward tone. "When I'm...." I pause, but she watches me

carefully, waiting for me to continue. Christ, this is awkward.  
“When I’m....”

I blow out a breath. I wish she’d fix her eyes somewhere else. I shrug. “When I’m attracted to a woman, I can’t help it.”

Andie blinks at me, looking bemused, and dissolves into giggles. She’s laughing so hard she has to put down her coffee and press the fingers of both her hands to her mouth to try to stifle the sound.

“Oh,” she finally manages to choke out while I grin at her. “I see.”

I continue to eat while she struggles to get her laughter under control.

“Is there any other time it happens, and you can’t help it?”

“When I’m angry.”

Andie nods again, pursing her lips and studying me carefully.

“So you turn on the charm, and people do what you want?”

My lips twist into a wry smirk. I sigh, reaching for my coffee mug. “*Leannán*. My life hasn’t been some great struggle.”

I gesture around the kitchen of the house I bought for myself and my mammy to live in when I was only twenty-two.

“I’ve the accent, the charm, the Fitzpatrick name. Poker comes as naturally to me as breathing. It always has. I was only a little lad when I realized I could read people’s faces the way other lads could read books.” The humor is long gone

from Andie's face as she watches me. "Life has been pretty easy for the most part."

I fall silent, and Andie doesn't speak until I've finished eating. Once I sit back from the clean plate, picking up my coffee, she finally breaks the silence. Leaning forward, her fingertips rest lightly on the back of my hand lying on the table.

"Do you honestly believe that your life is easy breezy?"

I blink at her, opening my mouth to reiterate what I said, closing it when I remember talking to her about my pa dying. About the fact that watching a man die evokes no emotion in me.

"Maybe not 'easy breezy'." I raise my eyebrows at her. "I've darkness in me, lass. I know that, but it's not been a hardship."

Andie nods, stroking the handle of her coffee mug with one hand while the other still lies on top of mine.

"How do you deal with your darkness?"

I stare at her, nonplussed. I've never really thought about it before.

"I suppose my mammy used to keep me grounded. She wasn't the kind of woman who would take any shite. If she thought I was acting in a way she felt was unacceptable, she wouldn't hesitate to cut me down to size. She had a way with words, my mammy did."

Andie nods, tapping the back of my hand. "I can't imagine what it must have been like to have a mother who did things like that. It must have been nice."

“It was a pain in my arse, *leannán*. The woman thought she was untouchable sometimes, and she often forgot who owned this house.”

“You never kicked her out.”

“Sure, I could never. She’s my mammy. You don’t do that to family.”

I shrug, moving my hand out from underneath hers, shoving it into the pockets of my sweats to hide the fact it’s now clenched into a fist. I hate that Andie doesn’t have nice memories of family. My family isn’t perfect or even normal, but it’s a family. I’d do anything for Mammy, Uncle Sean, and Seamus. Anything. Andie takes the hint and rises to continue cleaning.

# Chapter TEN

## Andie

Things have fallen into a rather comfortable pattern in the four days since Connor and I first went to bed together. Connor goes to Oracle most evenings after dinner to watch over his gambling operations.

But before he goes, he's working his way through having sex with me on every surface in the kitchen. Afterward, he showers and leaves. I don't see him again until mid-morning when he emerges for breakfast.

Honestly, I'm glad we have finally acted on the sexual chemistry between us. I was starting to get a complex that Connor wasn't feeling the tension the way I was. I'm especially glad of it when my phone beeps. I glance at it, a tightness filling my chest.

**HAMISH: Bby were u at?**

It takes a whole minute of staring before I swipe the message away, drop my phone like it's on fire, and move to start dusting the mainly unused sitting room. My mind is racing.

Why on earth is Hamish messaging me? Why is he trying to find out where I am? What on earth could he possibly want from me? He already stomped on my heart and stole my apartment from me. What more do I have for him to take?



Gritting my teeth as my phone beeps and *beeps*, I meticulously clean the rest of the living room, returning to where I dropped the phone, picking it up with cold fingers, scrolling through the messages.

**HAMISH: miss u**

**HAMISH: bby were u been?**

**HAMISH: u still in dot?**

**HAMISH: nobody seen u in over a month?**

**HAMISH: u even still alive?**

**HAMISH: u leave Boston?**

**HAMISH: Lou said he seen u at the Irish strip club**

**HAMISH: u working as a stripper bby?**

**HAMISH: u can strip 4 me if u lyk**

**HAMISH: u ignoring me?**

My phone beeps again. I almost drop it, I'm feeling so jumpy. But it's not Hamish. Mellie, the tanned, blue-eyed brunette I met at Oracle, Lauren's friend, has sent me an Irish stew recipe because I want to make it for Connor tonight.

Trying to put Hamish's confusing messages out of my head for a moment, I focus on the ingredient list. I have all those things here, so I don't need to go to the store.

Moving to the fridge and pantry, I throw myself into making dinner. But in the back of my mind, I can't help but have a constant thread running through it, wondering why the hell Hamish is trying to get back into contact with me. I don't for one second believe the "miss you" text. He must want

something. Thank God I didn't tell anyone back in Dot where I was moving to. Can you imagine if he showed up here?

While the stew is happily bubbling on the stove, I take myself and a glass of wine upstairs for a long soak in my lovely tub, styling my hair carefully, and picking out a pretty dress for when Connor comes home for dinner and our now daily sex session.

Feeling fresh and pretty, I return to the kitchen, stirring the stew and meticulously setting the table, selecting a bottle of wine. Is that too much? Putting the wine away, I make sure there is cold beer. I don't want it to feel like a date or something. I don't want to freak him out.

I have no delusions that this is anything but a fling, and I'm honestly okay with that. It's a very nice fling, and I have only recently been badly burned by men and relationships. A fun, flirty fling with my boss is perfect. When it ends, if things are super uncomfortable, I'll find another job. Maybe Lauren has another mobster I can be a housekeeper for. Or perhaps I could set up a house cleaning and cooking service for her mobsters.

After a while, I start to fidget. Connor would usually have been home a few hours ago, so I'm not sure what's going on. It's not like he texts me his movements.

At about eight o'clock, I give up waiting. Serving up two bowls of stew, I place one in the oven to keep warm and put the rest in plastic containers in the fridge. I slowly eat my stew, my eyes glued on the driveway outside. No headlights sweep in, and eventually, my bowl is empty no matter how slowly I eat.

Stifling a sigh, I tidy up the kitchen. The clock on the microwave reads almost ten o'clock. It's late. I'm tired. I hope Connor is okay, but I'm not going to text him and ask – that's not what we do.

I'm about to shut off the lights and head to bed when the headlights of his SUV sweep up the driveway. Thank goodness. No matter what I told myself, I was starting to worry something had happened to him.

My feelings of relief dry up wicked quick when Connor steps through the door, and my lungs feel like the air is being squeezed out of them.



## CONNOR

I'm about to head home, my head full of what delicious dish Andie will have made for dinner and which surface in the house I'm going to fuck her on.

I'm slowly working my way through the house. The kitchen is almost done, so maybe I'll eat her out and fuck her on the antique dining table. Yeah. A smirk tugs at my lips. That's what I'm going to do tonight.

Sliding into my SUV, I pull out of the Oracle parking lot, turning for home. Unfortunately, my pleasant thoughts are disturbed by my ringing phone. It's Seamus, so I quickly hit answer, his sharp tone ringing through the Bluetooth.

“Lucky, there’s been an issue with an arms shipment. Get the fuck down here to the warehouse right fucking now,” he snaps before hanging up.

Christ. There go my delectable evening plans. It’s my night off from the tables, so I was going to take my fucking time too.

The tires of my SUV screech as I pull into the parking lot at our warehouse, where we usually accept all our arms shipments. It’s otherwise empty because we don’t keep the guns there, but it’s a hotbed of activity at the moment.

I first see Paddy knocking some Eastern European-looking fuck out with a sharp uppercut. Beside him, Ronan has some cunt in a headlock while the fucker tries to elbow him in the gut.

Throwing myself out of the SUV, I tackle the asshole with the knife, attempting to sneak up on Niall while he cuts up someone else’s face.

Jesus fuck. I groan as the butt of the knife connects with my jaw. Thank fuck it wasn’t the pointy end. I can hear Seamus swearing, so he’s clearing fucking fine. Liam isn’t here because he’s probably watching over Tiggy.

That’s a shame. We could use the fucker right now. I grunt as I take a fist to the gut. The lad is handy with his fists and not too shabby with a knife.

We finally manage to subdue the lot of them. Only two of them are dead, which is a fair outcome. With Niall, you never can tell which way it will go, but he’s restrained himself tonight, which is a blessing.

Ronan and Paddy are tying them all up, and Seamus is on the phone with his father, organizing for them to be picked up and taken to Oracle so Niall can work them over one by one.

“What the fuck was this all about?” I groan, holding a handkerchief to my face, where I’m sporting a busted lip and a bleeding nose.

At least I didn’t get cut or lose any teeth. Both of those things would have fucking sucked.

“I have no fucking clue,” Seamus growls, “but it felt fucking personal.”

He turns to Niall, who is currently threatening the only one who is still conscious with his scary-looking, blood-stained knife.

“Niall, I want fucking answers,” he snaps.

Niall nods at him. “I’ll start with this one, Fitzzy.”

His hand closes around the man’s collar and yanks him until he’s standing, his hands and feet bound. Seamus nods as Niall and Ronan march the fucker over to Niall’s SUV, throwing him into the back. Sliding in, Ronan throws Seamus a mock salute as they squeal out of here, heading for Oracle.

Sean’s men arrive to collect the rest of them, and Seamus claps me on the back.

“It’s your night off, Lucky,” he chuckles. “You head home, and I’ll see you tomorrow at mine for a debrief.”

I shove my bloody handkerchief into my pocket, climbing into my SUV to drive home. My face is aching, and I want nothing more than to bury myself in Andie’s sweet-smelling

body. Unfortunately, it's almost ten, so I've no doubt the lass is tucked up in bed fast asleep.

Pulling into the drive, I slide out of the SUV and climb the stairs. The kitchen light is glowing around the doorframe. I'm surprised they are still on. Usually, the lass is asleep in bed by this time of night.

As I walk through the back door, Andie freezes, her hand resting on the light switch. She is clearly on her way to bed. My eyes drop to take in her attire. It's not her usual jeans and sweater combo.

She's wearing a pretty little sundress. She dressed up for me. My stomach jolts. Now I'm really cursing my luck that I got sidetracked on my way home.

Her eyes land on my face and widen. In half a dozen strides, she's across the room, her hands cupping my jaw tenderly.

"Oh my god. What happened?" Andie murmurs.

It's a rhetorical question, her eyes broadcasting that she really doesn't want to know. I let her shepherd me to the table while she fusses and fetches a first aid kit from one of the kitchen drawers.

Andie cleans up my face, especially my nose and lip, turning her attention to my split and bruised knuckles. I'm not paying much attention to my various aches and pains anymore.

All I'm focused on is that Andie is kneeling between my legs, dressed up like a pretty girl next door, ready for a fourth of July barbeque, smelling like mango and honey.

She packs up the first aid kit when she's finished, placing it on the table, freezing as my hand reaches out, stroking her silky hair, tied back underneath one ear.

Andie's eyes flit up to mine, and the kitchen is silent apart from our breathing, which becomes steadily more labored as we stare at each other.

Jesus fuck, I want her so badly. When her tongue darts out, tracing along her lower lip, I groan, her dilating at the sound.

Still without speaking, Andie's hands rest on my knees, slowly sliding over my thighs. I can't tear my eyes away from hers as she reaches my crotch, her fingers deftly unbuckling my belt and unzipping my trousers.

My lips part as she reaches in and takes out my dick, stroking firmly from base to tip, rolling her thumb over it. Christ. Andie licks her lips and leans forward, still holding my gaze. Sweet baby Jesus. *Yes.*

My breath comes out in short, sharp pants as her sweet mouth closes around the tip of my dick. Andie's tongue flutters around, and her eyes dip, to focus on what she's doing.

Released from her hypnotic gaze, I tip my head back, my eyes fluttering shut as my other hand slides through her hair. I'm in fucking heaven. She runs her tongue along the underside of my dick, taking me deep into her mouth as her hand slips into my trousers to cup and squeeze my balls.

Another groan rips out of me as the tip of my dick hits the back of her throat. Like that. Christ, like that. Andie makes a slight choking sound, swallowing as I gasp. I'm definitely in

fucking heaven right now, her throat constricting around my dick.

“Feck, *leannán*,” I growl. Spurred on by my appreciation, Andie bobs her head, occasionally massaging my balls until I can’t fucking take it anymore and explode.

The lass swallows, sitting back, my dick slipping out of her mouth as I stare down at her in shock. She kneels quietly in front of me, sitting back on her heels, her hands resting in her lap as she looks up at me. What a fucking perfect sight.

It might be completely caveman, but I quickly button my dick away, surging to my feet, tugging her up and lifting her, throwing her over my shoulder while she giggles as I carry her to my bed.



# Chapter ELEVEN

## Andie

Struggling through the door with hands full of groceries, I squeak in surprise at the sight of Connor standing in the kitchen, drinking coffee. He's not usually home in the middle of the afternoon when I get back from the grocery store, and if he is, he stays out in the mafia cottage.

Immediately, he sets down his mug, springing to grab the bags off me. I could get used to this kind of assistance... No. That's a bad idea. I can't get used to anything. I need to separate Connor, my boss, from Connor, my lover in my mind.

He watches me with laughing grey eyes while I put all the groceries away. When I turn away from the walk-in corner pantry, shutting the door behind me, Connor is still standing here; his hands shoved into the pockets of his charcoal-colored three-piece suit as he grins at me.

"Can I help you with something?" My eyebrows raise. Like, is he going to spring afternoon sex on me? I'd be okay with that.

"Come on." He tips his head at the archway through to the dining room.

Uh, okay? I trail after him, bemused, blinking in surprise. He has set up the dining table with cards and chips, like in his illegal gambling den.

“What’s this?” I ask, standing in the doorway, staring at the table. Connor grins at me, holding out a hand in invitation.

I automatically reach out and take his hand. Connor tugs me against him, his arms closing around me as he kisses me thoroughly.

“I’m going to teach you how to play poker,” he says against my lips. I lean back to study his face. He looks like an excited schoolboy. Holy shit. He’s adorably excited by the idea. Clearly, I can’t say no.

“Okay.”

Connor beams at me, stepping back and gesturing for me to sit at the head of the table. When I do, he takes the seat to my right, picking up a deck of cards and doing the cool shuffling move that looks like a waterfall.

I wonder if he’ll also teach me how to do it. That would be wicked *awesome*.

“There are many variations of poker.”

I school my face into a neutral expression and pay attention.

“The oldest type is called *straight* poker. You get dealt five cards, bet on your hand, and then show them. That’s usually not played very often anymore because there’s no real strategy in it.”

Okay. I don’t need to know the rules of straight poker, but I think this will be a full history of poker.

“*Draw poker* is when you are dealt five cards, but you can’t look at them. You choose to play, put your money in the middle of the table, in the pot, and look at your cards. Then

you can bet according to your hand. After you bet, you can discard up to three cards and take three new ones from the top of the deck. Then you all bet again and show your hands. Best hand wins.”

I’m never going to remember all of this. I hope there isn’t a test at the end because we haven’t even got to the actual rules yet.

“But I didn’t get five cards when I played. I only got two.”

What is *that* one? That’s the one I want to know how to play.

Connor nods, grinning at me. “That’s community card poker. What you played was *Texas hold ‘em*, but *Omaha* is also well known. You get two cards in Texas hold ‘em and four in Omaha.”

My eyes stay glued to the cards as Connor runs through all the *hands*. High card is the lowest value, through pair, two pairs, three of a kind, straight, flush, full house – which I won with – four of a kind, straight flush, and the royal flush is the best. This makes sense because it literally has the word royal in the name.

“Are you ready to play?” Connor waggles his eyebrows at me. Oh, yeah. I grin back at him.

“I’m going to win,” I tell him confidently. His grin grows wider.

“You’re that certain, huh?” he asks. I nod smugly. I won against all those men at Oracle. I can do this. “Certain enough to play *strip poker*?”

A blush steals across my cheeks. Okay. I don't think I'm that certain. But I came in with confidence. I can't back down now.

"Um, yes?" I squeak, my worry bleeding through into my tone. Connor hears it, his grin taking on a decidedly heated look.

I was too confident. *Way* too confident. He deals the first hand, and I peek at my cards. Ohh. Two aces. That's so good! Connor throws his cards on the table. Folding.

"Wait! No! I have a really good hand!"

"I know."

My mouth drops open. Uh. What? How? "Did you peek at my cards?"

"No, *leannán*," he chuckles, shaking his head. "Ye have very obvious tells."

I frown, laying my two aces down face up. Connor's eyes dart to them, and he smirks.

"What's a tell?"

Connor picks all the cards up, doing the waterfall shuffle again. "A tell is something you do with your face or body that gives away if you have a good or bad hand."

"Oh. You read it on my face?"

"I did." He seems very smug at the idea. Sighing, I reach for the cards, dealing a hand. Jack of clubs, seven of hearts. Okay. Not bad. I school my face into a neutral expression.

I search Connor's face, but it's a blank, impassive mask. Narrowing my eyes, I watch him as I flip over the fourth card.

His eyes take it in but...nothing.

“I can’t tell if you have a good or bad hand. What’re your tells?”

Connor smirks, shaking his head at me. “Oh, no, *leannán*. That’s not how it works. Ye need to learn to read my tells on your own.”

Boo. I flip over the fifth card. I have a pair of sevens. That’s not very good. We place our cards down. Shit. Connor has two pair. His fingers drum on the table as I sigh, grasping my hem and drawing my sweater over my head. It flutters to the ground as Connor’s heated eyes stare at my breasts.

His gaze flits back up to meet mine, a grin crossing his face as he swallows. “I’m enjoying this game, *leannán*.”

“I bet you are,” I grumble. Connor chuckles, shuffling the cards and dealing a hand.

In less than an hour, I’m sitting in the dining room wearing only my bra, panties, and a single sock, while Connor has only lost his jacket and belt.

Those were sheer luck because I forgot some rules and thought I had terrible hands when I had a flush and four of a kind.

I’m going to lose this hand. I know I am. But I have a plan. Sure enough, when we put our cards down, and Connor explains why he won and I lost, he smirks at me, his eyes dipping to my sock-clad foot.

Yeah, I figured he would think I would take my sock off next to preserve my modesty for a little longer. Not happening. I think it’s time to put my plan into action.

When I make no move to bend down to remove my sock, his eyes dart back up, widening as I reach behind me to unsnap my bra. I think my plan might be working.

His eyes greedily drink in the sight of my breasts, my nipples pebbling under his heated gaze. I giggle as I throw my bra at him. It lands on top of his shoulder. He growls. Like, actually growls, which makes me feel wicked desirable. It takes almost a whole minute before he swallows roughly, dragging his eyes back up to meet mine.

“Your deal,” I beam at him, turning my attention to the table.



## CONNOR

Andie smugly smirks as she deliberately avoids my gaze by staring at the table. Mechanically, I start dealing out the next hand, shifting in my seat as I do so.

I’ve been fucking hard for the last thirty-five minutes since she took off her damn shirt. But fuck me, now I’m almost in pain. As she reaches for her cards, her tits sway, and the hardened nipple of one brushes against the table. I groan, biting down on my knuckle.

My eyes keep dipping to her tits as she fidgets and moves around, her perky tits bouncing around with her.

“I win!” she giggles. What? I blink, staring at the hands we threw onto the table. Yeah, she did win. She got a full house.

When she claps in excitement, her tits bounce around again. I can't stop staring at them as I slowly unbutton my vest, shrugging out of it and throwing it to the other end of the table with her pile of clothes, my belt, and jacket.

Andie deals and I try to pay more attention, but every time she flips over a card, her nipples brush against the table, and I'm fucking mesmerized.

“I win again!” she squeals, bouncing around in excitement as I kick off one of my shoes. Whatever. Let's play the next hand. I want to see those tits bounce around some more.

I lose my other shoe and socks before I cop on to what she's doing. She's distracting me deliberately, the sneaky little minx. Forcing myself to keep my eyes on her face for the entire next hand, I win.

I lick my lips, but she doesn't lean forward to take off her remaining sock. Instead, Andie stands, and my mouth is drier than a desert as she shimmies out of her panties. Missing out on her bouncing tits was worth it for this moment.

Picking them up, she holds them out to me. I snatch them off her, shoving them into my pocket, licking my lips again as my eyes zero in on her pussy.

When she moves to sit back down, I can see a slight trail of wetness on the inside of her thighs. She's been sitting there, fucking *turned on* this whole time. Jesus. Fuck.

Andie moves to deal the cards, but fuck that shit. I have other ideas. Sliding off my chair, I walk on my knees over to

her, grabbing one of her knees in each of my hands.

Tugging her thighs apart, I bury my face in her wet heat. She gasps, her fingers tangling in my hair, but I'm focused on her fucking sweet taste.

I dip my tongue into Andie, swirling my way up until I find her clit, lashing it with my tongue and sucking it into my mouth. Increasing the pressure, Andie's hips start to writhe and buck.

Gripping her hips tightly, I hold her in position and suck even harder until she shatters.

"Connor," she moans breathily. I grin against her clit. I don't think I'll ever get sick of hearing Andie moan my name as I make her come. Fucking *ever*.

Lifting my head, I smirk smugly at the blissful look on her face, her eyes closed, a contented smile playing over her lips.

Picking her up, I set her on the table, stepping between her legs. Nudging her thighs apart with my hips, I kiss my way up her neck while unbuttoning my trousers and lifting my dick out. I've been waiting for this from the moment she walked into the house.

Setting my dick at her opening, I murmur meaningless things against her ear as I slide smoothly into her, groaning as her tight, swollen inner muscles clench at my dick until I'm fully sheathed.

"Oh, Connor," she breaths, her arms closing around my neck and her tits pressing against my shirt as I slowly start to rock in and out of her.



Every other time I've had Andie, I've fucked her. Proper, hard, fucking. This time I take my sweet time, savoring the feel of her pussy clenching at my dick as I withdraw, smoothly sliding back into her to the hilt.

Andie is mewling, moaning, and gasping, her fingers gripping my neck and shoulder tightly as her legs wrap around my waist. I tighten my hold on her hip, my other hand sliding up her neck, cupping the back of her head as my lips find hers.

I devour her mouth while continuing my slow, steady pace until she whimpers against my lips. Andie's pussy contracts hard around my dick as she comes, milking me. I can't hold off any longer. My hips jerk as I come along with her.

Burying my face into her neck, I struggle to catch my breath. Andie hugs me tightly, her own breathing ragged.

"I think I'm getting better at poker."

Her breath brushes my neck as she pants. I snort, chuckling into the smooth skin of her neck.

"At least ye know the rules now."

Andie giggles, tightening her grip on me and pressing a kiss into my hair.

# Chapter Twelve

## Andie

Dappled sunlight spills into the room, and I rub my nose and frown. The sun is in the wrong place, and I feel...heavy.

Hair tickles my cheek as Connor nuzzles my collarbone in his sleep. Why is Connor here? The room comes into focus as I blink away my sleepiness. I'm in Connor's bed. That's why he's here. Why am I in Connor's bed?

I stay very still, not wanting to disturb him where he's curled around me, his leg thrown over both of mine, his face buried in my neck.

It is an altogether wicked nice way to wake up. Of course, when I went to sleep – while Connor was at work – I was in *my* bed. So, I either sleepwalked up here, or he came home, came into my bedroom, picked me up, carried me back downstairs and up to his room, put me into his bed, climbed in with me, and fell asleep snuggling me.

That seems farfetched, so I'm going with the sleepwalking thing. When Connor got home, I was snuggled up in his bed, and he climbed in with me. Yeah, that sounds so much more realistic.

My trying to stay still doesn't work, and Connor nuzzles my neck, his lips moving. A soft moan escapes my lips, and he starts kissing my neck, his tongue swirling over my pulse-point. His hand strokes across my stomach, slipping beneath

my cotton panties, finding my clit, and rolling it between his fingers until I'm squirming.

I think he might be leaving a hickey on my neck. My hips lift, and Connor takes the hint, moving his lips up my neck and latching onto my mouth, kissing me deeply as he crawls over me, spreading my legs and sinking into my wet heat.

Okay. This is *definitely* a wicked nice way to wake up. He thrusts swiftly, rocking my world. I lift my hips in time with his pumps, chasing my release. It bursts over me as Connor groans, thrusting deep and sighing against my lips.

He rolls off me, throwing his arm over his eyes. I blink, staring and trying not to giggle as he quickly falls back asleep. My heart is racing, my core is throbbing, and I feel awake and sated. I'm ready for my breakfast and running routine.

Connor strolls into the kitchen, dressed in his suit, his eyes roaming over my sundress.

"Morning," he rumbles. I smile over my shoulder, moving to make his eggs and toast. Furnishing himself with a cup of coffee, he drops into his chair at the table as I slide the plate in front of him. He doesn't ask me to sit with him, so I start washing up the breakfast pan.

Connor appears at my side, placing his dishes in the sink and pressing a kiss against my temple.

"Have a good day, *leannán*."

"You too."

He disappears through the backdoor. I allow myself a moment to grin goofily, letting the dishwater out of the sink.

I think I will give the two spare bedrooms on my floor a thorough dusting, vacuuming, and cleaning. Unused rooms collect dust at an unbelievable rate, and I haven't been into either of them since Paddy gave me a tour on my first day here almost two months ago.

Once I'm satisfied with the cleanliness of the first room, I move across the hall to the one beside me, which has two twin beds rather than a full-size like my room and the other spare room. I flip the mattresses, vacuum, dust the room, and move to dust inside the closet.

Opening the doors, I sink to my knees, first reaching in to dust the back corners. I pause as my eyes land on the plush Disney toy.

Bile rises in my throat as I rock back onto my heels, the toy in my hand as I stare at it. Tiggy mentioned that her baby would be the first baby in her husband's crew when she was here. In *Connor's* crew. So who's toy is this? And why is it in a closet in a room with two single beds in Connor's house?

Leaving the toy on one of the beds, I continue my cleaning spree, my eyes darting back and finding the yellow and blue toy with its huge eye far too often.

Once the room is completely dust-free, I snag the toy, carrying it with me and propping it on the toilet seat while I take a bath, glaring at it as I have a long, hot soak.

I waste time carefully blow-drying and styling my hair, sliding into jeans and a baggy sweater like I haven't worn

when Connor comes home for dinner and sex since we first slept together.

I hear his SUV on the drive, so I grab the toy and go to the kitchen, checking on the roast pork in the oven. The kitchen smells wonderful, and I prop the toy on the small table while I warm the plates.

Connor comes in, sauntering over to me and dropping a kiss on my temple. He doesn't comment on my sweater and jeans combo, sliding his hands down, cupping my ass, and squeezing it.

“It smells amazing in here, *leannán*.”

He grins, crossing to the fridge and collecting two beers. When he takes them over to the table, he pauses for the briefest moment, setting the beers on the table and snagging up the toy, turning to me with his eyebrow quirked.

“For Seamus' wean?” he asks me.

I blink at him. Who? “Uh, who is Wayne?”

Connor chuckles, snorting and shaking the toy at me. “Not *Wayne*, lass. *Wean*. Seamus and Tiggy's baby?”

Oh shit. He thinks I bought the toy as a gift. Which means he has no idea what it is.

“I didn't buy it.”

Connor frowns, looking down at the toy, weighing it in both hands.

“Did someone leave it on the stoop then?” he asks slowly.

I feel a pang of fear. Uh, is that a mafia thing? Like the horse head in the bed? Connor's tense shoulders relax as I

shake my head, but he looks very perplexed.

“I was dusting and cleaning the two spare bedrooms,” I tell him quietly, nodding to the toy. “That was in the closet in the room with the two beds.”

As I serve our dinner, Connor looks back at the toy, studying it carefully. When I carry the plates over, we sit down, and he places it carefully on the table, off to the side, reaching for his beer, his eyes still glued to the toy.

Neither of us speaks as we eat our meal. At least, neither of us speaks until we’re almost finished. Connor’s eyes narrow at the toy.

“It must belong to one of the Moldovan weans.” He is weighing his words carefully, toying with his fork.

“Moldovans?” My fork freezes halfway to my mouth, confusion coloring my tone. Connor’s eyes dart over me. He looks torn like he doesn’t want to elaborate.

“The Italians wanted Lauren,” he sighs at last. I feel like I’ve had a bucket of iced water thrown over me. I remember those Italian guys. I remember them coming over a few times.

They trashed Lauren and Josh’s apartment and pissed in there. They killed Mrs. Dawkins. What the hell did they want with Lauren? My eyes fill with tears, and I abruptly stand, grabbing the plates and mechanically cleaning the kitchen while Connor silently watches me with worry.

Once I’ve finished, he stands, holding out his hand to me. Wordlessly, I take it. He flips off the light, leading me out of the kitchen and up the stairs to his bedroom. I don’t have any

sleep things up here, but Connor hands me one of his T-shirts and a pair of cotton boxer briefs, gesturing to his bathroom.

I dress on autopilot, and when I emerge, he ducks in, coming back out in sweats, his chest gloriously bare. Connor nods to the bed, and I obediently crawl in, watching as he flips off the light, sliding in beside me.

In the light from the nightstand, I look over and study Connor. I'm underneath the coverlet, but I'm sitting up, hugging my knees to my chest, while he lies beside me, one hand underneath his head while the other lays on his bare chest. Taking a deep breath, I ask the most important question.

“What did the Italians want with Low?”

Connor's eyes fix on my face, and he hesitates, blowing out a heavy breath.

“Her brother Josh refused to take a fall in a fight, which cost the Italians a lot of money. So they killed him. They wanted Lauren to work off her brother's debt.”

Uh. Okay. But before she met and married Paddy with all his mafia money, Lauren was just as much of a broke bitch as I am.

I stare at Connor, uncomprehending as he raises his eyebrows. Oh my god. I realize what he's saying, blood flooding my cheeks as I mouth furiously at him.

“Lauren would *never* agree to be a prostitute!”

He nods slowly. “Aye, lass. But they wouldn't have been asking her.”

I pale at the implication. Oh my god. Thank god for Paddy Flynn.

“Paddy would never have allowed it,” Connor smirks at me. Well, I’m glad he can smile about it because I feel faintly nauseous.

“What does this have to do with Moldovans and Disney toys?” I finally ask once I have moved past the fact that the Italians looking for Lauren wanted to force her into prostitution against her will.

Connor’s fingers beat a staccato against his chest, and he chews his tongue for a moment before replying.

“Clearly, we weren’t going to hand over Lauren,” he snorts. “Paddy was head over heels for the lass, even then.”

As appalled as I am, I have to bite back a smile at his statement. Paddy and Lauren are so cute.

“So we asked the Italians for their shopping list.”

Their...what?



## CONNOR

After staring at me, bewildered for a long moment, Andie hugs her knees tighter to her chest.



“They wanted you to buy groceries for them?” she speaks slowly, sounding doubtful. I chuckle at the absurdity of her words, poking up quickly when she glares at me.

“No, lass,” I sigh, lifting my hand off my chest and reaching over, running my fingertips along her bare arm until they get to her hand where it is gripping her leg.

Andie lets me take her hand, resting our clasped hands on the bed between us.

“A shopping list is a list of things they wanted us to do to get them to leave Lauren alone. Relinquish their claim to her, so to speak.”

Andie pales again like she knows it will be an unpleasant list.

“What kind of things?” she whispers, looking faintly ill and a little scared.

Jesus fuck. I don't want to tell her this. Andie's not cut out for mafia life. She deserves a happy, light-filled life where the worst things only happen on the telly.

“Paddy had to take a fall in a fight.” I start with the easiest one. Andie nods, looking at me expectantly. “Niall, one of the other lads in the crew, had to carry out four hits.”

Her fingers flex where I'm holding them, but she doesn't tug her hand away.

“Niall?” she asks softly, but I'm pretty sure she knows the answer to the question that she's asking. “From the wedding?”

“Yeah. Niall Byrne.”

Her eyes widen, and she looks like she's about to hurl, taking a deep, shuddering breath. Yeah, she knows who the Irish Reaper is.

“He's Mellie's husband.”

Andie's eyes widen further. She remembers Niall from the wedding and saw Niall the night at Oracle. She has certainly spent some time with Mellie.

“Mellie and... the *Reaper*?” she asks hesitantly. I smirk at her. I thought the same thing, but they seem well suited.

“Aye. Well, there's no accounting for taste, lass.”

The tiniest smile tugs at the corners of her lips. Swallowing it down, she sighs.

“That still doesn't explain the toy.”

Damn it. Andie knows I'm trying to avoid telling her. My lass is too clever.

“The last thing on the list was that we had to hold some collateral.”

I stroke my thumb over her knuckles, carefully studying her face. Andie has no fucking idea what it means. Of course she doesn't. As I said, Andie's not cut out for mafia life.

She's kind and sweet and goodness personified. She bakes for fun, for fuck's sake! Still stroking her knuckles with my thumb, I sigh, coming clean.

“A Moldovan owed the Italians some money. A *lot* of money. They weren't sure when he would be able to pay, so they made him hand over something precious to them for collateral. His children.”

Andie makes a small whimpering noise, and she's gone statue still. I push on, needing to get this out quickly so I can comfort her.

"Seven and four. They stayed here with my mammy while I went to stay with Paddy and Lauren to act as Lauren's bodyguard."

There's absolute silence in the room for a long, drawn-out moment, and I'm tense, half expecting her to wrench her hand and run screaming. Maybe not out of the house, but definitely out of my bed. To my surprise and relief, she doesn't go anywhere. She doesn't even stop holding my hand.

"They went back to their father?" Andie finally whispers slowly, relaxing as I nod.

"Yeah, they went back to their Pa once he had paid. That's when my mammy told me that she wanted out. Said she drew the line at holding children as collateral."

Andie nods slowly, chewing on her lower lip as we lapse back into silence.

It's another ten minutes before either of us moves or speaks again. Andie lays down, curling up on her side to face me, our hands still clasped between us.

"Okay. Should we post their toy back to them?"

I blink at her in surprise. Jesus fuck. *That's* what the lass is thinking about? The idea never fucking occurred to me. Andie blushes when I stare at her for a long moment without speaking.

"What?" she asks defensively. A slow smile settles across my face.

“You took all that better than I thought you would.”

Andie frowns, sighing. “The children weren’t hurt?”

“Not at all. They were treated very well here with my mammy. She made it seem like she was looking after them while their father was busy working.”

Nodding, Andie brushes a strand of hair out of her face as she shrugs.

“Lauren is safe. That’s all that matters.”

My heart thuds in my chest out of sheer relief. I hadn’t realized how worried I was that Andie might call time on whatever the fuck we are doing.

I’m not close to being done with her. Not by a fucking long shot. Flipping off the bedside lamp, I tug her into my arms, closing my eyes as I bury my face in her neck and inhale her sweet mango and honey scent. Andie’s fingers trace slow circles on my upper arm. It feels right to have her in my arms as we fall asleep.

Like most nights, when I got home last night, Andie had already gone to bed. But when I was ready to slide into bed, I didn’t feel like sleeping alone.

I had argued with myself the entire fucking way to her room and then stood beside her bed, looking down at her while she looked so peaceful and beautiful as she had slept.

I didn’t want to get into bed with her because that would have felt like I was intruding on her private space, so I gently pulled back her coverlet and picked her up.

She hadn't woken, but she had snuggled up against me, murmuring my name, making my heart thump. I carried her to my bed, settled her there, and slid in beside her, wrapping myself around her, much like I am now.

I slept like a fucking baby, much like I'm sure I will tonight. I like the feeling of sleeping soundly. I don't want to lose it.

"Lass," I whisper against her hair, and she murmurs sleepily back to me, letting me know she is still awake. "On nights when I have to run the tables...." I pause, swallowing roughly, but forge ahead before losing my nerve. "I want ye to come and sleep in here, okay?"

Andie stills underneath me for a moment. Even her breathing seems to have stopped. Finally, she makes a small noise of agreement.

"Okay," she whispers back. I smile against her neck as I close my eyes to sleep.

# Chapter THIRTEEN

## Andie

Walking into the kitchen, I spot my phone lying on the side counter, charging innocuously. Crossing to it, I unplug it, glancing at it. My stomach plummets, a sour taste filling my mouth.

Sighing, I swipe the notification away on my phone. Another eight messages from Hamish last night. Thank goodness I have stopped taking it to bed with me. When Connor asked me to sleep in his bed every night, even when I went to bed before he got home, I thought it best not to take it up to bed if it woke him in the morning.

I wonder if I should get a new number. As I stare at Hamish's spamming messages with distaste, a call from Lauren comes through, diverting me.

"Hi, Low. What's up?"

She pauses, distracted from whatever she is going to say.

"What's wrong?"

I internally curse, gritting my teeth. Of course Lauren knows something is wrong! How the hell does she even do that?

"It's nothing."

I try to brush it off, but Lauren is nothing if not persistent.

“It’s Hamish. He’s started sending me text messages. A lot of text messages.”

“Saying what?” She sounds pissy. I rub the heel of my hand against my thigh. I know Low. She’ll bug me unless I tell her. I should skip the whole nagging bit....

“That he misses me. Asking where I am, that kind of stuff.”

“Fucking asshole,” Lauren swears low under her breath.

“It’s fine. I can handle it. I ignore him. He sends a bunch and then stops for a week,” I rush to assure her. “What did you call about?”

I manage to distract her successfully.

“I want you and Connor to come to dinner tonight. I haven’t had anyone over for dinner now that I have this wicked amazing house. Tiggy goes to bed ridiculously early; now she’s ready to pop. Mellie and Fee are always at Oracle, so you two are it.”

“Aw, shucks. Way to make a girl feel special,” I drawl wryly.

Lauren laughs at me. “Please say you’ll come. I have the menu planned and everything.”

“I’ll come. But I can’t speak for Connor.”

Lauren laughs. “Not to worry. I have got Paddy working on him.”

Lauren always did like my jelly donuts, so I set about making a batch to take with me tonight. I wonder if Connor is going to agree to come too.

We've been continuing our little fling, and honestly, it feels like we're in a relationship. We eat dinner together every night, and we share a bed. I don't keep any clothes or whatever up in his room, but I do go to sleep there every night, even when he's at work, and when I wake up in the morning, he's always wrapped around me like a koala, his face buried in my neck.

Still, dinner at Lauren and Paddy's would feel like a couples dinner or a double date. Yeah, he's probably going to say no. More jelly donuts for the rest of us.



## CONNOR

I glance up as Paddy strides into the kitchenette. “What brings you in at this time of day?”

He raises an eyebrow, snatching my coffee mug off me. Prick. Flipping him off, I start making another cup.

“You’re coming to dinner at the house tonight.”

Uh, what? “No offense, but I’m happy with the dinner the lass will have waiting for me at home.”

Paddy smirks, leaning his hip against the metal counter, and sipping my coffee.

“Well, I don’t know what you’ll be eating because your lass will be at our house eating the dinner Lauren is planning.”



Frowning, I dig my phone out of my pocket, but there's no message from Andie telling me about a change of dinner plans.

"She's not mentioned it."

"Does she inform you of everything?" Paddy mocks.

"Uh. Yes. Housekeeper. House owner. That's how it works."

"Whatever. Lauren said she's spoken to Andie, and she's in. So you're the only one we're waiting to say yes."

"Who else is coming?"

"No one. It'll be the four of us."

"Intimate," I smirk. Paddy rolls his eyes, draining the mug and setting it into to industrial dishwasher.

"It's what Lauren wants. Be there, or I'll fuck up your face."

"Whipped, much?"

Amusement flickers across Paddy's face. It's nice how much he's mellowed since he met his lass. Annoying as fuck, but nice. He's more like he was a teenager before his parents were murdered. I've missed the fucker.

"She makes it worth my while when I do what she wants."

He's totally talking about getting his dick sucked. It's obvious from the fleeting look of pleasure flashing in his eyes.

"So, I'm supposed to have dinner with my best mate, his wife, and my housekeeper?"

“Your housekeeper is having dinner with her best friend and her friend’s husband. You’re there to make an even number. Apparently, that shit matters. Also, so I don’t have to listen to conversations about...shoes.”

Paddy officially has no fucking clue what women talk about at dinner parties. I don’t either, but I’m sure it’s not exclusively *shoes*.

“You’re coming. End of discussion.”

“I’ll be there. Don’t worry.”

“Be a gentleman. Bring the lass.”

“I said don’t worry.”

Nodding, Paddy strides off as I stir my new coffee, sipping it propped against the counter. I don’t suppose there’s an excuse I can make to get out of going tonight.

It’s not that I have an issue going to this double date dinner party, per se. It’s just that it feels like a *date*. If I were going to take the lass on a date, my first choice wouldn’t be Paddy’s house with his little wife. I know she’s close friends with Andie, but a first date should be...somewhat private.

The lass and I aren’t dating. We’re... I have no fucking clue. But we’re not *dating*. Are we?

# Chapter Fourteen

## Andie

The house is sparkling, so I head upstairs to prepare for dinner before Connor gets home. I haven't been to a fancy dinner party in West Roxbury before, so I pick out my nicest dress: the one I wore to Lauren and Paddy's wedding and a pair of black suede stilettos.

I loved this dress the second I lay eyes on it. It's dark grey, with three-quarter sleeves and a boat neck, showing off my collarbones. The bodice is fitted and hugs my hips and ass, flaring to my knees.

I knot my hair into a loose chignon, adding dangling silver earrings and keeping my makeup semi-natural, though I do ring my eyes with black liner and add a mulberry lip for a bit of color.

I start with surprise when a dark shape appears in the mirror. Jumping, I spin to see Connor leaning against the doorjamb, his hands in the pockets of his dark grey suit, his feet crossed at the ankle.

His heated eyes slide over my figure as I turn to him, slowly trailing down to my feet and back up again. His tongue darts out and wets his lips, and when he finally speaks, his voice is husky, which had my stomach clenching.

"Ye look beautiful, *leannán*," he breathes. My cheeks heat up as I blush. "Are ye ready to leave?"

Not trusting myself to speak without sounding ridiculously breathy, I simply nod. Connor straightens, gesturing for me to lead the way. I grab my silver clutch purse on the way out of the bedroom, and I catch Connor's excited grin as I collect the covered basket of jelly donuts on our way through the kitchen.

Connor helps me into the front seat of his SUV, pulling out of the drive. There's some soft jazz coming out of the radio, and I blink at it in surprise.

The only other time I have been in his car, it was playing pop music that I sang along to humiliatingly loudly and out of tune. Jazz suits him better than pop music, with his sharp suits and love of poker.

"Oh, lass." Connor glances over at me when we turn out of his street. "You should know that I call Lauren *seamair no cheithre duilleog*."

I blink at him in surprise, hoping the fact that my heart has sunk into the soles of my stilettos isn't broadcast across my face. I thought having Connor call me things in Irish was my special little thing. But apparently not.

"What does it mean?" I ask at last, proud I have managed to keep the hurt out of my voice.

"My four-leaf clover," he replies easily with a smirk.

"Oh," is all I manage, his eyes darting to me. "Like a lucky charm?"

Connor chuckles. "I was having a run of luck the night we all met Lauren. I started calling her it as a joke, but now...." He shrugs, an evil grin tugging at the corners of his lips. "Well, it pisses Paddy the fuck off, which is an added bonus."

He smirks as I blink uncertainly at him. “That’s something you aspire to? Pissing Paddy off?”

Connor’s smirk widens to a mischievous grin. “All my life.”

“But... why?” I’m so confused. Connor glances across the SUV at me in surprise, shrugging like he hasn’t just ripped through my little fantasy.

“Because it’s fun.”

I stay silent. It’s clearly more than that. Connor eventually sighs into the silence.

“Because he stole Seamus from me.”

There it is. “Stole him?”

Connor shifts uneasily in his seat, shrugging again. “We moved from Ireland when I was eight, and Seamus was nine. With his parents and my mammy. We were excited lads. It was a grand adventure, to be sure.”

He has slipped back into his Irish accent, but I think it’s subconscious this time.

“Paddy was the first lad Seamus met over here, and they clicked. Thick as thieves from the get-go.”

“And you felt left out in the cold,” I surmise quietly.

He nods, sighing. “Aye, *leannán*, and so I did. My cousin was my best mate, and now he had a new one. It seemed like there was no place in his life for me anymore.”

“But you *like* Paddy.”

He snickers. “And so I do, *leannán*. But I like pissing him off more.”

The cheeky grin is back now, and what the hell, I grin conspiratorially back at him.

“Well then, let’s hope it riles him wicked good.”

Connor’s eyes light up at my words, and he reaches over to take my hand, squeezing it and bringing it to my lips, brushing a kiss over my knuckles.

“That’s the spirit, *leannán*.”

My heart thuds. Okay, maybe the talking it Irish thing isn’t special, but this feels a little special. It will have to do.

Paddy and Lauren only live ten minutes away from Connor’s house, so we arrive in no time. Connor helps me out of the SUV.

I fight the urge to shiver as we walk up the paved path to their stoop because Connor puts his hand on my back to guide me, running his hand lightly up my back from the top of my ass until it rests between my shoulder blades.



## CONNOR

Paddy and Lauren answer the doorbell, probably because Paddy is an overprotective bastard and wouldn’t let Lauren answer it alone if her glare at him has anything to do with it.

“Andie!” Lauren shrieks, knocking my hand off the lass’s back as she pulls her into a tight hug.

“Hey, Connor.” Lauren offers me a smile once she has finally released my lass.

“*Seamair no cheithre duilleog,*” I smirk at her, earning a glare from Paddy.

“Lauren, or silence,” he hisses at me, slapping me upside the head as Andie and I step in through the door.

As Lauren takes Andie’s delicious-smelling baked goods, I see the smirk Andie is trying to hide. Catching her eye, I wink, and she stifles her giggles, though a tiny one slips out.

Andie looks absolutely mouthwatering tonight. When I arrived home, I went straight upstairs to shower and dress since Paddy had told me that I had to come, no matter what, because Lauren was determined to have us over for dinner, and what Paddy’s little lass wants, Paddy’s little lass gets.

When I went searching for Andie, I found her in her bathroom, putting the finishing touches on her makeup. Though I had initially searched for her to see if she was ready to go so we wouldn’t be late, I stood there watching her because she looked so fucking gorgeous.

Paddy hands me a beer and Andie a glass of white wine as Lauren leads us into the formal dining room. I’m sure they’ve never used this room before. When I stayed here with them, we only ever used the kitchen table.

Paddy smiles at Andie, taking a stab at conversation. “You look nice, Andie. Is that a new dress?”

Andie smiles back at him, but Lauren snorts before she can open her mouth to respond.

“She wore it to our wedding, Paddy.” She rolls her eyes.

Andie was at their wedding looking like *this*? And I didn’t fucking notice her that night? What a fucking travesty. I must have been drunker than I had thought at that reception. I clearly took the wrong woman home that night.

“I only had eyes for ye at our wedding, lass.” Paddy – the fucking smooth-talking prick – wraps his arms around his wife, murmuring into her ear.

She stops glaring at him immediately, giggling up at him instead. Jesus fuck. They’re a sappy, loved-up pair. Sometimes I forget what it was like to live in the house with them for about a month. It was fucking awkward.

Every time I call Lauren my four-leaf clover while eating dinner, Paddy gets a little more riled up. His eyes are promising me pain before we even finish the main course.

At the same time I have been winding Paddy up, I have also been playing footsie with Andie underneath the table. She moves her feet away and stiffens up each time I call Lauren *seamair no cheithre duilleog*.

At first, I thought she was anxious that Paddy would retaliate, but now I think it’s because she doesn’t like it any more than Paddy. I’ve spent the last ten minutes trying to figure out what problem the lass would have with it, but I can’t for the life of me think of a reason.

Lauren disappears into the kitchen to fetch dessert, taking our plates with her.



“Where’s the bathroom, Paddy?” Andie asks, placing her napkin on the table.

“Down the hall to the left, lass,” Paddy replies, gesturing as she stands.

“Thanks. I’ll be right back.” She smiles over the table, placing her hand on his arm.

Suddenly it clicks. I fucking get it. Andie doesn’t like it when I call Lauren a nickname in Irish for the same reason I don’t like it when she touches Paddy.

Lauren returns before Andie does, carrying a tray of jelly donuts. Paddy blinks in surprise, doing a double-take as his eyes land on the plate.

“I thought that you made a pie for dessert?”

Lauren laughs. “I did, but no one can hold a candle to Andie’s baked goods. *Trust me.*”

I smirk at Paddy, who glares back at me. He still wants to cause me pain for my jibes all night.

Andie returns at that moment, the back of her hand brushing against Paddy’s arm as she moves past him. It’s accidental and innocent and has me seeing fucking red.

As soon as she sits down, I rest my arm along the back of her chair, my fingers stroking the back of her neck. She stiffens under my hand, surprise radiating off her.

This is the first open sign I’ve given all night that we’re together. Paddy and Lauren’s eyes dart to my fingers. Lauren swallows a knowing smile while Paddy stares in shock.

Andie is distracted by the sight of her donuts in the middle of the table.

“Oh, Low. You didn’t have to serve them up!”

Lauren laughs, rolling her eyes as she serves a jelly donut onto each plate.

“Yes, I did. Anything I made will seem sad in comparison.”

Paddy tries to argue, but Lauren snatches up one of the donuts and shoves it in his mouth, which has him shutting up quickly. He swallows down the mouthful, grinning and placing another donut on his plate, the first one still in his mouth.

“They’re good, lass.”

Andie bites back a smile, picking up her own donut. I keep my fingers stroking her neck as I eat my donut, smiling smugly as Andie’s hand tentatively brushes over my thigh, disappearing quickly into her lap. It’s a start.

Andie and Lauren share a long hug when we leave. Paddy and I nod stiffly at each other. He still hasn’t had a chance to take a swing at me. I might cop it tomorrow.

Paddy and Lauren disappear back inside as I guide Andie back to the car. Christ. I have a point to make before we get home.

Andie is surprised when I open the back door for her instead of the front. Still, she obligingly slides in, staring as I climb in after her, closing the door as the overhead lights turn off, plunging us into darkness.

“Why are we sitting in the backseat of your car, Connor?” Andie whispers. But we’re not in here to talk.

I growl at Andie, tugging her until she's seated astride me, tilting my head back, and pulling her face down to mine, kissing her deeply.

"Ye didn't like it when I called Lauren *seamair no cheithre duilleog*, did ye *leannán*?" I murmur against her lips.

"That's not -," she starts to protest.

"Don't ye ever lie to me, lass," I growl. Andie falls silent for a moment.

"I didn't like it," she admits in a whisper. "It felt too intimate."

I know exactly what she means. I slide my fingers into her hair, holding her head close enough to see her eyes in the darkness.

"I didn't like it when ye touched Paddy," I whisper back, rewarded with a sharp intake of breath from Andie.

"It won't happen again."

A smug smirk tugs at my lips as I pull her even closer.

"Aye, lass. It better not. And I'll not be talking to another lass in Irish again."

"Aye," Andie breathes against my lips, "you better not."

I'm fucking undone at her teasing. Fumbling with my belt and fly, I get them open as I shove her panties aside, groaning softly at their lacy feel. Thrusting my hips up, I sink into her.

Andie's breath catches, her fingers gripping my shoulders tightly, drawing a groan from me.

“Why will ye not be touching other lads?” I hold her hips in position, roughly thrusting up.

“Because I’ll only be touching you,” Andie gasps, her forehead tipping forward to rest against my shoulder, her cheek pressed against my jaw.

“And why will ye only be touching me?”

Andie moans. “Because I’m your woman.”

That’s fucking right. She’s my woman.

I thrust up hard, groaning as I come. “Aye, *leannán*. Ye are.”

Moving a hand off her hip, I find her clit and grind my thumb against it, still thrusting. Andie tenses and comes, murmuring my name as she does. Jesus fuck. That will never get old.

# Chapter FIFTEEN

## CONNOR

Striding through the hallway, I glance around. Usually, Tiggy hovers somewhere, hugely pregnant, but the house is almost eerily quiet. Maybe she's upstairs having a nap.

Opening the door to Seamus's den, I step into the room, noting that I'm the last to arrive.

"Lads -."

Paddy's fist smashes into my jaw before I see it coming, and I'm laid out on the floor. Seamus blinks over at us, smirking as he returns to looking at the takings figures on his iPad Ronan has emailed through.

"You should stop winding him up about his wife if you want to keep your jaw intact, Lucky," Seamus snorts. I flip him off, accepting the hand Paddy is offering to help me up.

I shrug, dusting my suit off. "Don't worry. I'll be calling her Lauren from now on."

Seamus looks up, his eyebrows rising in surprise, while Paddy smirks knowingly. Arsehole.

"I guess I'm not the only person it pissed off last night?" he drawls. I flip him off again, but Seamus has copped on to our conversation.

"Are you sleeping with your housekeeper, Lucky? How cliché of you."

“Aye, you can fuck right off, both of you,” I snap at them, not wanting their comments on what Andie and I are doing in private. Paddy shifts uncomfortably for some reason.

“Lucky,” he sighs, rubbing the back of his head. I swear, he better fucking not be about to warn me off Andie because she’s Lauren’s friend. If he does, I’ll return the favor of laying him out on the floor.

“What?”

Paddy sighs again, clapping me on the shoulder. “Lauren told me something last night. About Andie. Something she thought you ought to know.”

Paddy looks uncomfortable as fuck right now, and Seamus has given up all pretense of reading his iPad.

“What, are we in fucking high school?” I snort, but Paddy still looks completely serious. What the fuck about Andie does Lauren think I should know because we’re sleeping together?

“Her ex has been texting her.”

I stare at Paddy in shock while Seamus snorts with mirth.

“Jesus fuck,” he drawls. “We *are* in fucking high school.”

Paddy ignores him, watching me carefully. Waiting for my reaction. What? Am I supposed to rant and rave? I’m not some kid with a crush.

“Andie can text whoever she wants,” I say stiffly. Except we agreed last night that she was my woman and she wouldn’t be touching anyone else. For some reason, the blood pumping through my veins turns ice-cold, my heart sinking. Jesus fuck, what’s that all about?

Paddy shrugs, still looking awkward. “Andie isn’t texting him. Apparently, the prick is harassing her.”

*What?* Since *when?* I’m not fucking cold anymore. Anger is coursing through me. Whatever is broadcast on my face, Seamus has abandoned his seat and his iPad as he and Paddy physically restrain me.

“You should probably talk to Andie about it before you go and kill the cunt,” Paddy grunts.

Fucking *why* would I do *anything* before killing the cunt who is harassing *my* woman? Especially after he dumped her, kicked her out, and made her fucking *homeless*. Jesus fuck. I should have killed him *before* he was able to harass her.

“Paddy, take him home to Andie. That’ll cool him off,” Seamus snorts. Paddy nods, and they manhandle me out to Paddy’s SUV, shoving me inside. Seamus leans against the door with all his weight until Paddy slings himself into the car, a clicking noise sounding. What. The. Fuck.

“Did you just fucking lock the doors?” I hiss at Paddy.

Laughing uproariously, he nods to Seamus and pulls out of the driveway. I’ve never been less amused in my life. I have no idea what this prick is laughing about.

“I don’t trust you not to throw yourself from a moving vehicle to find the cunt,” Paddy teases me. I flip him off. He’s *enjoying* himself, the sick fucker.

“Why are *you* so okay with one of Lauren’s friends being harassed?”

Paddy stops laughing immediately, his shoulders and neck tensing.

“I’m not,” he spits out, his knuckles turning white as he grips the steering wheel harder. “But she’s *not* just Lauren’s little friend, is she?”

His mischievous grin is back, his eyes sliding sideways to me. “She’s *your* little lass.”

Paddy’s eyes spark like he remembers something, his lips twitching.

“D’you fall asleep cuddling her every night?”

My eyes widen as they snap to him and narrow suspiciously. Where is the prick going with this?

“Aye, I do.”

“D’you love her then?” Paddy asks. I choke on air.

“*Love?*” I manage through my hacking coughs. “What the fuck are you on about, Paddy?”

He snorts and looks smug, his mouth twisting into an evil grin.

“What does the lass’s hair smell like?”

“Mango and honey,” I answer promptly, nonplussed. “What’s that got to do with anything?”

Paddy is howling with laughter now, so I don’t think I will be getting anything more from him about how what Andie’s hair smells like has anything to do with me being *in love* with her. Whatever the fuck that’s supposed to feel like.

“It looks like the lass is off to a business meeting,” Paddy drawls as we pull into my driveway, parking beside Andie’s navy blue sedan. I still need to organize her an SUV.



She is in the process of putting some containers into the car's trunk. And she is indeed dressed for a business meeting.

I've seen Andie in jeans and sweaters, dressed for clubbing, dinner parties, in her sundresses, and nothing at all. The last one is my favorite, Andie, but I've never seen her dressed like *this*.

She is wearing a long-sleeved, hot pink silk blouse, buttoned to her collarbones, and a dark grey pencil skirt that hugs her ass and has my mouth watering. She's also wearing stockings and dark, heeled pumps. Her gorgeous hair is pulled back in a ponytail, and she looks like she's about to head to work in an office or meet with her bank manager.

When she spots us, Andie straightens and smiles, holding her hand in a small wave. I'm out of the SUV as soon as we come to a stop, and Paddy releases the door lock. Fucking arse.

"Where are you off to then, lass?" Paddy asks her, climbing out of the SUV.

"Oracle," Andie smiles at him. "I'm meeting Lauren, Mellie, and Tiggy there."

That explains Tiggy's absence from the house earlier.

"Lauren's at Oracle?" Paddy frowns.

The overprotective prick isn't going to like her going there without him. Andie checks her phone, tipping her head to the side.

"She might not be there *yet*." She purses her lips. "But we're meeting in about half an hour, so I should go."

“I’ll drive you, lass,” I tell her. I need to get some answers. Also, I don’t want her at Oracle without me. It’s a seedy strip club. I know exactly what kind of patrons walk through those doors, and I don’t want those lads within a mile of Andie without me present.

Andie blinks at me in surprise, gesturing to her sedan. “But I’ve already loaded this car.”

Why would that change anything? Also, my SUV is still at Seamus’s house. I’m going to have to organize to have it dropped here.

Reaching over, I pluck the keys out of her hand. “Aye, lass. That’s what I’ll drive. My SUV is at Seamus’s house anyway.”

“O-okay.” Andie moves to the passenger side door, offering Paddy a wave as she slides in.

As I climb in and start the engine, Paddy’s SUV roars to life, booking it down the driveway and squealing out onto the street.

“Where is he off to in a hurry?” Andie twists to stare at the disappearing SUV.

“Oracle,” I snort. “He’ll be trying to get there before Lauren.”



**ANDIE**

I wonder if Lauren will be in trouble for going to Oracle without telling Paddy first. I wonder if *I'm* in trouble for going to Oracle without telling Connor first.

My eyes dart over to him as I smooth my hands nervously over my skirt. He doesn't *seem* annoyed. Mainly he seems amused at Paddy's rush to beat Lauren to the club. He also looks a little on edge about something, but I don't think it's my choice of venue to meet the girls.

"Is everything all right?"

Connor starts in surprise, throwing a glance my way. "Of course. Why do you ask?"

I clutch my pocketbook in my lap, studying him carefully. I'm definitely getting a weirdly tense vibe off him. Normally he's so unflappable. This vibe is...strange.

"You seem a little bit on edge."

Again, he blinks in surprise, shrugging quietly.

"Is it..." I pause as his eyes dart over to me. "Is it okay that I'm meeting the girls at Oracle?"

There is uncertainty in my voice, and Connor sighs, grabbing my hand and holding my fingers to his mouth, kissing them.

"If you're going to meet the girls away from someone's home, the VIP room or Seamus's office at Oracle are my first preferences," he admits. "But maybe text me a heads up next time. After all, it is a seedy strip club."

I catch his smirk at that statement. I don't think Oracle could be called *seedy* by any stretch of the imagination. As

strip clubs go, it's kind of classy.

“Why are you meeting the girls?”

I squirm nervously. “No reason in particular.”

I don't want to tell him it's because I need advice on what to do about Hamish harassing me. Connor watches me for a long moment. I'm pretty sure he knows there's something I'm not telling him, but he doesn't say anything, pulling into the parking lot and helping me unload my baked goods from the trunk.

“What have you made?” Connor asks, holding up the boxes he is carrying inside for me.

“Macaroons, bear claws, brownies, and shortbread.”

His eyes immediately dip to the boxes. “And you weren't going to tell me where you were taking such delicious goodies?”

He sounds accusing, and I giggle. “You might have eaten them all and left none for anyone else.”

Connor snorts, holding the door open for me, nodding, so I lead him inside.

“That I would have, lass. But I'll try to limit myself now that I've been called out.”

# Chapter SIXTEEN

## ANDIE

I look around with interest as Connor leads me through the VIP bar and into the back area of the club. I've never been in the business end of a nightclub or strip club before. It's...kind of boring. Very business-like.

Connor stops at the door with a simple sign reading "Manager." Lauren said to meet her in Seamus Fitzpatrick's office. I can't believe someone so important in the Irish Mafia has such a nondescript door. Good for him.

I follow Connor into the room, admiring the gorgeous large, highly-polished hardwood desk and the matching sideboard with a wicked impressive array of liquor.

Paddy and Lauren are nowhere to be seen, but Tiggy and Mellie are here. Mellie is admiring some baby clothes Tiggy has laid out across the desk. Based on the cute little outfits, Tiggy is having a boy.

Connor places my boxes on the table, rifles through until he finds a bear claw, and leaves, pressing a kiss against my temple.

"Hi ladies, bye ladies," he calls, shoving the bear claw in his mouth on his way out the door, leaving it to swing shut behind him.

They manage to hold it in until the door fully shuts, but Tiggy and Mellie erupt into loud and piercing squeals, almost

making my eyes water.

“How long have you two been a thing?” Tiggy gasps as Mellie giggles.

“Since our girl’s night,” I admit.

Mellie squeals again, clapping her hands. “I *knew* it! The way he was looking at you and how he caught you. I knew it!”

“Is it love?” Tiggy asks excitedly, reaching for a macaroon. Uh, what? That’s a leap. I roll my eyes at her, snorting inelegantly.

“Of course not. It’s a fling. That’s all.”

Tiggy nods, looking completely skeptical. “Uh-huh. Where do you sleep every night?”

I blink at her in surprise. That’s...not a good indicator.

“Uh. I’m not sure what you mean.”

I totally know what she means, but I’m hoping I’m mistaken. She’s so going to misinterpret what Connor and I are doing. She has baby romance brain.

Tiggy rolls her eyes at me. “I mean, on nights when you go to bed before Connor gets home, where do you sleep?”

Shit. She’s freaking *got* me. She’s so going to read this wrong.

“Connor’s bed,” I whisper, my cheeks cherry red. They both start squealing again.

“And Connor doesn’t mind?” Tiggy arches a brow once she’s stopped celebrating my last confession.

“He asked me to,” I mumble, setting them off again.

“Girl,” Mellie rolls her eyes at me. “He asked you to sleep in his bed even when he isn’t there? That’s not a fling. That’s a relationship.”

Screw cherry red. My cheeks are actually on fire right now. They’re so wicked hot with embarrassment. I’d *know* if I was in a relationship. Connor and I are having a fling. He’s my boss. He’s in the mafia. It’s a fling.

Thankfully I’m saved from their scrutiny when the door opens. Lauren walks in, her cheeks flushed, her eyes bright, and she’s straightening her skirt. Paddy slaps her ass as she walks in, snagging the door handle and pulling it closed.

As he disappears from view, I can’t help but notice his hair is very messy. It doesn’t take much to put two and two together.

“Paddy eats you out when you’re in trouble?” I giggle, and Lauren blushes, giggling too. “That’s a wicked good deal.”

Where can I sign up for that deal? I am more than interested.

“Why do you think I’m always getting in trouble?” Lauren waggles her brows at me, completely dissolving into laughter and dropping into her chair.

The door opens again, and the blonde stripper we made it rain on during our girl’s night strides in, kicking the door shut behind her.

Tiggy claps her hands as we sit on the chairs dotted around the room. “Excellent. Now we’re all here; we can eat these delicious baked goods and brainstorm ways to solve Andie’s problem that don’t involve the Irish Mafia.”

The blonde stripper snorts, turning her blue eyes on me. “Hey. I’m Fiona. You can call me Fi.”

“Hi.”

Turning to the room at large, she rolls her eyes. “She’s sleeping with Connor *Fitzpatrick*. The Irish Mafia is involved, whether she likes it or not. Do you honestly think a *Fitzpatrick* will let that kind of harassment of his woman slide?”

Okay. When she says it like *that*...it sounds bad. But as I keep trying to tell them all, it isn’t like that. At all. Plus, she’s missing one tiny, wicked important point.

I glare at her. “Connor isn’t ever going to find out.”

Lauren chokes on her brownie, Mellie pounding her on the back to help her swallow.

“You’re going to keep it from him?” Lauren eventually gasps in enough air to croak. I twist to look at her, shrugging. Of course I am. I’m not some helpless damsel begging Connor to solve my issue because we’re sleeping together. I’m from Dot. I can handle myself.

“It’s my problem. I’ll deal with it. I’m not some helpless little woman to go running to the big bad mafia man to solve all my troubles.”

“Hear hear!” Fiona cheers at my words, beaming at me. At least I have one ally. Of course, it’s the one not married to a big bad mafia man.

The others look varying degrees of skeptical to downright disapproving. Tiggy looks disapproving as all get out.



“You need to tell Connor,” she says firmly. Mellie and Lauren cast surprised looks at her. Yeah, that sounded like an order more than anything else.

Tiggy is married to Seamus Fitzpatrick, and he’s second in command of the Irish Mafia here in Boston, so I think she might be trying to pull rank on me. Well, again. One tiny, important detail....

I wave my left hand in her direction. “There ain’t no ring on this finger, girl. No mafia wife gets to pull rank on me.”

Tiggy glares at me for a moment, her shoulders slumping. She and Lauren exchange a look I can’t fathom. Oh well, not my problem.

Right now, my problem is trying to talk Fiona down.

“I say we get a baseball bat.” Her eyes flash with excitement at the thought. “We go to his apartment. Kneecap him. Tell him to leave you the fuck alone. Hell, while we’re there, we’ll get the place back for you. Problem solved, no men involved. I love it!”

I bite back a smile. The girl is wicked hardcore. She’s from Roxbury, so it makes sense.

“Do you even *own* a baseball bat?” Mellie drawls at her. Fiona shrugs, waving her hand airily.

“Ronan would lend me one. Especially if I flashed him my tits for a fair trade.”

From memory, Ronan is the mobster who won’t let her have extra sets, give lap dances, or work the main bar floor and stage. I wonder why he would be okay with giving her a baseball bat to go off and fuck shit up.

Then again, she's probably be wearing all her clothes for that. Maybe the man is a prude? Except he's not banned *all* strippers, just Fiona. Clearly, there is more to this story than I am privy to. I need to remember to ask Lauren about it sometime.

"I was thinking more about whether I should text him back, to tell him to fuck off or something like that?" I suggest to the group.

"Absolutely not," Tiggy wrinkles her nose. Fiona smirks at her.

"Of course the social worker is thinking of de-escalating the situation," she snorts. Tiggy rolls her eyes at her.

"Poking the bear isn't smart. Ignoring is the best option."

"I agree," Lauren chimes in. "We can think of something that doesn't involve engaging with him."

"How are we gonna get him to back the fuck off without engaging?" Fiona scoffs. I'm with her. That doesn't seem like sound logic.

"I don't think texting him is a good idea," Mellie says thoughtfully, holding up her hand when Fiona opens her mouth to argue. "What if it opens the floodgates for more messages from him? If he's sending all this stuff *without* interaction, imagine what he would send if he knew she was seeing it?"

Fiona pouts, straightening her shoulders as an evil grin crosses her face.

"I say you give us his number. We all text him. Spam the fucker."

“And say *what?*” Mellie snorts. Fiona’s grin grows.

“Hate mail.” She launches into a litany of things we should all send. The girl gets *very* graphic in her details of what we should say would happen to him if he doesn’t stop contacting me.

Tiggy looks faintly sick by the end of Fiona’s rant, her hand resting on her extremely pregnant stomach.

“Maybe not,” she says rather faintly.

Fiona grimaces, chuckling awkwardly. “Oops. Sorry, Tiggy. I forgot you have a wicked weak stomach these days.”

Mellie glares across the table at Fiona, totally furious.

“I’m not going to tell you about Niall’s torture techniques anymore if you tell *everyone*,” she hisses.

Shit. The blood drains out of my face. I keep forgetting my lovely friend Mellie who messages me wicked funny jokes almost daily, is married to the *Irish Reaper*, and is apparently *very* on board with his profession.

Tiggy takes charge of the conversation, fixing her eyes on me.

“What exactly does he send to you when he’s harassing you?” she asks, holding out her hand. I pull up the messages, handing my phone over. Tiggy bends to read it, Lauren craning her neck to read over Tiggy’s arm. Tiggy’s lips purse as she reads.

“This is definitely harassment. It’s totally illegal. I’d say bordering on stalking. He can’t be allowed to keep harassing

you. We have to decide to do something. I won't let one of my girls get harassed."

She needs to stop saying the word "harass." Anyone could walk in.

"I haven't dealt with harassment recently, but it was common when I was a social worker."

The door opens, and I shoot Tiggy a glare, but she doesn't notice, still staring at my phone.

"I could reach out to some of my old social worker contacts. They might have some up-to-date advice for dealing with online harassment."

"I think that's a good idea," Lauren pipes up, ignoring that Liam has walked into the room. What. The. Fuck? "Harassment is a serious issue."

Liam is standing right *there*. What the *hell* are those two playing at?

"Who's harassing *who*?" he snaps. Suddenly, everyone is *very* interested in this gorgeous hardwood desk of Seamus Fitzpatrick's.

"No one is harassing anyone," I finally reply huffily.

Liam's eyes narrow on me, studying me. Raising an eyebrow, he turns on his heel and storms away. Shit. He's probably going to go and find Connor.

"Thanks for nothing!" I snap at the rest of the girls, who look shamefaced. Good. So they should. I *told* them I didn't want Connor to know about this.

Shoving out of my chair, I hurry out of the room, hoping to catch sight of Liam. He is nowhere. Damn, that man is fast. Because I don't really know where else he might go, I head straight for Connor's gambling hall upstairs, praying he's there. I need to do damage control.

When I walk into the gambling hall, my eyes land on Connor. He is here, and so is that freaking snitch, Liam.

They're over by the window, talking in low voices with serious faces, occasionally glancing out the window through the heavy curtains. When Liam spots me, he looks shamefaced, says one last thing to Connor, and hightails it out of the room.

"Snitches get stitches!" I yell after Liam's retreating back, turning at the sound of Connor's warm chuckles.

He's still standing at the window, his hands in the pockets of his suit trousers, which is his favorite way to stand. I cross to him, propping my hip against the windowsill and crossing my arms over my chest.

"What do you keep looking at?" I ask, hoping to distract from my "harassment" issue he undoubtedly knows about now. Connor tips his head at the street below. I follow his gesture to the only car parked on that side of the road.

"The unmarked Crown Vic," he says. I blink at him. Why is he looking at that car? "Undercover Vice cops."

Oh. *Shit*. Are we in trouble? Are they going to do a raid? Is it illegal for me to be Connor's housekeeper because he does illegal stuff? I don't want to go to jail. I don't want Connor to

either, but at least he signed up for this stuff and probably knows what to do in a raid.

“Because the Irish own this place?” I whisper. Connor studies me silently for a moment, sighing.

“Because of the people who tend to congregate in this room each night to play poker.”

My eyes dart around the room as I hug my middle. I try to remember who was here the night I was. My eyes land on the table at the back of the room with real money. Stacks of it. Probably illegal.

“Why don’t you just do online poker? That way, you wouldn’t have cops watching you, but you could still get all their money?”

Connor doesn’t speak for a long moment, his face almost pained at my suggestion. I have no idea why. They’d still get their money.

“We *do* run online gambling, lass,” he says at last, rubbing the back of his neck with one of his hands. “What do you think is out in our little cottage?”

I blink in surprise, more over the fact he called it *our* little cottage than that he just told me there is an online gambling hub on the premises.

“So why still run the tables here?” I ask once I’ve regained the power of speech after my flush of pleasure. “Because it’s more money?”

Again, Connor looks pained. “Online makes much more money. But online poker isn’t about skill. Not really. Remember what I told you about reading your opponents and

spotting their tells?” His eyebrows raise. Oh. Yeah, I do. I nod. “That’s half the beauty of poker. It’s not about playing the odds. It’s about playing the man.”

Connor speaks very eloquently and passionately on the subject, so I nod and agree with him. I’d always figured Connor was good at poker *because* he was in charge of the gambling tables.

It had honestly never occurred to me that he ran the gambling tables because he loved the *game*. He doesn’t see it as gambling or odds. To Connor, poker is an *art form*. I also realize they might call Connor “Lucky,” but luck has nothing to do with his abilities when it comes to poker.

“Besides,” Connor grins at me, “purists like me who want to still sit at the tables and eyeball their opponents, we tend to have rather deep pockets.”

“And maybe you enjoy a bit of danger?” I grin, teasing him. Connor reaches for me, sliding his hands over my ass as he presses me against his front and squeezes. His nose tickles my ear as he smiles against my neck, which I’ve bared to him.

“Maybe a little, *leannán*,” he breathes. I shiver with anticipation. I hope he’s going to kiss me. He doesn’t, and I freeze at his next words, my eyes fluttering closed in defeat.

“I want to see the text messages, lass.”

Sighing, I step back, and Connor reluctantly lets his arms fall away from me. I can see the determination on his face. He’s not going to let this go.

“I wasn’t kidding,” I glare at him. “Liam better watch his back.”

“Because you’re gunning for him?” Connor smirks like he finds the idea amusing.

“I’d cut a bitch,” I grumble. Connor laughs outright.

“Liam’s a lad.”

“He’s still a bitch.”

“And so he is, *leannán*,” he agrees with me easily, chuckling warmly. “Would you like me to hold him while you cut him?”

I’m pretty sure Connor is joking, but something in his eyes says maybe he’s a little serious. He holds his hand out. Oh. He wants me to hand over my phone right now. I haven’t had any time to put Hamish’s messages in context. This is going to be bad. Wicked bad.



# Chapter SEVENTEEN

## CONNOR

Andie very reluctantly places her phone in my hand. She is serious about wanting to hurt Liam for tattling to me. Poor lad.

He only went in there because Tiggy had called us as Lauren had arrived in the room and put her phone on speaker the whole time. The lads were all up here with me, listening to their conversation.

Paddy and Liam felt it was dishonest for them all not to know they were being listened to, especially when Ronan and Niall started teasing Paddy because we all heard Andie and Lauren giggling about his punishment methods.

Ronan stopped laughing pretty fucking quickly when his little blonde stripper went off the rails, talking about getting a baseball bat and going around to confront the prick herself.

Niall had to physically restrain the man from storming down to stop the lass. He stopped struggling when she had smugly announced he would give her a bat if she asked him to and flashed her tits at him. But I'm sure he imagined her tits and got distracted.

When she started her bloodthirsty little rant about what they should text him, with all the threats, Niall had groaned and buried his head in his hands while Ronan had glared at him.

I wasn't sure how Ronan's little stripper learned about the more sickening of Niall's torture methods until Mellie snapped

at her to shut up. Niall's wife's been blabbing.

Niall shot a worried look at Seamus, but rather than being pissed that Niall's been talking to his wife, Seamus looked rather stunned.

"You tell *Mellie* about that shite?" he asked faintly. Niall had shrugged.

"She wants to know about my day," he defended himself while we stared at him.

"And she still fucks you after knowing that shit?" Liam had looked particularly disturbed by the idea.

"My *Mellie* is a surprising one," he admitted. Andie went on and on about being adamant I would never know about this prick texting her, which is when Paddy sent Liam in as an excuse for me to find out since I know already.

I'm sure Paddy doesn't want his wife getting in trouble for being the one to blab. Maybe he was right to try to protect Lauren, seeing how bloodthirsty Andie is about Liam.

Scrolling through her messages, I find them easily enough, seeing as how the last time he contacted her was yesterday.

Jesus fuck, the cunt is spamming her. He oscillates from telling her he misses her to demanding she tells him where she is and threatening her if she doesn't tell him.

Anger surges through me as I scroll further and further back, reading the constant flow of messages. This *Hamish* messages her eight to ten times and then doesn't message for a few days before starting again.

Andie has never responded, so the fucker clearly can't take a hint. Finally, I get back to the last message she sent him before she came to live with me, telling him that she had moved out, like he had asked, calling him a thief, and informing him she hoped he contracted an STD that made his dick shrivel up and fall off.

When I look up, Andie is watching me warily, probably because my face looks as fucking pissed as I feel.

“Why didn't you tell me he was hounding you, Andie?” I growl. She winces. I think her response is because I used her name since I never do. Fuck that. I need her to know how fucking serious this is right now.

“It was nothing I couldn't handle.” She shrugs defensively.

My fingers tighten painfully around the phone. I grind my teeth, trying to rein in my temper before speaking again. Sighing, I drop it into my pocket, closing the distance between us. Sliding my fingers into Andie's hair, I tip her head back, brushing my lips gently over hers.

She needs to get one thing straight in her head. I press my forehead against hers, my eyes boring into her cornflower blue ones.

“Ye're my woman, Andie,” I growl. Her eyes widen, burning into mine. “That means we're a fecking *team*. It's not about what ye can handle. It's not a weakness for ye to ask for my help, *a chuisle mo chroí*. It's a fecking relationship.”

Tears fill her eyes. Christ. I feel like a right prick seeing that. But she smiles a shaky smile at me.

“You’re right. I’m sorry,” she whispers, snaking her arms around my neck and tugging my face down to kiss me deeply. “I should have told you. I was being stubborn. I’m so used to being on my own. It didn’t occur to me that I’m not anymore.”

Her admission tears at my fucking heart. I’ll make sure she’s never alone again.

“Ye go home, *a chuisle mo chroí*,” I murmur against her mouth. “Paddy and I will pay yer ex a wee visit.”

Andie shudders under my hands, but she doesn’t argue or try to talk me out of it. She nods, kissing me again, digging her hand into my pocket to retrieve her phone.

“I’ll see you when you get home, Connor,” she says quietly.

As Andie turns away from me, I capture her hand, cupping it with both of mine and raising it to my lips, pressing a kiss against her fingers, finding her gaze.

“I want ye naked in our bed when I get home, *a chuisle mo chroí*.”

Her breathing hitches. I’ve no idea whether it is because of my request, my calling it *our* bed, or my Irish phrase, but I let her hand go reluctantly, following her out of the room and down the stairs.

Paddy is waiting for me in the foyer with Lauren, nodding stiffly as we enter the small room. We walk Andie and Lauren to their cars, climbing into Paddy’s SUV and heading for Dot.

The building is a rough-looking place. I don’t like the idea of Andie living here. There’s a fucking dodgy cunt loitering near the foyer doors in a trenchcoat. I’d bet my house he’s a

flasher. He takes one look at us and hightails it out of here. The fucker is smarter than he looks.

Paddy got the address off Lauren, so I follow him up the dimly-lit stairs to the third floor. He jabs his finger at the door with the number 15 on it. I stalk over, raising my fist and pounding on the door.

Paddy seems drawn to the door across from the one we are here to pound on. I know it's because it's the apartment Lauren grew up in, but I shove his shoulder and jerk my head at Andie's old door. He can visit nostalgia with his wife another time. Jesus fuck, this is about Andie.

He wises up and cracks his knuckles while I bang on the door again. There is a shuffling, and the door opens. Paddy shoves his foot inside to block it as the lad tries to slam it in our face.

I shove my shoulder against the wood, forcing it open. The lad stumbles back, raising his hands in a surrender position. Christ. He looks slimy as all hell. I can't imagine Andie with him. Fuck that. I don't want to imagine Andie with this fucker.

"Yes?" he sneers at us, dropping his hands as he finds some confidence from somewhere. After a quick assessment, he has clocked that we're not Italian, and the Italians control Dot. Us not being Italian isn't going to save him. Gianni Manchetti wouldn't stand up for this prick even before he knew the fucker messed with my woman.

"Hamish MacLauchlan?" I growl.

"Who's asking?"

Yeah, we have the right prick. I close my hand around his throat, shoving him back, so we're all inside the apartment, which is a fucking pigsty. Andie would take one look at this place and cry. That's another strike against him.

Slamming him against a wall, I sink my fist into his stomach, wiping the smug look off his face. He grunts in pain as he doubles over.

"Ye don't fecking contact Andie Halpern again. Ye hear me?" I tug his head back and slam my fist into his nose, the skin of my knuckles splitting right as his nose breaks with a satisfying crunch.

"You know where Andie is?" he pants through his pain. I drive another blow into his stomach, winding him.

"Aye, I know where my woman is."

His eyes widen and narrow contemptuously at me. Christ. The fucker has a death wish. Just how big is confirmed when he opens his mouth again.

"I guess that slut will spread her legs for just about anyone these days," he sneers.

Big fucking mistake. No one calls my Andie a slut. Paddy watches from the doorway while I systematically work this cunt over with my fists until he's barely conscious, moaning and occasionally coughing up some blood.

Straightening, I aim one last kick at his ribs. He moans, curling into a fetal position in a last-ditch attempt to protect himself. It's a bit late for that, but he can try.

Paddy strolls over, leaning down and getting all up in the prick's face. He opens one swollen eye, peering through the

slit as Paddy sneers at him.

“You even think about contacting Andie again, and it won’t just be Connor Fitzpatrick beating your fucking arse.”

“That’s right. I’ll bring the Reaper,” I spit.

Fear flashes across his battered and bloody face. Good. Hopefully, it’s enough fear for him to leave Andie the fuck alone. Paddy and I let ourselves out of the apartment, heading back to our SUV.

Seamus wanted an update, so by the time I drive my SUV home from his place, all the lights are off. Andie must be in bed. I remember my request with a smirk, taking the stairs two at a time until I’m on the third floor.

The bedroom is dark, and Andie is fast asleep as I slip into the room. I can see her bare shoulders peeking above the coverlet from the hall light. She clearly followed my instructions.

Stripping, I throw my blood-speckled clothes into the hamper, quickly showering and scrubbing the blood off my hands. I towel myself down and make my way back into the bedroom, not bothering to put any sweats on. They would only get in the way of what I have in mind.

My fingers close around the coverlet, and I slowly slide it down, exposing all of Andie’s gloriously bare skin inch by beautiful inch. Christ, my lass is a gorgeous woman.

Once it is lying at her feet, I crawl onto the bed, spreading her thighs and burying my face between her legs. Licking through her folds, I nip at her clit, savoring her sweet taste as she wakes up with a start, moaning and thrusting her hips.

“Connor,” she gasps, tangling her fingers through my hair.  
“I need you inside me.”

Jesus fuck. I don't need to be told twice. With one last nip at Andie's clit, I rise to my knees, flipping her over and tugging her up until she's on her hands and knees before me.

When I thrust into her, Andie's head tips up, and she arches her back, throwing her hips back eagerly.

“God, yes, Connor,” she whimpers. “So good.”

Fuck. She can't say shite like that, not if she wants me to fucking last. Pumping my hips, I grab her shoulder and tug her up until her back is pressed against my front, anchoring her with my arm across her chest.

I don't let up my pace, and Andie's head tips back, resting on my shoulder, her hands gripping the arm I have across her chest as she comes, gasping my name.

I groan into her ear as her pussy clamps down almost painfully tightly.

“Feck, I'm not going to last, *a chuisle mo chroí*,” I growl as I come, my hips stopping, and I pant against her temple.

I tip Andie's face to mine, kissing her lazily as we collapse onto the bed in a tangle of limbs, attempting to catch our breath.

“Say something to me in Irish,” Andie commands, still sounding breathless. She reaches over to take my hand where it is laying on the bed between us. I look over at her, my eyebrows rising.

“Like what, *a chuisle mo chroí*?”



She rolls her eyes, snickering. “Not a nickname. Like a sentence. Or a fact, or something.”

I study her silently, rolling over, throwing my leg over hers, and reaching down to brush a stray lock of hair from her face. I know exactly what I want to say to her.

“*Is breá liom tú,*” I murmur, leaning down and pressing a kiss against her nose. And I do. I fucking love the lass. I have no idea when it happened, but I guess Seamus and Paddy were fucking right. Pricks.

“Same,” Andie sighs. I freeze above her. Jesus fuck. Can the lass understand Irish?

“Really?” I ask her, insanely hopeful. But Andie laughs, shaking her head. My heart plummets.

“I have no idea what you just said,” she admits with a giggle. That’s better than her saying she doesn’t love me.

I force a smile, dropping another kiss on her nose, rolling onto my back, tugging her against my chest as she asks how Paddy and my *mission* went.

“We’re not in the army, lass.”

“Was he at least unconscious when you left him?”

I bite back a grin at her bloodthirstiness. “He was conscious, lass.”

She sighs in a way that manages to sound *disappointed*.

“But barely,” I concede. Andie giggles softly again.

“Thank you,” she mumbles. She’s almost asleep. Pressing a kiss into her hair, I cuddle her tightly to me.

“I’d do anything for ye, *a chuisle mo chroí*. I love ye,” I  
whisper, but she’s already asleep.

# Chapter EIGHTEEN

## ANDIE

Googling Irish is impossible. Apparently, it is *not* a phonetic language. Not even close. I know when he calls me “lan-awn” he’s calling me sweetheart because Lauren knew that one.

“Muh kree” is *my heart*. Lauren knew that because that’s what Paddy calls her, but she didn’t know the “khwish-leh” bit. And I couldn’t even attempt that sentence he said. “Braw lum” something. So I didn’t even bother asking her. I’ll have to ask him what it means sometime.

“Ms. Halpern?”

Shaken from my reverie, I smile at the OBGYN, standing and making my way into her office.

“How are you feeling today?” Dr. Mackenzie asks me.

“I feel great.” I kick off my shoes, shimmy out of my panties, and sit on the examination bed.

“And it’s been under twelve weeks since your last injection?” she clarifies. I nod in agreement. “And have you been sexually active in that time?”

Again I nod, blushing slightly this time. “I, uh, I live with my boyfriend.”

I feel a secret thrill at calling Connor my boyfriend. He did call it *our* bed, I remember, with a thudding heart and a smug

smile. And he said we were in a relationship. That makes him my boyfriend. I'm sure of it.

“And do you use condoms?”

I immediately shake my head. “Just the shot.”

She smiles at me again, still nodding. “It is 99% effective, but as you have been sexually active, we'll get you to do a pregnancy test before your next one. Clinic policy.”

Dr. Mackenzie's warm smile is comforting as she hands me a container to go pee in. I scuttle into the small bathroom outside her exam room, feeling weird walking around without panties. I'm used to this procedure. I had to take a test each time when I was living with Hamish, even though our sex life would be described as stagnant at best. Nothing like it is with Connor, even in the beginning.

When I return with my cup of urine, Dr. Mackenzie snaps on some gloves, unscrewing the cap, and sticks a pregnancy test into it.

“No issues since the last one?” she asks conversationally, turning her back on the test, taking my blood pressure, and listening to my heart.

“None at all. No symptoms that I noticed. I haven't even had a cold.”

Nodding, Dr. Mackenzie turns back to the test, pulling it out and doing a double-take. My eyes flicker to the test, but I can't see anything. She checks her notes and looks back at the test again. Uh. Is there a problem? Do I need to take another one? I hope it's a different brand. They really shouldn't be handing out defective tests. Can you imagine?

“I’m afraid the test is positive, Ms. Halpern,” she tells me in a calm, professional voice.

It’s...*what?* No. That’s not possible. I’m on the shot. It’s... it’s impossible. I can hear the blood pumping through my ears, and my lips are cold and hard to move.

“I’m sorry?” I manage to squeak. She turns to me, compassion in her eyes.

“It could be a false positive, but abstinence is the only 100% effective birth control method.”

Placing the test down, she takes a needle out of her drawer.

“Clinic policy after a positive test is a blood test to confirm. We have a lab on-site, so it won’t take very long. Is that okay?”

Uh, of course it’s fucking okay. I need them to confirm this is a false positive so I can go about my life.

I nod, croaking out a “yes” when she tells me she needs verbal confirmation of my permission.

Dr. Mackenzie draws the blood, patting me on the arm as she leaves the room. I immediately reach for my phone but am overwhelmed by nausea.

I shove my pocketbook as far away as possible. I cross to the window, wrapping my arms around my middle and staring, unseeing, out the window at the traffic moving on the street below me. What the hell will I do if it’s not a false positive?

“Ms. Halpern?”

I startle when the doctor returns. She guides me back to the bed with a kind smile. I don’t like the look of that smile.

“The blood test is also positive. You’re about eight weeks pregnant.” She snaps on some gloves as I stare at her, the words not penetrating through the ocean roaring in my head.

“I’m going to do an ultrasound, all right?”

Ultrasound. For the *baby*. I nod, lying back on the bed, staring at the ceiling. Eight weeks. Fucking shit. I must have got pregnant almost the very first time we fucked. And I’ve been fucking pregnant for *two fucking months*? How didn’t I notice?

“I-I’ve had alcohol.”

Dr. Mackenzie smiles down at me, snapping on gloves and picking up a large tube.

“It shouldn’t have had any effect on the fetus. But from now on, no alcohol and no smoking. You will also need to follow a stricter diet, no soft cheeses, no deli meats, and I’ll have the nurse give you some supplements.”

I nod mechanically. I have some slightly more pressing issues than diet right now. I suck in a breath when the plastic wand with the cold gel hits my still flat stomach.

Dr. Mackenzie moves it around, and the tears I had been managing to hold back spill over as a *wap-wap-wap* fills the room. Oh, *God*.

“That’s the heartbeat,” Dr. Mackenzie tells me quietly, pressing a tissue into my hands.

I hold it to my eyes as she does some measurements and hands me a paper towel to clean the gel off my skin.

I sit up, and we sit in silence until she speaks again.

“There are several options. We can give you a referral to Planned Parenthood if that is the path you wish to take.”

I shake my head, a small whimper in my throat. I want this baby. Connor’s baby. *Our* baby. If he doesn’t, then I will leave Boston. My heart aches at the thought because, *of course*, I’m the stupid idiot who went and fell in love with my fucking Irish mobster boss.

“All right then,” she says kindly, running me through the do’s and don’ts of pregnancy and arranging my next check-up. I thank her, stumbling a little as I get to my feet, and she steadies me.

“We’ll get you a glass of water before you leave.”

Dr. Mackenzie guides me out to the waiting room. One of the receptionists smiles and brings me water, standing and making sure I drink the whole lot before paying and leaving. I need to get home and lie down. I need to *think*.

I’m so close to my car when I hear “Ms. Andrea Halpern?” and turn, thinking that the clinic forgot to give me an information packet or something. But it’s a uniformed cop. I automatically curl my arms around my middle, protecting Connor’s baby from these people.

“Yes,” I huff defensively. The cop’s eyes rove over me, and he gestures at his patrol car, where his partner is standing.

“We need you to come with us to the station.”

I blink at him. Don’t they need a warrant to arrest me? I haven’t done anything wrong. Is this because those Vice Cops saw me with Connor at Oracle? Did they follow me here to the clinic in Dot?

“Why?”

His eyes narrow. “We have some questions for you regarding the assault of Mr. Hamish MacLauchlan.”

I blink at him again. Well, at least it isn't about Connor's gambling hall. I had nothing to do with Hamish getting his ass handed to him. They can question me all they want. I was at home taking a bath and getting ready to have sex with Connor.

“Can I take my car?” I ask, but he's already shaking his head.

“I don't want to have to cuff you, Ms. Halpern,” he tells me sternly.

I hold my midriff a little tighter. Numbly, I follow the officer, and they shut me in the back of their patrol car like I'm some sort of criminal. I stare out the window as Dot flashes past us. This has to be some kind of bad dream. Maybe I'm going to wake up, and it will be this morning, and I won't have been to the clinic yet.

At the station, I'm taken into an interrogation room. They let me keep my pocketbook. They thoroughly searched it and were happy I didn't have anything that could be a weapon on me.

Sitting on the uncomfortable plastic chair, I keep my arms wrapped around my waist as two different cops sit across from me. These don't have uniforms on.

“You were in a relationship with Mr. MacLauchlan for almost three years, correct?” One of the officers questioning me kicks off the interrogation.



“That’s correct,” I whisper, huddling over, still protecting my stomach. It’s probably irrational, but I don’t want Connor’s baby near these people.

“And this relationship ended, when?” Officer Two asks. I swallow, trying to think of exact dates.

“Uh, about five months ago.”

I clear my throat, and they nod, checking their notes again. Hamish must have made a complaint after Connor beat him up. I wonder if they’re going to bring Connor in for questioning.

I almost snort. They wouldn’t have the balls. Why else would I be here? Unless Hamish lied and said I was there.

“And did it end on a sour note?”

“Define sour?” I ask dryly, finally finding a volume above a whisper.

“Did it end badly?”

I shrug nonchalantly. “Hamish hounded me to put him on my rent-controlled lease. Two weeks after I did, he dumped me, gave me four hours to pack three suitcases, and kicked me out. Then he had his friend fire me. So we’re not exactly *besties* now.”

The cops study me for a beat, and I swear one of them swallowed a grin.

“And where do you live now?” Trying-not-to-smile cop asks me.

“I live with my boyfriend.”

They share a look. “And his name is?”

I chew my lip for a moment. I'm not sure if I'm supposed to say Connor's name. I can't not say anything. I don't want my baby stuck in a prison cell for not cooperating or whatever the charge would be.

"Connor Fitzpatrick," I whisper. They both sigh in unison like they were expecting it.

"Mr. MacLauchlan asserts that a Connor Fitzpatrick paid him a visit at his apartment, viciously beat him with no apparent motive, apart from mentioning your name."

They both fall silent as they watch me, but I school my face into a blank expression, wondering where they are going with this. When I don't speak, the first cop continues.

"Mr. MacLauchlan was insistent about pressing charges against this Connor Fitzpatrick...." the cop hesitates, a flicker of something in his face. Oh. I almost giggle when I realize his dilemma.

They came to me hoping it was some random Connor Fitzpatrick, not Lucky Fitzpatrick of the Irish mafia. They don't want to press charges against Connor. Or they can't. I'm pretty sure the police force is rife with corruption. Hell, this whole city is rife with corruption.

"If you could confirm a few things regarding Mr. Fitzpatrick." The cop clears his throat, and I smirk at him.

"He's the Connor Fitzpatrick you think he is," I drawl, feeling smug when they try but fail to hide their grimaces. "My boyfriend, that is. I have no idea if he attacked Hamish. All I know is that Hamish has been harassing me. I can show

you the messages if you allow me to get my phone out of my pocketbook.”

The cops nod stiffly, looking a little relieved that there might be a reason for them to rubbish Hamish’s claims.

Digging out my phone, I open the message thread and slide it across the table to them. Hunching over my phone, they scroll back through the messages, reading them all until they reach the ones from when Hamish kicked me out. The first cop offers me a small smile.

“Given the circumstantial nature of Mr. MacLauchlan’s statement and the evidence that he was harassing you, there is no need for us to pursue this matter further.”

The cop rubs his hands together as his partner returns my phone.

“We can arrange for you to be dropped back at your vehicle.”

Uh, no. They’re not getting out of this that easily. They have terrorized me for no reason. I want to see them squirm.

I smile, sitting back in my chair. “Oh, no need, I’ll arrange a lift. Thank you.”

I stand, and they hurriedly shove to their feet, leading me out of the foyer while stammering about it being no trouble arranging a lift.

Um. No. Connor will come and have a word with these people, and I’m going to enjoy the *fuck* out of it.

# Chapter NINETEEN

## CONNOR

My phone buzzes in my pocket as Paddy holds up a yellow duck with a blue egg patterned gift set.

“I don’t think Tiggy will like it,” I drawl at him. He grimaces while I pull my phone out of my pocket. “Why don’t you just have Lauren pick something?”

“I can choose my own gift for my godson,” Paddy snaps. “What did you buy him?”

“That’s between me and my future godson,” I smirk at him, glancing down at my phone. It’s Andie. Shit. I answer immediately.

“Is everything okay, *a chuisle mo chroí*?”

Paddy smirks at my words, but I flip the bastard off. She *never* calls me.

“Yes, I need a lift back to my car. Could you organize one for me?”

I frown. Why would Andie be separated from her car?

“Of course. Where are you, *leannán*?”

Again, Paddy smirks, and again, I flip him off.

“At the police station, in Gibson Street, in Dorchester.” She sounds way too fucking calm.

“We’ll be right there, *leannán*,” I growl down the phone, hanging up and shoving it back in my pocket.

Paddy glances at me as he holds up an ugly blue egg cup.

“Put that the fuck down. Andie’s in the Dot police station,” I snap. Paddy’s eyes widen as he drops the gift back on the table, and we stalk out of the mall, heading for his SUV.

I pull up Seamus’s number, shooting off a text.

**CONNOR: Going to Dot police station. Something is going on with Andie. She needs a lift from there.**

My phone buzzes before I can even lower it.

**SEAMUS: If I don’t hear from you in thirty minutes, Ronan and I will head your way.**

The tires of Paddy’s SUV squeal as he pulls up in front of the police station. We slide out and stalk inside, my eyes darting everywhere.

Andie is sitting quietly in one of the ugly, uncomfortable-looking chairs, holding her pocketbook on her lap. As we stride in, her eyes fly to my face, and she shoves out of the chair, hurrying toward me. Thank fuck she’s okay.

My arms close immediately about her, my hands stroking her face and hair before resting on her shoulders.

“Are ye all right, *leannán*?” My worry bleeds through my tone. Andie smiles and nods.

“Of course. They wanted to question me about Hamish being beaten up. It seems he pressed charges.”

They *what*? In what fucking universe do cops approach an innocent woman when the incident involves two lads. My eyes

snap to her face, narrowing as anger courses through me.

“And they brought you in for questioning, but not me?”

My voice is icy cold, but Andie doesn't flinch away. Instead, she nods solemnly.

“I think they wanted to clarify if you were the Connor Fitzpatrick they thought you were.”

And so they harassed my lass. My Andie. Well, that's a sure-fire way to piss me the fuck off.

“I hope you told them who I was, lass,” I drawl at her with a smirk. She blinks up at me, flashing me an answering grin.

“I told them you were exactly the Connor Fitzpatrick they thought you were. They will drop the charges since Hamish has been harassing me, and his word can't be trusted.”

She rolls her eyes at me, and Paddy snorts beside me. *Sure*, and that's the reason they're dropping the charges. Not because they don't want to try and charge me. Connor *Fitzpatrick*. I guess the stupid fucker, Hamish MacLauchlan, seriously underestimated the Irish's influence in Dot. We might not control it, but we're not hamstrung here.

Two uniformed cops come out and freeze when they see us. When they see how pissed I look. Wrapping my arms around Andie, I glare over the top of her head at them.

“Next time ye have questions regarding me, ye talk to me. Not to my woman.”

The blood drains from their faces as they offer me matching stiff nods. Paddy smirks at them, and we all leave. I bundle Andie into the back of the SUV, climbing in with her.

“Where’s your car, lass?” I ask, buckling her into the middle seat so I can have her pressed against me, burying my face in her hair to calm myself down.

“At the clinic, a few blocks away. They picked me up from there. I came to get my shot....” Andie’s voice trails off.

I nod into her hair. Her birth control shot. She’s been muttering about getting another one for a week now. Something about making sure she gets within twelve weeks, so it’s effective.

I told her to put whatever the charge was on my bank card. After all, it’s for the benefit of both of us, and I’m not exactly offering her insurance.

Holding Andie anchored against me, I pull out my phone, texting Seamus that I have Andie and we’re heading home now.



## ANDIE

I didn’t tell Connor I didn’t get the shot. Or why I didn’t get it. Not when Paddy was in the car with us. When we slide into my car, and Connor drives us home, I don’t tell him either.

I’m not sure how to broach the subject. What if he thinks I lied to him about having a shot in the first place? What if he

thinks I got pregnant on purpose to trap him in marrying me? What if he doesn't want kids and asks me to get an abortion?

No, I need to figure out the best time to tell him. And springing it on him when he's pissed that the cops picked me up and interrogated me is *not* the right time.

Once we are home and inside, Connor picks me up by the waist and deposits me on the countertop in the kitchen, kissing me thoroughly. I return his kisses eagerly. When I tell him my news, he will be done with me. I need to take this and savor it while I can get it.

He shoves up my skirt, unbuttons his trousers, and thrusts into me. Oh well, I'm already pregnant. I suppose it doesn't matter that I didn't get my shot today.

"I'm sorry they took ye in for questioning, *leannán*," Connor murmurs into my hair, rocking slowly in and out of me until I'm panting and squirming.

"It doesn't matter," I gasp, tipping my head back as his lips slide over my neck. I shatter, and he picks up the pace, hammering into me until he comes with a groan, his lips pressed against my pulse point on my neck.

"*Is breá liom tú, a chuisle mo chroí*," he mutters, withdrawing, buttoning his trousers back up and lifting me off the countertop. Setting me on my feet, he tugs me into a tight hug.

"Let's order pizza and watch movies."

He sounds boyishly excited at the idea, which has me snickering. Crossing to the fridge, Connor pulls out two beers.



No alcohol. I wave him off, shaking my head, my heart hammering in my chest.

“Not for me, thanks.”

Connor shrugs, replacing one. Crossing to me, he takes my hand, leading me to the den near our bedroom. Shedding his suit jacket and tie, he lounges on the leather sofa, tugging me down into his lap and flipping through the channels until he finds some high school sports drama.

Snuggling against him, I stare at the screen, not paying any attention to the movie we're watching. I wish this moment could last forever and that reality would never intrude. I know it's impossible, but it's a nice dream.

# Chapter TWENTY

## ANDIE

It's been two weeks, and I still haven't told Connor I'm pregnant. Thank god I haven't been sick or anything. Otherwise, it might have given my secret away.

He's at the club tonight, as he is most nights. I have cleaned up after dinner and am about to head up to have a lovely long shower, wash my hair, and curl up on the sofa in the den watching some reality TV when the front door creaks open.

That door was locked. No car came up the drive. Connor and I rarely use the front door. We mainly come in through the kitchen. Before I can think of grabbing a knife or something, there's a crash from the living room. The antique-filled living room.

Shit. It sounds like someone has toppled the lovely little upright piano. I tiptoe over, peeking my head around the door to see through the living room and freeze at the sight of men in ski masks, some of whom are heavily accented.

I try to move away to see if I can sneak out the back door and make it to the cottage, where Connor always has one guy working on the online gambling operations, but they spot my freaking pink sweater. Why the hell am I wearing *pink*?

"Hey!" One of them yells. I think about making a run for it, but what if they shoot or tackle me? I need to protect our baby. Connor's baby. "Who are you? Why are you here?"

“I-I’m the housekeeper.”

I think fast. It’s best if I don’t admit I’m someone important to Connor. You can’t tell me this is a random home invasion. This has to do with the mafia. If I have to tell them I’m pregnant, I don’t want them putting two and two together that they have Connor Fitzpatrick’s baby mama.

“Are you the lady who looked after the little kiddies when they were hostages?” One of them snaps at me. Oh, shit. This is definitely a mafia thing. I frantically shake my head.

I sob as they hold a gun to my head. “N-no. That was before I got a job here. That w-wasn’t me.”

They share a look over my head, and there is a sharp pain as they smash the butt of the pistol into the back of my head. I don’t pass out immediately, but black is creeping around the edges of my vision.

“Let’s lock her in the basement.”

My hearing is fuzzy, but they talk above my head as I sink to the floor. “There’s no need to kill her. We weren’t hired to kill anyone.”

There’s some shuffling and some swearing. Thank God they aren’t going to kill me. I have to protect my baby.

“There’s no basement,” One of them hisses, and there is more shuffling, my body swaying between them as they use my armpits and ankles to carry me.

“There’s an attic crawl space on the third floor. Let’s put her there.”

I blink, trying to stay awake as they carry and shove me somewhere dark. A lock clicks, and there are faint, distant smashing noises and some yelling. I fight it but eventually sink into the darkness tugging at my brain.



## CONNOR

“You won’t be so lucky the next hand, Fitzpatrick,” Novikov, the Russian bookkeeper, drawls at me, throwing his chips into the center of the table.

Smirking, I throw my chips in, holding his eyes as I meet his challenge. I’m in my shirtsleeves, my tie in the pocket of my jacket hanging over the back of my chair, entering hour four of a hell of a fucking game of poker with the Russian contingent.

Novikov opens his mouth again, twisting, distracted by something over my shoulder. I turn, watching Ronan hurry across the room. He leans down, his lips close to my ear.

“Anthony just called. There’s been a disturbance at the house.”

I freeze. What the fuck is that supposed to mean? A fucking disturbance. With the online shit, or with the actual house and Andie?

“Everything okay, Fitzpatrick?” Novikov asks, his eyebrows raised. I fold. My blood is like ice in my veins, mechanically signaling a waitress to collect my chips.

“This is a private issue,” Ronan tells the Russian, who nods, his eyes still glued to my face.

“If it stops being private, you call, okay?”

I nod numbly, snagging my jacket as I follow Ronan down the stairs. What does he mean, private? Private as in, Irish business, or private as in, *my* business?

I climb into the SUV, where Paddy and Seamus are waiting, while Ronan and Niall climb into another SUV. Jesus fuck. This must be fucking serious. My heart is in my mouth.

“What’s going on?” I snap at Seamus while Paddy squeals the tires in his hurry to get us out of here.

Seamus holds his hands up while he twists to face me. “Now, don’t freak out, Lucky, but Anthony says the house is smashed up, and there’s no sign of Andie.”

The entire fucking world has stilled, and I’m vaguely aware of Paddy breaking every traffic law imaginable to get us to my house in fifteen minutes.

The SUV fishtails as he screeches into the drive, and Niall and Ronan are less than thirty seconds behind us. Anthony is standing near the door to the kitchen, but I shove past him, my gun in my hand, while Seamus stops to talk to him in a low voice.

Niall, Paddy, Ronan, and I make our way through the house, which has been completely trashed. They’ve slashed up

my mammy's antique sofas and toppled the fucking piano, which is smashed on the floor.

The kitchen is full of shattered plates, mugs, and glassware. Ronan and Niall report the sofas and mattresses on the second floor have been slashed, and Andie's clothes have been scattered around her room.

The leather sofa and easy chair in my den have been slashed, and the TV is broken on the floor. So clearly not a robbery. The mattress in our room is cut, my clothes are scattered all around the room, and the mirror in the bathroom has been smashed.

Andie is fucking *nowhere* to be seen. The rest of the lads join Paddy and me in the bedroom, Seamus looking around angrily, his eyes lingering on my shredded suit jackets on the floor.

"No sign of her?" he asks me. Paddy shakes his head while I clench and unclench my fists. Where the fuck is Andie?

"Did Anthony see who fecking did this?" I snap, but Seamus is already shaking his head.

"He heard the smashing in the kitchen, and when he came to investigate, they made a run for it. They were wearing ski masks and dark clothes. But Andie wasn't with them."

Jesus fuck. She was definitely home tonight. She would have told me if she was planning on going out. Fumbling with my phone, I dial Andie's number, but it rings out.

Paddy is on the phone with Lauren to see if Andie went to see her, but she didn't. Niall makes a similar call to Mellie, who also answers negatively. I cock my gun.

“Paddy. Key. Fecking *now*.” I hold out my hand. My SUV is still at Oracle, and I need a vehicle to go and burn the world down to find Andie.

“Now, Lucky.” Seamus holds up his hands at me like it’s supposed to calm me or some fucking shite. “You can’t go off half-cocked. We’ve got to play this smart.”

“Feck ye, Fitzzy, ye fecking hypocrite,” I spit at him. He blinks in surprise at the venom in my tone, but I’m not done. “When it was fecking Tiggy, ye were all ready to go off half-cocked.”

“Aye,” Seamus replies hotly. “That’s different. Tig was my wife.”

He doesn’t even blink as my fist smashes into his jaw.

“Feck ye!” I scream at him. “If ye were given the option, ye wouldn’t have fecking married her! I fecking love Andie, and I’ll burn the whole fecking world down to get her back, starting with yer fecking sorry arse!”

Paddy and Niall grab my arms to keep me from jumping on Seamus and beating him black and fucking blue. To his credit, Seamus doesn’t call me out on yelling at him. He stands and takes the abuse I’m screaming.

Ronan is prowling around the room, looking for clues, for anything, when he stops.

“Lucky,” he barks at me. “Shut yer trap fer two fecking seconds. I think she’s still here.”

I’m about to lose it at him when his words penetrate the fog of rage and fear in my mind. I fall silent. None of us are even breathing, straining to hear.

There is it. Screaming. Coming from inside the fucking walls. Jesus fuck. My heart thuds to a stop completely in my chest. How the fuck can Andie be *inside* the walls?

“Is there an attic crawl space up here or something?” Paddy asks, letting go of me and hurrying to the wall, pressing his ear against it.

Swallowing my fear, I strain for any sound of her. “There was on the plans. I’ve never seen it.”

Spreading out, we listen along the walls to Andie’s frantic screaming, tearing at my heart.

“I’ve found the fecking panel!” Niall’s voice floats through from the landing.

Hurrying into the stairwell, we all watch while Niall ignores the padlock on the door, kicking again and again at the door hinges until the wood cracks under the repeated blows, the screaming stopping. Finally, Niall rips the door off.

There’s complete silence, followed by a hacking cough. Niall steps aside as I rush over, crawling into the tight, dark space and searching for Andie.

“C-Connor?” she sobs, her voice scratchy. Thank fuck. My hands make contact with her soft hair and her smooth skin.

“*A chuisle mo chroí,*” I whisper, tugging her into my arms and dragging her back into the stairwell.

Andie is dusty, dirty, and bleeding from somewhere underneath her hair. But she’s alive. She’s fucking *alive*. I need to find a church and empty my wallet into the prayer box.



Sitting on the ground, surrounded by the lads as they look down at us, I cradle Andie in my lap, brushing kisses over every spot on her face I can find.

“*Tá brón orm,*” I groan repeatedly. I’m sorry. “*Is breá liom tú.*”

Eventually, Paddy helps us up, and I lift Andie in my arms, carrying her downstairs and out to the SUV. Sliding in, I cradle her in my lap. Paddy and Seamus climb into the front, driving away from my trashed house. My eyes don’t leave Andie’s terrified face the entire drive to Paddy’s house.

Carrying her inside, I set her down on the sofa, my hands sliding over her to check for injuries.

Seamus perches on the coffee table in front of us, his face a mask of fury and worry, while Lauren and Paddy stand behind the sofa, cleaning the cut on the back of Andie’s head. Ronan and Niall stand over near the door, watching us.

“Andie,” Seamus speaks softly to her. “What happened? Do you remember?”

A sob breaks free from Andie’s lips. Christ. I hug her tightly to me, my lips at her ear.

“Everything is going to be okay, *a chuisle mo chroí.* I’ve got ye,” I murmur.

Andie’s fingers curl around my jacket lapels, and she rests her cheek against my chest, her eyes fixed on Seamus’s face.

“They came in the front door and smashed the piano. When they saw me, I told them I was the housekeeper.”

Smart play. They were clearly there to target me. It might not have ended so well if she'd told them she was my fucking girlfriend.

“Th-they asked if I was the housekeeper from when the children were held hostage,” she whispers.

Jesus fuck. Mammy. Seamus pales. After all, my mammy is his fucking aunt.

“I s-said that I wasn't, and they hit me with a g-gun.” She gestures to the cut Lauren is cleaning up while Paddy holds the first aid kit. “Then they p-put me in the c-crawl space and smashed everything. It was s-so dark, and I p-passed out.”

She makes a choking noise, hunching forward and wrapping her arms around her midriff.

“Is Anthony okay?”

“Aye, lass. He's fine. They ran off when he came inside,” Seamus rushes to reassure her. “We're going to get the place cleaned up, and there'll be guards on it before you move back in, I promise.”

Andie nods, pressing her face into my shoulder, whimpering as Lauren finishes cleaning the cut and bandages it.

“You'll both be staying here in the meantime,” Paddy interjects. I nod stiffly, reluctantly relinquishing my hold on Andie as Lauren helps her up, leading her upstairs to have a bath.

“I'll put her in your old room,” Lauren calls over her shoulder to me.

As soon as they have gone upstairs, Seamus's face darkens.

"The fucking Moldovans. They'll pay for this, Connor," he assures me. I nod stiffly at him.

He's fucking right they'll pay for this. I'm going to fucking slaughter the lot of them.

"Why smash the place up?" Ronan pipes up from the corner. "What message does that send?"

"That they can get inside a fecking Fitzpatrick's house?" Seamus's face darkens at the thought. I don't like the idea of it either. "Ye'll be having a permanent presence when ye move back in, Lucky. I'm taking no chances. They've crossed a fucking line."

Ronan is still puzzling. "Okay, so a message about getting in. Why pull clothes out of wardrobes and drawers?"

Paddy claps a hand on Seamus's shoulder, his eyes finding mine. "Looking for something? I can't imagine your mammy would have let the weans leave anything behind."

Except something *was* left behind. My blood pulses loudly in my ears. "Their toy."

Seamus's eyes snap to mine. "What fecking toy?"

I frown as I conjure up the toy Andie left on the table. "A Disney one. Little yellow thing in overalls with a huge eye. Andie found it in the closet in the bedroom mammy had them in. At the back."

"Maybe they found it when they bailed?" Niall grunts, frowning as he crosses his arms over his chest. I slowly shake my head.

“It’s in the glovebox of my SUV. At Oracle. I told Andie I would mail it back to them, but I never got around to it.”

Ronan’s phone is at his ear. “Liam. Get to Oracle. I want Lucky’s SUV brought to Paddy’s house.”

My hands flex as we wait for the lad to arrive. Seamus calls Uncle Sean to keep him updated and organizes for lads to be placed at his house and mine.

When headlights wash over the house, Paddy strides out, reappearing with Liam, holding the yellow toy. Niall immediately holds his hand out, pulling out a flick knife. When Paddy hands the thing over, Niall guts it like a fish, pulling out a small flash drive. A growl rumbles out of Seamus, but I frown at it.

It’s so tiny. They smashed up my house. They could have seriously hurt my lass, and all for *that*. It doesn’t seem fucking worth it.

Paddy plucks it out of Niall’s hand, grabbing his laptop and plugging it in. We all crowd around, but it’s a bunch of code.

“Get Anthony here,” Seamus grunts. Pulling my phone out of my pocket, I shoot him a text with the address.

Paddy scrolls through the meaningless text until there’s a tentative knock on the door. Niall goes to answer it, returning with Anthony trailing him.

“What does it say, lad?” Seamus asks, gesturing at the laptop screen. Anthony’s eyes turn to it, flickering across the endless text with a frown.

“That’s not any computer code I’ve ever seen. I think it might be code code.”

“What’s code code?” Seamus frowns. Anthony shrugs.

“You know, like, secret code.”

Secret code? What the fuck. Anthony is shifting awkwardly, so I clap him on the shoulder.

“Thanks, Anthony. You can go back to the cottage. We’ve got lads on the house now.”

Relief washes over Anthony’s face. “Yeah, thanks, boss. They showed up about half an hour ago. Mickey O’Shea was in charge. He said he was in Doyle’s crew.”

“They’re good lads,” I assure him. “I wouldn’t trust anyone more for security.”

Anthony leaves with a nod, but Seamus doesn’t notice, still frowning at the laptop.

“Does anyone have any favors to call in with the Russians? Code is right up their alley. I’d rather use an owed favor for this, but we can make a deal if we have to.”

I toy with my phone. “I was playing with Novikov before coming here. He offered to help if needed.”

“Does he owe you a favor?”

It’s more complicated than that. Seamus only deals with the Russians when he needs something...or when they do. I sit with them for hours most nights at the tables. Conversation flows. Information is exchanged. I’m Uncle Sean’s go-to conduit when wanting to pass on information, or sound it out, without requesting a formal sit-down.

“It’s not going to cost us anything I’m not willing to pay.”

Seamus eyes me carefully. “You’re willing to pay a fucking lot that I’m not right now, Lucky.”

That may be so, but I have a way to find out what was so important that Andie’s life was put at risk.

“Do I have permission to call him or not?”

The silence stretches as Seamus’s eyes narrow. Finally, he nods slowly.

Dialing the number, I hold my phone to my ear. Novikov’s deep growl answers quickly.

“Less private now, Fitzpatrick?”

“I need a code broken.”

There’s a long pause, and when Novikov finally answers, he sounds intrigued. “What kind of code?”

“I thought it was computer code, but my programmer says it’s not. It’s on a flash drive.”

“And are we supposed to read with code once we crack it?”

That’s why I want the Russians on this. They’re fucking confident, cocky bastards.

“It belongs to a Moldovan. They decided to break into my house to retrieve it. We want to know what it says.”

“They broke into your house? That’s a step too fucking far,” Novikov growls, outrage coloring his tone.

“They were willing to go to great lengths to get this back. I need to know what it says.”

“Consider it done. I’m still at Oracle. Bring the drive to me.”

“I’ll send Liam.”

Novikov hangs up, and I turn back to the lads. Liam nods, pulling the flash drive from the laptop.

“Novikov is still at the tables. He’ll take the drive.”

With a nod, Liam strides out of the room. Seamus sighs, scrubbing his face as Paddy shuts down the laptop.

“Niall.” Seamus turns to him. “Fucking find who is responsible for this. But I want them alive. After we confront them with what the Russians find out, they’re Connor’s fucking kill.”

Niall’s eyes narrow, and Seamus glares at him. “Don’t fucking give me that, Niall. I wanted it to be you who killed Remmington, but it wasn’t my fucking call. This is.”

Niall’s jaw is tight, but he nods. He and Ronan leave the room as Seamus claps me on the shoulder, standing to follow them.

“I’ll keep you updated, Lucky.”

I watch him leave the room, rubbing my eyes and standing. Paddy is packing away the first aid kit and merely nods as I stalk upstairs. I need to have Andie in my sight.

She is tucked up in the bed with a bandage around her head like she’s a WW2 soldier while Lauren fusses over her. I snag the pair of Paddy’s sweats and T-shirt left out for me, quickly showering while Lauren stays with Andie.

As I walk back into the room, Lauren shuts the door behind her as she leaves. I slide into bed, wrapping myself around

Andie and burying my face in her neck, my heart thudding at the idea of losing her.

“I was so fecking *scared, leannán,*” I murmur. Andie’s arms wrap around my shoulders. “I thought they’d taken ye, or worse.”

My voice breaks slightly on the last word, and Andie’s lips press against my temple.

“I knew you would find me,” she whispers, her tone fiercely certain. “I knew that you would get me out of there.”

I don’t fucking deserve her. Andie’s mango and honey scent fills my nostrils, and I breathe it in deeply, reveling in the knowledge that she is here, okay, and safe in my arms.

“I’ll not be letting ye out of my sight, *a chuisle mo chroí,*” I warn her. She giggles softly.

“I think I’ll like that,” she admits with a soft sigh, snuggling down in my arms and quickly falling asleep.

I stroke my fingers through her hair, staring at her face. I can’t lose her. I won’t. I’ll put a bullet through the heart of anyone who tries to take her away from me.



# Chapter Twenty-One

## ANDIE

Connor drops onto the sofa in Paddy and Lauren's den next to me, tugging me so I'm sitting pressed against him, my legs across his lap.

He hands me an iPad with a furniture catalog web page open as I glance over at him.

"What's this?" I ask, my eyebrows raising. Connor smirks at me with a shrug.

"We're in need of some new furniture, *leannán*," he drawls, tapping at the iPad screen. "And interior design is *not* my specialty."

I giggle as he wrinkles his nose, but I'm dying of happiness. *We* need new furniture, and he wants *me* to pick it out. Holy shit, another confirmation that Connor maybe sees a future with me. Swiping through the catalog, I hold the iPad up to Connor.

"This is all nothing like what your mother originally furnished the house with," I point out. He shrugs again.

"You never used the front room when it had her things in it. I thought this might be more to your liking. But you can find another website that's more your style."

Again, my heart starts thumping wildly. He wants me to pick things *I* will like, so I use the room and treat it more like

my house, rather than sticking to the small den on the second floor.

“This might take a while,” I smirk at him. Connor grins at me, making a show of getting comfortable.

“I’ve cleared my schedule for the day.”

After studying him for a long moment, I shift to lie down on the sofa with my head in his lap. Connor strokes my hair as he watches me pick out the furniture, commenting when I hold the iPad up for his input.

I wasn’t kidding when I said it would take a while, especially when Connor holds up pictures on his phone of the smashed-up rooms so I can see what we need to buy.

Lauren comes in to bring us sandwiches and sodas at one point, but other than that, we spend the whole day alone in the den, picking out furniture, pictures, and new kitchen things.

Connor has no clue about pots and pans, but he pulls up a website for a fancy kitchenware store, and I’m almost crying with happiness.

I look at everything and drool over it all, ensuring I don’t go overboard, even while Connor is egging me to buy a gorgeous casserole dish we don’t need.

Once we’ve ordered everything we could possibly need and some things we don’t, Connor puts the iPad on the coffee table and tugs me up so I’m sitting in his lap.

He cuddles me close, burying his face in my neck like he does when he sleeps.

“I’m so sorry you got dragged into my sordid world, *leannán*,” he whispers, sounding sad. I stroke my fingers through his thick ashy blonde hair, pressing a firm kiss against his temple.

“It was always going to happen at some point, Connor,” I whisper back.

He snorts against my skin but doesn’t sound amused when speaking.

“I never wanted that shite to touch you, *a chuisle mo chroí*,” he says sadly, his fingers brushing along my arm lightly, raising goosebumps. “I’m so sorry.”

Placing my hands on either side of Connor’s head, I tip his face to mine.

“I happen to think you’re worth all the trouble, you know,” I smirk at him. The corners of his mouth tug up into a smile, though it doesn’t quite reach his eyes.

“I wish you could have the good bits without the bad bits.”

My heart tugs. Oh, Connor. You have no idea how precious you are.

“There are no bad bits,” I murmur, leaning down to press a kiss to his lips. Connor groans, sliding his hands up my back and tangling them in my hair as he deepens the kiss.

“Oh my god! I’m so sorry!” Lauren squeaks as she walks into the room while we are making out.

“Fleck off, Lauren,” Connor calls out, his lips still fused to mine.

I giggle as we hear her scamper out of the room, closing the door tightly behind her, still apologizing.

“She won’t come back for a while,” Connor murmurs against my mouth as his hand slides up my skirt, his fingers curling around my panties. They find my clit, stroking it.

“I need to be inside ye, *leannán*,” he breathes, his tongue swirling against my throat. The second I gasp out my agreement, he’s unbuttoning his trousers and thrusting up into me as I moan appreciatively.

When I roll my hips, Connor groans, alternating between kissing me and murmuring things in Irish.

“*A chuisle mo chroí.*” Kiss. “*Is breá liom tú.*” Kiss. “*Mo mhuirnín dílis.*” Kiss.

I whimper as he grasps my hips to stop them from rolling, devouring my mouth as he pumps his hips up. I’m shattering around him, his mouth swallowing the sounds of my pleasure as Connor groans and holds still, grinding me down on his dick as he comes.

Panting against my neck, Connor mutters, “*Is breá liom tú,*” again, lifting me off him, buttoning up his trousers, and holding me tightly in his lap, against his chest, pressing kisses to my hairline.



## CONNOR

Seamus smirks at me as we walk into the jewelry store and points at the glass counter with sparkling diamond rings.

“Those are the ones you want, Lucky, unless you think Paddy and Niall are on to something. Bucking the trend.”

I think about Lauren and Mellie’s rings, shaking my head.

“Andie’s pretty traditional in her jewelry. I think she’d like a nice diamond ring.”

The saleswoman behind the counter beams at us as we approach and then specifically at me when Seamus shakes his head, gesturing in my direction.

“What can I help you with today, sir?” she asks eagerly. I scratch the back of my head.

“Uh, engagement rings?”

Her face lights up, no doubt with the thought of the commission she’s about to make, and she eagerly gestures to the rows and fucking *rows* of diamond rings inside the glass counter between us.

“Just let me know any that catch your eye, and I’ll bring them out for you to look at.”

I nod, turning my eyes to the display.

Jesus fuck, that’s a lot of engagement rings. How the fuck am I supposed to pick the one Andie will wear for the rest of her life?

How come no one impressed upon me the enormity of this fucking task? What if she doesn’t like the ring I pick her? What if I ask her wrong? What if she says no when I ask? Give me a high-stakes poker game any time. Hell, give me an

adrenaline-filled shootout in a warehouse. Anything would be less stressful than this decision.

“You’re overthinking it, Lucky,” Seamus rumbles from beside me, clearly reading the panic written large across my face.

“Why are they all so different?” I hiss at him, and the fucking prick starts to laugh. “How did you pick Tiggy’s?”

Seamus shrugs, his hands stuffed into the pockets of his coat. “I just picked the biggest fuck off diamond I could find.”

I stare at him incredulously.

“That’s it?” I ask, sounding as unconvinced as I no doubt look, and again, Seamus shrugs.

“I know my wife. An engagement ring doesn’t mean anything to her because we didn’t choose to get married. But she understands that having a giant fuck off diamond is a must as my wife. She’s going to be the wife of the head of the Irish Mafia, for fuck’s sake.”

“So her ring has nothing to do with her personality?”

Seamus sighs. “Not a fucking thing, Lucky. Not a one. The necklace that she wears? I bought that because I knew she’d like it.”

I try to picture the necklace Tiggy always wears. It’s on a silver chain, a simple silver circle.

“She likes a plain silver circle?” I snort at him, and a touch of pink colors Seamus’s cheekbones, which has me turning to study him carefully.

“It’s not silver,” he says stiffly. “It’s tungsten. Tough but beautiful, just like she is.” He sounds almost defensive now. “And it’s not plain. You just can’t see the bit that lies against her. It’s engraved.”

“Engraved with what?”

Seamus definitely flushes this time.

“*Is tú mo shaol ar fad,*” he says quietly. I blink at him. I would not have picked my cousin to be such a romantic. He had a custom piece of jewelry made for his wife engraved with “you are my whole life”? What a fucking sap.

I grin at him as he flips me off, turning his attention to the rings in front of us.

“Andie usually wears gold earrings,” I tell the saleswoman. She moves over to one section, which only has diamond rings on yellow gold bands.

“This is your section then,” she tells me brightly, gesturing at the glass case.

My eyes rove over the selection. There are rings of different shapes and sizes, but my eyes keep drifting back to one particular ring. Finally, I jab my finger at it.

“Can I see that one?”

The lady nods and removes it from the display case, laying it on a green felt mat that she lays on top of the glass counter. Seamus leans in and whistles.

“It’s very pretty.”

I shrug. It’s a sizable diamond but not ridiculous, which is good because Andie would laugh outright at any obscenely

huge diamond. It's rectangular, with lots of little round diamonds surrounding it, set in yellowy gold, and the slim band is also shiny yellowy gold.

"Andie will like this one." I nod to the saleswoman, who beams at me.

"And the sizing?"

I freeze. Christ. I didn't think of that. Squinting at the woman's hands, I shake my head. Seamus calls all the other saleswomen over. I look over their hands. A petite woman is wearing a badge that says she is in training. I point to her.

"Andie's hands are about her size."

The young woman blushes but obligingly moves over and tries the ring on. It's a good fit for her, so it will probably fit Andie.

"I'll take it."

The first saleswoman packages it up and hands me the bag. Immediately I pull the ring box out and tuck it into the inner breast pocket of my jacket. Now I've found Andie the perfect ring, I'm not about to fucking lose it.

Seamus claps me on the back as we leave the store.

"Now you've just got to ask her," the prick smirks at me. I flip him off.

The asshole didn't have to worry about saying the wrong thing or any of that shite. Just turned up to marry the woman of his dreams. Lucky bastard.

Niall's eyes sweep over us as we climb into the SUV. He pulls out of the shopping mall parking lot, the disapproval



rolling off him as we drive to Novikov's Back Bay apartment. It's not far from where Paddy used to live in his self-imposed shitbox.

"You can always stay in the SUV, Niall," I offer. A growl rumbles out of him.

"I go where Fitzzy goes."

"He can stay here too."

Seamus scoffs. "Not fucking happening, Lucky. I'm not about to let you walk in there alone."

"They're not our enemies."

"They're not our family."

I roll my eyes but allow them to trail me into the building. The doorman calls up, turning obsequious at whatever response is given.

"Right this way, Mr. Fitzpatrick."

We are led to an elevator, where an imposing Russian acts as a bellhop. He glowers at us the entire trip to the penthouse level. Another guard stands at the highly polished front door, nodding as he opens it, allowing us entry. Neither follows us in, though both keep their eyes glued to Niall. A visit from the Reaper is never taken lightly.

The spacious reception area is bathed in sunlight, shining through the floor-to-ceiling windows. The walls and ceiling are stark white, allowing the sunlight to be the feature, playing across the highly polished hardwood floors, so dark they are almost black.

We stop walking on a sand-colored wave rug, our eyes lingering on the abstract paintings and sculptures peppered around the room.

Within minutes, a door opens at the other end of the room, a hulking guard stepping through, eyes latching onto Niall as Novikov walks into the room. Despite being half a head shorter than his six-foot-six bodyguard, Novikov exudes a quiet danger, drawing eyes away from the man mountain to him.

“Fitzpatrick. I see you brought company.”

“I see you did too.”

Novikov’s eyes flicker over his companion, and he smirks, raising a hand in an open-palmed gesture toward an open archway.

“Please, come in. Sit. Drink.”

We file through the living room area into a smaller den with walnut paneling on the walls. While Seamus, Novikov, and I sink into the plush white sofa and easy chairs, Niall and the man-mountain hover close to the other two, their eyes locked in a silent stand-off.

Unperturbed, Novikov pours three glasses of vodka, gesturing for us to take them.

“Будем здоровы!” He raises his glass. Seamus smirks, saluting him right back.

“*Sliánte.*”

I echo Seamus’s toast as we knock back the vodka in one swallow. Novikov’s eyes linger over the man-mountain as he

flicks his fingers dismissively. The man hesitates for the merest moment before leaving the door, closing the door firmly behind him. Seamus's eyes slide toward Niall, who crosses his arms.

“Not a fecking chance, Fitzzy.”

Novikov's lips twitch, and he shrugs. “I did not send my man out of the room to force you to show the same consideration. I did it for privacy.”

He fishes the flash drive out of his pocket and throws it at me. I catch it as Novikov grins.

“No copy was made. I made sure of it.”

Seamus leans back, his eyes on Novikov, his eyebrows raised. “So what was on it?”

Novikov slugs another vodka, shrugging and toying with his glass. “Names.”

“What names?” I frown, leaning forward, resting my elbows on my knees.

“Police. Politicians. Judges.”

“Informants? Those on the take?” Seamus plucks the flash drive from my fingers, frowning at it.

“How many can the Moldovans have?” Seriously. That's why they smashed up my place? Fucking unacceptable.

“It's an Italian list,” Novikov grunts, pouring a third glass of whiskey. Seamus's eyebrows shoot up, his fingers closing around the flash drive.

“They stole it from the Italians?”

Novikov shrugs. “I don’t know if they did. But that’s not what I was asked to uncover.”

“And you say you didn’t make a copy?”

“That’s what I said, Wolf Pup.”

Seamus bristles at the use of his hated nickname but holds his tongue. His eyes dart to the door, still closed, with no sign of the man-mountain.

“Who knows about this?”

“I do. And Petrov.”

Seamus’s lips thin. Apart from him not seeing the beauty in poker, I find Petrov to be an okay guy. Seamus has other ideas.

“Only you two?”

“We cracked the code. There didn’t seem to be a need to share the information around.”

“And Petrov was okay with no copy being made?”

Novikov shrugs. “He did it as a favor to me. I did it as a favor to Lucky.”

Seamus nods, muttering something about poker under his breath. Hey, poker got us this information free of charge. I don’t know what he’s complaining about.

Seamus rises, sliding the flash drive into his pocket as he extends a hand to shake Novikov’s. I also stand, offering my hand. As we leave the room, Niall and the man-mountain resume their glaring stand-off, all the way to the front door.

“I’ll see you at the tables, Lucky,” Novikov grunts, turning away before I can respond.

Seamus leads us out of the building, Niall's shoulders only relaxing as we drive out of Back Bay toward Oracle. My eyes linger on Seamus's pocket, where the flash drive is ensconced.

“What are you going to do with it?”

Seamus sighs, rubbing his eyes with his fingers. “I'll pass it to Pa. It's not that valuable. I have no idea what the Moldovans planned to do with it. It will be more useful when we find whoever trashed your house and confront them.”

My eyes turn forward, meeting Niall's in the rearview mirror. “I'm on it, Lucky. I'll have yer man before ye know it.”

He fucking better. I have an itching to strangle the bastard.

# Chapter TWENTY-TWO

## CONNOR

I leave Andie and Lauren in the kitchen at Paddy's house, baking because Lauren wanted Andie to teach her how to make jelly donuts.

I think the little old lady who lived in their building – the one murdered by the Italians when they were looking for Lauren – originally taught Andie. And I think that might be why Lauren wants to know the recipe since she looked at that woman as a mother.

The phone rings for about a minute before it's answered.

"Siobhan Fitzpatrick speaking."

I swallow roughly. "Mammy, it's Connor. How are you?"

I lean against the door of my SUV, staring up at the clouds, wondering how she will take the news I'm about to deliver.

"Connor? I'm grand. Are ye calling to tell me that ye're coming to Dublin to live with me?"

Jesus fuck. Of course, that's what she's still pushing for. Stupid woman. It's never going to happen, and she knows it. I shouldn't have let her get away with so much when she lived here. She's read my indifference as something else, and it's gone to her head.

"Not exactly, Mammy."

“Then why are ye calling me? Ye know that I told ye not to call unless that was what ye were going to say.”

Jesus fuck. Give me the strength to deal with this insufferable woman.

“I just thought I’d call ye to let ye know I’m fixing to ask a lass to marry me,” I grit out.

There’s absolute silence on the other end of the line before she erupts in shrieks.

“Connor Fitzpatrick! Ye better not be coddling me with this!” she screams.

“I’m dead certain, Mammy,” I assure her, and she squeals a bit more. “Her name’s Andie. She’s from Boston.”

That shuts her right up. “So ye’ll be marrying there and living there?”

I make noises of agreement down the line.

“And weans?” Mammy breathes, sounding hopeful.

“Aye. If she’s in agreement, we’ll be having plenty of weans.”

“When?”

I fight a smirk. “As soon as she’ll agree to have them with me. I’d like a wean close in age to Seamus’s, and Tiggy’s about to pop any day now.”

There’s dead silence on the other end of the line, and I’m briefly wondering if she’s keeled over in her excitement.

“I’ll be moving back to Boston then.”

Christ. The woman changes her mind more than the direction of a breeze in a storm.

“I’ll have a chat with Sean. We’ll sell yer Dublin house and get ye a nice little three bedroom here in West Roxbury.”

She makes a sound at the end of the line that might be disbelief.

“Ye’ll not be living with Andie and me,” I warn her. “We’ll be newlyweds. We’ll need our own space. Ye can live close though, and ye can have ye’re little blue car back.”

Andie would fucking leave me if my mammy tried to move back in and take over the running of the house. Not fucking happening. Not to mention I’d probably shoot the woman myself. I’ve gotten used to not being nagged every two seconds. I used to be able to tune her out, but I don’t think I can anymore.

Plus, that little car isn’t going to be safe for weans. No, Andie will need that SUV I still haven’t got around to buying.



## ANDIE

Lauren sighs as she stares at her disastrous attempt at jelly donuts.

“You’ll get it right eventually. What’s it like being married into the Irish Mafia?” I ask Lauren as she dumps her



misshapen, burnt donuts into the trashcan.

Lauren blinks at me, her eyes flashing with excitement.

“Are you thinking of getting married? To Connor?”

Shit. She’s practically bouncing with excitement over the idea.

“I mean, maybe one day, if things keep going well,” I hedge, and she’s almost bursting with happiness.

“It’s great! There are bits... gross, icky, bloody, *illegal* bits, don’t get me wrong.” She shrugs, and I wrinkle my nose. “But all the good things outweigh those bits, so you don’t even think about them.”

“Like, what good things?” I smooth the cheesecloth I’m holding against the breakfast bar. Lauren tips her head from side to side, pursing her lips.

“There’s a sense of family,” she says, and I have to admit a family sounds nice. “They all look out for one another, and if you’re in, you’re *in*. You know what I mean?”

I kind of do, so I nod. Lauren sighs.

“Being loved by someone like Paddy, or Connor, it’s....” She pauses, and I hold my breath. “All-consuming. Don’t you think?”

I flush, shrugging. “I mean, we haven’t really...you know....”

Lauren’s mouth falls open. “You haven’t said the L-word to each other yet?”

I wrap my arms around my midriff defensively.

“But you do, right?” Lauren prompts. “You do love Connor?”

“Of course I do. I just don’t know how he feels about me.”

Lauren purses her lips, studying me carefully. “I think he does.”

My doubt must show on my face because she rushes to defend her position.

“I mean, I see the way he looks at you! If you aren’t sure how he feels about you, why are you asking about marriage?” Lauren asks casually, but I see right through her fishing expedition.

“I’m pregnant,” I sigh resignedly. Lauren drops the mixing bowl she’s holding, which hits the floor with a resounding clang, though she doesn’t bend to retrieve it.

“You’re *what?*”

I shush her quickly. “No one else knows!”

Lauren almost looks disappointed in me. “You haven’t told Connor?”

I hate the censure in her voice.

“I was on the shot! It wasn’t supposed to happen, and now I have no idea *how* to tell him or how he’ll react!”

Lauren opens her mouth, probably to give me some speech about how I *have* to tell him or some shit, and suddenly, I really don’t want to fucking hear it.

“You can’t tell him, and you can’t tell Paddy or fucking anyone!” I snap at her. I can see the defiance on her face. “It’s my fucking secret, Low. You breathe a word of this to Paddy,

to *anyone*, and I will disappear. None of you, not even Connor, will ever hear from me again, and he will never know his child, and that will all be on you!”

I feel shitty for threatening her, especially when I see her face fall, but I have to protect my child. My baby, *Connor's* baby, comes first.

“I won't tell anyone, but I think you owe it to Connor to tell him,” I mumble.

“Stay the fuck out of my relationship, Low,” I warn her quietly. She nods again, her shoulders slumping.

“Are you at least taking baby vitamins?”

“What the hell are baby vitamins?”

“Tiggy takes them. You can buy them at the Pharmacy. I think you should be taking them. They're good for you and the baby.”

“I'll talk to my doctor about it,” I promise her, getting to my feet and offering her a small smile. “How about we try those donuts again?”

Lauren offers me an answering smile and nods. Nothing more is said about my baby, and she better keep it that way. I don't want to have to act on my threat to disappear and never see Connor again. I think it would destroy me because I do love him.

# Chapter TWENTY-THREE

## ANDIE

I have no idea how the hunt for the home invaders is going, but Connor and I have been staying with Paddy and Lauren for over a week now.

Most of his house has been tidied up, and they've replaced almost all damaged things. But apparently, some windows were smashed, and Seamus insists on bulletproof glass for the whole house. It's a custom order, so it will take another two weeks to get them fitted and installed.

Lauren is humming as she folds laundry while I watch her. She refused my help. Since I let her in on my secret, Lauren won't let me help her with any chores. So far, I know she's kept my secret, and she has yet to tell Paddy, which I can see is eating at her. But tough cookies, bitch.

This is *my* secret, and no way Paddy is finding out before Connor. My legs swing as I watch her, wondering how I can trick her into letting me help cook dinner. I feel like a mooch sitting around watching her do all the chores.

Lauren's phone rings, and she goes all soft and gooey when she answers it, so I know it's Paddy. I'm about to leave the laundry to give them some privacy, but she's already hung up, excitedly turning to me.

"Tiggy's waters just broke! Paddy and Connor are with Seamus heading to the hospital. He says we should meet them

there.”

I nod, standing and going in search of a coat and my pocketbook.

“Should we call Mellie and Fiona?” I ask, knowing they are friends with Tiggy. Lauren shakes her head.

“I’ll text them. They won’t come to the hospital.”

I nod and follow her out to her SUV. It’s not until we’re parking at the hospital that I speak again.

“How come Mellie and Fiona won’t come to the hospital?”

Lauren shrugs, scrunching up her nose. “Well, Seamus and Paddy are close. Like, brothers. I’m married to Paddy, so he wants me there. And Connor is Seamus’s cousin, and *he* wants you here. The others will come later, I suppose.”

Again, I nod, trailing her into the small waiting room. Paddy and Connor are there, and Paddy immediately stands, crossing to Lauren and folding her into his arms, while I cross to Connor and drop into his lap, his arms encircling me immediately.

“Do you think it will be a long wait?” I ask him. Connor mumbles something noncommittal, brushing a kiss against my ear.

“We’ll find out, I suppose. Seamus went straight in with her.”

I always thought first labors were supposed to take hours, but we’re only there for about five when Seamus comes out, beaming, carrying a little bundle wrapped up in a blue blanket.

“Cillian Sean Fitzpatrick,” he announces proudly.

We all stand, moving toward him for a peek. Seamus reluctantly relinquishes him to Connor. The blanket falls away from the baby's face in the awkward handover.

I'm sure neither Seamus nor Connor has ever held a baby before. Seamus gives Connor some tips about cradling the head, which sounds parroted since he was clearly only recently told himself.

Connor looks scared to death, but his eyes lock on the baby, and his whole face lights up as he smiles tenderly. His eyes flicker up to mine, and he beams at me.

"He's perfect," he tells me, and I move closer, cupping the back of the baby's head, agreeing with him.

"Hand him over, Lucky. I'm a godfather too," Paddy chides him.

Connor stares at the baby's face for a moment longer before reluctantly handing Cillian over to Paddy while Lauren helps him hold the baby properly.

Connor takes my hand, hugging me to him, beaming down at me. Resting my head against his shoulder, my heart thumps in my chest.

He was absolutely smitten with the baby. Even now, out of the corner of my eye, I can see he's still watching the baby with a tender look on his face, where Paddy is cradling him.

I have to tell him. I realize with a start. I have to tell him he is going to be a father, and I think he will be okay with it. Please, God, let him be okay with it.



## CONNOR

Andie has been pensive since we got home from the hospital. I haven't had a chance to ask her about it. She and Lauren disappeared to cook dinner, and Lauren wanted help baking some goodies to deliver to Tiggy now she's home.

Seamus took her home yesterday afternoon, getting her and his son settled in at his house, which now also has bulletproof windows since Tiggy was kidnapped.

When we got into bed, Andie seemed like maybe she wanted to say something, but she didn't, so I ate her out and fucked her senseless before we fell asleep.

When I woke up this morning, she and Lauren were already in the kitchen, baking.

"Where's Paddy?"

Lauren glances over at me. "Already gone to Seamus's."

I curse under my breath. I didn't realize how late I had slept.

"He took a lasagna and a quiche," Lauren continues. "If you're going soon, we have some muffins and things that Tiggy likes."

Andie mumbles something to Lauren, who casts her a look and nods, squeezing her arm. Andie crosses to the door and

beckons to me. Bemused, I follow her into the den at the back of the house, sinking onto the sofa beside her, taking her hand.

“What is it, *leannán*?” I ask her, squeezing her ice-cold hands. “Jesus fuck, you’re hands are cold.”

I chafe them. Andie shrugs, taking a long, shuddering breath.

“Connor,” she whispers, her eyes darting up and holding mine, looking apprehensive. “I’m pregnant.”

The words rattle around my brain, bouncing off the walls of the now fucking empty space as I try to comprehend what she’s telling me.

“Y-you’re pregnant?” I stare at her open-mouthed, and she nods.

“Almost twelve weeks,’ she whispers. My brain is racing to do some quick math. Jesus fuck.

“You got pregnant the first time we were together?”

My mouth feels like it’s full of cotton balls right now. It sounds like it too.

“But...but you’re on birth control. You only had your shot right before you moved in.”

Andie is nodding earnestly now. “I know. It’s just unlucky. The shot is only ninety-nine percent effective.”

That might be the case, but ninety-nine percent is still a fucking *lot*.

“I see....” I say slowly, not really seeing at all.



I think I've discovered what shock feels like. Is this what people normally feel like when they watch someone die? Unrelated and unhelpful. Why am I thinking about people dying?

Andie says something, but it's fuzzy against my ears, and she stands, walking quickly out of the room. I let her go because I'm going to be a *father* and, Jesus fuck, I need a minute.

When I finally wrap my mind around the idea, I poke my head back into the kitchen, but Andie isn't there.

"Where's Andie?"

Lauren looks up sharply at my rough tone. "She went for a drive to clear her head."

"I'm going to go to Seamus's and call her. When she comes back, let me know."

Lauren nods, and I head outside, climbing into my SUV and driving to Seamus's house.

They're all in the den when I arrive, including Liam, since he's been staying here while Tiggy was heavily pregnant.

Seamus grins at me, grabbing an extra whiskey tumbler while I sink into a chair. I gather Tiggy and Cillian are sleeping upstairs.

I accept the whiskey from Seamus and shoot the whole thing immediately, and he tops me up.

"Are you all right, Lucky?" Seamus asks as he sits back down. "Only you seem out of sorts."

“Andie’s pregnant,” I groan, hunching over in my seat, resting my elbows on my knees, and burying my head in my hands. Stunned silence meets my pronouncement. “I don’t even know how this happened.”

“Well,” Seamus replies after a beat, and it sounds like the fucker is smirking. “When a lad and a lass get horny, sometimes they fu-.”

“Aye,” I snap at him, shooting the smirking prick a glare, “I’ve copped on to that part. She’s on fucking birth control!”

“Fitzpatrick super sperm strikes again!” Liam whispers loudly, earning himself a glare as well.

“Fuck, I’m glad I don’t have super sperm,” Paddy comments offhandedly. Ronan nods fervently in agreement, but I can see they’re smirking at me too. Arseholes.

“I wouldn’t mind super sperm,” Niall interjects, “then I wouldn’t have to wait until May.”

I have no idea what the fuck that means or why May is suddenly a magically impregnating month. But clearly, there’s no magic reason that birth control is weaker in May because neither Tiggy nor Andie got pregnant in May. Fucking Fitzpatrick super sperm. Groaning, I swallow the second tumbler of whiskey as well.

# Chapter TWENTY-FOUR

## ANDIE

It's hard to drive while I'm dashing tears away with the back of my hand, but somehow I manage. Connor looked like I slapped him with a brick when I told him. Then he kept repeating that I was on birth control, so I couldn't be pregnant.

I'm so upset and heartbroken over the idea that Connor might not want our baby I almost hit the guy trying to flag me down. Shit!

My tires screech, and I swerve at the last minute, avoiding him, though my car does end up in the small ditch on the side of the road, one of the back tires spinning.

Dazed and still a little teary, I climb out of the car and move to apologize to the guy I nearly hit.

"I'm so sorr-."

I cut off with a scream as he grabs me, trying to shove me into the back of his car. Uh, no. I'm pregnant. I'm not being kidnapped, raped, and murdered. Not today!

I kick out a foot, trying to shove away from the car, and cry out in pain when my ankle twists and pops. There's a crunch, and holy freaking shit, I think I broke my ankle.

Pain radiates up my leg, and I thrash my arms and start biting. I get his ear, and he howls in pain, dropping me on my ass.

There's a honking and a screeching of tires. A car door slams, and my would-be kidnapper's car squeals off. Oh my god. I suck in a breath. I'm okay. *We're* okay.

"Are you all right?" A young female voice sounds in my ear, and I grunt in agreement, looking up at the slight young woman with wispy black hair as she bends over me.

"I'm okay. Could you get my pocketbook out of my car?" I point to where it's still nose-first in the ditch.

"Of course!" She hurried over to it, leaning in through the open door and lifting out my bag. Handing it to me, she crouches, hovering.

"Should I call the police? I got a picture of the guy and one of his car."

"Uh, no. It's okay. I'm fine. We don't need to bother them."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah. What would they do anyway? Take my statement and never look at it again?"

Sighing, she scrunches up her face. "Yeah. I guess. Can I at least drive you to the hospital?"

"That would be amazing. Could you send those pictures to me? I want to see if I recognize him or his car. I didn't really get a good look at him when he grabbed me."

"Of course! I'm Mindy."

She straightens, pulling out her phone and getting my number to text me with pictures.

Putting her phone back in her pocket, she helps me hobble to her car, sliding into the front passenger seat. I dig out my

phone as she drives to the closest hospital. I don't have insurance, but I don't care. I need my baby checked out.

I look at the pictures Mindy sent through. She did well to get one of the guy's face. The one of the car is good too. It has the make, model, and license plate.

Mindy parks in the drop-off zone, helping me hobble inside.

"I'm happy to speak with the police if you decide to call them. You can give them my number."

I smile tightly at her. That so isn't happening. "Thanks for everything."

"Not at all. I hope your ankle isn't too bad."

I watch her go, turning to the patient representative who has appeared pushing an empty wheelchair. I think it might be for me. Relief floods me at the thought of not having to hobble on my poor ankle again.

"What brings you here today?"

"I was in a car accident. I think I've broken my ankle. I'm also twelve weeks pregnant."

"Of course, I'll just grab some details. Name?"

"Andrea Halpern."

"Next of kin?"

"Uh, Connor Fitzpatrick."

There's a pause as she blinks at me.

"Oh. We'll take you through immediately. I can get the rest of your details once you're comfortable."

“O-okay.” That never happens. Did I just say the magic word?

After they check my baby is okay, which was my first demand, and hook me up to pregnancy-acceptable painkillers and set and plaster my ankle, I call Lauren.

“Hey, are you on your way home, girl?” she asks when she answers. I fight back a snuffle. The waterworks are threatening again, damn it. I think it’s a pregnancy thing.

“Not quite. I got jumped. The car ended up in a ditch, and I got a ride to the hospital. Just a broken ankle. The baby is fine.”

“What?” Lauren loses her shit on the other end of the phone. I text her the two pictures and give her my room number at the hospital before she rings off.

Dropping my phone onto the nightstand, I sleepily snuggle down in the soft pillows and start to cry again.



## CONNOR

Paddy’s phone rings and he pulls it out, a sappy look crossing his face. Lauren. He answers, and his whiskey tumbler smashes on the ground as he surges out of his chair.

“Is everything okay, Paddy?” Seamus glances up at him in surprise from where he’s cradling his son.

“That was Lauren,” Paddy spits, his frantic eyes turning to me. “Someone tried to kidnap Andie.”

I’m on my feet, the chair crashing behind me as I feel hot and cold.

“She fought them off but broke her ankle. She’s at the hospital. Baby is fine,” he assures me as I start to panic.

His phone beeps, and he glances down. “Lauren’s sent a photo of the arsehole and his car and license plate.”

Paddy is fishing his keys out of his pocket while pulling up the number of the dirty cop he knows, who can run the plates and put a BOLO out so we can find the cunt quickly.

He’s striding towards the door, his phone at his ear. “Come on, Lucky. We’ll find the fucker.” He pauses at the door when I don’t move. “Lucky?”

I shake my head. “Take Niall. I’m going to the hospital to be with Andie.”

Paddy studies me for a beat and nods, while Niall stands and slips out of the room, nodding to me as he goes.

“I’ll give ye a lift to the hospital, Lucky.” Ronan stands as well, and Seamus looks over at me.

“Let me know how she is. We’ll keep you updated on all this.”

I nod, following Ronan out of the room.

I don’t know how many laws he breaks, but he gets us to the hospital fucking quickly, leaving his SUV illegally parked as we stride inside.

“Can I help you?” the young man at the reception desk asks.

“Andie Halpern,” I spit out. He blinks as I jab my finger at his computer screen. “What’s her room number.”

He taps around, pulling something up, but his next words aren’t a fucking room number.

“We don’t just let anyone in, especially outside of visiting hours.”

I glare at the fucking cunt. “Do ye know who I am, lad?”

“Uh... no?”

“He’s Connor Fitzpatrick,” Ronan rumbles, his face promising pain. The lad’s eyes dart to the screen.

“The father? Oh, we can take you through.”

Thank fuck for that. An orderly guides us directly to Andie’s room. Ronan sits outside while I let myself in, quietly closing the door behind me when I see she’s asleep.

My breath catches in my throat as I round the end of the bed and take in her tear-streaked face and plastered foot while one of her arms curls protectively around her middle.

Around *our* baby. Keeping them safe. Jesus fuck. I should have been with her, keeping them both fucking safe.

Kicking off my shoes and stripping off my coat, I crawl onto the bed with Andie and cuddle her close to me. She stirs and blinks awake, her eyes widening as she takes me in.

“Connor,” she whispers, her voice rough from her earlier tears. “You’re here.”



“Of course I’m here, *a chuisle mo chroí*,” I murmur back, brushing a kiss against her brow. “Sure, and where else would I be?”

“I-I don’t know.”

I cup her cheek, stroking it with her thumb, lowering my head to kiss her, my tongue sliding into her mouth, fencing with hers. Drawing my head back, I press my forehead against hers.

“I love ye so much, *leannán*.”

Andie’s breath hisses in sharply. “Y-you do?”

She sounds incredulous, and I don’t know why she finds that fact hard to believe.

“Of course I do.”

Her eyes narrow suspiciously at me. “You’re only saying that because of the baby.”

I snort, rolling my eyes at her. “Don’t be daft, lass. Sure, and why on earth would I go and do something like that. I’m not an eejit.”

But Andie still looks unconvinced.

“*Is breá liom tú*. Ye have to believe it.”

“What does that *mean*?” Andie groans, rubbing her forehead. “You *always* say it, but I don’t know what it means.”

“*Is breá liom tú*?” I clarify, and she nods. “I always say it, do I?”

I smirk at Andie as she frowns and nods again. “Yeah, but you’ve never told me what it means. You could be calling me

an asshole, for all I know.”

I shoot her a look and grin at her. Why would I call her an asshole?

“*Is breá liom tú* is how ye say ‘I love ye’ in Irish, lass.”

Surprise crashes over her face as she quickly tries to remember the first time I said it to her. I can remember the first time I said it to her. It was after I beat the shite out of that good-for-nothing loser she used to date, and she told me to tell her a fact in Irish.

“Why did you say it back then?” she whispers, clearly remembering the same thing I am.

“Ye told me to say something in Irish. Tell ye a fact.” I shrug at her. Andie blinks in surprise as she blushes so hard her cheeks turn cherry red.

“You’re not upset that I’m pregnant?” Andie whispers, changing the subject so fast I’m surprised I don’t have whiplash. Now it’s my turn to blink at her in shock.

“Sure, and why would I be upset about that?” I ask, sliding my hand down to cup her slightly rounded stomach.

I have no clue how I didn’t notice her stomach is no longer completely flat or her tits are bigger. Probably because I am actually a fucking *eejit*, after all.

“B-because...I was on birth control. We haven’t even discussed what our relationship exactly is....” She trails off as my eyebrows shoot up.

“Fecking permanent is what our relationship exactly is,” I tell her, and she starts in surprise. “I love ye, lass, and I need

ye and our wean in my life. I'll not be letting ye go now. Ye're stuck with me for life."

Andie blushes with pleasure at my statement and moans as I capture her mouth with my own.

# Chapter TWENTY-FIVE

## CONNOR

Seamus glances over as I step into the basement room under Oracle. The Reaper's domain. The swarthy Moldovan strapped to the blood-stained table in the center is panting, the soles of his feet bright red from the beating they've taken with a metal pipe. From the looks of things, Niall has moved to his hands. Two fingers look broken, and he's missing a pinky, blood dripping down onto the cement floor.

“You called, Fitzzy?”

He jerks his head at the man moaning in pain. “This is Munteanu. His niece and nephew were your young houseguests.”

My eyes swivel over the man, tightening as we lock gazes. “Are ye the piece of shite who broke into my house?”

His responding stare is belligerent, but when Niall's gardening shears pinch at his ring finger, he gurgles.

“Yes. For revenge. We wanted the Irish to pay.”

“Pay for what? Treating those children with more care and kindness than the Italians would have shown them?” Seamus scoffs, his arms crossing over his chest. Munteanu sneers.

“Kindness would have been returning them to their Papa.”

“We were doing the Italians a favor. Why aren't you breaking into their compounds? They're the ones who ordered

the collateral be held.”

Munteanu shrugs. “We don’t have a death wish.”

“Then why did ye go after a Fitzpatrick?” Seamus takes an involuntary step forward as his temper snaps.

“Not the important Fitzpatrick.”

Rage surges through me. My entire life, I have been treated well because of my last name. The Fitzpatrick name has afforded me every luxury, every deference. But it didn’t protect my lass. The mother of my unborn wean.

This would never have happened if I had caved to Uncle Sean’s cajoling at any point, taking over my own crew. I would not have been considered unimportant. I would have been able to protect Andie and our baby together.

As my face darkens, Seamus accurately reads my mood. “Don’t even think about it, Lucky. This isn’t on you. They’ll pay for this.”

I inch closer, my fingers itching, my eyes lingering on the knives Niall laid out. Seamus throws me a warning look, turning his eyes back to Munteanu.

“Why were you so desperate to get the flash drive back?”

Munteanu flinches, trying to recover and look unperturbed. “What flash drive?”

Niall drops the gutted Disney toy on his bloodstained chest. Munteanu’s eyes widen, horror crossing his face.

“When did you steal it from the Italians?”

“A year ago. We were trying to code break it.”

“Did you ever manage it?”

“No. It wasn’t a computer code. Did you?”

“Yes.”

His eyes flicker to me, cringing at the dark look on my face. He knows he’s facing his imminent death.

“What was it?”

“Not worth dying over,” I growl. Resignation flutters across his face. “Why did ye go after my woman?”

Munteanu’s eyes dart back to me, boring into my face. “She was the housekeeper.”

“She kept my house. Yes.”

He frowns, the cogs behind his eyes whirring. “Her clothes were on a different floor of the house.”

“Aye. They were. We never got around to moving them.” Thank fuck for that. They would probably have taken Andie then if they knew she was my lass.

“We thought we might be able to find out from her where the toy was.”

“And what was yer plan once ye had interrogated her?”

He doesn’t speak. He doesn’t need to. I see the spark of interest in his eye. Andie is a stunning woman. His tongue darts out to wet his lips, and fury flows through me. They were going to touch my lass. The mother of my wean. It’s time. My eyes slide across to Seamus, who nods grimly. Fucking finally.

Stalking across the room, I snatch up the gleaming knife I had my eye on from the second I walked into this basement,

twirling it between my fingers as I step up to the table. I've never killed someone who couldn't fight back, but I will happily kill this scum.

His eyes widen as my knife swipes across his throat. Munteanu's head tips back, red spilling across the table, dripping onto the floor to join the blood from his hand.

Dropping the knife onto the table to the side, I nod to Niall, stopping beside Seamus as he claps me on the shoulder. Behind us, Niall is already moving to wrap the body in a plastic sheet.

"You go home and shower, Lucky. I'll collect Paddy, and we'll meet you at the hospital."

My eyes sweep the body again as Niall flips the sheet across his face, and satisfaction surges through me. I might not have been able to protect Andie, but I have defended her, and that's what matters to me. Now I can walk into that room and face the priest with a clean conscience.

It takes no time to stop by my house, showering and tucking the rings into my suit pocket. I check my reflection in the mirror, grinning as I smooth down my tie. I have matched it to the lass's eyes. It's a glorious color.

Andie smiles softly as I walk into the room. Her eyes drop to take in my suit, but she doesn't mention it. Perching on the edge of the bed, I take her hand in mine, smoothing my hand over the back of it.

"How are ye feeling, *a chuisle mo chroi?*"

"I'm all right," she whispers, squirming to get comfortable. "I'm ready to go home. It's a little bit boring in here."

I bite back a smirk, my eyes lingering on the clock above the door. In five minutes, it's about to be a lot less boring.

“How's our wean?” My eyes drop to her stomach, covered by her baggy sweater. Lauren must have delivered some more clothes.

“They're okay. The doctor came by earlier and said everything seemed normal.”

Nodding, I keep stroking her hand with my thumb. The door creaks open, and as the priest enters the room, Andie stares in shock.

He turns to me, holding out his hand. “Do you have the rings, Mr. Fitzpatrick?”

“What rings?” Andie whispers.

Ignoring her, I fish out the box Liam fetched for me, handing it to the priest while he gets set up with his robes and Bible.

Gently, I help Andie sit up in bed.

“What's happening?”

I gently kiss her lips, my hand splaying over her stomach where my baby is growing.

“We're getting married, *a chuisle mo chroí.*” I smile affectionately as she blinks, staring at me, her mouth hanging open.

“Now?” she squeaks, her hands fluttering over her hospital gown. “But I'm not dressed for it.”

I smile down at her, kissing her again. “Ye've never looked more beautiful.”



Andie blushes a deep red. “Shouldn’t we wait until I can at least stand?”

I press my forehead to her, and my tone leaves no room for argument.

“I’m marrying the mother of my child, Andie,” I tell her, and she freezes, swallowing, tears pooling in her eyes. Jesus fuck, that wasn’t the right thing to say.

She thinks that this is only because of the pregnancy. I can see it in her eyes.

“I’m also marrying the love of my life,” I whisper, and the tears spill over. I brush them away with frantic fingers, climbing into the bed, cuddling her close.

The priest looks over at us, blinking in surprise as he sees us both laying on the bed. He clears his throat, clutching his Bible.

“This can wait.”

I wave him over, growling. “No, it can’t.”

Andie giggles, pressing her fingers to her lips.

“I’d better be a married man in the next fifteen minutes if ye value yer life, Father.”

“You can’t threaten a priest!” Andie chides me, though she’s still giggling.

“I can threaten any man standing between me and my bride.”

She completely dissolves into laughter. The priest pales but steps up to the side of the hospital bed regardless.

“Witnesses?” he asks, his voice shaky.

“Right here, Father,” Seamus says smoothly as he and Paddy slide into the room. Paddy grins evilly when he sees me on the bed and waggles his eyebrows.

“Didn’t *cuddling* get you into this mess?”

Andie and I flip him off simultaneously, drawing a chuckle from Seamus.

“We can get a nurse to be the second witness. We don’t need you,” Andie snipes at him.

Paddy grins at her, holding up his hands in a surrender position.

“Truce, lass. Sure, and I wouldn’t miss my best mate’s wedding in a million years.”

I’m glad. It would feel wrong to get married without both Seamus and Paddy here.



## ANDIE

The priest marries us while we’re still cuddled together in my hospital bed. I have no idea when Connor organized this or when he managed to get his hands on two plain gold wedding bands, but suddenly we’re married, and I’m Andie Fitzpatrick. Connor kisses me deeply and probably a little inappropriately.

Paddy and Seamus howl with laughter, and the priest clears his throat uncomfortably.

Finally, Connor stops kissing me, pressing his forehead against mine and holding my gaze.

“Ye’re the most perfect lass,” he murmurs, brushing another kiss over my lips. “I can’t wait to get ye home and spend the rest of my life with ye.”

Another blush steals across my cheeks. I never really thought about whether or not Connor was romantic because he’s not a hearts and flowers kind of guy. He’s a strip poker and oral sex kind of guy. But right now, he’s knocking it out of the park with romantic gestures.

The priest says a bit more, shaking hands with Connor and the two others, and leaves. Paddy places a duffel bag on the bed. One of my sweaters is sticking out of it, so I guess I’m going home.

Dropping kisses on my cheeks, Seamus and Paddy slide out of the room.

“Are we heading back to Paddy and Lauren’s?”

“No, lass. We’re heading home.”

I beam at him. Connor kisses me, picking me up and carrying me out of the room. Seamus and Paddy have commandeered a wheelchair.

Setting me down in it, Connor starts pushing me. “Let’s get you out of here, lass,”

I tip my head back and grin up at him. Connor meets my grin, winking roguishly. Looking forward, I smile at my

wedding band, stroking my fingers over it.

Paddy drives us home, Connor snuggling me in the backseat while Seamus reads something on his phone. Seamus doesn't get out of the car when we park in the driveway.

Paddy does, slinging my bag over his shoulder as Connor carefully lifts me out of the SUV, knocking the door shut with his elbow and turning his back on them, carrying me into the house.

I'm excited as Paddy unlocks the door, ducking inside and emerging without my bag. He claps Connor on the shoulder, disappearing into his SUV as they leave.

Connor carries me over the threshold, a smirk tugging at his lips. I look around eagerly. Oh my. I have good taste.

"Can we go through every room?" I ask hesitantly. Chuckling, Connor nods, carrying me slowly so I don't miss anything.

I admire the new furniture I picked from the online catalog at Paddy and Lauren's house. It looks wicked good.

I think I will need a moment alone in the kitchen later because he bought every item from the kitchen website I had pointed out, and a few I sighed over but insisted we didn't need. I'm so glad Connor didn't listen to me. I'm going to be living in my dream house.

After the tour, Connor settles me in the living room downstairs. Now it's not a showpiece room full of antiques, I've made it useable. There are overstuffed, comfy sofas, a coffee table, a small TV, and bookshelves I fully intend to load with interesting books. Mainly cookbooks.

“I got ye something, *a chuisle mo chroí*,” Connor murmurs, leaving the room.

Propping my foot up on the coffee table, I wait patiently for him to fetch whatever he wants from upstairs. My fingers stroke over my wedding ring, and I giggle to myself. Oh my *god*. I’m married. To *Connor*. Talk about a dream come true.

He returns empty-handed, with his hands in his pockets. I smirk at him.

“What does it mean?” I ask as he drops onto the new comfy sofa beside me. Connor raises his eyebrows.

“What does what mean?”

He picks up my injured foot, twisting me so my ankle rests in his lap and I’m facing him.

“Ah kwish....” I start butchering the words, and he chuckles.

“*A chuisle mo chroí?*” he clarifies, the sounds falling easily from his tongue. I nod. Connor taps my toes with his fingers for a moment, tipping his head to the side. “Pulse of my heart.”

My breath catches, and he shrugs. “It’s nicer in Irish.”

I laugh, but my own heart is clenching. What a lovely saying. What a beautiful thing for Connor to call me.

“So, what did you get me?” I prompt him, grinning eagerly.

He returns my grin and draws a jewelry box out of his jacket pocket. Flipping the box open, he hands it to me. Taking it, I gape at the gorgeous engagement ring.

It's a huge emerald cut diamond, set in gold with small round diamonds in a halo, on a shiny yellow gold band that matches our wedding rings.

"Ye didn't get a fancy wedding with a nice dress, so I got ye a fancy ring instead."

I tentatively stroke the diamond. It's the nicest thing I've ever owned.

"It's stunning," I breathe, and Connor shrugs.

"It's a nice ring, but it's not as stunning as ye are."

I blink at him, giggling, but he looks completely sincere.

"Flattery will get you everywhere, Mr. Fitzpatrick." I bat my lashes at him. He growls at me as he plucks the ring box from my fingers, taking out the ring and sliding it on next to my wedding band.

"As long as ye are everywhere with me, Mrs. Fitzpatrick," he replies easily, tugging me into his lap and kissing me deeply. Mrs. Fitzpatrick. I like the sound of that.

# Epilogue

## CONNOR

Andie has compulsively cleaned the house all day, ignoring my pleas for her to sit down and rest. The lass is four months pregnant. She should not be dusting every inch of a three-story house. At least she's out of her ankle plaster cast.

She's nervous about my mammy arriving. I should never have told her Mammy could make this house shine because now she's worried Mammy will judge how she keeps it.

“Aye, she will judge you, lass, for about five minutes, and then we'll tell her you're pregnant, and all will be forgiven, I assure you.”

Andie keeps straightening the curtains until I physically restrain her, wrapping my arms around her and hugging her to my chest, dipping my head, and kissing her thoroughly.

It seems to calm her until Seamus's car pulls up at the curb, and he emerges, helping Mammy out.

She glares up at the house, striding ahead of Seamus as he collects her suitcase. She's inside the front door without even knocking. That's something that I will have to talk to her about. She doesn't live here anymore. She might be staying with us for a week until her new house is ready, but after that, she has to knock, just like everyone else. This is Andie's home now.

“So, this is the lass then?” she asks, cocking an eyebrow.

Andie flushes under her scrutiny. Mammy's eyes drop to the ring, taking it in as she sniffs and marches into the living room.

"Where is my piano?" she screeches. We all hurry in after her.

"There was an incident. We had to replace a lot of things."

"I can see that!" Mammy sounds shocked. "All the lovely furniture is gone."

Andie is getting smaller and smaller beside me, especially when Mammy rounds on her.

"This is all your taste then?" Jesus fuck, Mammy sounds accusing.

"Andie and I picked the furniture together."

Mammy harrumphs, eyeing Andie again. "Ye'll have the wedding all planned then?"

I wrap my arm around Andie's shoulder. "Actually, we're already married."

Mammy's eyes cut to our hands, narrowing as they take in the wedding bands.

"It was a small ceremony. Us, Paddy, Seamus, and the priest."

Mammy swells up like a bullfrog. "Ye couldn't even wait for yer own mother?"

She sounds hurt now, and I shrug at her. Andie seems petrified into permanent silence. I think she might be a little overwhelmed.



I did warn her that my mammy was a lot to take in.

“It’s a good thing I started packing as soon as ye called and said ye were going to ask the lass to marry you.” Mammy rounds on me as Andie starts with surprise beneath my hands. “Otherwise, I might have missed ye having a wean as well. And when might that happen?”

She is glaring at us. I hug Andie tighter to my side as I smirk.

“Five months or so.”

Suddenly, she’s lighting up like a Christmas tree, all hostility gone.

“No wonder ye rushed the wedding!” she crows, rushing over and grabbing my face, pulling me down to kiss my cheek, turning to Andie and folding her into a tight hug.

“Ye’ll be wanting to decorate a nursery. That den up on the third floor will be the perfect place.”

And she’s off, dragging Andie away from me and into the kitchen. I follow, watching Mammy sit Andie at the table, making a pot of tea and fussing over my pregnant wife.

Seamus swallows his laughter, coming up beside me and slapping me on the back.

“I’ll take her to see Tiggy and Cillian in a bit. That’ll give Andie a break for a few hours.”

“Thanks,” I mutter gratefully, but he’s grinning because the prick is *enjoying* this.



## ANDIE

Seamus took Siobhan Fitzpatrick away for a few hours this afternoon to see Tiggy and meet Cillian. It was a bit of a relief. The woman is *full-on*.

“She’s only staying for a few days, *a chuisle mo chroí*,” Connor assures me, his mouth full of toothpaste, while I perch on the edge of the toilet, watching him. “Then her new place will be ready, and she will go and live there. We had the locks changed after the break-in, so we won’t be giving her a key.”

He spits and rinses his mouth, grinning mischievously at me. I roll my eyes at his teasing, but at the same time, I’m a little relieved she won’t be coming and letting herself into our house whenever she pleases.

When we slide into bed, I snuggle down in Connor’s arms, tipping my head back to grin up at him.

“When did you call your mother to tell her that you were going to ask me to marry you? Because you never actually *asked* me, you know. You brought a priest into my hospital room.”

Connor grins down at me, brushing a kiss over my lips.

“I bought yer ring and called Mammy to let her know before Cillian was born.”

My heart thuds rapidly in my chest. “You were planning to ask me before you knew I was pregnant?”

Connor nods earnestly. “I was, *mo mhuirnin dilis*. I already knew I wanted to marry ye and have weans with ye. I knew it before we went to stay with Paddy and Lauren.”

My stomach clenches at his words.

“You wanted to have children with me?” I mumble, hardly believing what I’m hearing.

Connor kisses me again. “Aye, lass. Ask my mammy. She’ll tell ye that I told her on the phone I wanted to have a wean with ye as soon as we were married because I wanted them to be close to Cillian in age, just like Seamus and I.”

Tears are gathering in my eyes at the thought. Connor brushes the few that spill over onto my cheeks away, pressing his forehead against mine.

“Never doubt for a second that I’ve loved ye for a long while now,” he whispers, the sincerity shining in his eyes. “Ye are everything to me, Andie. *Everything*.”

I sigh as his lips move on mine. My sigh quickly becomes a moan as his hand slips between my legs.

“I love ye, wife,” Connor growls against my lips.

“I love you too, husband,” I murmur back to him. He chuckles as he moves down my body, kissing every bare patch of skin he can find.

## The End.



## Irish Phrases:

My heart = *mo chroí* (Muh khree)

Sweetheart/beloved = *leannán* (lan-awn)

My darling = *a mhuirín* (Ah woor-need)

My own true love = *mo mhuirín dilis* (Muh woor-need deelish)

My heart's beloved = *a ghrá mo chroí* (Ah ghraw muh khree)

Pulse of my heart = *a chuisle mo chroí* (Ah khwish-leh muh khree)

Cheers = *Sliánte* (slawn-che)

Fun/news/gossip/entertainment = *Craic* (krak)

I love you, my beloved wife = *Is breá liom tú, mo bhean chéile* (Iss braw lum too, muh vyan khay-leh)

I love you = *Is breá liom tú* (Iss braw lum too)

You are my whole life = *Is tú mo shaol ar fad* (Iss too muh he-um er fard)

My four-leaf clover = *seamair no cheithre duilleog* (sham-widge nu hair-da dill-log)

I'll never let you go = *Ní ligfidh mé go deo thú* (Knee li-key may guh-jaw who)

You are my everything = *Is tú mo gah rud* (Iss too muh gar rud)

Health to the men, and may the women live forever! = *Sláinte chuig na fir, agus go mairfidh na mná go deo.* (slawn-cha kwig)

nah fur, og-us guh mar-fig nah mnaw guh joe)

My seven blessings on you! = *Mo sheacht mbeannacht ort!*  
(Muh shocked bannocked urt!)

May you live long! = *Go maire tú!* (Guh morra too!)

May you live to be 100! = *Go dté tú an céad!* (Guh day too un  
cay-ad!)

God's blessing on you = *Beannacht Dé leat!* (Bannocked day  
lat!)

May your journey be successful = *Go n-éirí an bóthar leat!*  
(Guh nye-ree un bow-her lat!)

I'm sorry = *Tá brón orm* (Tar brone or-em)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Writing has always been a hobby for me, ever since I was little. But it wasn't until I took some time off from work to raise my daughter that I really had a little more time to set aside to properly focus on my passion and bring the very real people in my head alive on the page.

I find the best way for me to write is to immerse myself in a story, let my characters take me where they want to go, and hope for the best. When finishing a book, I always like to leave my characters at a point in their lives where I know that they are happy, in love, and hopefully, going to go off and live good lives without me looking over their shoulders. I hope that I have managed that!

When I'm not living in the world of my characters, I live in Brisbane, Australia, with my very understanding husband, our wonderful little girl and chilled out son, and our two energetic cats.

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novella.**

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Find out more about K.S. Ellis' latest releases at [ksellis.com](http://ksellis.com)

Read on to see what happens in Ronan's story, *Bad at Heart*, available [here](#).

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# Chapter One

## Fiona

The Irish Saint is officially on my shit list. I have absolutely no idea how one man can be so infuriatingly, all-consumingly *irritating*, but somehow, Ronan Murphy fucking manages it.

Ever since I accidentally got myself on his radar, he's been out to save me, and holy fuck. It's like he has been placed on this planet solely to annoy the fuck out of me.

It doesn't help that he's so fucking sexy. Asshole. I gave in *once*. I blame it on too much vodka at Lauren's wedding, and I made out with the dickwad.

Huge mistake. Now the fucker is even more persistent. I'm not entirely sure what his end game is. I know he wants to fuck me, but then again, so do loads of guys. Not that I'm tooting my own horn or anything.

I'm a stripper. My livelihood kind of depends on my being able to make men want to fuck me. But I've gone out of my way to avoid appealing to Ronan. But the fucker noticed me anyway.

Damn good deeds. The road to hell is paved with good intentions, and I'm fucking marching along it to the beat of my

own damn drum.

Well, I'm not presently marching. I'm crawling out a window just a shade smaller than my hips so I can shimmy down a fire escape and not have to face my annoyed landlord when he comes to demand I pay him the back rent I owe.

If I'm not careful, I will end up with an eviction notice stapled to my door. And if that happens, I'm going to march down to Oracle and try to castrate Ronan fucking Murphy. Hell, if I'm dead, I won't need to worry about finding another place to live.



## Ronan

Fiona shoots me a glare as she marches into the dressing room at Oracle, the strip club the Irish run in West Boston. As always, I'm immediately aware of her presence. Of her everything. Jesus fuck, the woman has consumed me every moment since I first noticed her.

I'm currently standing in front of the floor-to-ceiling mirrors mounted on the back wall, having a conversation with Carmen Pena about changing her set tonight. Carmen is one of the older strippers here – in her late twenties – and has been here for almost seven years.

She is supposed to have two sets in the VIP bar, but her kid is sick, and she needs the night off.

“What about Fi?” she asks, gesturing wildly in Fiona’s direction. “She could easily do three sets.”

“Yeah, I’d be happy too!” Fiona beams at Carmen as I grit my teeth.

How the fuck am I supposed to get her to stop being a stripper if everyone is fucking conspiring against me to get her more shifts?

“Thanks so much, Fi! You’re a damn lifesaver!” Carmen blows her kisses, slinging her purse over her shoulder and hurrying out of the room.

Fiona throws me a smug look as she drops into the chair at her dressing table, her angelic face lit up by the strips of lightbulbs around the mirror.

She opens her makeup bag with practiced indifference. I have no idea what it is about this little blonde stripper, but I can’t get her out of my fucking head.

I know that she’s attracted to me too. A certain memorable half-hour at Paddy’s wedding comes to mind. When Fiona let her guard down enough to stop fighting the pull of attraction between us and let me taste that sweet mouth of hers. Jesus fuck, those plump pink lips haunt my fucking dreams.

I shouldn’t have pushed my luck that night, but my dick got excited, and I was tugging up her dress. It brought Fiona to her senses, and the shutters came back down; all her emotions tucked back behind those blue eyes.

Stupid fucking eejit that I am. If I’d kept my fucking hands on Fiona’s back and neck, she would have let me keep kissing

her; I'm sure of it. Since then, she's been even more skittish around me.

Fiona's eyes dart up to meet mine in the mirror as I stalk towards her. She's got her shutters down now, her expression unreadable. I fucking hate that look. Sometimes, I catch glimpses of her emotions flashing through her eyes. When she's drunk, I see more. That's when I can see she's fighting her attraction to me. I like looking at her face when she's drunk.

Fiona swallows as I lean down, the slight movement in her throat catching my eye as my lips slide along the outer shell of her ear. Her delicious scent of roses and lemon tickles my nostrils.

"Three sets," I murmur, our eyes locked in the mirror. "But the same rules still apply, *leannán*. No going topless, no lap dances."

"I'm not your sweetheart."

Her response comes automatically. However, where usually it's snapped and harsh, right now, Fiona's voice is breathy, and my dick leaps hopefully.

Keeping my lips against her ear, I slide my hands up her bare arms, the backs of my fingers brushing against the outside of her breasts through her T-shirt. Her breath hitches and my dick is definitely leaping now.

"Ye are to me, *leannán*," I breathe. For the merest moment, the shutters in her eyes disappear, and I can see the blazing heat in Fiona's eyes.

Too soon, she clears her throat, dropping her eyes away from mine in the mirror and reaching for her makeup bag again. The action causes her to lean away from my lips and my hands.

Straightening, I move away from her, ignoring all the other strippers, who are carefully avoiding looking at us, giving us privacy.

Striding through the corridor, I reach the door to my office, set up next to Seamus's. I now run the club. He wants to be home with his wife and son every night. I want to be here to keep an eye on Fiona – to make sure she obeys my rules – and Sean Fitzpatrick has his son doing other things to get him ready to take over the organization some day.

I kick the door shut behind me and drop into my desk chair. Tipping my head back against the leather, I close my eyes and groan, remembering the soft feel of Fiona's skin and her delicious scent, which always wraps around my senses.

I have no idea why it took me so long to notice Fiona Clatham. 'Tis a crime that it did. She worked here as a stripper for over a year before the day burned into my brain.

I was sitting in Seamus's office when Fiona walked in to tell him that Tahlie, one of the other strippers, was spreading vicious rumors about Seamus's wife. Trying to get Tiggy killed. Crazy fucking bitch.

It took a lot of courage for Fiona to walk into that office, and I sure as fuck sat up and paid attention to her after that.

Now I'm starting to wonder if Fiona was deliberately attempting to fly under the radar when it came to the lads and

me.

Ever since that day, I see her everywhere. Not in a hallucinogenic way. More like she already *was* everywhere, and I'm the blind eejit who never *saw* her before.

Well, I fucking see her now. She's the only fucking female face I see. I've had to take care of business myself for almost a year now, and I just want to bury myself in Fiona.

I haven't ever been celibate this long before. Not since I had my first lass. I've fucking tried too. But I just can't seem to get into the act with anyone when all I want to see is Fiona's face as she writhes beneath me.

Jesus fuck. I need to fucking think of something else. Good thing I can always count on Liam fucking Kelly for a distraction.

Easing my ringing phone out of my pocket, I put it up to my ear.

"Liam," I rumble, hearing his sigh on the other end of the phone.

"I might be in a spot of bother, Ronan," he starts. Christ. I shove out of my chair, striding towards the door. My SUV is in the staff parking lot outside the building.

"Where are ye, lad?"

"The riverfront," Liam replies distractedly. "Follow the blood trail. You'll find me."

Jesus fuck. I stick my head into the kitchenette where Niall, the Reaper, is drinking coffee and laughing with his little ex-bartender wife.

“Let’s go,” I tell my best mate. He immediately puts down his mug, kisses Mellie, and follows me outside.

“Liam?”

I roll my eyes at him. “Who the fuck else?”

The fucker just grins. Prick.