

**BAD BOYS  
OF BOSTON**  
The Irish

**BORN**  
*to be*  
**BAD**

*K.S. Ellis*

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Born  
to be  
bad

Bad Boys of Boston

The Irish

Book one

k.s. Ellis

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Cameron, thank you for looking after the kids while I tore my hair out to get edits done. Thank you for listening to me describe a scene I spent days on only to say, “that’s not how the mafia would work...” Just... thank you.

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The best things are usually found when you're not looking for them.

- Prakhhar Sahay

# Chapter One

## SEAMUS

Two hours ago, we were covered in blood, and God knows what else, and now, Liam's got his face buried in a stripper's tits. The lad really knows how to compartmentalize, that's for fucking sure.

The rest of my crew are dotted around the private VIP room, watching the show on the stage. The stripper who is working it like a pro up there has been working here at Oracle in West Boston for three years now.

The one on Liam's lap has been here for less than three months. I hope she's enjoying herself because tonight will be her last.

"It looks like Liam's getting his dick wet tonight."

I glance over at Paddy as he speaks. Patrick Flynn, my best mate for over twenty years and my right-hand man, is lounging against the bar table, a tumbler of whiskey in his hands, watching the youngest member of our crew coax a stripper into committing the ultimate faux pas.

Out in the main club, this shit might fly, but here, in the VIP room, if there's a girl on the stage, she commands the attention, and the tips, of the room.

We didn't make the rule, but we sure as fuck enforce it when one of the girls complains. Our job is to keep our

clientele happy, and the best way to do that is to keep our strippers happy.

Paddy was the first lad I met when my father up and moved us here from Dublin twenty-one years ago. Pa was heavily involved with the Dublin Underworld before he transplanted us here.

My cousin Connor, who is also in my crew, and his mammy came with us for the ride. His mammy was married to Pa's brother, and his Pa was killed in a shoot-out with coppers when we were little, so Pa takes care of her.

Paddy's Pa had taken mine under his wing when we arrived in Boston, and we've been mates ever since. Paddy also grew up in Ireland but moved a few years before we did. I didn't know him back in Ireland, but we've been thick as thieves for almost two decades now.

Connor and Ronan are standing near the bar, watching Liam with inscrutable eyes. He's not one to cock block, so Ronan will let the lad finish with her, but he's going to make Liam's life a fucking miserable affair for the next few weeks. It looks like my dry cleaning is getting done.

A few years ago, Ronan brought Liam into the crew when he caught the lad trying to jack his car. Liam's lucky. Most people who cross Ronan end up six feet under. Because he's the one who brought him in, Liam is Ronan's problem. Since the lad can never seem to keep his dick in his pants, he's Ronan's problem a fucking lot.

My phone buzzes against my thigh, and I work it out of my jeans as Carmen's eyes meet mine as she works the stage. Her

face is controlled, but I can see the fury in her eyes. I give her a short, sharp nod. Juliet's out.

Satisfied Juliet will be disciplined, Carmen's lips twist into a sultry smile as she crosses to the pole and works it, to the crowd's delight. Dropping my eyes to my phone, I bite back a curse, shooting my whiskey.

"Sort it out," I tell Paddy, jerking my head in the direction of Liam and Juliet. He nods, swirling the amber liquid around his glass, saluting me with the tumbler as I leave.

The drive from Oracle to West Roxbury only takes half an hour, and I pull up at the gabled, red brick five-bedroom house I grew up in after we landed Stateside when I was nine.

Dermot, the man on guard tonight, nods to me as I stalk up the path and knock on the door. Darragh, Pa's closest advisor, answers my knock, gesturing for me to follow him through to the den where Pa does all his business.

"Seamus, son."

When I enter the den, Pa rises out of his leather wing-backed chair, embracing me when I reach him, clasping my shoulders and kissing my cheek.

Once I'm ensconced in my own leather chair, furnished with a glass of whiskey, Pa steeple his fingers, gazing over the top of them at me. His eyes dart around, landing back on my face.

"I take it our Moldovan problem has been taken care of?"

He taps his steepled fingertips against his chin, studying me with his steely blue eyes. It's not like him to fidget. My eyes fix on his moving fingers. Darragh takes his seat across from

my father as I answer the affirmative. There must be another job for my crew to handle.

Pa shifts in his chair, his eyes latching on me again. Why the fuck does he look so twitchy? Do we need to off a cop or something? Niall would always be down for that, but I'd rather not.

"How's that woman you've been seeing?" he asks. What woman? At fifteen, I lost my virginity and haven't been monogamous once. I blink in surprise at him. Since when does he give a fuck where I stick my dick?

"Which one?" I smirk.

He grins, so it's obviously the answer he wanted to hear. I'm happy to oblige.

"You know I'm in no mood to settle down and make a mammy of a woman just yet, Pa."

I grin at him, and Darragh smothers his smile with his hand over in the corner. Pa's nodding along, his grin disappearing as he sighs.

"We've another shipment coming in from Matvei. I want your lads there for the handover."

I guess we're done talking about my sex life. The end of that conversation can't come soon enough. I haven't spoken to Pa about sex since he told me always to wrap up tight.

He runs through the details of the handover for the weapons shipment. Matvei is our Belarusian arms dealer. He also sorts out the Russians, with who we have an alliance, and the Romanians, with who we very much don't.

Not that it affects Matvei's relationship with any of us. He is based in Eastern Europe and cares nothing for what he refers to as the "petty squabbles of city factions".

With Matvei, you buy his stock, or you don't. He controls almost a quarter of the world's black market arms trade. He really doesn't care who buys his goods as long as they pay on time and in full.

"We'll be there," I assure Pa when he finishes running through the details of the drop.

"Good," he sighs and rubs his eyes. "I've heard Matvei is also delivering a shipment to the Romanians this trip, so keep your eyes peeled."

We've been at war with the Romanian faction here in Boston for almost three decades. The feud goes back well before my father took over the Irish faction eight years ago and Marius Albescu took over the Romanian faction.

They inherited the war, and it's fizzled along with various set to's and clashes. We're at something of a stalemate at the moment.

We stay out of their territory, they stay out of ours, and if we do cross paths, someone usually ends up cut. But it hasn't escalated into full-blown warfare for almost twenty years.

Eventually, something is going to have to give. The lads are itching for a fight, so I don't think it will be the end of the fucking world if we go toe to toe with those Eastern European fucks. But Pa is keen to avoid such bloodshed, and I can respect that.

It's why I know I'm not ready to take over just yet. I'd be all for a war, and Pa knows exactly why Paddy and I would be spoiling for that fucking fight. My lads would be onboard as well. We'd wipe out all those Romanian fuckers and piss on their ashes.

When it comes to the topic of my taking the top job, Paddy occasionally teases me about how I lack the "bigger picture thinking". In private, of course.

He'd never let on to anyone else that he's anything other than confident in my ability to run the entire Irish Mafia in Boston. Anything less than a show of absolute confidence would have devastating consequences for my father and me, who has publicly named me as his successor, and a death sentence for Paddy. And Paddy's no idiot.



## TIGGY

I want nothing better than to go home, run a bath, pour a *very* large glass of red wine, and blast classical music out of my Bluetooth speakers until I feel completely relaxed.

Unfortunately, after leaving work, I'll only be at home for all of twenty-five minutes, *tops*, to shower, change, and do my makeup. Then I'm going to Bunker Hill in Charlestown.

When I arrive at the brightly colored clapboard townhouses of my youth, I knock on the bright red door of the yellow townhouse, the back of my neck prickling.

Glancing back at the street, I can see at least two cars with occupants sitting as still as statues. My father's guards must be watching me. Someone sure is.

I surreptitiously touch the familiar wooden door, feeling the grains beneath my fingers. One. I exhale, brushing my hand over the golden bracelet fixed on my wrist. Two. Taking a deep breath, I smell my floral perfume. Three.

Straining, I can hear faint sounds of Romanian being called out as footsteps stomp towards the door. Four. A slight breeze ruffles my hair and rustles the leaves of the elm tree growing out of the sidewalk, and I stare up at them. Five.

Waiting for whoever is in the cars to call inside and tell them it's me waiting to enter. I fidget with the mid-thigh hem of my long-sleeved lace grey dress, feeling more relaxed.

Eventually, the door opens, and Ivan, my father's right hand, stands before me. I've known Ivan since I was a little girl, and he gives me a stiff nod, ushering me inside, his eyes darting around outside. I feel cold.

Two cars. I noticed two cars, and that's overkill, even for my father. Either something is going on, and he needs extra security, or someone else is here.

I haven't been inside this house for three years. Not since my father yelled at me never to darken his doorway again when I told him I was going to work for the city. He saw my



career choice as a complete betrayal of our family and the Romanian Mafia.

When he called to ask me to come to supper, I thought it was an olive branch. Maybe it's something else entirely. I start counting again.

Ivan ushers me into the parlor, his hand on the small of my back. Sure enough, two strange men are seated, looking over as I walk in. My father stands, crossing the room to kiss my cheeks, handing me a glass of white wine.

I am introduced to both his guests. Irish mobsters. Sean Fitzpatrick and Darragh Connelly. I know enough about the shadier side of the city of Boston to know that Sean Fitzpatrick is the head of the Irish Mafia. From the way he shadows Sean, Darragh is his right-hand man, the same as Ivan is for my father.

Father sits beside me on the sofa and rests his hand on my knee. This isn't a random visit from the Irish. It can't be. We've been at war with them my whole life. Now they're here to have supper in my father's home. The home my mother died in.

This is big. Huge. Enormous. And my father wanted me here for it. I sit on the sofa beside him, listening to them make small talk about the weather, the president, the economy, and nonsensical little things until the maid comes in to announce supper is served.

Standing, we move, my father gripping my upper arm as the five of us walk into the dining room and occupy the table there. My father sits at the head. Sean Fitzpatrick at the foot. I am to my father's left, Ivan to his right. Darragh Connelly sits

to Sean's left, and there is one seat between him and Ivan and two empty seats beside me.

Sean Fitzpatrick and Darragh Connelly study me far too often for comfort. I turn my eyes to my soup. Smoked ham hock and bean soup, a traditional Romanian recipe.

The conversation and the cigar smoke flow around me. Occasionally offhand comments are made about my looks, but I ignore them.

This was my entire life growing up. Women aren't *people* to these men. They are objects, so a passing comment about my breasts or lips is neither here nor there.

Finally, after papanași is served for dessert, the Irish, Ivan, and my father disappear while I sit in the parlor by myself. I mess around on Instagram until my father finally appears with an inscrutable look on his face. He hands me a tumbler of brandy, seating himself in the armchair across from me.

“*Dragă.*”

He smiles at me. That's how I know he wants something. He only calls me “darling” in Romanian when he wants something.

“We can end this war.”

The blood in my veins turns ice cold. I'm not involved in their shady as fuck business dealings. I haven't been since I graduated high school and walked out of this house with my middle finger held high. *We* can't end fuck all.

My silence speaks to him, and he sighs.

“You will marry the Fitzpatrick boy next month.”

*Excuse me?* I will do fucking *what?* My gaping mouth and incredulous expression have my father rushing to convince me.

“I have already signed the contract, *dragă*.”

My eyes are cold as they rest on him.

“If you walk away from this, the Irish, they will come for me. For you.” He doesn’t need to say anything more. He has signed a marriage contract between myself and the son of Sean Fitzpatrick, the head of the Irish mafia. If I refuse, the Irish Mafia will execute my father and me. Such is the price of dishonor.

This is the life and future I walked away from at eighteen. And somehow, my father has dragged me straight back into this world.

I have spent the last six years proving I am more than a puppet to be playing in this game, yet I didn’t actually have a say at all when things came to a head.

“I’m not getting married,” I manage to spit out, but my father looks at me sadly, shaking his head.

“If you do not agree to this, it will be all-out warfare. The Irish outnumber us. They have alliances with the Russians and the Italians. My life will be forfeit. *Your* life will be forfeit.”

I stare at my father, open-mouthed in shock, tears of disbelief filling my eyes.

“I don’t understand. You hate the Irish.”

“This is what is needed, *dragă*. We make this deal, and the incursions with the Irish will disappear. We will have -.”

“An alliance?” I sneer, anger welling inside me, my hands clenched tightly in my lap.

“Not as such,” he sighs, rubbing his hands over his eyes, looking tired. “We are too small for them to benefit from that.”

“Then what? What is the point? What does everyone gain from this?” Because I’m the only one who will be losing – that couldn’t be more clear.

“The Irish will get you. We will have a truce. We will no longer have to look over our shoulders or avoid certain parts of the city. The Irish are larger than us. They are more powerful. They have alliances with the Italians and the Russians. They could annihilate us if they chose. We are buying our way out of that scenario with you as the currency.”

“And you get to have dinner with the Wolf Pup every Sunday? That gives you...what? Bragging rights?”

Father sighs, reaching over and patting my hand sadly. “There will be no weekly dinners. There will be no dinners at all. No contact.”

My heart thuds. No. No contact? I must have misheard him. That can’t be right.

“N-no contact?”

“No contact. It’s written into the contract. You will be Irish after you marry... at least for now.”

He holds my gaze, but I have no idea what the hell he’s trying to convey. Probably that I’m to be a good little wife and do exactly as my husband decrees.

This night is going from bad to worse. Sucking a deep breath through my nose, I quickly count through my five familiar things. It gets my breathing under control, but not my rage. Tamping down on it, I turn to my father, my eyes flashing with anger.

“Why would you agree to this?” I hiss, clenching my fists at my sides. “*I did not agree to this.*”

But deep down, I know why he agreed to this. Because he needed a pawn, and my father had an ace up his sleeve. A wayward daughter is good for nothing. Better to have one you can marry off to forge an alliance.

“There was no other way, *dragă*. You need to sort out your affairs.”

There was no other way, my pretty little ass.

# Chapter Two

## SEAMUS

The arms shipment delivery went like clockwork. There were no issues with Matvei's men and no sign of the Romanians. We are back at Oracle before six PM, and Liam is bitching because Juliet has been fired. Ronan glares at him until he shuts the fuck up, but his annoyance is palpable in the air.

My father comes in just after nine o'clock, and my crew and I end up in my office, drinking whiskey and giving him a rundown of the meeting.

Pa nods along with our debrief, seemingly uninterested until Darragh shoves away from the wall in the corner of the room where he was standing and places a gold ring on the desk in front of my father.

Pa picks it up, playing with it in his long fingers as the entire room falls silent. We all stare at the piece of jewelry until Pa speaks.

“We have a chance for a truce with the Romanians.”

Paddy casts a dark glance my way, but I ignore him, grinding my teeth and staring my father down. There's only one person in this room that the wedding band could be for, and it's me. No wonder he was so fucking interested in where I was sticking my dick the other week.

“When?” I grind out.

Pa nods at me. He knows that I understand. “Three weeks.”

A hiss of breath intake sounds around the room from my crew.

“Her name?”

Pa studies me for a moment, nodding to no one in particular. “Ylenia. Ylenia Albescu.”

Paddy hisses with anger, but I keep my face neutral. Albescu. She’ll be the daughter of Marius Albescu, head of the Romanian faction. Pa’s pulled out all the fucking stops on this.

Disgust settles in my bones at the idea of bedding Albescu’s daughter, and it must show on my face.

“She’s beautiful,” Darragh speaks up from the corner of the room. Five sets of eyes turn to him. Everyone except my father and me.

Pa nods in agreement as I stare at his face, my own schooled back into a neutral expression. I fuck beautiful women, yes. But I don’t marry them.

Unable to fidget without showcasing my feelings, I clench my toes. Jesus fuck. I can’t turn this down. To do so would be the ultimate disrespect to my father. It’s probably why he’s telling me here, in front of my whole crew.

The entire room is silent, everyone watching me. But I only care about Pa’s eyes drilling into my face.

“Just tell me when and where,” I say through clenched teeth.

“Three weeks, as I said. It will all be arranged. Ye just need to show up, son.”

I nod stiffly, not bothering to rise as Pa and Darragh leave.

The door swings shut behind them, and it's just me and the lads. Paddy silently watches my face. Liam is indifferent, and Niall and Ronan exchange a look but, other than that, remain impassive. Connor plays with his watch until he finally speaks.

“Bad luck, cuz,” he quips.

“Fuck off, Lucky.” I glare at him until he looks away. Fuck this shit. “It was always coming.” I shrug, turning to Ronan. “Find out everything about her. I want her fucking bank receipts. Can the woman even fucking cook? Does she have a bad shopping habit? I'm not fucking bankrolling that shite.”

“Will do,” Ronan drawls. Do I actually give enough of a fuck about this woman to know her life story? Probably not. I grimace, biting back a curse.

“I don't need to know about it unless it's important. And I don't want to see a picture.”

Ronan studies me for a beat, nodding. I'm sure if any skeletons fall out of her closet, we can take care of that shit. She'd have to be a modern-day Hitler for Pa to call this off. I'm getting married in three weeks. Nothing is going to change that fact.

As for the picture, I will be staring at her down the length of a church. Who gives a shit what she looks like? Knowing what she looks like isn't going to make a difference in three weeks. It isn't going to change that I'm going to be married. It



isn't going to change who is standing on the other side of that lacy veil.

I'd rather not fucking know. This is what I have to do to prove my loyalty. If this is what I have to do to prove I am a worthy successor to my father, then this is what I'll fucking do.

It's no skin off my nose. Whether I fuck around with a bare fourth finger on my left hand or not doesn't make a difference to me. Nor does the existence of a woman who will soon be occupying space in my house.

That's all she'll be doing. She will wear my ring, carry my name, and eventually bear my children. And she'll mean absolutely fucking nothing to me.



## TIGGY

Sorting out my affairs mostly consists of convincing men that I actually want to do what I'm saying I'm doing. First, there's my boss at Child Services, Matt Rossi, who can't for the life of him work out why I would be up and resigning out of the blue.

"I realize my timing isn't great, but I'm giving my two-week notice," I tell him as he glares across the desk. "That's

more than enough time to reassign my cases and for me to do the file handovers.”

“Talk to me, Tiggy,” he sighs at last, rubbing his eyes. “You love your job. Are you leaving Boston?”

I toy with the material of my pencil skirt, finally lifting my eyes to meet his.

“I’m staying here in Boston, but I’m getting married.”

He blinks at me in surprise, his eyes skating over my bare left hand, which I reflexively curl into a fist.

“Congratulations,” he beams. “Ant is a lucky guy. I can’t wait to see the ring once it’s fitted. But you don’t have to quit your job because you’re getting married. This isn’t the 1950s.”

My heart clenches along with my jaw.

“It’s not Ant I’m marrying,” I say quietly.

The silence that settles in the room is almost claustrophobic. I sit and stare at the desk, my hands clenched, while Matt stares at me, his hands steeped in front of his chin.

“I see,” he says after an extended, awkward silence, his tone flat. “Tiggy.” He pauses, sighs, shakes his head, and continues. “I have friends in the DA’s office.”

I touch my golden bracelet. One. I rub my fingers over the hard wooden arm of the chair I’m sitting in, one I have sat in many times over the last three years. Two. I breathe deeply, smelling my perfume. Three. I look out the window over Matt’s shoulder at the familiar landscape of Boston. Four. My eyes dance over the nameplate on Matt’s desk. Five.

“As I said,” I cut him off, my gaze snapping up to meet his as I paste a bland, professional smile on my face. “I just wanted to thank you for all the opportunities you’ve afforded me over the last three years and notify you of my resignation in two weeks.”

Matt is frustrated. It is written all over his face. He opens his mouth to argue, but the shutters on my face make him close it again. He blows out a breath, scrubs his face, and his shoulders slump as he nods.

“You’ll always have friends here, Tiggy. If you ever need anything, you know where we are.”

I hear everything he doesn’t say, loud and clear. If I ever need an out from the life as an underworld wife, call him. That’s not going to happen. There is no out from that life except death, but I nod anyway.

Word gets around the office pretty quickly that I’m leaving. I have plenty of well-wishers, and plenty of nosy Nelly’s trying to figure out why I’m going. I keep my mouth shut.

I told Matt because he is my boss and needed an explanation. No one else needs to know. Too many loose ends don’t bode well for any of us. It is a frankly exhausting day, and the last thing I want to be doing is seeing Ant. I’d rather go home, curl up on my sofa, and cry.

Unfortunately, the clock is ticking, and it’s time for me to put on my big girl panties, suck it up, and break up with my boyfriend of eight months so I can marry a strange mobster. You know, normal relationship stuff.

Ant appears at the door, leaning his forearm against the doorjamb near his jaw, grinning cockily down at me.

“I got your text. What’s so important? I was kind of in the middle of something. You said this couldn’t wait until tomorrow?”

I take a step forward, ignoring the annoyance in his tone. No. It can’t wait. Ant presses a kiss to my lips, sighing like the most put upon guy as he ushers me inside.

I know I could never have fallen in love with Ant, even if our relationship had been allowed to progress to that stage. He’s kind of a prick. But he knows who my family is and doesn’t care. That’s a rare thing in Boston for someone like me.

He drops onto the sofa, shoving aside a game controller. So, the things he was busy with were video games? Yeah, this relationship ending is no big loss, that’s for sure.

I take a seat beside him, and he slings his arm around my shoulders, propping his feet up on the coffee table and groping my breast.

I shift uncomfortably, trying to dislodge his hand subtly, and sigh.

“This has been really great, hasn’t it?” I ask his coffee table. It hasn’t, but that’s what you say when you let people down gently, right? That’s what every guy has started this conversation with when he finds out who my father is and dumps me. Not a great frame of reference, but it’s all I’ve got.

Ant freezes, sliding his arm from around my shoulder, reaching over and grasping my chin.

“What’s going on, Tiggy?” he asks, forcing me to look into his eyes. I try to jerk my chin out of his grasp, but he tightens it, his fingers digging into my jaw. Uh, ouch.

“I’m trying to break up with you gently,” I grit out. He’s really making this fucking easy. I should have done this *months* ago.

His eyebrows fly up as he frowns. “Why the fuck are you trying to break up with me at all, Tiggy? As you’ve just said, it’s been great. Why mess up a good thing?”

Because it hasn’t really been good? Because our relationship is mainly me hounding him to organize dates, him toying with his phone, us fucking, and him leaving my bed?

My eyes roam over his face. He looks like a member of a 90s boy band. What the hell was I thinking? Maybe I should give him the truth, not a generic *it’s not you, it’s me*. That should make this quick.

“I’m getting married in three weeks,” I whisper.

All the blood drains from his face as his hand tightens on my chin. Shit. I try to jerk it away again, but he holds on for dear life. I’m totally going to have a bruise tomorrow. I need to pick up some decent concealer on my way home.

“Fucking hell, Tiggy. Of all the things you could have said, it had to be that, huh?”

The shutters come down over his eyes, and I’m on the outer. He shoves my face away from him as he lets my chin go. I flex my jaw, the blood rushing back into it.

“Best wishes with your marriage. You’re a fucking idiot for agreeing to it. You’ll never be happy.”

I nod stiffly. I know a dismissal when I see one. We both get to our feet, and he walks me to the door. I turn, pressing a kiss to his cheek before I leave.

“Have a good life, Ant. You deserve it.”

He doesn't, but one of us should be the bigger person, and if I learned anything in the last eight months, it's not going to be him. He nods, closing the front door in my face.

*Now* I can go home, cry and ice my jaw. Tomorrow, I need to call my landlord and break my lease. I guess I'm moving from a relationship with one asshole to a marriage with another one. I was so close to getting out of this life. But escape was never an option. Not for me.

I stop at the Pharmacy to buy some concealer on my way home. Walking along the strip mall, I also buy a frozen pizza and a bottle of wine. I've earned it.

A flash of red catches my eye, and I pause, turning to look in the window of a lingerie store. Chewing my lower lip, I sigh and walk inside. The scent of strawberry swirls in the air. I'm surrounded by lace and sexy lingerie.

Strolling around, I pause in front of a lacy white nightgown. That's...bridally. Seamus Fitzpatrick has two reputations in the Boston Underworld. He's a sadistic bastard who leads a crew of fucked up men who are really good at murder and all that awful mafia stuff. He's also a silver-tongued Casanova.

I've just spent eight months dating an asshole, who hadn't given me a single orgasm the entire time, simply because he didn't immediately show me the door when I admitted my past. If I'm going to spend the rest of my life married to a

womanizer, I'm having a fucking mind-blowing orgasm on my wedding night.

I have no idea what Seamus Fitzpatrick's plan is for us... sexually. But if he's as big a man whore as his reputation says he is, there's no way he will be able to resist me in *this* nightgown.

"Is there anything I can help you with?" The young retail assistant flashes me a bright smile, brushing her locs over her shoulder as she turns to look at the nightgown I'm staring at.

"Actually, yes. I want to try this one on."

"A special occasion, girl?"

"My wedding night."

Her eyes glitter as she grins. "Let's get you set up in a change room. He won't know where to put his eyes with you in this."

That's the plan.

# Chapter Three

## SEAMUS

The church is slowly filling up. The Romanians might be Eastern Orthodox, but they've agreed to a Catholic ceremony in our Irish parish church for this wedding.

I tug at the cuffs of my crisp white shirt underneath my navy blue suit. Paddy stands to my left, wearing a matching suit and a grim expression. I can see the rest of my crew on my side of the church, all of them looking like we're at a funeral, not my wedding.

A silence falls over the church as the Romanians arrive. We kept things small. We don't need a shoot-out in a fucking church, so there are only about twenty of them. They stalk in, taking their seats along the pews on the other side of the aisle, looking in various states of unease, discomfort, or unhappiness.

Pa arrives, flanked by Darragh and Dermot. He strides confidently up the aisle, embracing me and kissing my cheek.

"I'm proud of ye, son," he says in a low voice only Paddy and I hear. He nods briskly at me and sits beside Connor and his mother, my Aunt Siobhan, in the front pew.

There's a shuffling, and the priest steps up behind me as the strains of the wedding march sound out.

"Fucking showtime," Paddy mutters beside.



I turn my eyes to the doors of the church, where Marius Albescu, head of the Boston Romanian Mafia, enters with his only daughter on his arm.

I've never met Marius in person. He's about five years younger than my father, and unlike Pa, his hair is only just tinged with silver at the temples. The rest is still a rich brown. He has a slight stubble running across his jaw and is handsome in a heavysset way. But my eyes are locked on his daughter. My bride.

I can't see her face from this distance. It's obscured by a heavy lace veil finishing at her chin. What I can see is her body in all its glory. The dress is off the shoulder, with lace. It hugs her tits and waist, flaring gently under her ass until it hits the floor, dragging in a slight train.

She's got a banging body, so it won't be too much of a chore to perform my husbandly duties. I do wonder about the heavy veil. Maybe she's fucking ugly under there? No matter. I can do her from behind. And based on her shape in this fitted dress, what a behind it will be.

Once they arrive at the altar, the tension radiating in every line of Albescu's body becomes noticeable. Interestingly, there's no tension from the daughter. If anything, she seems calmer than her father.

She turns to him when they arrive, and all I can see is her back, so I focus on that glorious ass. Albescu lifts her veil off her face, settling it behind her head, taking her cheeks, and kissing her four times, twice on each cheek.

When her face is bared to the congregation, there's a shuffling in the Irish ranks, and out of the corner of my eye,

Connor flashes me a thumbs up as he stares at the side of her face.

*“Ylenia, fiica mea, sunt atât de mândră de tine. Te iubesc,”*  
Albescu tells his daughter.

Ugh. She won't be speaking that shite in our house. The woman nods, and they turn to face the altar, Albescu placing her slender hand in mine.

Darragh and my father weren't kidding. Ylenia Albescu is a stunning woman. Pale skin with masses of dark brown hair pulled back into a simple twist. Her dark eyebrows and high cheekbones cut across her face and frame her deep blue eyes.

Her bottom lip is slightly plumper than her top one, and I have the sudden urge to run my tongue over it. Of course, there's no way I'm fucking doing that. I don't kiss my women. Ever.

There's no expression on her face, and her blue eyes are flat. They flicker briefly over my face as she turns to the priest, her hand lying limply in mine. Yeah, I'm not exactly fucking pumped over this either.

Fuck that shite. She better not be a limp fucking fish in bed. She also better pay more attention to me than some flat-eyed dismissal.

I'm not used to women reacting to me like this. I know I'm a cocky motherfucker, and for a good reason. My way with the ladies is legendary. I have a silver tongue, and when I'm horny, it's silver tinged with Irish. It drives the ladies fucking mental.

The ceremony is over quickly. The priest has pared it down to the bare minimum required for a legal ceremony. We say the standard vows. She pledges obedience to me without blinking an eye. The register is signed, and Darragh steps forward to provide the second witness's signature as she came without any bridesmaids.

Finally, it's almost over.

"You may now kiss the bride."

Fucking hell. I forgot about this part of a wedding ceremony. Couldn't he have cut this shite out with the rest of it?

Under the watchful eye of my father and the congregation, I press my lips against hers. She doesn't move. Stands as still as a fucking statue, her eyes wide open. Not to be outdone, I keep mine open too, staring straight into her eyes until I step away.

"May I present Mr. and Mrs. Seamus Fitzpatrick," the priest announces to the congregation to muted applause.

The photographer takes exactly five photographs of me and my new bride on the church steps. Exactly as I specified. One for my father's desk and four to be placed strategically around my house.

"Come on."

Closing my fingers around her slender wrist, I stride over to the SUV parked at the curb, not bothering to look around to see if she is keeping pace.

I'm not a complete asshole. I hold the door open for her as she scrambles in, sliding in after. Paddy stares morosely out

the windscreen in the front passenger seat, refusing to look at the woman. Can't say I blame him. Fucking Romanians.

Liam is driving, twisting in his seat to eye her, a grin stretching across his face.

“Ylenia, I'm Liam.”

“Ee-len-ya,” she says in clipped tones. He tries again, still fucking butchering it. I bite back a smirk as she sighs, a pained look on her face.

“Tiggy,” she says, sounding resigned. “Just call me Tiggy.”

I have no idea what it is about her giving us an easier fucking name, but it snaps something in Paddy. His head whips around, anger and hatred blazing out of his eyes as he glares at her.

“What did your father say to you at the altar, Tiggy?”

Her lips flatten into a thin line, a sure sign she is about to refuse to tell us. My own lips flatten as well. She pledged her fucking loyalty to me in front of God twenty minutes ago. Refusing to tell me something isn't a great start. I reach over, intent on plucking up her wrist. But before I can, she glances over at me, acquiescence in her eyes.

“That he was proud of me. That he loved me,” Tiggy replies in the same flat tone she used throughout the ceremony.

She hates that we made her share it. I can see it in her face. She hates that we took away the last private moment between her and her father.

I feel a surge of smugness that she told us anyway. That she obeyed the command in my eyes. Good. It will make this

much easier if she does what she's told, even if her pliability is grudging.

The door opens, and Tiggy glances over in surprise. Like she didn't notice we had pulled up at the front of the hotel. The doorman smiles at her. Everyone loves a bride, even if she is the spawn of motherfucking Albescu.

I vault out of the SUV, round it, and start up the stairs. Jesus fuck. The woman. Stopping, I turn, raising an eyebrow at her as she thanks the doorman for helping her out of the vehicle and turns to me. She catches sight of my face and hurries over to me.

As she climbs the stairs, she reaches out for some fucking reason. Ignoring her hand, I turn, remembering to moderate my pace to her smaller steps as we walk through the hotel lobby to the ballroom, Paddy and Liam flanking us.

Her hand drops to her side, brushing over the skirt of her dress. Whispers and smiles follow our progress through the hotel. As I said, everyone loves a bride.

I relax when I step into the ballroom, familiar faces all around us. Beside me, Tiggy tenses for the same reason. From the look on her face, nobody bothered to fucking tell her this reception is just for the Irish. If we're going to be drinking, we're not inviting our fucking enemies. Marriage or no marriage. Truce or no truce.

A flash of panic crosses her face, and I raise an eyebrow at her. Straightening her back, she banishes the alarm, lifting her chin.

Everyone turns to us, and only about half the smiles look forced. At least the women, led by Aunt Siobhan, are beaming. What is it about weddings that get women so...happy?

Even though everyone here knows this is simply a sham of a marriage to bring a truce with the fucking Romanians, I'm expected to act in a certain way. Pa is watching me, so I can't stride over to the bar and get wasted with the lads.

Biting back an annoyed sigh, I lift my hand, not looking to see if she will take it. She better fucking take it. She does, allowing me to lead her into the room and up to the head table, where my father and Connor are already seated beside my seat, with Darragh at the other end of the table.

Paddy will sit between him and Tiggy. He has already expressed his disgust at the seating arrangements, but Pa pulled rank, and Paddy fell in line. He breaks away from us, striding to the bar to slam back a whiskey.

Ignoring Paddy and the glare Pa casts his way, I wait until Tiggy takes her seat and drop into mine, immediately reaching for the glass of champagne in front of me and draining it.

Pa raises an eyebrow, shooting me a warning glance as he stands, lifting his own champagne glass. Paddy slips into his seat, pointedly edging his chair away from Tiggy, closer to Darragh. I stifle my snort at his obvious aversion to her.

“Seamus and Ylenia.” Pa turns to us, holding his glass out in a toast. “May the lilt of Irish laughter lighten every load. May the mist of Irish magic shorten every road. May ye taste the sweetest pleasures that fortune ere bestowed, and may all yer friends remember all the favors ye are owed. *Mo sheacht mbeannacht ort!*”

Pa leads the toast, smiling down at Tiggy and taking his seat. Paddy is slow to take his feet, casting a dark look over Tiggy and a meaningful one over me.

He raises his almost empty champagne glass, glowering as he forces the words out through gritted teeth.

*“Go n-éirí an bóthar leat!”*

Draining his glass, he drops back into his seat. There is some murmuring and laughter in the crowd as people toast. I catch Pa’s glare. Jesus fuck. Paddy needs to watch himself. I need to do some damage control for his out-of-control arse.

Shooting him a glare, I shove to my feet, raising my glass and grinning out at the crowd.

“Short and sweet. I wouldn’t expect anything less from a man of few words like our Paddy.”

Laughter greets my words, and Pa looks appeased. Thank fuck.

“Sure, and I’m glad to share my wedding day with such wonderful people. You’ve made it a day to remember, even though it’s not over yet. I look forward to sharing good craic and a drink with every one of you. I’ll see you at the bar! *Sliánte!*”

As I drain my glass, the crowd roars their approval, the volume increasing as I hold the empty flute up to salute them again. Pa’s eyebrows are raised as I take my seat, but he shrugs, turning to speak with Connor. Thank fuck that is over.

The waiters hover, ready to bring out the first course. I think they were caught out by how short the speeches were,

but I don't give a fuck. Let's eat. I want to get drunk with the lads.

As soon as the three courses are out of the way, I'm on my feet, Paddy and Connor following, leaving Tiggy to her own devices.

Darragh stands and moves to Connor's seat, engaging my father in conversation as Tiggy remains surrounded by empty chairs, smiling tightly as she accepts another glass of champagne from the waiter.



## TIGGY

I am left alone, ignored, at my wedding reception. My father and none of my guests have been invited. The enemy surrounds me. My new tribe.

My husband is standing across the room, surrounded by his crew. At least, that's who I assume they are. They are all similar in age, yet all seem to defer to him. They have to be his crew.

They're drinking, laughing, and all studiously ignoring me. I have heard whispers of Seamus Fitzpatrick before. You've heard of him if you are involved even slightly in the Boston Underworld. His crew is lethal and feared.



The man himself is said to be arrogant, violent, and cruel. I get that. I can see it in his face and the way he holds himself. The innate confidence of a man who thinks he's untouchable.

I've seen them many times before. Hell, I grew up with them. But there's something else about Seamus Fitzpatrick. More than other arrogant mobsters I've met, there's something *dark* in his eyes, and it's unnerving.

My husband is also the most handsome man I've ever seen. I hadn't been expecting that. I knew about his legendary talent with the ladies, but all the rumors attributed that to his Irish charm and his silver tongue. Not his looks.

While I had been hoping for some kind of spark between us, I hadn't been expecting how my body reacts when he touches me. It feels like every nerve ending in my body is a livewire. I almost shiver every time his hand or arm brushes against me.

I should resent him for it, the way he clearly resents my existence. But I can't. Surely it's a good thing that simply smelling his aftershave turns me on. It certainly makes the whole...*consummation*...thing more bearable. Hell, maybe even pleasurable. Perhaps I will get my mind-blowing orgasm tonight.

My eyes trail over him as he looks everywhere in the room except at me. That's fine by me. If he's ignoring me, I can study him uninterrupted.

His light brown hair is artfully tousled, his jaw strong and covered with a five o'clock shadow of brown stubble to match his hair. Heavy brown brows frame his dark brown eyes, and he is tall and broad-shouldered, tapering down to a slim waist.

He has a fighter's build, and everything about him screams sexiness and danger. Exactly the opposite of the guys I normally go for. I almost snort into my champagne at the thought of comparing 90s boy band Ant to Seamus's smoldering sexiness.

He's a player of the highest order. I bet he charms his way into panties and walks away the moment he pulls out. Well, he better fucking wrap up tight because he's not putting his dick inside me raw if it's been inside other women that way.

I have no illusions about monogamy in this marriage. His monogamy, at least. I have to be faithful. He can do whatever the fuck he wants. The thought makes it easier to approach this as a business arrangement that might give me some orgasms.

I'm still studying Seamus as another glass of champagne appears before me, even though no waiters have passed by.

A solid body drops into the seat beside me. The source of the champagne. Glancing over, I recognize him as one of Seamus's men, who I have been staring at all night.

I'm not sure when he left the group across the room, but I clearly missed it. He's good-looking, in a rough, menacing way. Well, that's not true. He's handsome in a golden way. Sandy blonde hair, blonde stubble, and a slight tan on his skin. He just exudes menace somehow.

"I'm Niall Byrne," he introduces himself, and my insides go cold.

Niall Byrne. The Reaper of the Boston Irish Mafia. He's their hitman. And now he's sitting so close our shoulders are

almost brushing. The quiet air of menace is starting to make a shitload more sense.

“Tiggy,” I murmur, slugging back some more champagne and steeling myself not to flinch away from him.

“I’m yer new shadow, Tiggy,” he breathes into my ear, a shudder working its way up my spine. “And I don’t trust ye.”

I swallow more champagne to hide my gulp of nerves.

“Good to know.” I’m immensely proud of how cool my tone is. “I’ll make sure to keep an eye out for you.”

Niall Byrne watches me with his hooded green eyes as I do my best to ignore him, turning to face the room. For the first time tonight, Seamus is watching us, his eyes inscrutable. Locking my gaze with his, I tug the corners of my mouth up into a smirk, raising my half-empty champagne glass to salute him.

I’m tickled pink at my boldness.

“May I have this dance?”

I jump in surprise, tearing my eyes away from Seamus as I turn to my right to see Sean Fitzpatrick standing there. Carefully placing my glass on the table, I set my hand in his outstretched one. I can’t very well refuse the head of the Boston Irish Mafia, my new father-in-law.

He leads me onto the dance floor, positioning us as the music picks up, guiding me around. I can feel Seamus’s eyes on us the entire time.

“What do ye think of my son?”

I raise my eyes to meet his steely blue ones. There is curiosity there, alongside admiration. The admiration will be because I look pretty right now. A blushing bride in white. Too bad my husband doesn't look at me like that. I would settle for a little less resentment.

"He's very sure of himself," I settle on.

A ghost of a smile flits across Sean's face. "And so he should be. He's my named successor."

We dance in silence for a while as I process that piece of information. Shit. This isn't just an arranged marriage between the children of the heads of the Irish and Romanian factions. I'm going to be the wife of the head of the Irish Mafia in Boston someday. If I live that long.

It sounds dramatic, but then again, neither of our mothers are present at our wedding, so perhaps it's not a dramatic thought.

"We'll have eyes on ye at every moment, lass." Sean is talking again, and I meet his gaze again. "So toe the line and don't try anything funny."

Don't be a mole. Don't betray them. Not if I want to live. It's what he doesn't say and exactly what I hear. I want to cry. I never even got to say goodbye to my father, unaware he wouldn't be here at the wedding reception, and now I can never see him again.

Hell. I can never speak Romanian again. That part of my life and culture is over, and I feel crushing grief pressing against my chest. I focus on my breathing, grounding myself by counting five familiar things in this room. Just like I've

done ever since I was fourteen, and the panic started creeping up on me.

Just like I teach the children whose cases I manage. Taught. Because that's not my life anymore. Crap. I refocus. One, the golden bracelet on my left wrist, which was my mother's. Two, the gardenia perfume I have worn every day since I was fourteen. Three, the fact that I am surrounded by mobsters. Four....

“May I cut in?”

Sean steps away as Seamus takes his place, holding me much closer than his father did. Once we're alone in our little bubble, he leans his head closer to my face.

“You're panicking,” he murmurs accusingly, low enough so only I can hear. Four, four, four. I've run out of familiar things.

He sighs, picking my hand up off his shoulder and pressing it against my heart so I can feel my rapid heartbeat. Four, my heartbeat. Five. I close my eyes, five, the fact that I only have myself to rely on.

I blow out a long breath, feeling calmer now I have finished my list. My eyes flutter open, and I stare at Seamus, watching me carefully.

“I think that's enough champagne for you tonight,” he drawls, and I blink in surprise.

The flash of kindness when he helped me out of my panic spiral has disappeared, and his eyes are hard again.

“Niall will take you up to our room.”

He lifts his eyes over my shoulder and nods to someone, stepping back as he leads me off the dance floor. Niall gestures at the door, and when I glance over my shoulder as I leave, Seamus has moved back across the room to his crew.

The opulent halls of the hotel are practically deserted at this time of night. We've been at the reception for hours. Our trek is silent, my companion still exuding that air of menace. I wonder if he will go back downstairs after delivering me to my room or if his night is over.

The room Niall takes me to is on the seventh floor. He unlocks the door with a card key and gestures for me to enter.

“There's no balcony on this one.”

I glance over my shoulder at him, blinking. Yeah, I heard him correctly. He's definitely going to stand guard at the door. Fucking perfect.

Turning my back on my new guard and shadow, I walk inside the room, the last vestiges of my slight champagne buzz fading as the door shuts sharply behind me.

It's a generic hotel suite. I'm standing in a small sitting room with the minibar near the door. The curtains are drawn back, Boston is lit up and displayed in front of me. Niall was right. There's no balcony. I bet the windows don't even open.

I turn away from the stunning view, moving through the doorway into the bedroom. The plush queen-sized bed sits there, turned down and taunting me.

The small overnight bag I packed this morning is on an armchair in the corner of the room near the bed. Thank god. I

don't want to sleep in this dress. I cross the room, open it, and my lips twist into a wry smirk. Of course.

All my carefully packed items have been rummaged around. Jumbled messily there. They obviously searched the bag. My phone is gone too. Oh well. That was always going to happen. It was stupid wishful thinking to pack it.

I pull out the lacy nightgown with a grin. I'm definitely going to be a pretty bride on my wedding night. Who am I kidding? I'll be blushing like a tomato too. Turning to the bathroom, I realize my dilemma. Shit. Dropping the nightgown on the bed, I cross back to the door and open it.

Niall is standing there, lifting his eyes from his phone and glaring at me as I open the door. I resist the urge to roll my eyes at him.

“Relax. I'm not about to run away. I need your help.”

His eyebrows raise, but his green eyes remain impassive. I'll take that as a *yes, of course, I'll help you, Tiggy. Whatever you need.* Turning my back on him, I twist my arm around to where I can reach, about halfway down.

“Can you undo the zipper until I can reach it?”

There is a slight intake of breath. “Ye want me to undress Seamus Fitzpatrick's bride for him on his wedding night?”

Huffing a sigh, I roll my eyes at the wall in front of me. “I have a nightgown I want to wait for him in. I need to get out of my dress, and you're my only option. Unless you want me to go downstairs and ask my husband myself?”

A growl rumbles out of him. Yeah, he's not happy with this. Neither am I, but my options are limited. They are literally

this, or I march my ass back downstairs and demand Seamus do it.

Wedding dresses aren't exactly made for you to be able to get out of them by yourself. Usually, your husband doesn't send you to be *alone* on your wedding night.

Finally, the zipper starts to move. Niall is clearly being extra careful not to touch me. Probably a good thing. Seamus would have his head. Both our heads. Loyalty is a one-way street in the mafia, and Seamus is above us both on the food chain. He wouldn't even stop to hear any explanations.

The zipper stops, and I reach over when I'm sure his fingers have dropped away. The small metal point of the zipper pokes my fingertips. I throw a "thanks" over my shoulder as I stroll back into the hotel room, letting the door slam shut behind me.

Now, I need to get out of this dress, do my hair and face, put on the nightgown, and pose in the bed. I have no idea when Seamus will come upstairs, but eventually, he will have to. I'm going to get the wedding night orgasm I deserve.



# Chapter Four

## TIGGY

I remove my heels, dress, and veil, taking my time to shower away the careful makeup and the hairspray the hairdresser liberally used this morning in my childhood bedroom at my father's house. My last time there.

I didn't live there or anything, but my father still had it made up for me. I wonder what he will do with it now.

I blow-dry my hair until not a hint of dampness remains and shimmy into my sexy little nightgown, all white lace with a cream satin bow underneath the bra cups. Seamus still hasn't appeared, so I turn down the bed and crawl in.

Lying there, I focus on my breathing, and I've managed to drift into an uneasy sleep before long.

"Shit."

I jerk awake at the muttered oath. I'm about to scream at the sight of a man standing over me when it occurs to me that it's Seamus. This is it. The moment I dressed up for. I'm going to get my mind-blowing orgasm.

He's standing beside the bed, having discarded his navy suit jacket at some point, and he's holding the bedcovers back, staring down at my body.

The heat of desire in his eyes does funny things to my body. Seamus Fitzpatrick, legendary silver-tongued ladies man, is

turned on by the sight of me sleeping in my nightgown. I'm so glad I stopped and bought it.

I've never worn a nightgown for a guy before. I'm more of an awkward fumble under cover of darkness kind of girl. Of course, if I'm attempting to seduce my reluctant husband, being *seen* is kind of required.

Fighting the urge to cover myself from his heated gaze, I slide my legs up the bed, the see-through lacy material falling to my crotch, exposing more of my legs. Seamus's eyes follow the movement, and he licks his lips.

That's a good sign. I arch my back, thrusting my tits into the air, my eyes barely open as I stretch. I'm enjoying tormenting him because he clearly likes what he's seeing.

My mouth dries up, and I'm starting to regret my little game. Seamus drops the covers down at my feet and strips himself entirely naked before I even realize what he's doing.

I'm frozen, my eyes staring at his huge dick. That's going to hurt. I know it is. I'm way too small for that thing. It will tear me in half.

The bed dips as he lowers himself beside me, my breathing hitching as his fingertips touch the inside of my knee and slide up my leg, pressing my thighs apart as he leaves a trail of heated flesh where he's touched me.

My eyes are locked on his throat, unable to move up to meet his. I know I talked a big game about having a mind-blowing orgasm, but I've never had a one-night stand before. I've never gone to bed with a stranger, and now I am. And he's my husband.

His Adam's apple bobs in his throat as he swallows, his fingers brushing against my wet folds. I didn't bother about putting on panties because going into today, I had been left with no uncertainty that Seamus Fitzpatrick would have to consummate this marriage tonight.

"Feck, ye're so wet for me," he murmurs, a slight Irish brogue coloring his tone.

My cheeks heat up. Yeah, I am. How embarrassing. I wish the bathroom light weren't shining over both of us. I would be *way* more comfortable in the dark. His fingers part my folds, and two slide inside me. Oh god, that feels good.

"And ye're so fecking tight."

Well, hearing that is hotter than I thought it would be. You know what? Maybe I can ask him to turn off the light. I'd rather he can't see me. I snap my thighs together, provoking a low growl from him. Using his other hand, he pushes my legs apart, moving to place his body between my thighs so I can't close them again.

His fingers are now roughly pumping in and out of me – god, it feels so good – his other hand snags my chin, forcing me to meet his eyes. Surprisingly, his touch at my chin is gentler than Ant's was the other week when he grabbed my face. I would not have picked that.

"This pussy belongs to me. Ye don't ever deny me it again. Ye hear?"

There's an edge of menace in his tone that has me squirming. I blame his long, plunging fingers. Even with Ant – the asshole – I've always been treated like a breakable,

priceless piece of art, there for someone to take their pleasure, not to give me any. But this...I can't help but be helplessly turned on by the ruthless *order* in his tone.

“Answer me,” he snaps. “Whose pussy is this?”

“Yours,” I grit out through clenched teeth.

As turned on as I am right now, a surge of resentment spikes through me. I hate that Seamus treating me like an object he owns turns me on. I'm embarrassed that I'm enjoying how he talks to me and getting wetter. That my body is relishing being dominated like this.

Red stains my cheeks, but I will the blush to go away. I refuse to let him see how it affects me. How *he* affects me. I don't want to be just another woman who melts at the sound of his Irish brogue. I want to be special, even if that's a pipe dream. I want him to *work* for this. For him to want to get me off.

“That's right.” His voice is low now, gravelly with need. “And don't ye be forgetting it.”

His fingers disappear as he positions his dick at my entrance, rubbing the tip through my folds, soaking it in my juices.

“Ye're a little slut for me, aren't ye?”

I whimper at his words, refusing to speak in agreement. I'm not calling myself that, no matter how sexy he is. It doesn't matter that I don't agree. He doesn't need to hear it.

He uses his grip on my chin to nod my head, which seems to be enough for him, groaning as he sinks into me.

My breath catches as my body stretches to accommodate him. I'm wet enough that it doesn't hurt, thank god. But when he's buried himself to the hilt, I feel stuffed full almost to the point of discomfort.

"So fucking tight," he groans again, bringing his hard body down on top of mine.

Seamus tugs down the cups of my nightgown, freeing my breasts. His wet mouth closes around one of my nipples right as his fingers painfully pinch the other one. I swallow my whimper, jerking beneath him, thrusting my breasts up.

"I think I will enjoy this," he murmurs against my breast. "I get to fuck ye whenever I feel like it."

I want to squirm at his wondrous tone, so different from the cold one he has been using since we met earlier today. I open my mouth to agree, probably breathlessly like every other woman he's taken to bed, but that's not what comes out.

When I reply, I sound like a stranger to my own ears, a thread of steel in my tone.

"Yes, but I won't enjoy it."

Holy hell. Who was *she*? I like her, whoever she was. She can inhabit my mouth any time she wants. A rush of pleasure courses through me at my act of defiance. As much as I enjoyed him being bossy, I think I will enjoy taunting him more.

He freezes at my words, lifting his head. My nipple slips out of his mouth, and I automatically miss the bite of pain and the pleasure he was causing to shoot through me. His face flashes with anger at my words.

“What did ye say?”

I can hear the warning in his tone, but even though I’m stretched wide as he’s buried balls deep in me, I still raise my chin, my eyes meeting his. I’ve found my power, and I’m not about to back down.

“I said, I might submit, but I won’t *ever* enjoy it.”

His lips twist into a smirk.

“I thought that’s what ye said,” he murmurs. I shiver at the danger in his tone. His handsome face is hard. “Well, if ye aren’t even going to try to enjoy this, I won’t waste my time pleasuring ye. This will be for me only.”

Oh. Maybe my plan backfired. Shit. Seamus withdraws, kneeling between my thighs as he flips me over. A large hand presses between my shoulder blades, forcing my chest and shoulders into the mattress as he tugs my hips and ass into the air, moving me up on my knees.

I jolt forward, my face pressing into the mattress as he slams into me from behind. It’s even deeper than before, and it’s only just shy of painful. Oh god. So full.

Seamus presses harder between my shoulder blades as he speaks.

“Keep yer head down and take it,” he grunts, his hand disappearing from my back. He grips my hips with both hands as he starts to move, withdrawing almost fully before slamming back in to the hilt.

His pace is fast and brutal, pistoning in and out, and I press my face into the mattress, my orgasm building. Oh, I’m going

to take it all right. I'm going to seize it with both hands and ride this baby all the way to pleasure city.

I have no idea how the hell my body is enjoying this. He's treating me like a whore, and I'm on the verge of coming. I should be horrified, but I'm not. If this is going to be my life, at least the sex will be ah-mazing.

My mind is consumed by the feeling of him pounding into me again and again, his fingers digging painfully into the flesh at my hips, his grunts of exertion, and his small groans of pleasure. The wet sounds of our coupling, since I'm so fucking turned on from this right now.

Fucking *yes*.

I shatter, screaming as I bite down into the sheet in front of my face. So this is what it feels like to come during sex. It's pretty fucking incredible. I don't care how I got here. I'm just glad I have arrived.

The aftershocks of my orgasm continue as Seamus keeps pumping until he finally groans his release, collapsing beside me. My knees give out when he's not holding me in position anymore, and my hips slide down as I lie prone on the bed, my legs trembling. His voice cuts through the air, over the top of my breathy pants, and his tone is mocking. I can't help but smile into the sheet.

"I thought ye weren't going to enjoy it."



# SEAMUS

Holy fuck, I've married a fucking wildcat. Glancing over, the sexy little nightie is covering her ass again, such as it is. The thing is practically see-through. Not that I'm complaining.

When I came upstairs, I thought she might still be in her wedding dress, and I had a notion of cutting the fucking thing off her. But Niall told me she asked him to help her undress.

I have to give the man credit. He didn't even flinch when my fist crashed into his jaw. After rubbing it, he clarified that he merely unzipped the top half until she could reach the zipper herself, made sure he wasn't looking when he did it, and he didn't touch her. So I only punched him once.

I pulled back the covers to wake her up and spank the shit out of her ass for approaching one of my lads like that. But my brain had frozen at the sight, and she woke up, doing the sexiest little tempting stretch, all lace and legs and tits thrusting, and I was naked and in the bed with her before I could think.

Jesus fuck, she was so fucking wet for me as I finger fucked her, and I was assaulted with thoughts that maybe this marriage thing wouldn't be so fucking bad after all.

Christ, she's got a fucking mouth on her. I smirk at the thought. I never thought it would be sexy to have a woman mouthing off at me while my fingers were buried inside her.

But damn, if her defiance didn't turn me the fuck on. I intended to teach her a lesson when she told me she wouldn't



ever enjoy our time together in bed. I intended to take my pleasure and leave her wanting.

But the fucking wildcat got off on that. I could feel her pussy clenching down on my dick, and I contemplated reaching around to pinch her clit, but I told her I wasn't going to offer her any pleasure at all, and I couldn't go back on my word on the first fucking night. That would set a bad fucking example. But she *shattered*, and I was fucking done.

Tiggy ignores my taunt, her legs trembling until I hear her breathing change as she falls asleep. Smirking into the darkness, I reach down, snagging the covers with my hand and pulling them up over us both.

I've never fucking slept in a bed with someone before. I don't invite the women I fuck into my bed, and I leave theirs the minute I'm done. So this is a new experience for me.

I'm not sure I like having someone here, making noises as they breathe and shift in their sleep.

Eventually, I do drift off. But it is an uneasy sleep, and I wake up after only a few hours. As I blink awake with gritty eyes, it's about now that I realize the benefits of having a woman in the bed with me.

Rolling over, I lift the skirt of her nightgown and part her folds with my fingers. Finding her clit, I roll it between my fingers, rubbing and pinching, my eyes glued to her face as she starts to squirm, moaning and mewling while still asleep.

I've decided I like the challenge she laid down. Tiggy says she isn't going to enjoy my fucking her, so I'm going to make

sure she gets off every time we're together. Just to prove her a liar. Like all Romanians are.

I don't trust this truce. I don't trust this alliance. And I sure as fuck don't trust the gorgeous woman in my bed. I'm going to break her, and then I will make sure she is completely loyal to me. And I'm going to enjoy it.

Her eyes fly open, meeting mine, the shock evident as she comes, her hips bucking up against my hand. I don't bother speaking to her, positioning myself between her thighs and thrusting into her wet heat.

Her pussy is swollen from her recent orgasm, so I grit my teeth at the unimaginable tightness. As I start to thrust, I suck my fingers into my mouth, tasting her sweetness, and let out a feral growl, her pussy clenching around me.

"Feck, but ye taste good, *leannán*," I growl, dropping my fingers from my mouth to grip her hip. She moans at my words.

I knew she'd get off on the slight Irish brogue I get when I'm turned on. All the ladies love it. Gives me a definite advantage in bed.

Tiggy starts whimpering, and I decide that the next time I wake her up to fuck her, it will be with my face buried between her thighs.

"Come for me," I breathe, my thumb finding her clit, pressing down, rolling it around as she cries out, coming hard on my dick.

Gritting my teeth, I keep pumping until I come too. Collapsing back onto my side of the bed, I roll onto my side

and promptly fall asleep. I could get used to having sex on tap like this.

# Chapter Five

## TIGGY

I'm exhausted. Seamus Fitzpatrick is a sex machine. After fucking me to sleep last night, he woke me up twice more. The first time he made me come with just his fingers on my clit, nothing inside me and fell straight asleep after fucking me.

The second time I woke up to him absolutely *devouring* my pussy. I don't think I've ever come so hard in my life, and then he fell straight asleep after fucking me. I'm sensing a pattern here.

Seamus is still asleep when I wake up, sunlight streaming through the open curtains in the sitting area, spilling through the open bedroom door. I seize the opportunity to sneak into the bathroom and shower.

When I finish, he is already dressed and having an in-depth conversation with Niall over near the door.

Seamus looks up when I emerge from the bathroom, saying something to Niall, who glances over and nods.

"Niall's taking you home. I'll see you tonight," Seamus tells me when I come to a halt in front of them. "Have supper on the table by seven-thirty."

I blink as he nods to Niall, turning on his heel and shutting the door behind him. No farewell, no soft words, not even a goodbye kiss.

I guess our dynamite chemistry in bed doesn't have a hope in hell of translating into real life. Not when I'm married to the spawn of the devil.

I think of how dangerous and handsome he looked last night. Maybe he's not the spawn of the devil after all. Perhaps he's the devil himself. That would be in line with my luck.

Niall doesn't speak to me. I sense another pattern. We walk silently through the hotel, traversing our steps from last night as he carries my overnight bag.

The valet has an SUV waiting, a different one from last night. That one was jet black. This one is ice white. The valet flinches as he hands Niall the keys, beating a hasty retreat. I guess Niall's reputation precedes him.

As I wait, he holds open the car door for me, his hand brushing my back as he helps me into the rear seat. I turn to thank him and get a slammed door in my face before I can form words. Okay, then. The tailgate opens and slams - my suitcase, presumably - and Niall slides into the driver's seat, his eyes finding mine in the rearview mirror.

"Seatbelt."

My eyebrows raise as I meet his gaze. What am I, five?

"Seamus's orders," he grunts. Damn it. Where is Ms. Sassy from bed last night? I could do with an appearance from her now, but instead, I find myself meekly fastening my seatbelt. My husband might be dangerous and filled with darkness, but Niall's eyes are deadly.

Satisfied with my capitulation, Niall turns his eyes to the road, pulling out of the hotel's covered driveway and turning

southwest.

“Where is home?”

Niall’s eyes flicker up to meet mine in the rearview mirror as we leave the city center.

“West Roxbury.”

Oh. It’s nice out there. Nicer than Roxbury, that’s for sure. It’s about a half-hour drive from the hotel in the city. I wonder what Seamus’s house looks like. *My house*. I wonder what my house looks like.

I blink in surprise when Niall pulls into the driveway of a large, white, square clapboard-sided family home. It’s lovely. It’s not what I was expecting. Maybe he moved because he was getting married.

“Has Seamus lived here long?”

Niall slides out of the car without answering, the tailgate opening and closing again. Okay. I jump when he appears at my door, opening it and helping me out with a strong hand on my elbow.

“Three years,” he grunts, guiding me up the brick steps and through the wood and stained glass front door. Oh. Yeah, I didn’t pick this house for him.

If the outside surprised me, the inside totally floors me. I can’t say for sure what I thought Seamus Fitzpatrick’s house would look like based on his reputation, but it wasn’t *this*.

Niall trails me like a silent ghost as I explore my new house. To the right of the front door is a large, airy kitchen, all black marble countertops and white wooden cabinets with

stunning terracotta tiles on the floor. It's a housewife's dream kitchen.

The kitchen flows into a formal-looking dining room with large bay windows overlooking the spacious and well-kept back lawn.

To the left of the front door is a comfortable and stylishly furnished parlor with a large stone fireplace and a white marble mantelpiece. There's a small powder room with a toilet and sink at the bottom of the gorgeous hardwood stairs leading to the second level, and next to the parlor is a den with a large television and a desk. Niall lets me peek inside but snaps the door closed before I can enter.

"That's Seamus's office," he grunts, his Irish brogue thick with menace. "Ye don't look in there again."

I nod, knowing when to pick my battles. If Seamus needs his secret mancave, he can have it. I'm not about to risk my life by prying.

Turning to my right, I peek in and admire the sparkling white tiled laundry room at the back of the house with a door out to the backyard. The property sits on a large block, and I can see a paved area with a table to seat eight and a barbecue.

Upstairs, there is a full bathroom, including a Jacuzzi corner tub and three made-up but clearly unused bedrooms. I wonder if one of them will be mine.

The furnishings are super nice, and everything is very clean. I can't imagine *Seamus Fitzpatrick* doing laundry or vacuuming floors, so he must have a cleaning service. I also can't imagine him picking out the gorgeously carved wooden

bedhead in one of the bedrooms. Maybe the house came furnished?

The last room on the second level is the master bedroom. As soon as I walk into it, I recognize this is Seamus's personal space. He might not have selected the furniture throughout the rest of the house, but I would wager everything I have that he picked this stuff out.

The navy sheets and comforter look practical, soft, and very masculine. The furniture is all heavy wood, intricately carved and beautiful, but there's nothing fragile about it.

The ensuite bathroom has a large claw-footed tub I want to fill up and soak in and a large shower that would easily accommodate two with a waterfall showerhead.

I sigh over the space. I could be very comfortable here. A sound out in the bedroom reminds me that Niall is waiting for me. Stepping back out onto the plush navy carpet, I blink in surprise at the sight of my three suitcases and my overnight bag from the hotel sitting at the end of the bed.

Niall clears his throat, my eyes darting over at him, where he stands in the doorway, looking uncomfortable at the idea of being in the same bedroom as me. Join the club.

"Part of the walk-in closet has been cleared out for ye, plus some drawers in the bathroom. That nightstand is yers." Niall points to the left-hand side of the bed. "Don't touch anything else. I'll be downstairs when ye're done. Ye can organize yer shopping list for supper."

Right. Because I'm not a career woman anymore. I'm a housewife. He shuts the door firmly behind him, and I sigh,



crossing to my suitcases and flipping one open.

I didn't bother bringing everything I owned with me. What would be the point? I brought clothes my father approved of for a mafia wife, and I brought my favorite book, a poetry compilation my mother gave me when I was fourteen, the year before she died.

Once they are empty, I stack the luggage inside of each other and wheel them into one of the spare bedrooms, where they will be out of sight. I can ask Niall what he wants to be done with them later.

He's sitting on the sofa in the parlor, just as he said he would be, reading on an iPad. I wave a hand at him and move through to the kitchen. Sure enough, he trails me. The back of my neck prickles as I walk, and I fight the urge to shiver.

There's something about having a mass murderer eyeing you off that makes you uneasy. Not that I think he'd kill me. Seamus wouldn't like that. If I did something to displease them, no doubt Seamus would want to kill me himself. After all, that's what my father did to my mother.

While his house might not look like a bachelor pad, the inside of his fridge sure looks like it belongs in one. It's mainly old pizza, half-empty Chinese containers, and a *lot* of beer.

Sighing, I clean it out, moving the beer to one section, and turning my attention to the rest of the kitchen, opening and closing his pantry – hello fancy wine fridge – and all his cabinets until I amass a monster shopping list. Niall doesn't even blink. He asks if I have my bag and guides me back to his SUV.

At the grocery store, Niall trails me as I push the cart, his eyes darting everywhere. It's enough to remind me that I'm now the wife of the next leader of the Boston Irish Mafia. *She* gets her own bodyguard. Yay me.

The cashier boldly eye fucks Niall as she scans and bags my groceries, and I fight the urge to shudder. She's very welcome to him.

He helps me unload everything at home, moving to sit silently, reading an iPad at the breakfast counter. While it appears he is engrossed in whatever he is looking at, I know he is watching every move I make. I haven't felt this on display since high school.

Ignoring him the best I can, I contemplate making some traditional Romanian cabbage rolls but dismiss the idea and instead make lasagna and salad. I might be finding my feet when it comes to having a backbone, but I'm not suicidal.

Sighing in front of the well-stocked wine fridge in the pantry, I select a nice red that will pair well, leaving Niall in the kitchen as I move to set the table in the dining room.

Once supper is in the oven, I go upstairs and admire the tub covetously. Unfortunately, seven-thirty is fast approaching, and I don't want to risk Seamus's wrath on the very first night.

Sighing, I turn my back on it, stepping into the spacious shower. Feeling refreshed, I pick a comfortable navy blue woolen jersey dress with black tights and black leather ankle boots. This looks housewifey. It will do nicely.

Pinning my hair back and adding a lick of dark pink matte lipstick, I cast one last longing glance at the tub before

walking downstairs.

Niall is still seated at the kitchen island, not moving as he watches me carefully carry the lasagna, bread, salad, and wine into the dining room. I suppose his job is to watch, not to help.

It's twenty-five past seven, so I sit down and pour two glasses of wine, steepling my fingers as I wait. I'm wicked proud of myself for running to Seamus's deadline so perfectly.

At seven-thirty, I listen carefully, but there is no sound other than Niall drumming his fingers in the kitchen. Sighing, my eyes darting to the ornate wooden grandfather clock in the corner of the room, I pick up my crystal glass and start drinking my wine.

By eight o'clock, I am halfway through my second glass. The food is cooling, and I am feeling distinctly disgruntled. At the very least, Seamus could have offered me the courtesy of a phone call. Surely Niall would tell me if Seamus had called to say he would be home late.

I try to tell myself that it's only his second night as a married man, and when he got busy, it probably didn't occur to him that he needs to call to let me know. But it doesn't work. I'm too angry to listen to reason. I was *owed* a phone call. Hell, I would have taken a three-word text via Niall's cell phone.

Miffed, I fill my plate and a plate for Niall and stomp into the kitchen. He glances up from his iPad with an expression of surprise as I place the dishes on the breakfast counter and pop two beers, sliding onto a barstool beside him.

“Eat,” I snap as I wave my fork at his plate, taking a long pull of my beer. “I made this fucking thing from scratch. Someone might as well enjoy it.”

Niall watches me with a measured look, hesitating for about two seconds before digging into his meal.

We eat in silence, and once his plate is clean and his beer is empty, he grunts, “it’s good, thanks.”

It’s grudging, but it counts.

Seamus still hasn’t appeared by nine, so I make up a plate, cover it in tin foil and leave it in the fridge. I slowly clean the dining room and kitchen, drawing out the chore to see if he will show, but he doesn’t.

Eventually, everything is sparkling, and I am fuming. I bid Niall goodnight, getting a grunt in response, stomping upstairs to fall into bed. Seamus’s bed. It still doesn’t feel like mine.



## SEAMUS

Rolling my shoulder back, I let myself into the house. It’s almost midnight, and the place is dark. Niall opens his eyes from where he’s sleeping on the sofa and is beside me in a second, assessing my bloodstained clothes.

“I should’ve been there,” he growls.

I smirk at him. “You were right where I wanted you to be. Did she have supper ready at seven-thirty?”

Niall smirks back at me. “Handmade lasagna. It was delicious. She left ye a plate in the fridge.”

Frowning at him, I stride into the kitchen. How the fuck does he know what it tasted like? Opening the sparkling stainless-steel door, my eyes dance over my fridge. At least all the beer is still in here, but there seems to be an awful lot of fucking vegetables.

I pull out a beer, popping the lid and snagging the covered plate. I don’t bother heating it, just peel off the tin foil and scarf it down. Even cold, it’s delicious.

“Did she seem pissed off when she had to eat alone?”

Niall shifts uneasily. The Reaper isn’t usually cagey. What the fuck is going on? I glance over at him, my eyes narrowing.

“She seemed pissed off that she went to the effort, and ye didn’t show,” he admits, scratching the back of his head. “Then she came in here and made me eat with her.”

She fucking *what?* I glare at him, and he shifts uncomfortably again, shrugging as my eyes narrow further.

“I was hungry. It smelled good.”

A low growl rumbles out of me. To everyone else in Boston, he might be the fucking Reaper, but to me, he’s a subordinate who does what I fucking tell him.

“I had *intended* to teach her an important lesson. And that lesson wasn’t that she was to have supper with one of my lads when I wasn’t available.”

“It won’t happen again, Fitzzy,” Niall assures me. It better fucking not. The woman is trying my patience. First, she has Niall unlace her dress. Now she’s eating dinner with him. She better watch herself.

If I didn’t trust my lads implicitly, I would be assigning a different bodyguard. As it is, I want the fear of the Reaper in her. At least until I get a better read on her.

I nod stiffly at him, finishing my meal and dropping the plate in the sink, draining my beer, and throwing the empty bottle in the trash.

He drifts back to the sofa as I stalk upstairs, pissed off as all fuck right now.

A glance assures me Tiggy is asleep in my bed when I get into the room and that she is on the left side of the bed. Good. I sleep on the right.

Ignoring her presence, for now, I move directly to the bathroom to discard my bloodstained clothing and shower. I took a hard hit to the shoulder, but the blood isn’t mine.

Tiggy is still asleep when I come back into the bedroom. Her dark hair is spread across her pillow, and I see a bare shoulder peeking out from under the coverlet. Now that’s something I can get behind. Does she sleep naked?

I eagerly tug down the sheets, smiling smugly when I see she is in another one of her little nightgowns. This one is baby blue. Again, she’s not wearing panties underneath it.

Licking my lips, I kneel beside the bed, pulling her legs open, tugging her towards me, and burying my face in her wet

heat. I can tell the exact moment she wakes up, her soft little moans getting deeper.

Tiggy's legs wrap around my head, her hips lifting to thrust her clit that little bit deeper into my mouth. I smirk against her, using my forearm to pin her hips down as they try to roll, and plunge two fingers inside her, curling them until they're pounding on her g-spot with every thrust.

Tiggy is writhing now, coming with a gasp and a whimper. There's my little liar. I stand, flipping her over and plunging into her, still standing beside the bed.

Anchoring her hips in position, I pound into her, my hand creeping around to pinch her clit as she arches her back and comes again, hard. This time, there's no whimper. Instead, she moans.

“Oh fuck, *Seamus*.”

The sound of my name moaned out of that sexy little mouth means I only have to pound a few more times into that tight little channel before I groan out my own release.

Withdrawing, I slap her ass, feeling cocky about making her come twice. So much for her never enjoying herself in bed with me.

Tiggy spins around, anger and defiance flashing in her eyes.

“Don't spank me,” she spits. My eyebrows shoot up as I grab her chin, leaning in close. Her eyes dip to my lips briefly, and I smirk. Not going to happen, *leannán*. I don't kiss my women.

“Next time I'm not home for supper,” I breathe into her face, menace clouding my tone, and she freezes, “you eat

alone in the dining room. My wife doesn't eat alone with other men. Especially not *my* men."

We stare into each other's eyes for a long moment. I wonder if that steel backbone I get glimpses of sometimes will come out. It better fucking not. Not on this. Finally, Tiggy closes her eyes and nods. It's a sharp, jerky movement, and I know instinctively it is a surrender.

"I'm sorry," she murmurs. She does *sound* contrite. "I should have realized it was inappropriate. It won't happen again."

"See that it doesn't."

I release her chin with a small shove, climbing into the bed beside her. Tiggy rolls on her side. I stare at the ceiling, wondering if I'm going to be able to fall asleep with all the noise of another person in here. After about twenty minutes, her breathing evens out as she falls asleep.



# Chapter Six

## Tiggy

Niall shoots me a glare as I walk into my yoga class. I had to give up a lot of my life for this marriage, but this class is one thing I insist on keeping.

Seamus initially said I couldn't. But I managed to swing it by telling him that the only reason I was so flexible in bed was the yoga. He backed down wicked quick.

I don't know how often I will be able to thwart my husband's orders using sex, but I'm definitely going to pull out the big guns when it matters. After all, if you don't try, you'll never know.

Rolling out my mat, I stretch with the other attendees and contort myself into the first position. Yoga always cleanses my mind. It doesn't empty it, but it makes me hyper-focused on what is bothering me, all the other distracting clutter in my brain falling away.

As I move through the motions, my head is full of Seamus. No surprises there. Of course my husband is what is weighing on my mind.

He doesn't speak to me. He leaves before I get out of bed in the morning, going god knows where – I think a strip club is involved – he gets home late, tumbling me into bed before we sleep.

Married life is certainly different from how I had imagined. It's different in the bedroom because there is no way I could ever have imagined having such mind-blowing sex every night of my life. I've had more orgasms in the last week of marriage than I have ever managed to give myself in my life.

But apart from our incredible chemistry in bed...there's really nothing in our marriage. We're two people who float along, existing – not even in the same physical space – who come together every night to put fireworks to shame.

Is it selfish to want more of a connection with my husband? Should I just be grateful that we at least have amazing chemistry in bed? It could be worse. He could be a sexual taker like Ant was.

When I think about it, Ant was kind of rude to me in the bedroom too. At least Seamus accompanies his slightly condescending nature in bed with an all-inclusive stud-servicing. I can't really complain about that.

I'm bored. I have to admit it. I used to have a full life helping other people. Now I cook meals for my husband, which he never bothers to show up for. I shop for groceries, and I come to yoga class. The rest of my time is filled with cleaning the huge house I now live in and reading my single book of poetry.

I think back to our wedding night. To the flash on his face when I challenged him. To the surge of excitement I felt when I defied him. Hmm. Maybe I should try winding him up. At least that would be a break in the boredom. Screaming at each other has to be better than silence. Doesn't it?



## SEAMUS

Tiggy takes my warning about her dinner plans to heart because I am late for supper every night of the first week of our marriage, and every night, she eats alone in the dining room before serving Niall his supper in the kitchen while she flits around cleaning up. Then she goes to bed.

Apparently, all she does around the house all day is do chores. My laundry is done and folded away. Hell, she even got the blood stains out of my blue shirt without using bleach. Fuck, a wife is a handy thing to have sometimes.

Of course, having a wife is a fucking pain in my arse most of the time. She keeps moving shit around in my house. I put something somewhere, and the next time I look for it, I can't find it.

The only room in the house that seems safe is my office. I think Niall put the fear of God into her about going in there. Or, more likely, he put the fear of Seamus fucking Fitzpatrick into her. I smirk at the thought.

Unlike my office, my kitchen is another matter entirely. My fridge is full of rabbit food, and my cabinets are full of weird spices.

She's a good cook, and her cooking is just as good cold, which is a fucking relief since I haven't eaten a hot meal with

her. I'm still teaching Tiggy her place.

She's yet to serve up any Romanian food. Thank fuck. If it happened, I'd have to chew her ass out for that transgression. I'm not sure if Niall put the hex on it or if she just clued in that it wouldn't be smart. Either way, she mainly sticks with staples like lasagna, pasta, meat, and veg. Hell, she even made a lamb stew one night. That was a highlight, and I wish I'd been home on time for that one. I haven't had a decent fucking stew since my mammy died.

My Aunt Siobhan is many things, but a good cook is not one of them. So a hearty stew hasn't been on my menu for fifteen years. I'll be asking Tiggy to make it again when I intend to be home for supper.

“Seamus.”

I look up from the spreadsheet on the iPad, tapping my fingers against it. I wasn't exactly paying attention to the bar takings, so I don't mind the intrusion.

I shake my head, trying to clear it of my wife. Why the fuck am I thinking about her anyway?

Paddy stands in the doorway, his eyebrows raised.

“What is it, Paddy?”

“How's the marriage going?”

My eyebrows shoot up, and I shrug as he strolls into the room, pouring himself a glass of whiskey and dropping into one of the chairs across my desk.

“Sex on tap, what's to complain about?”

Paddy smirks at me, tapping his thumb against the side of the glass.

“Does it bother you that you’re living with our enemy?”

Draining my own drink, I shove to my feet to fetch another. Glancing over my shoulder, my gaze meets Paddy’s, where he’s still watching me.

“I wouldn’t trust the woman further than she could throw me, but she’s a fucking good lay.”

“If that’s all she’s good for, why do you need her? You’ve got sex on tap here.”

Shrugging, I drop back into my leather chair, stretching my legs out as I study my best mate. “She keeps the house nice.”

“Your cleaning service did that.”

“She’s a good cook.”

“You can hire one of those.”

“Jesus fuck, you’re a belligerent cunt tonight, Paddy. What crawled up your arse and died?”

He shrugs, taking a slug of his whiskey. “It bothers me that you’re alone in that house with a snake.”

Well, not alone. Niall sleeps on the sofa. He refuses to take one of the bedrooms, stupid prick. Says that being upstairs won’t help if someone breaks in. Paddy’s just paranoid.

“You still think she’s a Romanian plant.”

“Aye. I do. I think Sean should have looked more into this. Why the fuck would Albescu randomly offer a truce?”

“To bring tensions back from the boil?”

“If you think that you’re not ready for the top job, you’re being taken for a ride.”

We glare at each other. It’s all well and good for Paddy to say that to me, but he can’t talk like that when anyone else is present. He has to be seen to back me one hundred percent, or he’s looking at a shallow grave.

“She cooks. She cleans. She shops. She does yoga. She fucks me like a bitch in heat. The woman doesn’t say *boo* to me, and I don’t talk in front of her. If she’s a Romanian spy, she’s doing a fucking terrible job.”

Paddy flips me off. “She married you, you cunt. She’s probably playing the long game.”

“So keep an eye on her.”

“I fucking will.”

Sighing, I shoot my drink and stand, dropping the glass onto the desk for someone else to clean up.

“Where are you going?” Paddy asks, starting to stand as well.

“Home. To fuck my little Romanian honeypot.”

Paddy drops back into his chair, snorting and taking another sip of his whiskey.

“Famous last words.”

I stride out of the office, flipping him off, looking for Liam. He’ll be out on the floor of the VIP room, watching the strippers. He’ll give me a lift home.

The lights are on when I get there. It’s only nine o’clock. I immediately notice Niall sitting in one of the easy chairs in the

parlor, reading an iPad. Tiggy is curled up on the sofa on the other side of the room from him, reading her poetry book.

It's the only non-clothing-related item she brought, apart from her phone - which was confiscated and destroyed on our wedding day. You can't be too careful about bugs and spies, and I still don't trust her.

I cross to the kitchen, retrieving the foil-covered pasta dish scoffing it down, and collecting a beer as I wander into the parlor. Niall stands and smirks at me as I pass by him, and he melts out of the room. I drop onto the sofa beside Tiggy, but she doesn't even notice my presence. We'll see how long she can keep that act up.

After a good ten minutes of my staring at the side of her face, Tiggy finally puts the fucking book down and looks over at me.

“Good day at the office, darling?” she drawls.

My eyes narrow at the sarcasm in her tone. I can't say I appreciate having her in my fucking space with her snarky attitude.

“What the fuck is your problem?” I snap. Tiggy eyes me for a moment longer, shrugging and picking up her book again, turning her eyes down towards it.

“Nothing at all.”

Eyebrows raising, I slap the book out of her hands. I get a glare for that as Tiggy moves to pick it back up.

“Don't touch my things,” she snaps.

Oh, fuck no. I pluck it out of her hand, throwing it onto the easy chair Niall vacated. *Her* stuff? Everything in this house is *my* stuff, including her, and she better fucking cop on to that right fast.

Tiggy huffs a sigh. I'm about to snap at her about her attitude when I see the look in her eyes. She's enjoying winding me up. I don't fucking believe it.

What kind of crazy-ass woman enjoys winding someone like me up? She'll be lucky if all I do is spank the shite out of her ass.

As Tiggy stands, moving to collect her book, I reach out and snag her knee, causing her to topple to the ground. Before she can complain or get back up, I slide off the sofa, straddling her hips, and pinning her to the carpet.

Immediately, Tiggy starts bucking her hips, trying to throw me off, but I can see her eyes are no longer flat. Jesus fuck. The woman is deliberately winding me up because she's *bored*.

Well, I guess I'll just have the fuck the boredom out of her right here on the floor. Thank fuck she's wearing a dress. It makes access a lot easier.

As I pop the buttons to open her dress at her tits, Tiggy stills for a moment, her chest heaving with every breath. We stare into each other's eyes, my fingers plucking at the buttons. After another second, she starts fighting me like the wildcat she is.

I've noticed she keeps her fingernails short. They're delicate and pretty, a pale shade of pink and rounded. Right



now, I'm thanking my lucky stars that they aren't brightly colored talons like our strippers wear because the psychotic woman has just taken a swipe at my face.

Snatching her dainty wrists, I pin them above her head, holding them together with one of my hands while I use the other to keep opening her dress.

Undeterred, Tiggy glares at me, trying to burn a hole in my face with the angry heat of her eyes as I focus on my goal of freeing her tits.

She's such a slender, dainty little thing, and I'm about a foot taller than her, but her tits and ass are perfect handfuls. Like she was made just for me.

Tiggy's dress is open now, hanging down the sides of her chest, exposing her silvery lacy bra. I smirk when I see it is a front clasping bra. Reaching down, I flick it open. As the bra cups slip off her tits, Tiggy starts bucking and twisting underneath me again.

Now that's a beautiful sight. She probably doesn't realize, but when she moves like that, her tits bob around.

Still keeping her wrists pinned above her head with my hand, I pinch one of her nipples. Hard. Tiggy sucks in a breath and stops moving.

Her pupils dilate, and my smirk grows. She might have talked a big game about not enjoying herself, but I would bet every cent I have that she's soaking wet right now. She might not like me, but her body sure as shit does.

The frustration grows in her eyes when she realizes her body is aching for me. Making a liar out of her, yet again. My

pretty little liar.

Bending down, I capture her free nipple, sucking it into my mouth and biting down on it as I pinch her other nipple. A moan sounds out, her back arching, pressing her breast against my tongue. If my lips weren't otherwise occupied, I'd be grinning triumphantly right now.

I release her wrists to use my hand for a better purpose. As soon as her wrists are free, Tiggy tangles her fingers through my hair, and tugs, sharply. It stings, and I bite harder down on her nipple as punishment. She whimpers, her fingers loosening their grip just enough not to be painful anymore. That's better.

As a reward, I move off her hips, spreading her thighs with mine. Shoving her panties aside, I plunge two fingers into her dripping wet pussy, finger fucking her hard.

I fucking *knew* she'd be wet for me. Fuck, sometimes I like being married. Having a wet and wanting wife and sex on tap is starting to spoil me.

I've never been one to indulge while I'm working, but since I've never been one for delayed gratification either, I'm horny all the time these days.

I contemplated fucking one of the strippers today, but I couldn't get my dick to cooperate. The little bastard only wanted to be buried in fucking Tiggy, so I'm home hours earlier than I originally planned.

My beautiful little liar shatters around my fingers, moaning and writhing. I want her taste on my mouth when I fuck her, so I snatch my fingers away, sucking them into my mouth as I unbutton my jeans. Even as I thrust into her wet heat, groaning

as her muscles clench me tightly, Tiggy still fights me for dominance.

I'm intrigued to see where she's going with this, so I roll us over and settle onto my back while Tiggy freezes, perched on my dick as she straddles me, caught unawares by the move. Our eyes meet, and my eyebrows raise. A slow smirk plays across her lips as she recognizes the challenge.

She takes her fucking time. Reaching down, she slowly starts to unbutton my shirt, rolling her hips once every third button before stopping again.

Once she has the thing unbuttoned, she pushes my shirt off my shoulders, her eyes running over my torso, her tongue darting out to wet her lips. I swallow down a groan. Fuck, she is a sexy little thing.

Her fingertips trail over my pecs, her smirk reappearing. Tiggy's eyes flash as she pinches down hard on my nipples, swiveling her hips. My own hips surge, and I smirk at the breathy, needy little sound catching in her throat at the movement.

Releasing my nipples, Tiggy trails her fingertips softly down, swirling in patterns over my abs as she rolls and swivels her hips sporadically.

“What?” she snaps when she catches me staring at her.

“I was just wondering when you were going to get to the fucking point.” I shrug, and her eyes narrow.

I'm not kidding. This is fucking torture. In my entire life, I have never let a woman take charge. And I've never fucked someone so slowly before. This isn't fucking at all. Tiggy's

either trying to torture me, or she's trying to make love to me, and both those options are off the table.

Surging up until I'm sitting, I capture one of her nipples between my teeth, biting down while I slap her ass hard.

"Start fucking, or I'll do it for you," I growl against her breast. She sighs like I'm irritating her.

"So fucking impatient," she mutters, which is when my non-existent patience well and truly snaps.

Clamping my teeth down harder, she whimpers as I grab her hips and start roughly jacking her up and down, fucking her on my dick.

She grumbles for all of two seconds until her breathing changes, and she's all breathy little moans as her hands clamp down on my shoulders, holding onto me, her head tipping back.

Letting her nipple pop out of my mouth, I slide my lips up to her pale, slender throat. I suck hard, and she moans even harder. Fuck me. I'm like a schoolboy, getting off on leaving a hickey on my woman to mark her.

"*Seamus*," she whimpers, her head lolling back. Jesus fuck. I explode with a growl as her pussy flutters on my dick, and she comes.

As soon as I've finished, I lift her off my dick, dropping her onto the floor beside me, tucking my dick away, and buttoning my shirt back up as I climb to my feet.

"Get cleaned up and go to bed."

Tiggy flinches at the coldness in my tone. I'm not sure what she expected. Cuddling? Fuck that shit.

"I don't want you back out of the bedroom tonight."

Tiggy clutches her dress over her chest and keeps her head down as she snags her poetry book, stumbling out of the room. As I follow her, I see Niall standing in the kitchen doorway, his eyes glued to the ground, avoiding looking at her. It's just as well. Tiggy's dress is still open at the front.

He glances up when I come out of the parlor and smirks, holding up his hands. The bedroom door upstairs slams before Niall starts to talk.

"I didn't see anything, Fitzzy," he chuckles.

I glare at him, stalking to my den. He better fucking not have.

# Chapter Seven

## SEAMUS

There's a disturbance at the door to my office, and I look up from the latest inventory count in surprise. Not many people come in here without knocking. Only my father would dare. Even Paddy knocks, usually just the once before he barges in, just as a courtesy, but he still fucking knocks.

It's Tahlie, one of the strippers. She flashes me a smile from her blood-red lips, sauntering over. She's not dressed for work, but she is still in sky-high stilettos and a tight bandage dress with cuts in the fabric high on her thigh and over her tits, spilling through the ripped material.

"I just wanted to congratulate you on your marriage," she says breathily, her pupils dilating. She came in here without knocking to congratulate me on something I never fucking wanted? My eyebrows raise as she slides down to her knees, her long taloned fingers deftly unbuttoning my jeans and stroking my dick from base to tip as she licks her lips.

I lean back in my chair, watching her. I've fucked Tahlie on multiple occasions, most recently at my stag night. She's a good ride. But right now, I can't seem to get into it.

Maybe it's her harsh perfume tickling at my nostrils, making me want to sneeze. Perhaps it's the fact that when I look at my dick in her hand, I'm reminded of Tiggy's slender hands with her pale pink, short, manicured nails. Maybe it's because I'm getting laid multiple times a night.

Honestly, it's probably the fact that I haven't fucked Tiggy's mouth yet, and her lips are the ones I actually want to see stretched around my dick right now.

Whatever the reason, it's not happening right now. I stand, knocking her hand away and buttoning my jeans back up.

"Not tonight, Tahlie," I tell her, my voice steely. "I'm in the middle of something important. Next time, knock."

She blinks in surprise, looking like a deer in the headlights, shrugging and getting to her feet. Frankly, her entitled attitude is getting on my nerves. Yeah, I've had my dick in her. So have some of the other lads.

I'm pissed that she would dare to enter my office without permission. Despite my dismissal of her, Tahlie's hand reaches down to cup my still flaccid dick.

"I could help you forget about your stresses," she simpers.

I'm reminded of the defiance flashing in Tiggy's eyes. Always challenging me in bed. Tiggy wouldn't keep begging after I've rejected her. She has too much pride.

"I'm not stressed." Dropping back into my chair, I jab my finger at the door, silently telling her to fuck off. "And I have a wife who does quite well in taking care of those urges."

Too well, in fact. Toying with my phone, I call Paddy into my office. He doesn't like what I ask of him, but he stalks off to do it anyway.



# TIGGY

Niall grunts that he has to go and take care of some things. I figure he means that he has to go and carve up, torture, and murder someone before disposing of their body, so I don't ask.

I'm surprised to be left alone in the house. I hadn't been expecting that. Before I can revel in my unexpected freedom, I'm brought back to earth with a thud as Paddy, Seamus's best man from our wedding, strides in.

Where Niall is golden, rough good looks, Paddy is smooth dark gorgeousness. Thick, tousled dark brown hair, dark brows, and dark stubble, he watches me silently for a beat, a scowl on his face.

"Get dressed for Oracle. Seamus wants you there," he grunts. I blink in surprise. Apart from my yoga class and grocery shopping, I haven't left the house for almost two weeks.

I have no idea what a woman wears to a strip club, but I study my wardrobe and decide there is no way I can compete on a sexiness level with the strippers.

I mean, hello, their job is literally to be temptation itself, so in the end, I settle on a deep purple, long-sleeved silk blouse and a black pencil skirt that hugs my hips and ass, flaring out to the knees. Adding sheer stockings with a naughty red lace garter belt, I slip on black heeled pumps.

I might look business on the outside, but at least I'm sexy underneath. My red lace push-up bustier matches my garter



belt and lacy panties. There's no way in hell I can be as sexy as a stripper, but I can secretly feel that way underneath my clothes, which helps immensely with my confidence.

Paddy opens the car door for me, but he doesn't talk to me at all on the way to the club. Pulling up in the parking lot, he points his finger in my face, and I watch him carefully.

"Now you listen to me, and you listen carefully," Paddy glares at me. "You don't talk to other men in there. You don't embarrass Seamus, or I'm going to -."

"I grew up in this life, Paddy," I snap at him, and he falls silent, watching me. "I'm not an idiot. I know my role."

"That's a lesson you'd best not be forgetting, lass," he warns menacingly, and I flinch.

We glare at each other, at an impasse, before he nods, shoving out of the car and rounding the hood to open the door for me.

The bouncer nods to Paddy, who ushers me through the door, his hand between my shoulder blades. The bar is low-lit, and two strippers are dancing their hearts out on stage.

Paddy takes me through a side door, down a dimly lit corridor into a smaller bar, with a single bartender, a single stripper commanding the stage, and a much more subdued crowd. It is a private bar, with seating around small, round tables for about twenty-five patrons. A few eyes flicker over to us, dismissing me as boring and frumpy in my business attire and turning their attention back to the show being put on for them.

We walk over to the bar, pausing there as Paddy raises a finger to get the attention of the pretty brunette bartender with smooth tanned skin and piercing blue eyes

“What’ll it be then, Paddy?” she asks, her accent pure Boston.

“Whiskey and a red wine.”

She nods, her eyes darting over me, looking intrigued as she pours our drinks.

Nodding to her and not bothering to pay, Paddy picks up our drinks, steering me over to a table at the back. As we arrive, Seamus’s cousin Connor, with his ashy blonde hair and sleepy bedroom eyes, salutes me with his glass of whiskey.

In a gesture I did not expect from someone who so obviously despises me, Paddy holds out a chair for me. Shocked into confused silence, I take a seat, nursing my glass of red wine as my eyes are glued to the pretty redhead on stage.

She’s wearing an emerald green thong, emerald stiletto heels, and nothing else. I can’t keep my eyes off her. I have always wished I had rhythm like that. Unfortunately, my skills do not lie anywhere *near* dancing.

“Tahlie caught your eye, huh?” Connor smirks at me, and Paddy turns his eyes to me as well, an inscrutable look there as he frowns.

“She’s quite talented,” I muse, sipping my wine while they watch me silently. There is something in their eyes when they look between the pretty redhead on stage and me, but they don’t say anything, so I let it go.

She finishes her set, shaking her tits as she sashays her way around the room, collecting her tips. She pauses at our table when she reaches us, Connor and Paddy holding out cash to her.

“Enjoy the show, boys?”

She smolders, her eyes lazily dragging over the two of them. I would kill for that kind of sexy confidence. Suddenly, my red lingerie doesn't seem very sexy when coupled with the rest of me.

Her eyes finally dance over me, taking in my business-style attire.

Two perfectly plucked eyebrows raise, and she smiles. “Whose date are you?”

Tahlie leans casually against the table, her nipples hard and exposed as she is still only wearing a thong. Paddy clears his throat while Connor grins.

“This is Tiggy Fitzpatrick,” Paddy drawls. “Seamus's wife.”

Tahlie's eyes roam over me again, flashing with disbelief before she banishes the look.

“Surely not,” she giggles, running her hand down Paddy's arm. “Everyone knows wives don't come to the club. Pull the other one.”

Paddy silently watches her, nonplussed, until she blinks, slightly uncertain.

“She's Seamus's wife. She can do whatever the fuck she likes.”

Tahlie straightens, collecting her tips, and strolls away, clearly put off by the sharp warning in Paddy's tone. I squirm in my chair.

"I don't need to be here. I don't want to cause any trouble."

My mind dances back to the conversation Paddy and I had in the car before we came inside. In translation, I don't want to overstep, and I don't want to break any rules the Irish might have about how they expect their wives to behave. I know the consequences of that kind of thing.

"You're here because Seamus wants you here." Paddy glares at me as though daring me to argue. Draining his drink, he stands, gesturing for me to do the same. I hear what I'm sure I wasn't meant to, muttered under his breath. "Though God knows why he wants you here at all."

Paddy leads me through another door and down a well-lit corridor, loosely cupping my elbow. We are in the part of the club that patrons don't see. The back end, office part.

There is a door with a sign proclaiming *Dressing Room* and some restrooms, but we walk past them, coming to a halt before a nondescript brown door simply reading *Manager*. Still cupping my elbow, Paddy raises his hand, knocking once before shoving the door open and striding in.

Seamus is seated at an ornately carved wooden desk as I follow Paddy inside. He's leaning back in his chair, a tumbler of whiskey in one hand, the fingers of the other trailing over the spreadsheet he is skimming.

He glances up when he sees us, nodding to Paddy, barely acknowledging me as his eyes skim over me. Seamus blinks,

his eyes returning to me, looking me up and down very carefully as he takes in my attire.

“That’ll be all, Paddy.” His voice is gravelly as he nods again to his friend, who shoots me one last glare, stalking out, closing the door tightly behind him.

His eyes still glued to my face, Seamus takes a sip of his whiskey, carefully placing the tumbler back on the table, leaning back in his chair again. He beckons to me, my mouth feeling dry. My husband is looking at me like he wants to devour me, and I am trapped in his gaze.

My legs move of their own accord, as my body so often does when caught in Seamus’s dark, seductive spell. Seamus spins his chair as I approach him, and I step right up between his thighs as he lounges back.

His eyes darken as he slides his hands up my side, stopping when they reach my waist. As though I am weightless, he lifts me, seating me on the desk in front of him.

I fight the urge to shiver with anticipation under his heated glare. Always a contradiction in his eyes, like he resents me and wants to fuck me all at the same time.

My breath catches as he surges out of his seat, standing in front of me, crowding me, his face close to mine. I can smell his scent. It’s spicy and woody and sex and sin, and I have to steel myself not to close my eyes as I inhale. If I’m not careful, I could become intoxicated by my husband.

# Chapter Eight

## SEAMUS

Paddy delivered Tiggy, as I requested. She's a welcome distraction from the spreadsheets of numbers I was previously poring over.

She's dressed like a secretary, or maybe a naughty librarian, in a silk shirt with long sleeves and a tight pencil skirt hugging her curves. She's even wearing closed-toed pumps.

I don't think anybody has ever come into this club dressed like her. They're either dressed like a stripper or dressed like they're at a strip club.

I like that she dressed like she's meeting her husband at work. I like that she's not trying to compete with the strippers for the attention of men. She shouldn't be. She should only want my attention, and right now, she fucking has it.

I cup her cheek with one hand, my thumb stroking over the plump lower lip I want to run my tongue over and suck into my mouth. I don't kiss my women but fuck me, do I want to kiss Tiggy right now. As I said, I'm shit at denying myself when I want something, so fuck it.

Leaning closer, I replace my thumb with my mouth, kissing her softly, tasting her sweetness. My tongue does indeed slide along her lower lip, and she gasps into my mouth, her own dropping open.

Seizing the opportunity, I suck her lower lip into my mouth and bite down on it gently, eliciting a soft moan from Tiggy that is like music to my dick.

Stepping closer, I nudge her legs open with my thighs, spreading them as wide as her restrictive skirt will allow as I press myself against her. My hand is still holding her jaw while my other one tangles in her dark silky hair, manipulating it so I can tip her head back, deepening our kiss as my tongue licks into her mouth, fencing with hers, and curling behind her teeth.

Tiggy's hands slide up my sides, and she grips at my waist, moaning into my mouth again. Jesus fuck, I need to be inside her.

Breaking the kiss, I drop back into my chair, lifting her left foot and removing her shoe, letting it fall to the floor, and moving to the other one. Tiggy's breath hitches as I slide my hands up her legs, enjoying the silky feeling of her stockings, my breathing deepening as I watch my hands disappear underneath her skirt. My fingers encounter bare flesh, my nostrils flaring. Now that is what I am talking about. My eyes fly up to hers, watching me, half-hooded with desire.

The need to *see* her lingerie burns through me like a wildfire. Removing my hands, I shove her skirt up over her hips, exposing her garter belt's blood-red lace and golden bows and her lacy thong. Fuck yes.

"So fecking beautiful," I murmur, reaching behind her to unzip her skirt. It's in my way.

Lifting her by the waist, I slip the skirt back over her hips and drop it onto the floor on top of her discarded pumps. My

foot hooks under it, tipping it off them. I have plans for those shoes.

One by one, I pop open the buttons on her silk blouse, rocking back in my chair as my eyes roam over the treasure I have uncovered.

Tiggy is wearing a matching red lace bustier, pushing up her tits until they're practically on display, golden bows making her look like a fucking Christmas present just waiting for me to open. I feel like a kid waiting to see what Santa brought him.

Slipping Tiggy's blouse off her shoulders and dropping it onto her skirt, I lick my lips again as my eyes drink her in. Right, the shoes. I reach down and snag her black pumps.

Leaning back on her wrists, Tiggy watches me as I slide her heels back on, climbing to my feet to admire the fucking gorgeous sight in front of me.

She dressed like a librarian for everyone else to see and a fucking sex toy just for my eyes. Jesus fuck. Agreeing to this arranged marriage is quickly becoming the best choice I ever made.

Sliding between her legs again, I tangle my fingers into her hair and devour her mouth, my other hand gripping the bare flesh at her thighs, kneading it. Tiggy's hands move over my chest, unbuttoning my shirt from top to bottom and pushing it off my shoulders.

I groan against her mouth as her fingernails run over my bare chest, down over my abs, hooking into the loops of my



jeans. I need her panting and squirming beneath me, and I need it now.

Finally breaking the kiss, I straighten, gently pushing against Tiggy's torso until she is laying down, sprawled over the spreadsheets of inventory and takings. Paperwork will never look the same again.

I take a moment to admire the sight, reaching over and snagging my glass of whiskey. Taking a sip, I peruse her as her heavily hooded eyes watch me, her chest heaving.

Leaning down, I press a kiss against the hollow at the base of her throat, parting my lips slightly so she can feel the heat of the whiskey in my mouth against her skin. As Tiggy moans at the sensation, I swallow the drink, running my tongue over the patch of skin, savoring the lingering whiskey flavor mixed with her sweet taste.

Repeating the action, I slowly finish my drink as I kiss and lick my way down her body until I'm kneeling between her pale thighs.

Shoving the scrap of red lace aside, I bury my face in her wet heat, hooking her stocking-clad legs around my shoulders, her heels resting against my back. I've never enjoyed going down on a woman as much as I like eating Tiggy out. In fact, I'm notorious for never going down on a woman. I *can*. I just don't want to. Or I didn't, before now.

Tiggy shivers and shudders, and when my lips close about her clit, her back arches off the desk as she moans loudly, her fingers creeping down to tangle in my hair and hold my head close.

“Seamus,” she gasps, “*please.*”

I can hear the desperation in her voice, and a smug feeling floods me. I like hearing her beg for me to give her pleasure. Because she said she would never enjoy it. God, I love that I’ve made a little liar out of her. Just for that feeling alone, I’ll give her what she wants.

Baring my teeth, I rake them lightly over her clit, sucking hard. Tiggy’s legs tremble, and her fingers tighten almost painfully in my hair as she comes.

Suddenly, I can’t wait to be inside her. Kissing my way up her body, I unbutton my jeans with one hand, tugging her up off the desk with the other until she’s once again seated before me.

My mouth coming down hot and hard on hers once again, I kiss her until she’s soft and pliable beneath my hands, the tip of my dick sliding through her slick folds.

“I want ye to hold onto me, *leannán,*” I murmur to her. “Hold tight because I am going to fuck ye hard and fast.”

Tiggy’s arms immediately circle my neck, and she grips my shoulders because she’s such a good girl. In fact, she’s been such a good girl all week. That’s why she’s here. Because she deserves a reward.

Gripping her thighs, I thrust in hard, biting back a groan as her inner muscles clench my dick. Positioning her so her ass is half hanging off the table, I lean over, bracing my hands on the desk on either side of her as she clings to me, and I fuck her, hard and fast, just like I promised.

Thank God she came on my mouth because I am not going to last. Tiggy is panting and gasping, and her muscles clench again, milking my dick as I explode, roaring when I do. I keep thrusting, and Tiggy comes too, muffling her scream in the crook of my neck. It's muffled, but I hear her, and I can't help my smug smirk. The woman just screamed my name.

Pulling out, I let her thong fall back into place, bending and retrieving her clothes and my shirt.

“Get dressed.” I hand her the skirt and blouse, and she obediently pulls them on, her hands still trembling from the force of her orgasm.

Once we're both dressed, I comb my fingers through her hair until it's as respectable-looking as it ever will be after our extracurricular activities and help her off the desk.

Crowding her space, I kiss her once more, my lips sliding over her cheek and resting on her ear.

“I like that ye're dressed so demurely while underneath, ye're all hot and dirty for me.”

She shivers at my words.

“Come on, I want to show you off in the club and have a drink with the lads while you're sitting there, all prim and proper, filled with my cum.”



# TIGGY

I blush at Seamus's naughty words but allow him to tangle his fingers with mine and lead me from the office. We walk in silence, holding hands, back down the brightly lit corridor and out into the private bar, my heart thumping the whole way.

It's the first time that he's ever held my hand. Hell, apart from the hellishly awkward, eyes open, brief kiss at our wedding, tonight is the first night Seamus has ever kissed me. And holy hell, it was worth the two-week wait. The man kisses me like he's consuming me, and I melt under his lips.

Paddy and Connor are at the same table when we emerge into the intimate bar, joined by Liam, the younger guy in their crew who drove us from the church to the hotel on our wedding day.

Paddy notices us as we approach, turning to signal to the waitress for more drinks. As we reach the table, so does the red-headed stripper, Tahlie. She's wearing more than a thong and stilettos, though barely.

Her dress is gold and satin, and like a second skin, it's so tight and short. All of a sudden, I feel dowdy. I'm dressed like a schoolteacher. The feeling intensifies as her eyes light up when they land on Seamus, and she unashamedly drinks in the handsome sight of him.

I wish I was anywhere but here, where sexy, confident women covet my husband when Tahlie's eyes land on our tangled fingers and narrow.

Undeterred by my presence, she props her hip against the table, purring and jutting her chest out in our direction as Seamus reaches to pull out a chair.

“Seamus, you missed my set tonight.”

My heart sinks into the soles of my drab black pumps at the familiarity in her tone. They’ve definitely done the horizontal tango a time or two, possibly even on the very desk we just used. I feel cheap and dirty and want to scrub at my skin until it bleeds.

“And so I did,” he replies easily. “Have you met my wife? Tiggy, this is Tahlie, one of our dancers.”

His hand moves away from mine, and I suddenly feel bereft until it slides up my back, tangling in my hair as he tips my head back so he can press his lips to mine, where they hungrily move, his tongue licking at the seam of my lips, demanding access.

We break apart at a loud throat clearing, and Paddy is watching us with narrowed eyes while Tahlie is gaping at us. She recovers quickly, whistling through her teeth.

“She must be a special one for you to break your ‘no kissing’ rule,” she teases him. My heart sinks even lower, maybe into the basement. He has a ‘no kissing’ rule, and she knows about it? Yeah, they’ve fucked.

Seamus’s eyebrows shoot up. “Maybe you didn’t hear me.” His voice is ice cold, and his eyes flicker to Tahlie briefly before coming back to me, burning into mine. “She’s my *wife*.”

“And so she is, Fitzzy,” Paddy smirks as a wide-eyed waitress delivers our drinks. “But the next set is about to start, and right now, you two are the main show.”

He’s not wrong, all eyes are on us, and they are either smirking like Paddy and Connor or shocked like Tahlie and the waitress.

Shrugging, Seamus drops into the chair he draws out, tugging me into his lap, reaching for his drink.

“Run along now, Tahlie,” Paddy tells her. She throws one last, incredulous look at me and Seamus, where he’s playing with my hair, his lips nibbling at my earlobe, before she struts off, shaking her ass.

I sit on his lap, frozen in position. This is the most affectionate Seamus has ever been with me, and it’s making me feel a little bit uneasy. No one likes to experience a complete U-turn in someone’s attitude towards them. That’s a red flag for something going on.

As soon as the lights dim, the music starts, and another stripper makes her way on stage, Seamus sits back, sipping his drink, his other hand resting on the arm of the chair.

I feel a little silly, perched on his lap as he blatantly ignores me again. Whatever all that affection was about, it’s over now, and I think I might have whiplash.

For a second, I wonder if he had been having an affair with the red-headed stripper and was using me to make a point that their relationship was over.

But before I can feel weird about being introduced to his ex, I remember this is *Seamus Fitzpatrick*, and he would

simply tell a woman that things were over between them. If she didn't take no for an answer, she'd probably show up in about ten years rotting in a shallow grave. The reminder of who my husband really is has me fighting back a shudder.

Using the excuse of not being able to reach my drink, I stand, snagging my glass and moving to the empty chair at the table, between Connor and Paddy. Before I sit, I glance back at Seamus to see if he's annoyed I moved, but he has spread his legs out, looking like he hasn't noticed I'm gone. Biting my lip, I spin the chair, so I can face the stage and watch the show, taking my seat.

One, my golden bracelet. Two, my gardenia perfume. Three, my old work clothes help me feel like this is just a job. Four, my wedding ring. Five, the taste of red wine on my tongue.

"It looks like you made your point, Fitzzy," Connor laughs. As I glance over, he tips his head at the other patrons in the room. Glancing around, I can see they are all watching me. But as soon as I look their way, they hastily avert their eyes.

Ah. The little show Seamus just put on wasn't for my benefit or even Tahlie's. It was to show every other male in the room that I belonged to Seamus Fitzpatrick, so back the fuck off. I suppose that sending a little message to Tahlie was an added bonus for me, but definitely not Seamus's intention.

Seamus and the others talk amongst themselves for the next two sets while I am ignored and watch the women work the room, marveling at how agile and bendy they are.

Leaving his empty whiskey tumbler on the table, Seamus stands, and I automatically do too. I catch the smirk on his

lips. He liked that I did that.

“I’ve got to get back to work, lads.” He nods to the men still seated at the table. “Paddy, Connor.”

Moving around the table to me, his fingers tangle in my hair as he kisses me.

“I want ye naked in bed when I get home tonight,” he murmurs huskily against my mouth.

I nod, suddenly feeling all breathy. I think my automatic obedience without him asking for it was a massive turn-on for him. Certainly, he’s talking all Irish, like he does when he wants to be buried inside me.

His lips and hands disappear off me as he strides back through the side door without so much as a glance in my direction. Back to his office.

Paddy and Connor rise to flank me as we leave the private bar, walking through the main bar, which is much rowdier now, and into the parking lot.

It must be Connor’s car because it is different from the SUV Paddy and I came in earlier. This is a sleek black BMW sedan. I could drool over this car all night.

Paddy shoves me none too gently into the buttery leather backseat while Connor slides into the driver’s seat. Once Paddy is in the car, we pull out of the parking lot, driving toward West Roxbury.

I settle back, letting the comfortable leather seat cocoon me. We’re only about fifteen minutes into the half-hour drive when I’m jerked out of my reverie as the vehicle jolts and skids



sideways, the screeching sound of crumpling metal and yelling filling my ears.

I'm hurled sideways, throwing my hand up to stop my head from slamming into the window beside me. My seatbelt stretches taut before I am knocked back into my seat, my chest burning, and a loud scream fills the car.

We stop skidding with a hiss and a pop, the car settling with the sound of breaking glass. I blink at Paddy, twisting in his seat in front of me. His mouth is moving, and he's yelling, but I can't hear him over the screaming.

After a moment, I realize the sound is coming from me. Sucking in a breath, I manage to tamp down on it, and I can finally hear Paddy.

“Stop yer fecking screaming!” he's howling.

Now I have shut up, he falls silent too. Connor is swearing, and my head is ringing, the metallic taste of blood in my mouth. We must have been hit on the driver's side at the back. They both seem okay in the front seats, but the door opposite me is suddenly much closer than it should be.

Paddy shoves his shoulder into his door, expelling a grunt, forcing it open with another screech. He squeezes out, disappearing from view. I watch Connor awkwardly maneuver his long legs from beneath the steering wheel, crawling across the center console with difficulty and out Paddy's door.

I undo my belt, turning as my door opens. Paddy appears, his eyes flickering over me, his fingers closing around my

right hand. He jerks me out of the crumpled car, and I whimper in pain.

“Feck,” he mutters, and when he speaks again, his tone is more gentle than it has ever been with me. “Just cradle it. Here, like this.”

Paddy manipulates my hand, so I’m cradling my right wrist with my left hand, and looking down, I whimper again. My pinky and ring fingers on my right hand are broken. Fucking *ow!* No wonder it hurt when he grabbed my hand.

“Stay down,” Paddy hisses at me, drawing his gun, “and stay behind me. Close.”

I nod, pressing my lips together as the pain from my broken fingers seeps through me as some of the shock recedes. Connor also has his gun out, and he’s hanging up his phone.

“Backup is on the way,” he mutters to Paddy, who nods.

They peer over the top of the car right as machine-gun fire rings out. Cursing, they both duck back down, returning fire. Fucking hell. This is not how I imagined tonight going.

I crouch the best I can, cradling my hand, my left shoulder pressed against Paddy’s back. He said to stay close, and I figure if I’m touching him, he knows where I am and won’t have to waste time keeping an eye on me when he needs to keep both eyes on the action.

There’s a grunt and a thud. I think we may have hit someone, but the machine gun starts firing again. We didn’t hit the *right* someone. After another volley of return fire, there’s a slight yelp, another thud, and the machine gun doesn’t start again. Thank God.

“I’m going to check.” Connor edges his way around our poor car.

“Lucky, don’t!” Paddy calls after him, snatching at his disappearing suit jacket. But it’s too late, and Connor has gone.

Swearing under his breath, Paddy kneels, his eyes and his gun trained over the top of the hood of the car so he can cover Connor in case there are more of them. I hope there aren’t more of them.

It’s eerily silent around us and dark. There are no other cars. I think they may have all started reversing when the gunfire started. I don’t blame them. I wish I were in a vehicle hightailing it out of here.

A screeching of tires cuts through the stillness of the night air, and a black SUV fishtails onto the scene, illuminating us, the wreck of our car, and the other vehicle with its bright headlights. Oh, God. I cringe into Paddy’s back again as he swears.

“Lucky!” he hisses. “Get the fuck back here!”

The SUV doors burst open, and I sag with relief as Seamus jumps out. If Seamus is here, we’re going to be okay. He will make sure everything is taken care of.

“Liam, Ronan! Over here!” Connor calls to the other two guys spilling out of Seamus’s SUV. Seamus’s head swivels toward his cousin, but he keeps stalking over to Paddy and me. Now that the backup Connor called has arrived, Paddy turns, and carefully lifts my right hand.

“Don’t move it.”

He still sounds gentle, but I'm not paying attention to him anymore. Seamus reaches us, dropping to his knees, his gorgeous face like thunder. I can't help but stare at my husband. A dark, dangerous vibe is rolling off him, and I have to swallow the urge to scoot away from him.

"What the fuck happened?" he growls, knocking Paddy's hands away from me as he gently takes my wrist, muttering a low oath as he sees my broken fingers.

"They hit us from behind." Paddy is now leaning back against the car, running a hand through his thick, dark hair. "Thank fuck they hit the opposite side to where Tiggy was sitting."

I glance at him in surprise. Considering how much he seems to resent me, I would have thought Paddy would have preferred it if I got taken out tonight. Then again, maybe he doesn't want Seamus to know that's how he feels. Because if the look on his face and the vibe rolling off him are any indication, I think Seamus would probably seize any opportunity to snap someone's neck with his bare hands.

The same bare hands that are currently cradling my wrist. I focus on their chatter so I don't panic spiral.

"Bulgarians," the new guy grunts from above us. Paddy swears under his breath as Seamus frowns.

"We don't have any fucking problem with the Bulgarians, Ronan," Seamus growls, climbing to his feet and lifting me, bridal-style, to carry me across to the SUV.

Liam and Ronan climb into the front seats while Paddy, Connor, and Seamus sit across the backseat, with me tucked

into Seamus's lap.

“We weren't the only ones in that car tonight.”

Paddy's voice is casual, but I freeze when I realize what he's saying. This could have been about *me*? Now I'm in pain *and* trying not to have a panic attack. One, the golden bracelet on my wrist. Two, the smell of my perfume. Three, Seamus's wood and spice scent. Four, the beating of my heart. It's loud. I can hear it in my ears.

“Are you counting?” Connor, seated next to Seamus, glances at me curiously. At his words, Seamus glances down, his eyes lingering on my left hand pressed against my heart. Five, my wedding ring. I touch it with my thumb, Seamus's hand stroking through my hair.

It's a weird dichotomy, the gentle comfort he is offering me with his hands while murderous rage and tension keep his body taut beneath mine.

# Chapter Nine

## SEAMUS

My fingers twitch as I shove them into my pockets, my jaw grinding so loudly I'm surprised no one can hear them. I'm fucking pissed right now for a multitude of reasons. The first is that someone rammed the car carrying my wife and opened fire on it with a fucking machine gun.

They came after my *wife*. In our world, that's a crime punishable by death.

My wife is under my protection, and nobody fucking touches what is under my protection unless they want me to hunt them down and, if they're lucky, I put a bullet in their head for them, nice and quick.

If they're unlucky, I let Niall at them first, and I can't say that I've met a lot of lucky men in my life.

The second reason I'm fucking pissed is that I had plans for tonight. And I was looking forward to them. Plans that started with Tiggy naked in our bed and ended with her screaming out my name as she came on my dick.

Those plans did not involve driving to my father's house so a doctor could splint Tiggy's two broken fingers or my father interrogating my wife.

Pa is standing over Tiggy, seated in his den, looking up at him, her face a mixture of pain and fear. The doctor wanted to give her some painkillers, but Pa refused. He thinks painkillers

will make her fuzzy, and he wants answers. So we all had to stand here and wince as the doctor snapped her fingers back into position and splinted them while she pressed her lips together, silent tears running down her face.

Apart from one small scream when her bones were set, she hasn't made a single noise, even though she's clearly in pain. I don't think I've ever been so fucking proud of another person in my life.

“Why would the Bulgarians come after us?”

Pa's voice is dangerously low as he questions Tiggy, who is shaking her head.

“I don't know. I stay at home. Seamus doesn't tell me any of that stuff. I don't want to know about it,” she insists, keeping her eyes on Pa's face.

“Make no mistake,” Pa growls at her, pointing his finger in her face. “We have no beef with the Bulgarians. So the only reason they could possibly have for coming after the three of ye is *ye*.”

Tiggy pales, shaking her head again. “I don't know why they would come after me. Not unless it has to do with Seamus. I'm nobody except his wife.”

I can't lie. That statement makes me feel smug as shit.

“Bullshit,” Pa spits. “Ye're the daughter of Marius Albescu. If my lads are going to be caught up in a beef between the Romanians and the Bulgarians, then I need to fucking know.”

“That's highly unlikely,” Tiggy scoffs. It's the wrong tone to take. Pa's eyes narrow, and she shrinks back slightly.

“And why is that?”

Tiggy is undeterred by his lethal tone, which is sexy as fuck. Straightening and lifting her chin, she glares at him.

“Because before the night I was there for supper to meet *you*, I hadn’t been to my father’s house for almost two years. I lived alone. I didn’t have a bodyguard, and nobody came near me.”

There’s silence in the room, and Darragh speaks from where he’s standing behind Pa.

“Maybe they didn’t want to risk hitting the fancy neighborhoods you hung out in.”

This time, she actually rolls her eyes. It’s not the most opportune time to be turned on by my wife’s defiance, but I can’t help it. I’m fucking hard.

“I was a social worker,” she sneers at Darragh. “I spent most of my days in and out of crack dens in Roxbury and Dorchester. Trust me. There would have been ample opportunities to jump me.”

A low growl escapes me, and Pa and Paddy cast me curious glances. I clench my jaw, glaring at the side of my wife’s head. Those are some neighborhoods that she’s never fucking going near again. I don’t care if we have alliances with the Russians and the Italians. I don’t want my wife in neighborhoods we don’t control. Especially *those* neighborhoods.

“Reach out to Albescu,” Pa snaps at Darragh. “Find out if there’s bad blood between him and the Bulgarians.”

Darragh nods, striding out of the room. Pa turns to me, his face hard. “I want answers. Get Niall on it.”



I nod. I want answers as well. Specifically, I want the fuckers responsible for harming my wife strapped, screaming and bleeding to Niall's table.

"How's the hand?" Pa asks, turning to Tiggy, his dangerous tone replaced by a concerned one. Like flipping a switch, suddenly, he isn't the head of the Irish Mafia anymore. He's a father-in-law full of worry.

"It's okay," Tiggy whispers, but I can see the tightness in her eyes and know she is still in a great deal of pain.

"Can I take my wife home now? She's had a hell of a fucking night."

My voice rings out, loud in the otherwise quiet room. Pa turns, studying me for a beat before nodding and holding out the bottle of painkillers he was withholding. Connor takes them, following me as I stalk over to Tiggy, helping her up and leading her back to the SUV. Connor bitches the whole way home about needing to get a new car.

"You're getting a fucking SUV this time, Lucky," I say through gritted teeth, holding Tiggy close to my chest. Pa offered a second car to get us to my house, but I am content to have Tiggy cradled in my arms.

She's holding herself stiffly, her right hand held against her chest gingerly. I hand her the painkillers, and she swallows them. Hopefully, they work quickly.

"SUVs are never as smooth a drive," Connor whines. "Tiggy agrees with me."

My eyebrows shoot up, especially when Tiggy appears to be swallowing a smile.

“Is that so?” My voice is smoothly dangerous. How would he know what car Tiggy would like? They’ve never had a fucking conversation before.

“No,” Tiggy murmurs, but Connor snorts.

“I call bullshit. I saw your face before we got hit. You liked my BMW.”

“SUVs are safer,” she whispers, tucking her chin to her chest. Yeah, they fucking are.

“An SUV, Lucky. It’s not a suggestion.”

He grumbles but changes the subject, speculating with Ronan in the front seat about who might have hit us. On the other side of Connor, Paddy is staring blankly out the window. I caught his dark glare as we left Pa’s house. He’ll be running his mouth the next time we’re alone together.

The meeting at Pa’s house took fucking forever, and I’m relieved we are finally home. Niall is waiting for us, having secured the place, and he is pissed.

As soon as we are through the front door, he stalks over to Tiggy, ignoring my low growl of warning, and carefully snatches up her right hand, examining it with fury on his face.

He throws a dark look at Paddy and Connor like he’s pissed she got hurt on their watch. Well, he can get in fucking line.

After all her sass at Pa’s, I expect her to wrench her hand away and tell him to fuck off. Instead, she offers him a soft, sad little smile.

“I actually wanted to get out of having to push the grocery cart.”

A ghost of a smile flits across his face, which has everyone staring. Niall Byrne does not smile at lame jokes, especially when a woman makes them. *My woman. My wife.*

“Nice try,” he mutters, “but I don’t push grocery carts. Ye have a husband for all that domesticated shite.”

Tiggy wrinkles her nose and looks horrified. “I’m not about to ask my husband to come to the grocery store with me,” she sounds outraged. “The other housewives will stage a coup and kick me out of the club!”

They’re joking together, and I’m not sure I fucking like it. Niall looks over at me and goes to speak, but I brush past him, picking Tiggy up and carrying her upstairs.

“Wait for me in the den,” I call to them over my shoulder as they all watch me go in surprise.

Kicking the bedroom door shut, I carefully place her on the edge of the bed, kneeling in front of her, examining her hand again and her face.

“I’m sorry.”

She blinks in shock. Yeah. I smirk. Don’t get used to it, *leannán*. I don’t apologize. This is a one-off deal.

“We’ll find out who was behind this, and they’ll be taken care of. Ye have my name, and that should have protected ye.”

Tiggy seems to understand what I’m trying to say because she nods and sighs, reaching out gently to stroke my cheek.

Capturing her hand with mine, I hold it there for a moment, bringing it to my lips.

“I need to be inside ye.”

The words come out a little more strained than I intended. I feel like a piece of shit for needing this when Tiggy is injured, but it's a primal thing.

I need to fuck her to reassure myself she is okay. Also, after whatever the fuck happened downstairs between her and Niall, I need to fucking brand her, so she knows she is mine.

It surprises me that I feel like a piece of shit for needing it. Normally I don't have a conscience when it comes to other people's feelings. Certainly not a woman's feelings.

Then, like the good girl she is, Tiggy nods, pressing her fingers harder against my mouth.

"I need that too," she whispers, and it fucking undoes me.

I stand, and Tiggy looks up, watching my face as I undress. I am about to reach down to help her out of her clothes, freezing as she leans forward, gripping my dick with her good left hand.

My eyes flutter closed, and I groan as her gorgeous, plump lips close around the tip of my dick, her tongue fluttering around the head like a trapped moth. Jesus fuck, her mouth feels amazing.

She licks the slit, my eyes flying open as my fingers tangle in her hair.

"Suck me, Tig," I groan.

Her eyes flicker up to meet mine as she leans forward, taking more of me. I watch, fascinated, at the sight of my dick disappearing into her pretty pink lips. Fuck me. It's just about the most beautiful sight I've ever fucking seen.

A hiss of breath escapes me as the tip of my dick hits the back of her throat, and she wraps her left hand around the rest of my shaft, pumping it as her lips hollow out and she sucks hard. I almost see stars.

“I need to fuck yer mouth, *leannán*,” I murmur, and she slacks her jaw.

Groaning at her submission, I tighten my grip on her hair and start pumping. Her left hand falls away from my shaft, and she grips my hip with it as I fuck her mouth. My balls are tightening, a growl ripping from my throat.

“I want ye to swallow every last drop.”

Tiggy’s eyes widen as I come, and she’s frantically swallowing, making sure not a single drop spills out of her mouth.

Letting my dick slip from her mouth, I drop a kiss on her forehead, carefully helping her out of her clothes and into bed. Tucking the coverlet around her, I lie on the bed beside her, tugging her into my arms, my hand creeping down to her crotch to take care of her when she sighs, snuggling her head underneath my chin.

“Can you just hold me for a bit, Seamus?” she whispers.

My hand freezes on her stomach. I can’t say I have ever fucking *cuddled* with a woman before. I’m not entirely sure what I’m supposed to do, but Tiggy sighs contentedly when I leave my hand on her stomach.

Taking my cues from her soft noises of satisfaction, I curl myself around her as she lies on her back. Eventually, her breathing evens out as she falls asleep. My eyes trace over her

face, no longer pinched with pain as it was tonight. Her long, dark lashes lay against her pale cheeks.

I contemplate moving, going back down to the lads in the den now she is asleep, but I don't want to wake her, and fuck it, I'm comfortable where I am. I'm interested to see how long they fucking wait there. I close my eyes, falling asleep quickly.



## TIGGY

Seamus is gone when I wake up, which isn't anything new. I'm feeling stiff and sore, no doubt from being in a car that got rammed.

Every cloud has a silver lining, and mine comes in the form of the claw-footed tub. I have a lovely soak in the rose-scented water. I have been stockpiling bath bombs with every shopping trip.

Reluctantly climbing out when the water moves from tepid to cool, I pull on jeans, and an oversized woolen sweater, and stuff my feet into mocassins.

Unusually, Niall isn't in the parlor when I walk downstairs, but I can hear voices from the den. As I approach the door, I hesitate. It is more than him and Seamus here.

I know I'm not supposed to go near that room, so I am nervous as I knock on the door. Am I going to be told to fuck

off? I just want to offer them some breakfast.

The voices stop, footsteps sound, and the door opens. Liam stares at me for a beat, stepping back. They're all in there, all six of them, and Seamus shoves up from the desk chair in surprise.

"Everything okay?"

I flush as six pairs of eyes stare at me expectantly, but the words seem to have died in my throat. It's Niall who speaks up to save me.

"She wants to know how everyone takes their eggs."

"Eggs?" Seamus parrots, looking nonplussed, whether from the question or the fact that Niall is speaking for me, I'm not entirely sure.

I'm sure he wanted his dick in my mouth last night because he didn't like Niall and me having inside jokes, and it was his way of proving I am his.

"They'll have them scrambled," Niall tells me, ignoring Seamus. "Just come fetch us when they're ready."

As I turn to leave, I have to bite back a smile at the argument my husband and my bodyguard are now having.

"Fucking eggs?" Seamus spits.

"Maybe if ye hung around for long enough in the morning, ye'd know how fucking amazing at cooking breakfast yer wife is."

There's a low growl. Niall is taunting my husband for some reason. That's a dangerous move. My father wouldn't allow such disrespect from his men. I'm surprised Seamus allows

leeway from his crew. The rest of their conversation is lost to me when Liam shuts the den door.

Walking into the kitchen, I whip up a massive serving of scrambled eggs. Niall eats a lot, so I'd better ensure I have enough for six of them.

Once the bacon and pork sausages are cooked, I set the table in the dining room for seven, managing to awkwardly carry the heavy, food-laden serving dishes in, covering them and moving through the house to knock on the den door. I don't bother waiting for them, turning and going back to the dining room.

As they all file in, I take my seat to the left of the place I have set at the head of the table for Seamus. He stares at the table for a beat, sliding into his chair. Paddy takes the seat across from me, to my husband's right, and Niall wisely sits as far away from me as possible.

There's silence as everyone dishes up their food before Seamus breaks it, growling in a low tone.

"You have breakfast with Niall every morning, do you?"

You could hear a pin drop in this room. I roll my eyes at Seamus. He doesn't like it. I can see how his face hardens, his eyes narrowing at me.

"No. I eat breakfast alone here. Niall eats in there." I poke my finger at the door to the kitchen. "Same as every meal."

If they hear the censure in my tone, no one acknowledges it. It's fucking awkward as we all eat in silence until Seamus speaks up again.

"Well, you won't have to worry about that for a while."



I blink in surprise, my eyes flying up to meet his.

“You’ll be coming to the club with me every day.”

I stare at him in confusion. What the hell am I going to do in a strip club? Seamus seems to read the question in my eyes, shrugging.

“You can do inventory and other shit. Until we sort this Bulgarian mess out, I want you close.” His eyes flicker over Niall. “Besides, Niall will be otherwise occupied, so you’ll be down a bodyguard.”

It would be heartwarming if Niall’s preoccupation weren’t so sinister. I nod, a wicked smirk tugging at my lips. I lean forward, my eyes finding Niall down the length of the dining table.

“I’m not sure what you’ll be doing, but I bet you will miss yoga class.”

Niall’s lips twist into a smirk, which drops away quickly at the feral sound that rips out of Seamus, who is now snarling.

“Relax.” I smirk at Seamus, who turns his glare on me. “He’s too busy standing in front of the door and staring at Cheryl and Annie’s asses to notice mine.”

My words don’t appease Seamus like I thought they would.

“He’s not fucking there to stare at women’s asses. He’s there to protect *your* fucking ass.”

I open my mouth to point out that Seamus just got upset at the idea of Niall was watching my ass when his eyes narrow, and he snaps at me, pre-empting my words.

“He doesn’t need to have eyes on your ass to watch it.”

Paddy is glaring across the table at me, Connor looks amused, and the other three look like they're pretending they're not here. I focus on my plate. I was only having a bit of fun. I didn't mean to start an argument.

When everyone has finished eating, I move to clear their plates, but Seamus's hand comes down on my wrist.

"Liam can do that. Get what you need. We're leaving for the club in ten minutes."

Nodding, I stand and leave the room. I can hear Seamus yelling at Niall as I head up the stairs. Oops. I should have kept my mouth shut.

Ten minutes later, I'm waiting by the front door with my bag, having changed my moccasins for low, block-heeled brown leather boots and my baggy sweater for a more form-fitting cashmere one.

I have also plaited my hair back off my face. I have my poetry book in my bag if there is nothing for me to do at the club.

Paddy sits in the front of the SUV, and Connor drives while Seamus slides into the back seat with me. They all ignore me for the whole trip, which suits me fine. I don't want to get anyone else in trouble for being friendly with me.

# Chapter Ten

## SEAMUS

Tiggy follows me into my office, placing her purse on the table as I kick the door shut behind me. She looks at me while I shove my hands into my pockets, appraising her.

“So. What am I supposed to do here? I brought a book.”

Ah, her poetry book. She can sit in the corner and read it if she likes. It might get repetitious for her.

I cross to her, sighing as I pluck up her splinted right hand. I hadn't given much thought to what she could do here. I would let her stay at home with one of the other lads while Niall is off hunting these fucking Bulgarians, but everything conspired to wind me up this morning, and I found myself blurting out that she would start coming here.

Paddy was fucking pissed about it, and he wasn't afraid to make his feelings known. He's sulking now because I put him in his place. He's still convinced Tig's a spy. If she is, she's a fucking shite one.

Rage surges through me as I look at the splint on her hand. She should never have been touched. The fact that she was injured is unacceptable. I can't wait to see the fuckers responsible bleed out. Niall won't like it, but I think I'll kill them myself.

“I'm sure we can find you something to do, *leannán*. Maybe with an iPad.”

Tiggy looks up from where she was staring at her hand too, amusement flashing in her eye as she raises her left hand. Her plain gold wedding band flashes in the light as she waves her hand around.

“I’m left-handed.”

“You are?”

“All my life.”

She’s being a smart-arse, taunting me, but I smirk down at her.

“Good. That will make things easier. Ye can get started with the inventory and stocktake. Then ye can come back in here to do the bookkeeping.”

“Sir, yes, sir.”

She mocks a salute with her left hand, grinning up at me. Growling, I close my fingers around her right wrist, tugging her close to me, my lips crashing down on hers.

Tiggy moans, wrapping her left arm around my waist as I release her wrist, sliding both hands into her hair to hold her head at the right angle for me to deepen the kiss.

“Smart arse,” I mutter against her mouth. She giggles, pressing herself against me. Jesus fuck. If she doesn’t leave, I will have her bent over this desk, buried balls deep in her, in less than two minutes flat.

“Ye should go do stocktake, *leannán*, or ye won’t be leaving this office for a long while.”

Tiggy sighs as I lift my head, staring at me with a flushed face. “What’s my reward for doing a good job?” she asks

impishly. I grin down at her.

“Maybe ye should do a good job to find out,” I rumble.

“Okay.”

I swat her pert arse as she smiles at me over her shoulder, walking to the door.

“Ye’ll need this, *leannán*.”

Swiping the iPad off my desk, I tap around until I find the inventory app, opening it and handing it to her. As her fingers close around it, I press another quick kiss to her lips.

“I’m going to be wicked quick,” she boasts. A grin tugs at my lips.

“I’ll be waiting.”

My eyes drink in her swinging hips as she leaves, closing the door firmly behind her. Bringing my wife here might be the best decision I ever made.



## TIGGY

It turns out there is a lot for me to do at the club, even with a busted hand. Luckily I’m left-handed, so my broken fingers don’t affect my writing ability. If I am here every day, I will get thoroughly sick of stocktake, inventory, and bookkeeping,

but I'm also glad not to be stuck in our house anymore, so I'm not about to complain.

I walk out of Seamus's office with a goofy grin. He didn't really tell me *where* to go to do a stocktake, but I'm sure I can figure it out.

My mind is a little scrambled. My husband was flirting with me. I didn't imagine it. He was definitely flirting with me. We may have also reached an unspoken agreement that we will have sex when I get back to his office.

We had sex in there last night. Was it only last night? It feels like an age ago. I'm wearing pretty underwear today, but it's not the same sexy lingerie I was wearing last time. I hope he isn't disappointed by that. From now on, I think I will always wear sexy lingerie when I come here, just in case.

I enter the first door not designated a dressing room or a restroom, hoping it might be a storeroom. It's a kitchenette. A fancy one, with a large, industrial-sized stainless steel refrigerator and stainless steel counters. The smell of coffee wafts around the room from an expensive-looking coffee machine mounted on one of the countertops.

The petite blonde standing at the coffee maker turns around as the door swings shut behind me.

"Sorry," I blurt out. "I was looking for a storeroom."

She raises an eyebrow, looking around pointedly before turning her gaze back to me. "This isn't it."

A flush crosses my face, and she looks contrite, her eyes dipping to my hands.

"That looks painful. What happened?"

“Car accident.”

“Ouch,” she winces cheerfully. “I don’t drive, so I’ve never had to worry about that. Did you want a coffee before you continue your search for a storeroom?”

“I’d love one.”

She nods, grabbing a second mug out of one of the hanging cabinets. “I’m Fiona Clatham. I’m a stripper.”

“I’m Tiggy Fitzpatrick. I’m -.”

“Seamus Fitzpatrick’s new wife.”

“Yeah. Her.”

Fiona nods, smiling at me as she slides the mug across the countertop. I open the fridge to fetch the cream, pouring some in and replacing it. Fiona is leaning against the counter, sipping her coffee and studying me over the rim of the mug.

“Do I have something on my face?”

“You’re the first mob wife I’ve seen in here. Shit. Sorry! Am I allowed to call you that?”

“What? A mob wife? Probably not, but I won’t tell if you won’t.”

She grins with gratitude, nodding as she changes the topic to Oracle.

“I’ve worked here for almost a year, so I can show you around when you finish your coffee. I’ll introduce you to Mellie. She’s the private lounge bartender. She can show you all the stocktake stuff. That’s normally something she does.”

“Thanks. I’d really appreciate any help I can get. I may have promised Seamus I would do an amazing job.”

“What do you get if you do an amazing job?” Fiona stares at me, her eyebrows shooting up as my cheeks turn red. She smirks, giggling and taking a sip of her coffee. “*Oh*. Well, let’s get you introduced to Mellie so you can earn your reward.”

Fiona quickly stacks our mugs into the industrial dishwasher, waving me out of the room and along the corridor.

“Those are the two storerooms, by the way.” She points to two doors across the kitchen and the dressing room. “What did you do before you got married to Seamus?”

I glance over at her as she opens the door into the private bar, gesturing for me to walk through.

“Oh, I was a social worker. Mainly Roxbury, a little bit in Dot.”

Fiona wrinkles her nose, shakes her head slightly, and sighs. “I see how it is. You sucked me in and made me like you before I knew all the sordid facts.”

My eyebrows shoot up, and she grins at me, waggling her eyebrows. Despite her playful attitude, I think she may have only been half-joking. I wonder what it is about social workers that has her so up in arms.



# Chapter Eleven

## TIGGY

It has been six days, and Seamus is still bringing me to Oracle with him each day. I have become inoculated to this place. We get here in the morning, around nine AM, and we don't leave until almost nine o'clock at night.

I have mastered inventory, stocktake, and bookkeeping. It only takes me a few hours each morning to smash it out of the park. The rest of my day is spent holed up in Seamus's office with him. It's not exactly a hardship, especially when he likes to take frequent breaks from work to fuck me.

I'm starting to wonder if he had this much sex before we met. It's an unnerving thought because if he's used to this much sex on tap at work, it means he was possibly fucking strippers here those two weeks I was at our house.

It's a thought that sours my gut and makes me feel uncomfortable. I'm not naïve. While I am expected to be monogamous in this relationship, Seamus isn't. And honestly, I was ready to accept it at the start.

But now, I'm starting to feel possessive of him in a way I honestly hadn't been expecting, and it scares me on a primal level.

My new best friend and lounge bartender, Mellie, thinks Seamus is head over heels in love with me. She's been a

bartender here for about a year, and I'm obsessed with her piercing blue eyes.

"I'm telling you, Tiggy," she rolls her eyes as she wipes the tumblers and stacks them, "Seamus doesn't kiss his women. He sure as shit doesn't eat them out. Everyone knows Seamus Fitzpatrick doesn't give in bed. He takes what he wants and bails."

Okay. While I get that Mellie is attempting to cheer me up, she's not doing a very good job. In fact, she is raising more anxieties than she is stamping out. *Everyone* knows that, do they? And *how* do they know? How does *she* know?

I stare at her, tapping my stylus against the iPad. She glances up from her dishcloth and rolls her eyes at me.

"Ugh. God no." She scrunches up her nose. "Can't say that I've ever felt the urge to be a notch on Seamus Fitzpatrick's bedpost."

"Good to know."

A deep, rumbling Irish voice sounds from beside me as Niall reaches over the bar, snagging a bottle of whiskey. His eyes burn into Mellie's for a long moment, and I feel like I'm intruding on a private moment. I also feel like I need to take a cold shower.

They don't speak, and Niall turns on his heel, stalking off, the bottle of whiskey clutched in his fist. I turn back to Mellie with a smirk, fanning myself with my good hand.

"Phew. That was steamy," I tease her. Mellie stares at me for a beat, completely nonplussed, shrugging and returning to her task.

“I’m not sure I know what you’re talking about,” she brushes it off. I bite out a laugh. Seriously? She can’t be serious.

“Oh, come on,” I scoff, drawing her gaze back to me. “Some serious sexy vibes were coming off you two right there!”

Mellie’s glare has me shutting the hell up, But not before I put in one last good word for my old buddy Niall.

“He’s nice. You could do worse.”

“He’s the *Irish Reaper*,” she hisses at me. “I could do a lot -.” She cuts herself off and takes a deep breath. “It wouldn’t be a good idea. Not at all,” she finishes calmly. I nod, holding my hands up to appease her.

“Okay. I won’t bring it up again.”

“Thanks,” she mumbles. I nod and go back to my inventory list.

There is some event at Oracle tonight, so Seamus took me home to get changed. I’m dressed in a pretty party dress and heels that wouldn’t look out of place at a country club but do at a strip club. My splinted fingers stand out in this outfit, but thankfully the splint will be coming off in a week. I can’t wait.

I move through the main bar to request additional top-shelf whiskey be sent to the private bar. It’s more crowded here than usual, probably because of the event in the lounge. I imagine the men present there would probably have entourages out here.

“Tiggy?”

I stiffen and spin in surprise at the hand resting on my bare shoulder. I relax when I see who it is, though I shift, so his hand falls away from me.

“Ant.”

“How are you?” he asks, wrapping me up in a hug and pressing a kiss to my cheek.

Uh, does he not remember slamming a door in my face? I sure as shit remember it. It was right after he called me an idiot, so he will have to forgive me for not wanting to stand around and reminisce with him. He is still embracing me, and it makes me feel distinctly uncomfortable. As soon as he releases me, I quickly move to put some space between us.

“I’m great.”

I smile tightly at him. His eyes search my face before dropping to my hands. They tighten as they land on my wedding ring but widen when they move to my right hand. He snatches up my wrist.

“What the hell happened, Tiggy?”

I try to tug my wrist out of his grasp, but he doesn’t let go.

“Nothing. Just an accident.”

“An accident?” His voice is flat, and I flinch at his tone. I hear the disbelief. Hell, I *see* it in his posture. I was a social worker for long enough to understand. He thinks Seamus did this to me, that Seamus hurts me, and I am lying to protect him.

Well, that couldn't be further from the truth. Yeah, I might not have picked Seamus to marry, but he has never hurt me. Plus, my life is *none* of Ant's business.

"Yes," I snap at him, tugging at my wrist again. "A car accident."

Ant's eyes snap back to mine, darkening possessively. "Hell, Tiggy, you were in a car accident? Are you okay? You should have called me."

Uh, he does remember me dumping him, right? I gape at him, tugging harder against his hold. He still doesn't release me. If anything, he holds me tighter, his fingers digging into my skin. I wince, my breath hissing between my teeth as a sharp pain shoots through my wrist. Ouch. He needs to let go. Now. Maybe I should stomp on his foot or something?

"I'm fine, and why the hell would I call you? Let me go. You're hurting me."

I have no idea if he would have let me go on his own, but when long fingers close around his wrist and squeeze, he yelps, releasing me.

"What the fuck, dude?" Ant snaps at up Seamus, who is towering over him, his face promising pain. "This doesn't concern you."

"Everything my wife does concerns me." Seamus's voice is lethally cold, and Ant visibly swallows. "You don't come into *my* club and lay hands on *my* wife. Connor," he snaps, never taking his angry eyes off Ant's face, "take Tiggy to my office and wait there."

Connor's hand closes around my upper arm, but I hold my ground, glaring at Ant. This was a long time coming, but I bet it will feel good.

My left hand snaps up, cracking across his cheek. He gapes at me in shock, and even Seamus and Paddy seem surprised. I let Connor lead me away. I was right. That felt amazing.

Paddy and Seamus manhandle Ant out of the club as Connor steers me through to Seamus's office, his hand loosely cupping my elbow. I don't want to think about what they're going to do to him, but a small part of me feels a little satisfied.

Ant never treated me that well. Maybe he deserves what is coming. My wrist is still throbbing where he wouldn't let me go. Hell, he totally deserves what is coming.



## SEAMUS

We take out the trash to the back alley. Paddy grabs him by the throat, shoving him against the metal dumpster. There is a clang as his head connects, and Paddy sinks a few punches into this gut. The weasely fucker bends over, gasping for air.

“Name?” I growl, lifting his head by his black hair and slamming my fist into his face when he doesn't answer immediately. There is a satisfying crunch as his nose breaks.

“I won’t ask again,” I warn him, and he whimpers. Fucking pussy.

“Ant,” he gasps, struggling to catch his breath between being winded by Paddy’s blows and having his nose out of commission and pouring blood from mine. “Ant Gresham.”

Paddy slams him back into the dumpster by the throat again so I can see his face. *Ant*. Fucking suits him. A little crawling insect about to be crushed under my foot.

“And what business did you have in my club tonight, Ant Gresham?”

If my voice wasn’t cold steel, you could almost mistake this for a casual conversation.

“Bachelor party. A friend’s,” he groans, still struggling for breath.

“I see, and what business did you have touching my wife?”

He looks terrified as I drive a fist into his stomach. The moment he doubles over, Paddy straightens him, slamming his head back against the dumpster.

“You talk, or you die,” Paddy hisses. The weak prick pales. I think he might piss himself.

“She’s my ex.”

My eyes narrow as they roam over his face. Without the swollen, bleeding nose, he’d be a good-looking lad. A pretty boy. His teeth are abnormally white, his stubble a little too careful, and his eyebrows are definitely plucked. I can’t imagine Tiggy with him. No, fuck that. I don’t *want* to imagine Tiggy with him.

“How long were you together?”

He blinks in surprise. I guess it wasn't the question he thought I would ask. It would be almost comical if I didn't want to rip his fucking face off.

“Eight months.”

I drive a fist into his jaw, snapping his head back while Paddy holds him still.

“When did it end?” I growl.

“Almost two months ago.”

There's silence in the alleyway, except for his labored breathing. Motherfucker. They broke up right before our wedding.

“So recently?” I force a feral grin. “Trouble in paradise?”

He looks truly terrified now, as he well should be.

“She came to me, told me she was getting married in a few weeks, and so it was over. I haven't heard from her since,” he babbles.

It's a hollow fucking victory. Tiggy might not have contacted him, but she only broke things off because we were getting married. Eight months. Did she love him? Does she still love him?

Another feral growl tears from me at the thought. Pulling out my flick knife, I watch with satisfaction as all the blood drains from the fucker's face. Paddy watches silently.

Pointing the knife in his face, I speak slowly so he doesn't miss a fucking word.



“You touched what was mine.”

He’s shaking his head, and he’s pissed himself.

“No. I told you. The moment she knew she was getting married, we broke up, and I haven’t seen her since,” he stutters, falling silent as I move the knife closer to his nose.

“Paddy,” I speak without taking my eyes off this weasel. “Did we, or did we not, just remove Ant’s hands from my wife’s body?”

“And so we did, Seamus,” Paddy replies easily. The weak prick is definitely pissing himself now.

“And did my wife, or did she not, tell him to let her go?”

“And so she did, Seamus.”

“And did my wife, or did she not, tell him that he was hurting her?”

Ant’s eyes are so wide with fear they’re almost white.

“And so she did, Seamus,” Paddy replies for the third time.

“I’m sorry,” Ant whimpers. I sneer at him. I’ve been itching to punish someone for harming Tiggy. This isn’t the Bulgarian, but he’s a good enough substitute.

My lips twist into a snarl. “Nobody lays their hands on my wife. Nobody touches what is mine.”

My hand snaps out right as Paddy’s falls away. Ant grabs his throat, gurgling as blood seeps between his fingers, and he stares at me in disbelief. As he crumples to the ground, I hand Paddy my knife.

“Get rid of him, Paddy.”

He nods, wisely keeping his fucking mouth shut as I step over the prone body and stride back inside. Back to my office to confront my wife.



## TIGGY

I sit perched on Seamus's large wooden desk, swinging my legs, while Connor lounges by the door, apparently engrossed in his phone.

I'd be an idiot to think he's not watching my every move. The silence is starting to get eerie, so I attempt to make conversation to break it.

“Do you speak Irish?”

Connor looks up from his phone, his eyebrows raising as he stares at me.

“Yes.”

“What does lan-awn mean?” It's what Seamus calls me. I've worked out it is Irish, but I have no idea what it means. I can't even Google it because I still don't have a phone.

Connor blinks at me, a confused look crossing his face before it disappears, and he smirks.

“Sweetheart,” he grunts, looking back down at his phone. My lips curve up into a smile as I turn my eyes back to stare at

the ground. Sweetheart, huh?

After about half an hour, the door swings open, and Seamus stalks in. There are some spots of blood on his right sleeve. Ant's blood.

Connor disappears immediately, the door slamming shut behind him. Seamus stalks around the desk, his eyes flashing dangerously. His hand closes around my throat, and he roughly tugs me to my feet.

“Who the fuck was that?” he hisses.

Seamus probably got whatever information he wanted out of Ant when he spilled the blood he is now wearing, but he obviously needs to hear it from me.

“Antony Gresham,” I tell him promptly. His eyes signal for me to keep talking. “My ex.”

Seamus's fingers tighten almost painfully around my neck.

“I broke things off with him two days after my father told me I was marrying you. I haven't seen or heard from him since. I don't know why he was here tonight.”

Seamus's eyes search my face, but the pressure on my neck doesn't lessen. He backs me up against the wall without breaking eye contact, shoving my skirt up and my panties to the side, thrusting roughly into me.

I'm pinned against the wall, held in place by his hips, his hand still collaring my throat, just shy of painfully, his dick stretching me as he holds still.

Seamus leans close, his face inches from mine, his eyes angrily burning.

“I don’t fucking share.”

The lack of Irish brogue in his voice that is always present when he’s buried inside me tells me how serious this situation is right now.

“Any man who touches you is fucking dead, and if you let him, I’ll kill you too. Do you understand me?”

“Yes,” I choke out. I guess that answers my question. He totally killed Ant.

We stare at each other for a beat longer before Seamus growls, his hips moving as he roughly fucks me. It’s hard and raw and not at all for my pleasure. I don’t even think it is for his. This is to prove something to us both.

His fingers don’t loosen at my throat the entire time, and his eyes never leave mine. I take it silently, knowing this is what I need to do to prove to Seamus that I am his. And I’m willing to do it because things are fucked up between us, but there’s something there. I can’t explain it, and I don’t want to acknowledge it or examine it, but there is something there.

Seamus’s pupils dilate as he comes with a groan. He quickly withdraws, my panties snapping back into place as he drops my skirt, and his fingers finally disappear from my throat as he zips up the fly of his suit pants.

Hesitantly, with a gentleness so far absent in this encounter, he picks up my right wrist.

“You said he hurt you?” He’s carefully examining my wrist, turning it over in his hands.

“I’m fine. His grip was tight, and he wouldn’t let go, but I don’t think I’ll even have a bad bruise,” I assure him.

Seamus's lips thin for a moment as he drops my hand.

"I have to get back out to the lads. Can you go into the dressing room and send out Natalie and Imelda? I want them working the floor."

I nod, watching silently as he stalks out of the room. Connor's gone when I emerge after fixing my dress and hair. Liam waits in the corridor, silently trailing me as I walk purposefully into the strippers' dressing room.

It is a large, brightly lit room filled with beautiful women in various states of undress. They don't seem bothered by Liam's presence, though they look at me curiously.

"To what do we owe this honor, *Mrs. Fitzpatrick*?"

Tahlie's voice is sarcastic, and I can feel her metaphorical claws raking down my face.

"Seamus wants Natalie and Imelda in the private bar to work the floor," I say, loud enough for the room to hear me.

The two women in question quickly finish their makeup, slipping into lacy teddies and slipping out of the room.

"Is that all then?" Tahlie mocks. I have no idea what her problem is, but I nod, turning to go.

Her hand snakes out to grab my arm. When she speaks, it's low enough so only I hear it, and I'm slightly taken aback by the level of venom in her tone.

"You know, eventually, Seamus will get sick of prim and proper, and he's going to want what you can't give him."

I stare at her with impassive eyes, refusing to give her the satisfaction of knowing how her words affect me. How they

reflect my own fears that I don't even acknowledge to myself. How they make my gut curdle until I want to run to the bathroom and purge before curling up and crying.

I don't do any of those things. I give Tahlie a tight smile, jerking my arm out of her grasp.

"You touch me again, and you'll be sorry." I smile sweetly at her. "Now, if you'll excuse me, my husband is waiting for me to join the party."

Her hand drops away as she glares at me with obvious hatred as I turn on my heel, walking away from her like I'm not the least bothered by her. She doesn't like the reminder that *I'm* his wife and she's nobody.

Liam's eyes were glued to us through the exchange, but I ignore him, walking out of the dressing room and into the private bar.

Seamus is talking to a group of men in suits, but I bypass them, beelining straight to the bar and signal to Mellie. She looks at my face and shoves a glass of whiskey at me. I pound it back in one swallow, glaring at her as she smirks and tops it up. Leaning across the bar to me, Mellie raises one elegantly sculpted brow.

"Which stripper?"

That fucking obvious, huh?

"Tahlie," I grit out.

She nods sympathetically. "I wouldn't worry about it. Why would he want mincemeat when he has prime rib?"

I nod mechanically, sipping my whiskey slowly. I know Mellie means well, but if you eat prime rib multiple times every day, soon you get sick of it, and mincemeat has its own appeal.

Across the room, Seamus is gesturing for me to join him. Paddy appears next to me, snatching my whiskey away. He hands me a glass of red wine and a fresh glass of whiskey for Seamus.

Squaring my shoulders, attempting to shove Tahlie out of my mind, I stroll across the room, enjoying how Seamus watches me. When I reach his side, I hand him his fresh whiskey. His fingers brush mine as he takes the glass, and smirks down at me, my cheeks heating up under his gaze.

After introducing me to his companions, they all ignore me while Seamus plays with my hair. His fingers brush the back of my neck, and I stiffen. He freezes beside me, his eyes still on the man talking to him, tension in his jaw. Shit. I take a deep breath, willing myself to relax.

As soon as I do, the tension drains out of Seamus. His fingers abandon my hair and cup the nape of my neck, gently stroking until I'm almost squirming, heat pooling between my thighs. I'm trying to ignore the building need I'm feeling, but I can't, and my breathing starts to hitch.

Seamus's fingers disappear from the back of my neck. "If you'll excuse us for a moment, gentlemen."

He nods to them, his hand landing on the small of my back as he guides me out of the room, leaving our drinks on one of the tables we pass.

Seamus steers me through the doorway into the dressing room, which is closer than the door to the corridor leading to his office. Strippers look over at our entrance, and Tahlie is once again front and center, clad in nothing but a thong, thrusting her exposed tits at Seamus.

“Something we can help you with?” she purrs.

Seamus doesn't even glance at her, walking me over to the back of the dressing room where there are small cubicles. They don't have doors, but they do offer a modicum of privacy if one of the strippers doesn't want to change in front of everyone.

Once I'm inside the small space, Seamus spins me, crowding my space, his lips brushing against my ear.

“I need yer taste on my lips, *leannán*,” he murmurs.

My insides clench. Sweetheart. He's calling me sweetheart in Irish again. He drops to his knees, ducking his head under my skirt and hooking my legs over his shoulders. It's even sexier because I can't see what he's doing.

I shiver, biting back a moan as he moves my panties aside and gasp, my fingers scrabbling at the cubicle wall when his tongue slides up my folds, circling my clit, and lashing it.

My head tips back as my eyes flutter closed. Oh God, so good. This is *exactly* what I need. A noise has my eyes shooting open.

Tahlie and at least two other strippers are staring at us, their eyes wide and their mouths hanging open. I don't think I've ever seen Tahlie look so sour.



She's not looking at me. Her eyes are glued to where Seamus's head has disappeared under my skirt. I'm about to alert him that we have an audience when he sucks hard on my clit, a finger spearing inside me.

My hips jerk against his mouth, I make some sort of animal noise, and my head tips back again. The other two strippers melt away, but Tahlie stays. Because that's not weird at all. Why is she watching my husband try to get me off? It's creepy, right? It's causing me to squirm awkwardly.

Seamus uses his free hand to grip my hips, anchoring them in place as a second finger enters me. Oh, *God*. Fuck it, Tahlie can watch if she wants. I close my eyes, blocking her out and pretending she's not here.

"Seamus," I moan. "Please."

He knows what I'm asking, his fingers thrusting harder, ruthlessly fucking me, and his tongue lashes my clit again until my hips are jerking and bucking.

"Come on my mouth, *leannán*."

His voice cuts through my haze, his teeth biting gently on my clit, and I come apart, moaning and gasping, my fingernails raking down the walls.

Seamus's lips leave me, and he settles my panties and skirt back into place, kissing his way up my throat. Capturing my jaw with his hands, he kisses me deeply.

"Feel better?" he asks, smirking as he draws away from my face.

"Much," I breathe.

His smug smile is firmly in place on his lips. It's one I am really getting used to. He wears it *every* time he gets me off.

Tangling our fingers together, he lifts them to his mouth, pressing a kiss to them as his eyes burn into mine.

“Let's get back to the party then.”

He turns and freezes. Tahlie is still standing there. Shit. I forgot about her. Or maybe I figured she wouldn't watch the whole thing. Or perhaps I just didn't give a shit about her. Yeah, probably the last one.

“Can we help you with something?” Seamus's voice is icy, and Tahlie flinches away from it, shaking her head.

“No,” she mutters sullenly, turning on her heels and stomping away.

Seamus doesn't pay any attention to the rest of the dressing room's occupants as he leads me back out to the party, but I can feel their eyes on us. Some are smirking, a lot have open curiosity in their eyes, and one or two even have genuine smiles. Fiona flashes me a thumbs up, sticking her tongue out, and I bite back a giggle.

My warm, fuzzy feeling lasts the rest of the night, even though Seamus barely speaks to me. He called me sweetheart, and he got me off without even trying to get himself off. That definitely made me feel a little bit special.

He tumbles me into bed when we get home and fucks me hard until I come, screaming his name. After, he falls asleep cuddling me close.

Lying there, tracing my fingers over his bare shoulder, I smile into the darkness. Seamus Fitzpatrick doesn't strike me

as the type of man who typically cuddles. Another thing to make me feel a little bit special.

# Chapter Twelve

## SEAMUS

Tig fidgets with the floaty hem of her dress. She looks nice in her pretty dinner dress. She looks even nicer under it. I caught sight of her in the bathroom in her grey silk lingerie. The only reason I didn't bend her over the vanity and fuck her was that it would have made us late.

Normally I wouldn't give a fuck about being late, but we're expected at the one place I have to fall in line. Pa's house. Mickey O'Shea from Doyle's crew nods as we step through the wrought iron fence into the small courtyard at the front door. Pa mentioned he had Doyle's lads on security rotation.

Mickey's face snaps forward, eyes glued to the road as I take Tig's hand, lifting her fingers to my lips and pressing a kiss against them.

"You're nervous, *leannán*. Why?"

Tig turns her face up to mine, sighing as she gestures with her right hand, still in its splint.

"The last time I was here wasn't very pleasant," she grimaces. My face darkens, and I drop her left hand, reaching for her right and carefully cradling it.

"You don't need to worry about any of that. This is dinner with my father, not an interrogation."

Tig nods slowly, brushing a strand of hair out of her face. "I know."

“You get this off tomorrow.”

“I know that too.”

Smirking at her dry tone, I drop a hand and tap her sharply on her gorgeous arse. She arches a single eyebrow, glaring at me.

“What did I tell you about spanking me?” Her breathy voice defies the glare and her words. Lowering my head, I let my lips brush her ear.

“Ye can tell me again after dinner, *leannán*. Sure, and I’ll do my best to listen.”

Tig’s eyes glitter, but before she can respond, the door in front of us opens, Pa smiling at us, his arms wide. Mickey O’Shea must have called through to let him know we were here. I never did get around to ringing the doorbell, too distracted by my wife’s deliciousness.

“Son, Tiggy, come on in.”

He presses kisses to Tig’s cheeks, turning to greet me in the same manner. Keeping my hand on Tig’s arse, I guide her into the house, following Pa through to the sitting room. Tig’s eyes dart to the easy chair she sat on to have her fingers set, a shudder running through her.

The chair is currently occupied by Aunt Siobhan, who smiles, hauling herself to her feet and holding out her hands.

Tig moves away from my hand, which itches to pull her back to my side. To distract myself, I cross the room to where Connor is standing at the sideboard, fixing drinks.

“You’ll be wanting a whiskey and a red wine, Fitzy?”

“And so we will, Lucky.”

Nodding, he makes up the drinks, handing them to me before we cross the room. Connor gives his mammy her screwdriver, and Tig takes her glass of red wine from me with a smile.

Pa gestures for us all to take our seats. Connor drops into the easy chair near his mammy’s, and I steer Tig over to the two-seater sofa, sitting her there and draping my arm around her shoulders. Pa sits in his wing-backed leather armchair he has occupied every time we have sat in this room for as long as I can remember.

He opens his mouth, closing it again as Aunt Siobhan shoots him a glare. Despite being widowed twenty-four years ago, Aunt Siobhan is still a typical mob wife. She wants the lifestyle without knowing a single sordid detail.

“When d’ye get that thing off yer hand?” Aunt Siobhan asks Tiggy, who glances over at her with a smile.

“Tomorrow. I can’t wait.”

“I can imagine. It must be hard to do yer housework.”

Connor grins into his whiskey as Tig blinks slowly. Aunt Siobhan keeps Connor’s house, and the place is sparkling no matter what day or night you walk into it.

“It is a bit,” Tig admits, darting a look at me. I shrug at her.

“We manage,” I take charge of the conversation. “We’ve had a cleaning service in while Tig’s hand has been out of action.”

Not to mention Tig has been at Oracle with me every day. That doesn't leave her much time to clean and do laundry. My old cleaning service was happy to come back when I asked them.

I think Tig likes being at Oracle. She's made some friends. A little blonde stripper - who I've thankfully never fucking touched - and the private lounge bartender Niall staked a claim on when she first walked into Oracle and has proceeded never to take advantage of that fact.

I know she was a social worker before we married, so she's probably used to talking to people all day. I can't imagine anything fucking worse. Of course, with Tig spending a lot of time in the office at Oracle with me, we talk. We also fuck a lot, so I can handle the *chatting*.

Tig and Aunt Siobhan lead the small talk, but when we move through to the dining room, where Pa has had a catering service in, he hangs back, falling into step with me as Connor gallantly escorts both the women in.

“How goes the search for the Bulgarians?”

“Niall's on the hunt. They've gone to ground. Word got out that we were looking for them.”

“And he's confident?”

“The Reaper is always confident.”

Pa smirks at my reply, clapping me on the shoulder as we enter the room. I take my seat at Pa's right, beside Tig and across from Aunt Siobhan. Connor drops into the chair beside his mother, accepting a plate she has filled for him.

“How are the tables, Connor?” Pa asks, turning his gaze on my cousin. Aunt Siobhan shakes her head, but she doesn’t speak up, so Connor grins, launching into a rundown.

“There was some friction last night between the Italians and the Russians, but it came to nothing.”

“What friction?” Pa is frowning. We have alliances with both the Italians and the Russians, but they don’t have an alliance with one another. If anything, they’ve always been slightly hostile.

“De Luca, one of the young Italian capos, was on a streak, winning big. Yahontov took exception to it.”

“Ye defused the situation?”

“De Luca did. The man is a smooth talker. He calmed the Russian down and offered to move tables and everything.” Connor frowns as he toys with his fork.

“Pity Manchetti doesn’t have that kind of charm,” I interject with a smirk.

Pa sighs. “Gianni Manchetti is a good Don.”

I snort. “He’s got a tenuous grip at best. I think he is one bad move away from losing control of some of his capos.”

Aunt Siobhan clears her throat, glaring pointedly at the three of us. Connor’s eyes dart over Tig, studiously picking at her colcannon.

“So, how about those Red Sox?” Pa asks with a sigh. Connor and I bite back a smirk, but Tig perks up.

“They’re playing a risky strategy, but it seems to be paying off for them.”



All eyes snap to her, and I smirk, moving my hand under the table to stroke her thigh through her dress. All the chatting we've been doing, and I never knew she was a Sox fan? That's kind of hot.



## TIGGY

Liam leans against the door, watching the doctor as she removes the splint.

“Hold your hand up. Bend your fingers like this.”

I follow her motions, relief flooding through me as my fingers bend easily without any pain. Thank goodness.

“Don't go deadlifting or anything, but you should be fine to resume normal activities with your hand.”

“Thank you. I really appreciate your help with this.”

She gives me a tight smile. “I do what Sean Fitzpatrick asks.”

Liam smirks like he knows a secret, nodding to the doctor as she packs her black bag and leaves the house. Liam sees her out, dropping onto one of the barstools in the kitchen once she's gone.

Usually, I would be at Oracle now, but Seamus went without me today because of getting my splint off. Liam drew

the short straw of having to be my bodyguard.

Sliding onto the barstool beside him, I poke him in the ribs as he frowns down at me.

“What was with your smirk?”

“What smirk?” He looks cocky, like always, his eyebrows raising.

“When the doctor said she did what Sean told her, you smirked.”

“No, I didn’t!”

“Yeah, you did. You have a secret, and I want to know it.”

“Yeah, that’s what Paddy thinks.”

My insides go cold, the teasing smile dropping off my face. Of course they all think I’m some sort of spy. Does *Seamus* think that?

“I should go do laundry or something,” I say jerkily, sliding off the barstool and quickly exiting the kitchen.

I get halfway down the hallway when I remember that the cleaning service came yesterday, so there is no laundry to be done. Sighing, I alter my course, walking into the living room and sinking into the large sofa.

Tucking my feet under me, I flip through my poetry book, unable to read a single word, my mind a jumble.

Seamus and I have been talking while we sit together in his office at Oracle, but not saying anything of note. Mainly stuff about our house or television shows. He doesn’t give a lot away. He’s very guarded.

He doesn't talk about his crew and any jobs or anything. Sometimes we chat about Oracle, but mainly the bars and stocktake. We don't talk about the strippers or Connor's high-stakes poker tables upstairs.

We don't talk about anything you wouldn't want a spy to know. Oh my God. Seamus thinks I'm a spy. I have no idea how I'm supposed to contact anyone to hand over information.

My heart sinks into my chest at the idea. Just when I thought things were looking good between my husband and me, it feels like we're back to square one. Despite all the kissing and tenderness, he only acts like that to keep his enemies closer.

I stare at the same sentence, reading it for the tenth time. Liam's head pokes around the door, a frown across his face. It clears when he sees me, and he strides in, dropping down beside me with a sigh.

He pokes me in the side when I don't acknowledge him, as I did to him in the kitchen.

"Can you keep a secret?"

I glance over at him in surprise, my eyes narrowing at the earnest look on his face. Is this some kind of test? Like, if I say yes, I'm clearly a spy who is pumping him for information?

I bristle at the idea of him testing me. "Even if I couldn't keep a secret, who would I tell? I don't see anyone but the Irish and their employees," I say sullenly, turning my eyes back to my page.

“Sean and the doc are fucking,” Liam says with a grin. “That’s why she does what he tells her.”

I glance over at him in surprise. I don’t think he was supposed to tell me that. This is *definitely* a test.

“So why doesn’t she like me?”

Liam snorts, propping his feet up on the coffee table. Um, excuse me? That’s *my* coffee table.

“Because Sean might fuck her, but he’d never marry her. You’re an outsider who made it to the inner circle. Of course she doesn’t like you.”

“So she’s just some jealous bitch?” I frown. Liam grins across at me.

“Yeah.”

Ugh, what is this? High school? I don’t have time for cliques. I’m trying to navigate a world where my husband’s crew, and probably my husband, don’t trust me.

Liam grins over at me again. Glaring at him, I shove his feet to the ground.

“Don’t put your feet up on my furniture.”

“*You’re* feet are on the furniture.”

“It’s *my* furniture.”

His eyes narrow. “You know, you’re starting to get really bossy.”

“How’s this for bossy? I want to go to the grocery store. I want to make a lamb stew for dinner.”

Liam grumbles as I hustle him to his feet. He drags his feet all the way to the SUV. Whatever. If I'm stuck here, I should at least be able to go wherever I want. I'll start small with the grocery store. Maybe tomorrow I'll see a movie.

# Chapter Thirteen

## SEAMUS

I let myself into the soundproofed basement underneath Oracle, and Niall glances over at me. His white T-shirt is covered with blood, and the man strapped to the table is missing all his teeth and eight of his fingers.

The soles of his feet have been cut and beaten, and he's moaning softly as Niall lifts the knife out of his flesh.

"Anything?" I ask him.

Niall grins. "Some." He turns back to the moaning man. "This is Seamus Fitzpatrick. It's his wife ye went after."

At Niall's words, the man's eyes widen with fear, flickering over my face.

"W-we were approached and told which car to target. We weren't t-told who would be in it or anything like th-that." Blood dribbles down his chin as he babbles.

"Who approached you?" I ask, my arms crossing over my chest.

He shakes his head back and forth like a tennis spectator. "They were European, Eastern European. That's all I know."

Sincerity shines out of his tear-filled eyes. I nod to Niall, whose knife flashes out, and the man's head tips back, his throat opening like a blood-red flower blooming in one of those sped-up time-lapse documentaries.

“Get rid of him. I need to call my father.”

Spinning on my heel, I stalk up to my office. Tiggy is in the main bar, doing a stocktake with Mellie, one of our bartenders. Dropping into my chair, I pinch the bridge of my nose and call my father.

“Did Niall break the fucker yet?”

“Yeah. He’s taken care of him.”

“And?”

“They were paid to ram the car. No other information was given. Some Eastern Europeans.”

“So, Connor could have been the target, not yer wee wife.”

My stomach jolts. It was Lucky’s car. He could easily have been the target.

“You think this could be about Lucky’s tables?”

“I think we can’t rule anything out. It could have been a target on Lucky. It could have been on Tiggy if someone was watching the club and knew she had been put into that car. Feck, son, it could have been an attack on ye.”

Jesus fuck, this is a bigger fucking mess than I thought.

“Whether this is related, something is going on with the Romanians,” Pa curses. “Darragh is trying to get to the bottom of it. Send Niall to him.”

“I will. Keep me posted.”

“This marriage was supposed to end all this shite. I’m starting to think it’s not worth it. Maybe we should hand the lass back and pay for an annulment.”

“I’ll send Niall to Darragh,” I grit out, hitting the end call button before the growl I was suppressing rolls out of me. Like fuck I’m handing Tig back. She’s fucking *mine*.

I pull up Niall’s number. He’ll be disposing of the Bulgarian’s body, but he can go to Darragh.

**SEAMUS: Darragh needs help with something. The Romanians are up to no good. Need you on it. Sort it out.**

Dropping my phone onto my desk, I sit back in my leather chair, stroking my fingers over my chin.

So far, Tig hasn’t complained about having to come here every day, but I can see she is getting a little stir crazy.

The day she stayed at home to get her splint off, she made Liam take her to the grocery store and hit the mall. That was a good night. She made lamb stew and sucked me off in the dining room, enthusiastically using her newly healed hand to cup my balls. I smirk at the memory.

Part of her eagerness was because of her day of relative freedom. I fucking want her to have that all the time. Except I’m also a selfish, greedy prick and want her accessible at all times to stick my dick into. Normally I tire of the same pussy within hours. I have no idea why I can’t get enough of my wife.

A knock sounds at my door, and I sigh. “Enter.”

I stiffen as Tahlie comes in, throwing me a sultry smile, shutting the door tightly behind her. Not this fucking shite again. The woman can’t take a fucking hint.

I don’t think any other stripper has ever set foot in this room. Why the fuck is she always coming in? At least she



knocked this time. One of the other girls probably stole her song. I need to delegate all the stripper shite to someone, so I don't have to deal with petty squabbles.

Tahlie saunters over, swinging her hips and perches on the edge of my desk, spreading her thighs and leaning back like she expects me to take a peek up her short skirt.

I don't bother. Tig sucked me off not an hour ago, and I fucked her bent over my desk, so even if I was feeling that way inclined, there's no way Tahlie would have a hope in hell of tempting me. My dick is fucking sated.

"What can I help you with, Tahlie?" I ask her, tapping my fingers on the arm of my chair.

She pouts at my lack of interest in the peep show she seems intent on offering, spreading her legs wider and hiking her skirt up almost to her waist. I keep my eyes on her face.

"Perhaps an issue with the performance schedule?" I try again. My indifference is starting to annoy her.

"Nothing like that," she purrs, moving her hand between her legs. "I just thought you might be getting a bit sick of prim and proper and might want to be taken care of by a real woman."

My eyebrows shoot up. There's nothing prim and proper about Tig, but there's no way anyone else is ever going to fucking know that. That knowledge is just for me.

Steepling my fingers in front of my chin, I frown at her face. "And what on earth would give you that idea?"

She shrugs, licking her lips. "'You're a man with needs. We both know that. And you need a real woman who's not afraid

of her sexuality to explore them with you. Let me satisfy you.”

I tap my fingers against my mouth, cocking my head to the side.

“Let me ask you a question, Tahlie.” My eyes catch and hold her gaze. “What on earth makes you think my wife can’t satisfy each and every need that I have?”

Confusion clouds her eyes as she ponders my question, her hand finally moving away from her crotch. Thank fuck. It was getting awkward and annoying that she was attempting to pleasure herself on my desk when I had zero desire to be present for that.

“Well,” she stutters, straightening, and thrusting her tits out as she continues more confidently, “as memory serves, you have pretty wild urges. *Public* urges. Like little miss prissy would be down for them.”

I narrow my eyes at the dismissive tone about my wife. First of all, I have no desire to fuck Tig in front of an audience. No one is ever seeing what is under those prissy clothes except me.

Secondly, I thought eating Tig out in the dressing room last week would have made enough of a statement to end this kind of attitude. Liam told me the strippers had been disrespectful to Tig, so I made my point.

Clearly not well enough. You would have thought seeing me eat my wife out when it’s common knowledge that I don’t give in bed – I only take – would have been enough for them to clue in that she’s a class apart from them. Not because they’re strippers, but because she’s my *wife*.

“I see. That’s what you thought, is it?”

My fingers cease their tapping, and I grip the arm tightly, reining in my anger. Tahlie, idiot that she is, smiles seductively and nods.

“I wouldn’t make you kiss me. I know you don’t like that. I wouldn’t demand that you eat me out or get me off while denying yourself.” She sounds almost triumphant as she flutters her eyelashes at me.

I have no idea what she is talking about. I don’t do anything I don’t want to. I kiss Tig because I fucking want to. I eat her out because I fucking enjoy it.

I don’t know when this stupid bitch got it into her head that she knew anything about me or my wife or had any right to interfere, but she’s fucking crazy if she thinks I will let this disrespect and intrusion slide.

Shoving to my feet, I tower over Tahlie, my fingers closing around her upper arm as I jerk her off my desk.

“Let me make one thing abundantly clear to you,” I tell her, my voice is loud and angry. Tahlie’s eyes widen, a flash of fear in them. Good.

“I treat my wife the way she deserves to be treated. Exactly the same as I’ve always treated every woman I’ve ever been with the way *they* deserve to be treated. I fucked you like a whore, because that’s what you deserved. You come into this office one more time uninvited, and you’re fired. You proposition me one more time. You’re fired. You disrespect my wife one more time, to her face or behind her back, you’re

fired. In fact, you even look in the direction of *my wife* one more time. You're fired. Now get the fuck out of my sight."

I shove her away from me, and she scampers to the door, wrenching it open. The silly bitch hesitates in the doorway, looking back at me.

"I'm sorry," she squeaks, squealing as my whiskey tumbler smashes into the wall next to her, and she disappears.



## TIGGY

Finishing up the bar stocktake with Mellie, I go in search of some more coasters to restock the private bar stash. They are in the second storeroom along the back passage. The first has the consumables in it.

As I step out of the room, my box of coasters in hand, Fiona approaches me. Her eyes dart around like she's afraid someone will overhear, and I lean closer, so I can hear what she wants to tell me.

"There's someone here to see you," she mumbles. I blink in surprise. Why the secrecy? "They're waiting out the back, in the alley."

My stomach clenches. That sounds like a trap if ever I've heard one. I thought Fiona was my friend. My thoughts must be broadcast on my face because she quickly shakes her head.

“It’s a child,” she hisses. A child? Why would a child be here to see me? And in the back alley behind a Mafia-run strip club, no less. Fiona shrugs, taking the box of coasters off me and leaving.

Shit. Do I ignore it? Or do I go and see what is happening? I mean, a child... Why would a child want to see me? Why would Fiona set me up? She wouldn’t. I have to believe that.

Poking my head into the second storeroom, my eyes land on an open box of whiskey. My fingers close around the smooth, cool neck of a bottle, and I pick it up. I can wield it as a weapon if I need to. The element of surprise and all that.

Tiptoeing to the door next to the kitchen, I open it cautiously, peeking out to the back alley where the industrial bins are. My eyes land on the boy standing there, and I blink in shock. I *do* know him.

“Tristan?”

I open the back door wider as he turns to me, his eyes widening, relief flashing across his face.

“Ms. Albescu!”

Stepping outside, I prop the door open with the whiskey bottle and beckon for him to sit on the step. We sink onto the top stair, and he glances uneasily up at the building behind us.

“You quit to work in a strip club?” he asks, sounding unsure. I can see how that would be a shock.

“My husband runs this place. But that’s neither here nor there. What’s going on, Tristan? Why are you here?”

“I needed to talk to someone,” he whispers, and my heart aches for him. Casting my mind back to my final case files, I try to remember who I handed his file over to.

“Mrs. Shawney is your caseworker now.”

He shrugs, mumbling noncommittally. “I don’t like Mrs. Shawney,” he whines. “I liked you. I want you back.”

“Jesus fuck. How many fucking exes do you have sniffing around?”

We both jump at Paddy’s loud outburst. His eyes dart between us, landing on Tristan, blinking in shock.

“Christ, Tiggy. He can’t be more than fifteen. What the fuck?”

I’m about to protest that Paddy has completely misread this situation when Tristan makes a funny noise, projectile vomiting over the step at my feet.

My eyes widen as I take in Niall’s blood-splattered form and the bloodstained, sheet-covered object he is hefting that was clearly a living person not too long ago. Shit. I didn’t realize he was *working* downstairs today. Ugh.

“Fuck!” Paddy exclaims again, his hand closing around my arm, jerking me to my feet. “Connor, grab the lad!”

Connor darts out from behind Paddy, snatching at Tristan’s arm, where he is still emptying the contents of his stomach over the concrete steps.

“Take him downstairs.”

Tristan is now dry heaving, so Connor drags him inside without a second glance at me. Downstairs. Where Niall got

his sheet-covered, bloody body from. Not Tristan. Not happening.

I go crazy in Paddy's arms, kicking and scratching at him, screaming for them not to hurt Tristan. Niall pushes past us, disappearing down the steps as Paddy's hand clamps on my mouth.

"Stop this now!" he barks at me. "You'll hurt yourself."

"You have no idea what you saw, heard, or are talking about," I hiss against his hand.

He glares at me. "You're right. Which is why you'll be explaining yourself to Seamus."

He seems to think that it is a threat of some sort. Of course I'm going to fucking explain everything to Seamus while I'm demanding Tristan be let go. I stop fighting immediately, allowing Paddy to drag me to Seamus's office.

He lifts his hands to knock as we get to the door but pauses at the angry, raised voice floating through the door.

"You disrespect my wife one more time, to her face or behind her back, you're fired. In fact, you even look in the direction of *my wife* one more time. You're fired. Now get the fuck out of my sight."

I blink in surprise, and the door in front of us wrenches open. Tahlie's scared, wide eyes land on my face, and all the blood drains out of her face.

Spinning around, she squeaks, "I'm sorry."

She squeals as a glass smashes near her, and shoves past us as she runs down the corridor. I stare after her in shock, noting

that the skirt of her short, tight dress is tucked up practically around her waist.

There is a sour, bile taste in my mouth as Paddy pulls my attention off Tahlie, tugging me into the room, the broken glass crunching underneath our feet.

I stumble a little as he shoves me into the chair across the desk from the wing-backed leather chair Seamus is seated in. Seamus stands as I fall into the seat. He looks furiously at Paddy, who shoots a glare at him, turning to me. Before he can speak, I'm yelling at him.

“Where did Connor take Tristan? What is downstairs? You lay one finger on him, and I'll fucking kill you!”

Now they're both staring at me, open-mouthed.

“What the fuck is going on?” Seamus snaps, his face dark as thunder. “Who the fuck is Tristan?”

“And why does he want you back?” Paddy adds. A terrifying growl rumbles out of Seamus. Shit. Tristan better not end up like Ant. I'd never forgive him. Any of them. I'd make them pay. He's just a kid.

“Another fucking ex?” Seamus spits.

Paddy looks disgusted. “Jesus fuck, I hope not. He can't be more than fifteen.”

Seamus's eyes widen, turning away from Paddy to stare at me. Paddy's face is filled with revulsion. Seamus looks more confused, though his dark vibes gather like storm clouds, rumbling beneath the surface.



I fight the urge to roll my eyes. I need to stay calm so nothing happens to Tristan.

“His name is Tristan Caulfield. He is thirteen, and I was his caseworker until almost two months ago.”

“Jesus.” Seamus’s eyes flutter closed briefly, relief flashing across his face.

With a jolt, it occurs to me that he was worried I was threatening their lives over an ex. I make a mental note to unpack that later, along with Tahlie’s half-dressed exit from his office, and take a deep breath before continuing.

“Somehow, he tracked me down here. It appears he’s not entirely comfortable with his new caseworker. I didn’t get any more information before he started vomiting, and Connor took him downstairs.”

“Vomiting?” Seamus frowns. “Is the lad sick?”

Paddy hesitates as I shoot him a poisonous glare.

“Just shocked by all the blood and Niall’s appearance with a sheet-wrapped body,” I snap.

Seamus rubs a hand over his eyes. “Jesus fucking Christ.”

I cross my arms over my chest, lifting my chin defiantly. “I want to see him.”

Paddy looks furious, but Seamus nods thoughtfully. It’s Seamus’s reaction I focus on. It’s the only one that matters.

“He’s just a kid. He’s upset, and he’ll be scared. I’m a familiar face who he trusts.”

God, I hope he still trusts me. Seeing a dead body coming out of my husband’s strip club while I sit on the steps and then

being dragged down to a bloody torture chamber might have ripped some of that trust away.

“We’ll *all* go,” Seamus growls, shutting down Paddy’s complaints.

Expelling an annoyed breath, Paddy reaches down to seize my arm again, but Seamus knocks his hand away, extending his own for me to take.

Shooting a smug look at Paddy, I place my hand in Seamus’s, his long fingers curling around it as he helps me stand.

Seamus doesn’t drop my hand, holding it tightly instead, which annoys Paddy even more. He storms off ahead, wrenching the door open and striding through it.

We follow him at a more measured pace down the stairs to the basement. I have never been down here before, but it gives me the creeps.

We stop at an innocuous white door with serious ominous vibes rolling off it. So creepy. Seamus opens the door, ushering me inside.

I’m glad to see Tristan isn’t strapped to the table in the middle of the room with fresh bloodstains. Rather, he’s huddled over in one of the corners of the room, curled up over his knees, head buried, sobbing softly as he shakes.

Connor is standing near the door, frowning at the kid. I stalk through the door, glaring at him, and Connor’s eyes widen, his hands moving in a surrender motion.

“I didn’t touch the lad.”

Whatever. Tearing my hand from Seamus's, I shove at Connor's chest until he moves out of the way.

"You did enough." I turn to glare at the three of them. "If you insist on being in this room, you stay over by the door and don't make any sudden movements."

Seamus's hand shoots out, grabbing my arm. "He might lash out, Tig. I don't think you should go over there."

Really, Captain Obvious? Thank you for that incredible observation.

"He might lash out," I agree, jerking my arm out of his grip. "But not at me. *I* don't have a penis."

I hesitantly cross the concrete floor, three silent sentinels beside the door watching me. Stopping halfway across the room, I slowly sink until I am sitting on the floor.

"Tristan?" I call out.

He keeps sobbing, so I fall silent, my heart aching for him. He came here for help, and now he will probably be psychologically scarred for life. Some social worker I am. No one speaks or moves for about ten minutes. Once Tristan's sobs have quieted, I try again.

"Tristan?"

He lifts his head, his tear-soaked eyes finding mine.

"Is it okay if I come closer?" I keep my voice even and low, not wanting to spook him. He stares at me for a beat, stiffening as his eyes flicker behind me. Shit. I should have made them wait *outside* the door.

“They aren’t going to touch you, Tristan,” I call his attention back to me. “Can I come closer?”

His eyes fix on the three men again, but he nods. That’s progress. I’ll take it. Standing slowly, I take a few deliberate steps until I am next to him. Sliding my back down the wall, I sit beside him, about a foot away. His eyes don’t leave the trio by the door the entire time.

“They brought me down here.” His voice breaks. “They’re going to hurt me.”

“No, Tristan,” I say soothingly, shaking my head. “See the one in the blue shirt. That’s my husband, Seamus. He’ll make sure no one hurts you.”

My eyes find Seamus’s. He reads the plea there, nodding slowly. Thank God.

“The dark-haired one, his name is Paddy, he’s Seamus’s best friend. He was the best man at our wedding.”

“He grabbed you,” Tristan says, still sounding broken. “He grabbed your arm.”

“He did.”

Paddy shuffles uncomfortably as Seamus growls low in his throat.

“But that’s because he didn’t know who you were. I got hurt a little while ago, and he wanted to make sure I was safe. He didn’t hurt me.”

Tristan’s eyes flicker over at Connor in his sharp, light gray suit. He swallows reflexively. Unlike the other two in their

jeans and button-down shirts, Connor's smooth, professional look seems to unnerve Tristan the most.

"That's Connor. He's Seamus's cousin. He and his mother were at my wedding. They sat in the front row."

"The man with the blood and the body?" Tristan whispers.

Crap. Fucking Niall. I grimace. "He's not here. You don't have to worry about him."

Tristan doesn't trust that. At all.

"Because he's your husband's friend?" he asks, the sarcasm shining through his sadness. Well, that's progress, I suppose.

"Because he's *my* friend," I tell Tristan, not caring that Seamus won't like that. "And I trust him."

It seems to be enough for Tristan, for now at least, and he nods, his eyes darting between the men at the door and me. Again, progress. They no longer hold all of his attention.

"Now." I turn my attention to Tristan. "What's going on? Why did you come and find me? Why didn't you go to Mrs. Shawney?"

He swallows, looking a little sick again, sighing and scrubbing his face.

"She doesn't believe me. When I tell her things, she doesn't believe me."

He sounds so young and miserable. My eyes narrow.

"What kind of things doesn't she believe?" I ask, careful to keep my tone even.

“My mom.” He swallows, his eyes darting over to the door before he drops his voice really low. I have to lean in to hear him. “She got a new boyfriend. He gives her drugs at night. They both say that it’s to help her sleep, but then he locks me in my room, and....” he trails off, looking like he’s about to be sick again. I feel a flutter of fear low in my stomach.

“Mya?”

Tristan’s hands clench into fists. “She won’t talk about it. But last week, there was blood on her sheets. On her *legs*.”

A white-hot rage burns through me. I should never have left my job.

“And Mrs. Shawney didn’t believe you when you told her this?” I clarify, feeling like I deserve a fucking Oscar for keeping my tone even and my face neutral. Tristan shrugs.

“I think maybe she did. But they did an ‘investigation’ and said it uncovered nothing.”

His tone is full of disgust. Disgust with the system, with Justine Shawney, with me. I don’t blame him. We’ve all let him and Mya down so badly. I suck in a breath through my nose and nod.

“Okay. You’re going to go home now, Tristan. I’m going to come with you, and I’ll talk to Mya. Okay?”

He nods, and I stand, holding my hand to help him up. Even though he’s thirteen, he’s small and skinny for his age, so we’re about the same height. Placing my hand on his back between his shoulder blades, I guide him over to the door. He flinches as we get close to Seamus and the others, but he holds his ground.

“We’re going to Roxbury.”

Seamus frowns. “Like fuck you are. That’s one of the least safe places in Boston.”

“Well, I suppose it’s a good thing you’ll be there to protect me,” I tell him coolly.

Seamus’s eyes flash, his jaw tightening as he lifts his hand, blocking the doorway. He wants to argue this point. He wants to forbid me, lock me in his office so I can’t go. Stepping right up against him, lowering my voice so only he can hear, my eyes lock with him.

“If you don’t take us there, I’ll go to those Vice cops out the front of the club. They’re here to protect and serve, right? They’ll take Tristan and me to Roxbury.”

Seamus’s nostrils flare, his eyes flashing with anger. “Fine,” he grits out through clenched teeth, his hands closing around my upper arms. “But we will have a fucking conversation when we get home.”

“Fine,” I snap, shoving aside any thoughts of unpleasant consequences of my actions.

Turning away from him, I smile at Tristan, leading him out the door, ignoring Seamus’s hand that lands on my lower back.

I sit in the middle seat in the back of the SUV, Tristan huddled up against the door on one side, Seamus on the other, his thigh pressed against my leg, his fingers clamped around my thigh.

Tension radiates off him, but I don’t give a shit right now. Connor and Paddy are in the front, and they’re tense too. Roxbury is the Russian Bratva’s territory, so they don’t want

to be here. Whatever. They have an alliance with the Russians  
– Dad used to rage about it frequently – so they can all suck it  
up.



# Chapter Fourteen

## SEAMUS

Tig directs us to some shitty duplex, and I really don't fucking want her going inside there. I tighten my hand on her thigh, trying to keep her in the SUV, but she shrugs my hand off her leg, sliding out his door and following the traumatized lad inside.

We couldn't hear what they were whispering over in the corner of the basement, but it doesn't take a fucking genius to put two and two together that some fucking asshole is abusing the lad.

Connor stays at the door, his hand hovering at his back, ready to go for his gun. Paddy shadows Tig and me into the trash-filled parlor. My nose wrinkles as I look around. How can people raise their kids like this?

Before I can grab at her, Tig disappears upstairs with the lad.

"Ye should have checked out the upstairs before she went up there," I reprimand Paddy, the Irish bleeding through my voice because I'm so fucking on edge. Paddy shoots me a look of disbelief.

"Ye're down here. Why the feck would I check upstairs?" The Irish is bleeding into his tone too. He's as agitated as I am. Possibly for a different reason.

"Because that's where my *wife* is?"

“I’m yer bodyguard, not hers.”

We are locked in a silent stand-off. I’m getting fucking tired of his attitude to Tig. She hasn’t given us a single moment to suspect she is anything other than loyal to me. I think we can give her some leeway. Thank fuck Paddy didn’t hear her threat to go to the cops back in the basement. He would never have let her leave.

Paddy prowls around uneasily, and over my shoulder, I can see the rigid lines of Connor’s form, his eyes continuously darting along the road. As the time stretches, my eyes drift to the stairs. It’s been almost an hour, and there are no sounds from up there. Maybe I should go and check in on Tig.

Just as I’m inching to the stairs, she comes storming down like an avenging angel. Snatching the phone off the wall, she dials 911.

“What the fuck are you doing?” Paddy hisses, striding across to her. I’m between them in an instant, blocking him from reaching her. She mainly ignores us, sticking up her middle finger at Paddy without a glance in his direction.

“This is Ylenia Albescu. I’m a social worker for the city of Boston,” she says when the dispatcher answers, rattling off some identification number. “I have two juveniles who need to be taken into care.”

Two? Tig names a Mcdonald’s restaurant not far from here. What the fuck does she mean, *two*?

There is a sound on the stairs, Paddy and my heads swiveling. Paddy’s hand is at his gun, but he stays it as the lad

reappears with two backpacks, holding the hand of a little girl who can't be older than seven. Jesus fuck.

At the sight of Paddy, Connor, and me, the little girl starts wailing and screaming, cringing behind the lad. Connor's head snaps around, his eyes widening at the sight of her, a disgusted look crossing his face. Even Paddy looks appalled.

Tig darts across the room, ducking around me, and picks the child up, murmuring soothing noises.

"We are going to go for a walk to MMcDonald's Mya. Would you like a Happy Meal?"

"Yes," Mya mumbles into Tig's shoulder.

"Good. Let's go."

A wail starts up again, her little face burrowing further into Tig's neck.

"They aren't going to walk with us," Tig soothes. Like fuck we aren't.

I take a step closer to her, but Tig's head whips around, a hand coming up to halt my progress to her.

"We'll walk."

Paddy growls, casting her a dark look. His eyes linger on the girl, sighing, grinding his jaw. He doesn't look happy, but he's not going to push this.

"Fine. We'll follow in the SUV."

Tig looks appeased, but that's not fucking happening.

"I'm not sitting in a fecking SUV while my wife walks the streets of Roxbury," I snap.

“You can’t walk with us,” Tig warns.

“Fine,” I grit out. “Connor will bring the SUV. Paddy and I will flank ye.”

Tig looks like she is about to argue but nods instead, her lips in a thin line.

We all step outside, Connor moving to the SUV while Paddy walks ahead and I walk behind, shepherding Tig, who is still carrying the little girl, and the lad, who is walking at their side holding the backpacks.

We’re too exposed, and I fucking hate not being at Tig’s side. I speed up, attempting to close some of the distance between us. The little girl notices, losing her head and wailing again.

Tig’s head swivels to shoot me a warning glare.

“Don’t come closer,” she hisses.

Grinding my jaw, I fall back again. This is such fucking bullshit. We can’t get to this fucking Mcdonald’s soon enough. Thank Christ, it is only a few blocks to walk.

Tig gets them both situated with food inside the restaurant while Connor and Paddy watch both exits, and I sit two booths over. After about half an hour, two cops come in, beelining for Tig’s table.

It feels so fucking wrong to let two cops approach her without intervening. A glance around tells me Connor and Paddy feel the same. Especially Paddy.

I can’t hear what they’re saying, but the female cop manages to get the little girl to take her hand, and the lad gives

Tiggy a quick hug as the four of them leave.

The second they are gone, I'm on my feet, beside Tig's table, pulling her to her feet and marching her out to the SUV. I bundle her into the backseat, Connor and Paddy seconds behind us.

It is not until we are finally out of Roxbury that the tension drains from my shoulders. No one speaks until we are back at Oracle. Paddy opens his mouth to start running it, but I ignore him, my fingers closing around Tig's upper arm. I brush past Paddy's annoyed face, leading her through the club, only releasing her arm when we are ensconced in my office, the door closed on the world. Well, apart from Paddy and Connor, who have followed us in for some reason.

I move to cup the nape of Tig's neck, frowning as she shrugs away from me. What the fuck? I took her to Roxbury. We helped the lad and his sister. Why is she still pissy?

“Where's Niall? Is he back yet?” she demands.

My face hardens. “Why do you need Niall?”

Connor and Paddy melt out of the room as I jab my finger at the door, shutting the door firmly behind them. Tig doesn't answer, glaring petulantly at me as she slumps against the side of my desk.

Taking a step closer, I tower over her, crowding her space, my hands landing on the desk on either side of her.

“Why do you need Niall?” I ask again quietly, angrily, as she glares at me.

“I need his help,” she bites out.

I swallow an angry growl. We won't get anywhere if we're *both* pissed off.

"I'll help you."

She shakes her head. Excuse me? What the fuck.

"I don't want your help. I want Niall's help."

So help me, God, I'm going to spank the shite out of her if she doesn't snap out of this pissy mood.

"Well, ye're not getting Niall's help. Ye're getting mine."

I glare back at her as she shoves at my chest. It doesn't move me an inch.

"Get away from me," she hisses. Not happening. I lean in closer, going to kiss her. "Don't."

The pain in her voice has me hesitating, my mouth inches from hers. This is more than the thing with the lad. This is something else.

"What's wrong?" I ask her softly, tamping down on my anger and annoyance. Tig closes her eyes. When she speaks, still with her eyes closed, her voice is small.

"I don't want you to kiss me. Not after you've been with *her* today."

I watch her face for a beat, completely confused. Who the fuck is *her*? What is she on about? Silence swirls around us as I study Tig, sitting on my desk. Then realization dawns. Fuck.

She thinks I fucked Tahlie earlier. It shouldn't bother me that the idea hurts her. After all, if it were any other woman, I would have told her to get the fuck out if she couldn't handle the idea of me being with someone else.

But she's not any other woman. She's Tig. And fuck me, the idea of her being hurt because of something she thinks I have done *does* bother me.

Capturing her chin in my hands, I hold her face steady. "Look at me, Tig."

Her eyes flutter open. I suck in a breath when I see the pain there.

"I want you to listen very carefully to me," my voice is low, and she's staring into my eyes. "I haven't touched another woman since we were married. I've not even looked at one."

Some of the pain in her eyes lessens, but she is still skeptical. Sighing, I capture her mouth, holding her tightly against me as I trace her lips with my tongue.

Finally, she tangles her fingers in my hair, responding to my kiss, and opens her mouth. Reluctantly I lift my head, breaking the kiss and staring into her eyes.

"Now, what do you need help with?"

"Tristan and Mya's mother," she sighs, her shoulders slumping. "She has a boyfriend. I need to find him. He's been abusing Mya."

Motherfucker. I'm going to find the cunt, and I will end him.



# TIGGY

Seamus presses a kiss to my forehead, his voice scarily low and lethal.

“I will sort it for ye, Tig. Ye have my word.”

I nod, looking up to thank him, but he’s striding out of the room, slamming the door behind him before I even get my mouth open.

I wonder if I should find the iPad I left at the bar earlier and do some bookkeeping when the door swings open. I look over expectantly, but it’s not Seamus returning.

Paddy and Connor walk in, their eyes finding me.

“Come on, lass,” Connor jerks his head at the door. “We’ll take you home.”

Paddy glowers like he wishes he was anywhere else. After our moment on the highway with my broken hands, I thought Paddy might have turned a corner with his resenting me, but that was clearly wishful thinking.

Connor has a new car, a shiny dark SUV. It’s not as sleek as his BMW, and I can see a flash of regret in his eyes as he opens the back door for me.

It’s a silent drive back to West Roxbury. Paddy and Connor speak to each other in low voices, but I can’t hear what they are saying over the smooth jazz Connor has piping through the sound system.

Paddy stalks into the house without a backward glance when we arrive. Connor ushers me inside with a half-smile,



but as soon as the front door is closed, he peels off, sitting with Paddy in the living room.

I don't want to sit in there, being ignored by everyone, so I walk right past the door and up the staircase. I have one goal in mind, sinking into that giant tub. I've earned it.

Pausing, I alter my course into the kitchen to snag a bottle of fancy red wine and a glass. Now my bath will be perfect and relaxing.

# Chapter Fifteen

## TIGGY

It's late when Seamus comes home. After our fight in his office this afternoon, I wasn't expecting him home for dinner. I'm already tucked up in bed, which isn't unusual on nights when he sends me home from the club early and goes off to do things with his crew.

What is unusual is that tonight, when Seamus kisses me awake, his fingers playing with my clit, he doesn't fuck me.

"Did ye have a good night, *leannán*?" he murmurs against my lips, his long fingers parting my folds, one spearing into me, pumping.

"I had a nice long soak in the tub with a glass of wine," I moan, pressing my hips up to meet his hand.

"That sounds like a beautiful sight."

Seamus groans as his lips leave mine, kissing their way down my body until he has stripped the coverlet off, kneeling between my legs.

His tongue traces along my outer folds, delving in and flicking my clit. Oh, God. *Yes*. Seamus eats me out much more frequently than I could ever have imagined, going into marriage with a man like him, but every time is a wonderful surprise.

Sliding my fingers into his dark, thick hair, I cling to him, holding him *right there* as his tongue continues to flicker and

his finger continues to stab into me. He curls his finger, hitting my G-spot as his tongue flicks my clit, and I buck my hips, gasping and moaning as I come. So, so good.

My legs fall open lazily, like the slow blooming of a flower, away from his shoulders as he kisses his way back up my body, his tongue swirling over the skin at my throat.

Now would usually be when he would position me, grip my hips, and plunge his dick into me. As he settles between my thighs, I lift my hips in anticipation, but the expected – and welcome – intrusion never materializes.

Instead, Seamus rolls onto his back, bringing me with him until I'm settled on his chest. His heartbeat is steady under my ear, and his fingers stroke through my hair, combing it where it trails over his arm and onto the pillow.

“Seamus?” I murmur, the question lingering in my tone.

“Yes, *leannán*?” he speaks into my hair, nuzzling his nose gently.

I stifle a yawn, but he notices.

“Ye’re tired. Sleep now. *Oíche mhaith agus codladh sámh.*”

I need to learn Irish to know what he says to me. So far, all I have is *sweetheart*. But that won't help me right now. Instead, I fall asleep, cuddled against Seamus's chest while he gently strokes my hair.

Seamus is gone when I wake up in the morning, and it's a pattern that continues for the next eight days. I wake up alone, flit around the house while Paddy and Connor act like silent sentinels, go to bed alone, wake up when Seamus comes to

bed and buries his face between my legs, and fall asleep in his arms.

Sounds like a dream, right? I'm actually getting a bit sick of it. I just want him to fuck me. I have no idea why he's denying himself, but I don't like it. What if it's because he's angry that I pretty much told him not to touch me because I thought he'd been with another woman, and now he is off fucking them to teach me a lesson? The thought cuts me to the core.

I have a plan. I'm ready for Seamus when he comes into the bedroom tonight. I'm lying with my eyes closed, pretending to be asleep. The door opens, and he creeps in, tiptoeing straight through the room into the bathroom, determined not to wake me.

The shower starts running, a chink of light spilling through where he has left the door open a crack. Shoving back the coverlet, I crawl out of bed, stripping off my nightgown and creeping into the bathroom.

Seamus is standing in the shower, the water cascading over his head, obscuring the sound of my opening the door. Perfect. Slipping into the shower behind him, I run my hands up his back. Seamus turns in surprise, his eyes darkening as they slide over my naked body.

"Fuck, Tig," he murmurs. "I thought you were asleep."

"I know."

I smile up at him, dropping to my knees, taking his hard dick in my hand and stroking it from base to tip. A groan tears from Seamus's lips, his head tipping forward as he braces a

hand against the tiled shower wall. Rolling my thumb over the tip, I flick at the drop of pre-cum gathered there.

“How come you don’t fuck me anymore?”

There is a flash of something in his eyes. His fingers circle my wrist, and he tugs me to my feet, shutting off the shower behind him.

“Let’s go to bed, Tig,” he says quietly, his voice rough. Stubbornly, I shake my head vigorously.

“Is it because you don’t want me anymore?” My voice is miserably small, a look of regret crossing his face.

“Jaysus feck, Tig,” he breathes. “I want ye every fecking minute.”

It seems as though he will say something else, but he falls silent as I frown in confusion.

“Then why won’t you fuck me?” I bleat. God, I sound pathetic. I can’t help it. I need to know what is going on.

Seamus’s lips mash into a thin line as he guides me out of the shower, toweling us down and leading me back to the bed. Oh no. He’s not getting out of this that easily. I want answers. Or a good fucking. He can decide which he is going to provide.

I dig my feet in and stand here, arms crossed over my chest, as he blows out a breath, taking a seat on the end of the bed in the dark bedroom, looking up at me.

“I hurt you, Tig.”

I start in surprise. That is... not what I thought he was going to say. I’m more confused now than I was before. Why

the fuck would *Seamus Fitzpatrick* give a damn if he hurt me?

“I hurt you so badly that you wanted Niall’s help, not mine.”

There is a pained thread of anguish in his voice, and suddenly, it all makes sense. My heart clenches at the realization. He’s punishing himself. This isn’t about me at all.

Seamus feels bad and thinks he needs to pay for hurting me, which is his way of punishing himself. By getting me off but giving himself blue balls.

Oh my God. This is what happens when a man who has never experienced feeling guilty before in his life doesn’t know how to handle those emotions.

I move to kneel in front of him again, but he stops me, picking me up and throwing me onto the bed, burying his face between my thighs.

It’s on the tip of my lips to tell him to stop, but his tongue starts lashing my clit, and two fingers spear into me, finger fucking me hard.

Maybe we can discuss his hands-off attitude after he gets me off. I’m not a martyr, and I’m *not* a saint. Hell, I’m not even a social worker anymore.

My back bows, arching off the bed as I call out his name when I shatter around his mouth and fingers. He must sense my plan, the sneaky bastard, because, unlike the last eight nights, he doesn’t stop, bringing me to orgasm twice more until I’m practically falling asleep on him.

Only then does he kiss his way up my body, tugging me into his arms and pressing his lips against my temple, cuddling

me close until I fall asleep.



## SEAMUS

“You know, Niall is really fucking good at this hunting shit. Maybe you should ask him to be here. It’s not like he’s looking after Tiggy at the moment.”

I shoot Liam a lethal glare, Ronan obligingly leaning over and smacking the lad upside his head.

“Hey!” he whines. “I was just making an observation.”

“A fucking unwarranted one,” I growl. Liam falls into a sullen silence, but at least he has shut the fuck up.

He’s not wrong. Niall is better at all this hunting shite. He would be here in a heartbeat if I called him. But I’m a stubborn bastard, and I will do this without his help. It fucking stung when Tig wanted his help, refusing even to let me touch her.

“Connor has his lads from the cottage do some hacking off the books,” Ronan informs me, nodding at the seedy Roxbury motel we are standing across the road from. “They’re sure he’s holed up in there. We just need the room number, and we can end the fecking kiddy fiddler.”

Liam nods in agreement, spinning his flick knife between his fingers. For all his grumbling about wanting to call Niall in

to end this, Liam can't wait to get his knife into this cunt. Join the club, lad.

My phone rings in my pocket as we watch a john walk a prostitute in. I work it out of my trousers, my eyes still glued to the front of the motel, swiping to answer and holding it up to my ear.

“Yes?”

“I've heard from my dirty cop.”

Paddy. Finally, he's come through. I was beginning to think he hadn't actually reached out to his cop as I asked. I was ready to slam my fist into my best mate's face, which isn't an urge I feel more than once a year or so. I've been feeling it more and more frequently these days. I'm getting fed up with his attitude to Tig.

“What does he say?”

Paddy sighs. That doesn't sound promising. “The allegations have been made against this fucker, but he's in the wind.”

I'm fucking aware of that. I've been hunting this prick for two weeks. He might be a terrible excuse for a human being, but he's a fairly efficient cockroach. I grunt, waiting for Paddy to get to the fucking point of this phone call. He's hesitant to say it, which means he knows I'm not going to like his information, whatever it is.

“The mother swears black and blue she never knew, and that he won't be welcome in the house, that he's out of their lives. The cops say their hands are tied, and she's getting the kids back.”



He was right to be hesitant. I don't fucking like what I'm hearing. I'm ready to shoot the messenger in the fucking head. Paddy's a lucky fucker that he is delivering this information to me over the phone.

Growling, I end the call. Liam is still watching the front of the motel, though Ronan is looking at me.

“Problem, Fitzzy?”

“You could fucking say that, Ronan,” I spit. “That bitch is getting the kids back. The cops are just handing them over.”

“The system is fucked,” Liam agrees, almost cheerfully. “Can't count the number of times my old man got me back when he fucking shouldn't have.”

And then you jacked the Irish Saint's car, lad. So it didn't do you much good in life. Jesus fuck.

“Just have a word with her,” Liam suggests. “Send Niall. That would drive the message home.”

“I'm not fecking involving the Reaper in this shite. Stop suggesting it or get the feck out of my sight,” I snap. Ronan shoots his protégée a glare, slapping him upside the head again.

“We don't get involved in Roxbury, lad,” he rumbles. Liam rubs the back of his head, shooting Ronan a sullen look.

“We're in Roxbury getting looking to get involved right now,” he mutters. Aye, we are. But that's different. This is a hit. Not a warning. Besides, for me, this is fucking personal. This is about Tig. She cares for those kids, so I care what happens to this bastard.

“Get me on the phone with Petrov,” I grunt at Ronan. His eyebrows shoot up, but he nods, pulling his phone out of his pocket. “Keep yer fecking eyes on the motel,” I snap at Liam, flexing my fingers so I don’t plow my fist into one of my own lads.

Ronan has to ring around, but eventually, he hands me the phone.

“Petrov?”

“Speaking.” His Boston accent has a hint of Russian running through it like a thread, more obvious on certain words than others. Igor Andreyev is the head of the Russian Bratva here in Boston. Mikhail Petrov is one of his Two Spies. Usually, his job is to watch over the Avtoritets within the Bratva, to make sure they remain loyal to Andreyev and that none becomes too powerful.

He’s a scary motherfucker. Usually, an Obskchak is older, but Petrov is only in his late twenties. I don’t want to think about what fucked up shite he needed to do to prove himself so fucking young. Petrov is also exactly who I want to speak to about this.

“This is Seamus Fitzpatrick.”

“The Wolf Pup,” he chuckles. I grit my teeth. I fucking hate that nickname. I earned it when I was a kid, first making a name for myself in the Boston Underworld. It is a nod to the fact that Pa – the Irish Wolf – named me as his successor so young.

“What have I done to earn this phone call?”

“It’s not about what you have done. It’s about what you can do.”

“A favor? Are you sure you want to call one of those in, Fitzpatrick?”

“Never been fucking surer of anything in my life.”

That has his attention. “I’m listening.”

Aye, he is, sounding like a nosy, curious bastard.

“I need you to have a word with a woman in Roxbury.”

He snorts through the phone. “I’m sure you enjoyed her pussy, but having me tell her to fuck off seems a waste of a favor.”

Fucking Russian prick. Grinding my teeth, I count to ten before speaking so I don’t fuck up our alliance by telling him just what I think of him right now.

“She was letting her boyfriend abuse her daughter. Seven-year-old kid. We’re taking care of him, but the cops are handing the kids back to her.”

There’s a growl on the other end of the phone. “You want her taken care of? I can organize that. Give me her name.”

“Call it mercy. I just want you to have a word with her. Put the fear of fucking Andreyev into her if we so much as hear of anyone messing with either kid again.”

“Mercy sounds too good for her. You sure you don’t want her gone?”

No, I’m not fucking sure. But I think it would upset the kids more, and I told Tig I would take care of the bastard stepfather, not the mother.

“Not yet. She can have one more chance.”

“All right. But I’ll be keeping tabs on her my fucking self.”

Now that’s what I want to hear. I rattle off her name and address. Petrov pauses before ending the call.

“Why are the Irish getting involved in this? This is a Roxbury matter.”

“The kids mean something to my wife.”

There is a low chuckle. “Ah. You Irish. The way you cherish your women is strange.”

Fucking cold cunt.

“Maybe one day you will marry and understand.”

“Oh, make no mistake, Fitzpatrick. One day, I will marry. My life won’t change one bit.”

Yeah. That’s what I thought too. Now I’m standing outside a seedy Roxbury hotel, and my balls are bluer than a fucking autumn sky.

“I look forward to hearing about the day you fall, Petrov.”

“Never fucking happening, Fitzpatrick,” he laughs. “I’ll talk to your woman. No one will be touching those kids again.”

The phone goes dead, and I shove it into Ronan’s chest. His fingers close around it, his eyes still glued to the motel.

“You sure Connor’s lads couldn’t find a room number?” I growl. Ronan shakes his head, pocketing his phone.

“No, Fitzy. Maybe ye should have asked Petrov. The Russians are the best hackers in the city.”

Maybe I should have, but I don't like to burn favors. We can wait this bastard out.

# Chapter Sixteen

## TIGGY

“I didn’t get you into trouble, did I?”

I glance up at the softly spoken, worried tone. Fiona is chewing her lower lip, shifting from foot to foot, twisting her fingers together. I smile at her, shaking my head.

“Not at all. You did the right thing to let me know that he was here. He and his little sister were in a bad situation, so thanks.”

Fiona nods. “I thought so. He had that Roxbury look about him.”

She nods vaguely at me, sauntering off as I stare after her. She’s an enigma.

I’m not sure why she got a job stripping here because she plays her cards very close to her chest and doesn’t talk to many other girls.

Fiona is friends with Mellie and friendly enough with me to tease me about the *attention* Seamus paid to me in the dressing room the night he killed Ant. Both Fiona and Mellie tease me about that.

As Mellie pointed out, Seamus is well known not to kiss his women *anywhere*. But he kisses me everywhere. And right now, that’s all he’s fucking doing, and it’s still killing me.

I know that this is something he seems to think that he needs to do, but I don't see why *I* should be punished. I bite back a snort.

Right. *I'm* being punished. My sexy as sin husband has eaten me out and cuddled me to sleep every night for almost two weeks. Sounds completely terrible, right?

“Are you ready to go, Tiggy?”

I glance over at Connor. Paddy is nowhere to be seen. Maybe he finally convinced Seamus to be taken off my security detail. I wouldn't mind if that happened.

“I'm ready.”

I have a growing list of chores at home. Seamus has only had me come into Oracle twice a week since Tristan appeared, so I told him the cleaning service didn't need to do *everything* anymore. I'm back in charge of meals, shopping, and laundry, and it is piling up.

Unfortunately, Paddy is still on my security detail, lounging against the side of Connor's SUV, messing about on his phone. He shoots me a lethal glare as we approach, and I bite back a sigh. Maybe *I* could ask Seamus to take him off my detail.

I could word the request so Seamus might think agreeing would absolve him of any residual guilt, and he might finally fuck me. First, though, I'm starving. Maybe I'll make cabbage rolls for lunch. I haven't eaten them in forever.

I'm folding laundry after lunch when hands slide over my hips, pulling me against a hard dick and grinding my ass against it. I freeze.

It's been six days since I realized Seamus was punishing himself by not fucking me, and our routine continues. So someone grabbing me like this during the day isn't good. How the hell did they get past Connor and Paddy?

Taking a deep breath, I make sure not to telegraph my intentions and throw my elbow back hard.

"Fuck, Tig," Seamus grunts. His hands release me as he rubs his shoulder, where my elbow caught him.

"Oh my God, Seamus!" I squeal, spinning, my hands flying to my mouth before fluttering around his shoulder. "I thought some stranger was grabbing me."

He grins through his pain, his hands sliding around my waist again.

"Well, then I'm glad you have that fucking weapon on you."

I roll my eyes at him. "How come you're home during the day?"

The grin drops off his face. Shit. I didn't mean for it to come out so defensively. I rush to reassure him.

"Not that I'm complaining."

He leans down, pressing his forehead to mine, satisfaction rolling off him in tangible waves.

"We got the bastard. Niall's dealing with him now," he tells me solemnly.

The bastard? Oh my God. Tristan and Mya's stepfather. I blink in surprise, my breath catching. Holy shit. I know he said



he would sort it for me, but I didn't think he would manage it so soon. My eyes flutter closed, and I suck in a deep breath.

“Thank you.”

He nods, pressing a kiss against my hairline. “Ye’re welcome.”

My pussy clenches at the Irish brogue in his voice.

“I need to be inside ye, Tig,” he whispers, his voice almost desperate with need. Oh, thank God. I was starting to worry we would never have sex again. My hands are nearly shaking in their eagerness to unbutton his jeans. Dear God, do I need this.

“Please, Seamus,” I whimper, tearing his zipper down.

He hooks his fingers under the band of my panties, tugging them down as he lifts me, pressing me against the laundry room wall, thrusting into me, and burying his face in my neck.

“Holy feck, Tig.”

His lips move against my neck as he holds still inside me, both of us needing a moment to become accustomed again to this feeling.

“Ye feel so fecking amazing, *a ghrá mo chroí*. I’ve fecking missed this. Missed being inside ye.”

I have no idea what the Irish he whispers means, but I shiver at the worshipful way he murmurs it.

“I need you to fuck me, Seamus.”

He groans into my neck. “I can’t give ye gentle right now, *a mhuirnín*,” he growls as I slide my fingers through his hair.

“Good. I don’t want gentle.”

Another groan rips out of him as he holds me even more tightly, crushing me against the wall as he starts frantically thrusting, pistoning in and out, his lips pressing against my cheek hard enough to leave bruises, his fingers digging into my hips and ass as he holds me in position.

I tighten my grip on his shoulders as he pounds into me, my back slapping against the wall with every brutal thrust. My orgasm catches me by surprise, both its sudden appearance and strength. I shatter, screaming Seamus’s name, digging my fingernails into the flesh at his shoulders.

“*Is breá liom tú, mo bhean chéile,*” Seamus groans, holding deep inside me as he comes.

He exhales a shuddering breath into my hair as he lowers me to the ground, tilting my chin up as his lips taste mine.



## SEAMUS

Tig moans, opening her mouth to allow my tongue access, clinging to me as her tongue fences with mine. I’m hard again in no time. That’s what I get for denying myself pleasure for two fucking weeks.

Tig almost put the hex on that a week ago, and I was so fucking close to letting her suck me off in the shower, but I

managed to find the resolve to stop her. It was the hardest thing I've ever fucking done.

But I told myself that I didn't get to get off until I got my hands on the cunt and fulfilled my promise to help her. Call it whatever you want, extra motivation, self-flagellation, whatever, it was worth it.

I discovered quite a lot about myself during this self-imposed abstinence period. I learned that I could be an unselfish lover. I learned that I *really* enjoy eating Tig out. I learned that I sleep better than I ever have in my life when I'm cuddling her.

I learned that I'm an irritable fucker when I don't get laid regularly. Everyone else learned that too. And I learned that I love my wife. That last revelation knocked me sideways.

Because I'm a piece of chicken shit, I've yet to tell her in a language she'll understand. But at least I fucking said it. Nothing has ever felt as right as whispering those words to her.

Quickly buttoning my dick back into my jeans, I lift Tig, her legs coming about my waist, and stride out of the laundry, ignoring Paddy and Connor's grins. I carry Tig upstairs, still kissing her, kicking the bedroom door shut behind, gently laying her on the bed.

I need to fuck her again. Almost two weeks was too long to go without burying myself in her. Never again. This time, I want her in our bed, and I want her melting under my touch. I have some things I want to say to her, and even though she won't understand them, I don't want anyone else to hear.

Kissing Tig tenderly, I strip off her clothes, shedding mine as I come down on top of her. I proceed to worship her with my mouth and body. Sliding my lips over every piece of skin I can reach, I murmur endearments in Irish to her as I swirl my tongue over her skin, tasting her.

*“Mo chroí.”* My heart. *“A mhuirín.”* My darling. *“Mo mhuirín dílis.”* My own true love. *“A ghrá mo chroí.”* My heart’s beloved. *“A chuisle mo chroí.”* Pulse of my heart. *“Is breá liom tú, mo bhean chéile.”* I love you, my beloved wife.

My lips make their way back up to hers, kissing her deeply until I lift my head, positioning my dick at her entrance. Staring deep into her eyes, I sink into her.

*“Is breá liom tú, Tig,”* I murmur. *“Is breá liom tú.”*

Her breath catches, her fingers sliding over my back as I fuck her slowly and gently, murmuring *“is breá liom tú”* over and over.

I groan at the feeling of her pussy clenching at my dick as she sighs, a contented smile pulling at her lips when she comes. The look on her face as she comes apart, coupled with the feeling of her muscles milking my dick, pushes me over the edge, and I come too, our eyes locking.

“What does it mean?” Tig murmurs, her fingertips brushing against my cheek. I take a deep breath, holding her gaze.

“I love ye,” I whisper, baring my soul to her as her breath catches.



## TIGGY

He's staring at me, a beautiful, tender look on his face, and my heart clenches. My fingertips freeze on his face, and neither of us speaks or breathes for a long moment.

"Seamus," I whisper, but he lowers his head, kissing me deeply before I can say anything. Thank god.

I'm not entirely sure what I was about to say. I can feel him hardening inside me again because it has been two weeks.

Seamus rises onto his knees and elbows without breaking the kiss, fucking me hard. I cling to him, savoring this feeling. Inside, I'm a mess of emotions. Thoughts and feelings are swirling around like snowflakes in a blizzard.

Seamus comes with a grunt, rolling onto his back, bringing me with him, and anchoring me onto his chest. He exhales deeply, murmuring something too softly for me to hear it as he nuzzles his face in my hair, falling asleep.

As exhausted as I am from our marathon sex session, I lie awake, staring across his muscled chest at the closed door. My husband loves me. That is a lot to wrap my head around. Here I was, terrified I would fall for the wrong guy, and he went and fell for me.

If you had told me, going into this marriage, that Seamus Fitzpatrick would one day tell me he loved me, I would have

laughed so hard I would have given myself a coronary. But it just happened. *Oh my God.*

*Seamus Fitzpatrick* just said he loved me. Hell has officially frozen over. Do I love him? Does he even know what love means? Does he really just mean that he missed having sex with me, and he has equated that with love in his emotion-starved world?

After all my orgasms and hearing him say that, my brain is mush, so I can't ponder it anymore. My eyelids are drooping, and as much as my brain is arguing that we need to stay awake and over-think this so hard we earn a Harvard degree in the subject, my body is winning the war.

All I know is that I love him back. And I'm too scared to say it out loud.

# Chapter Seventeen

## TIGGY

I've been turning Seamus's declaration over and over in my head for the past week. He has murmured it in Irish a few times when we've had sex, but he hasn't said it again apart from that, and he hasn't seemed to expect me to say it back.

Which is a relief. I still haven't decided what I'm feeling. That's a lie. My mouth twists into a smirk as I set the table. I know exactly what I'm feeling. I'm head over heels in love with him. I have been for a while.

But I still don't know whether I'm ready to voice those feelings. Because if I tell Seamus, it becomes real, and I will have given him the power to break me. If he doesn't know and inadvertently breaks my heart, it would suck, but I would get over it. If he knew I loved him and broke my heart, it would destroy me.

I have been into Oracle twice this week again, but since there haven't been any more attempted attacks, Seamus has relaxed his hold a little more. I have also gone to my yoga class for the first time in forever.

Unlike in the early days of our marriage, Seamus has diligently come home from Oracle by eight o'clock every night to eat with me, and tonight is no exception.

I finish laying the fish and salad on the table when he walks into the room, looking effortlessly handsome in his jeans and a

light green button-down shirt.

Dropping a kiss on my cheek, he takes his seat and raises his wine glass at me as I sit.

*“Sliánte.”*

I butcher the word as I try to toast him back, stretching his grin wider.

“How did you get on today?” he asks, picking up his fork. I open my mouth to respond when a flash of green catches my eye, Niall appearing in the doorway.

“Perimeter’s clear,” he grunts at Seamus, nodding to us both and melting out of the doorway.

I keep my eyes fixed on the table, not even acknowledging him. Seamus notices. We eat in silence for a beat until he sighs, reaching over and taking my hand in his, smoothing his thumb over my healed fingers.

“Why don’t you talk to Niall anymore?”

My eyes flicker up to him as I hesitate. I shrug, frustration flashing in his dark eyes.

*“Mo chroí. Tig, talk to me.”*

Sighing, I put down my fork, take a large sip of white wine, and turn my eyes to meet his.

“My mother betrayed my father. With one of his men. Someone he trusted. I was fifteen.”

Seamus freezes, watching me carefully, his expression controlled, giving nothing away, though his hand tightens on mine. I swallow painfully.



“My father put a bullet through my mother’s forehead,” I whisper. “As honor dictated. The man, I don’t know what happened to him, but I can’t imagine it was pleasant.” My eyes find Seamus’s again. “I don’t want you even to *think* something like that might be happening. That’s why I don’t talk to your men.”

Seamus stares silently at me for a long moment, his thumb smoothing over my hand again.

“Tig,” he sighs. “I trust you. I don’t want you isolated. I want you to talk to them. They’re my closest friends. You’re my wife. I want you to all get along.”

“But...” I start to protest, falling silent as his eyes flash with something else. Something dark.

“Besides,” he growls, his voice low and controlled. “Even if I didn’t trust you, I trust *them*. They would never betray me.”

He blinks, the hard, dark look disappearing, and a new, tender look that he’s used for me over the last week is back.

“You once called Niall your friend, and honestly, Tig, I think he could use a friend like you.”

I study him for a moment, pursing my lips as I nod. “Okay. I’ll talk to them. But I don’t think anything short of a miracle will make Paddy like me.”

Seamus smiles, but it’s a little sad. “Come here.”

He drops his napkin onto the table, pushing his chair out from the table. Surprised, I stand, settling into his lap as his arms come around me, his nose nuzzling into my neck.

“Paddy has been my best friend for almost twenty years. When he was fifteen, his parents were killed, along with my mother.”

I stiffen against him, my arms moving around his shoulders as he continues to talk into my neck. Poor Seamus. Poor Paddy.

“We never found out who it was. My father suspected Romanian involvement. It’s probably one of the reasons he never moved to try for a truce before our wedding.”

My heart is thumping in my chest. Fifteen years ago. That’s when they died. Around that time, my father was very vocal in his hatred for the Irish and his desire to hit them where it hurt the most. Taking out the Boss’s wife and his second in command... would hurt the most.

“How did they die?” I whisper, my heart thumping in my chest. Seamus sighs against my neck.

“Drive-by shooting. They were eating at a café. It was a dark SUV, no plates.” His lips press a kiss to my pulse point. “Paddy moved into our house, and he had a lot of anger. All three of us did, but at least Pa and I had each other.”

“But Paddy had nothing except his anger at the Romanians. At my family,” I mumble. No wonder he hates me. Seamus nods, his hair brushing my cheek as he murmurs in agreement. “That’s why he thinks I can’t be trusted.”

“Don’t take it personally, *mo chroí*,” Seamus sighs, tilting my chin with two fingers so he can kiss me gently and thoroughly.

Breaking the kiss, Seamus moves his lips along the underside of my jaw, pulling back abruptly. I glance down at him, blinking at the serious expression on his face as he studies me.

“When your mother was executed, is that when you started the counting?” he asks softly. I freeze, blinking like a deer in the headlights. He sees so much more than I ever realized.

“Yes.” I swallow, a blush creeping up over my cheeks.

“And you count your heartbeats?” He presses his fingers against the center of my chest, feeling them now. They pick up at his touch and words, and I blow out a breath, shaking my head.

“I count five familiar things. It helps me ground myself. Helps me avoid falling into a panic spiral.”

Seamus is silent as he appraises me, a frown drawing his eyebrows down.

“What sort of things do you usually count?” His voice is casual, but I can hear the thread of curiosity hidden there.

“It depends on where I am.” I shrug. “If I was in this room, or any room in this house, it could be anything familiar. The plates, the furniture, the décor.”

“And if you’re somewhere else. Somewhere you don’t spend a lot of time?” he prompts. I hesitate, chewing on my lips.

“My mother gave me this bracelet when I was fourteen.” I hold it up, Seamus’s fingertips skimming over it. “I’ve worn the same perfume for the last ten years. I breathe in and smell

it. My wedding ring.” I hold up my hand. He looks insanely smug at that.

“My heartbeat.” I nod to my chest, where his hand is still lying. I pause, lifting my eyes to meet his. “You,” I whisper.

The word hangs in the air between us. Seamus stares at me for a beat, his pupils dilating as he reaches out with both hands, cupping my jaw and crushing my mouth to his with a groan.

Finally, he lifts his head, his thumbs brushing over my cheeks.

“We should eat. Ye went to all this trouble, and it’s going cold.”

I nod, my brain scrambled. Seamus’s arms release me, allowing me to stand and move back to my seat, picking up my fork again.

“Ye never said how yer day was,” Seamus prompts, his voice rough and tinged with Irish, gesturing to me with his fork. “Before Niall interrupted.”

“Oh, right. I went to yoga and the grocery store. Liam is a much better shopping companion than Niall. He pushes the cart for me.”

A smile tugs at the corners of Seamus’s lips as he takes a sip of his white wine, asking me more questions about my day.

To my surprise, Seamus helps me wash up after supper, drying the dishes in silence and placing them away. I stare at him as he takes my hand, leading me up the stairs. He has never helped with the dishes before. I wonder what is happening.

Seamus leads me through the bedroom and into the bathroom, running the shower as he turns to me with heated eyes. I meet his gaze, catching my breath as he slowly undresses us and tangles our fingers together, drawing me into the warm spray.

His breathing is harsh as he gently pushes me against the wall, sinking to his knees. Seamus is still holding my gaze as he lifts my leg, setting it over his shoulder, his fingers parting my folds.

As his eyes drop away from mine, focusing on his goal, his tongue circles my clit, my head tips back, my eyelids fluttering closed as I slide my fingers through his thick hair, a sigh escaping me.

“Like that, Seamus,” I moan, and he eagerly laps at me, his tongue curling as I come with a whimper, my hips bucking.

Seamus is on his feet in seconds, his hands on my waist, lifting me and stepping up against me, sliding home. I gasp, wrapping my arms around his neck as his lips close around my earlobe.

He sucks and nibbles on it, slowly withdrawing and pressing firmly into me again. It’s slow, unhurried, and wonderful, just as slow and thorough as his earlier kiss. I cling to him, my face buried in the crook of his neck as he continues making love to me. There’s no other way to describe this. I know he’s told me he loves me before, but after he opened up downstairs, this feels *more*.

My second orgasm washes over me like a warm, gentle breeze, leaving me languid and sleepy. Seamus sighs, pressing deep inside me, his breath hot on my ear as he comes.

*“Is breá liom tú, mo bhean chéile.”*

My heart clenches. I’m starting to believe him. Seamus sets me down, and we both shower, stepping out, drying ourselves, and moving into the bedroom.

He falls asleep quickly once we’re in bed with me tucked up in his arms. Once I’m sure he is sleeping, I gently place my hand over his heart.

“I love you, Seamus,” I whisper into the dark.



## SEAMUS

A timid knock at the door to my office has me glancing up in surprise. Ronan nods to Liam, who stands and moves to open it.

“Fiona?” he asks, sounding surprised. A soft, musical voice replies.

“Hello Liam, Could I please speak to Seamus?”

“Uh, sure.” The lad scratches the back of his head. “Hold on.”

He steps back, turning and gesturing over his shoulder at a pretty blonde wearing jeans and an oversized T-shirt.

“Fiona wants a word, Seamus.”

She steps into the room, my eyebrows shooting up when I finally figure out why her face looks so familiar. She's one of the strippers here. The one Tig has become friendly with in a little trio with Mellie, the bartender.

"Fiona." I beckon her inside, and Ronan is on his feet instantly, holding out the chair he had been lounging in for her.

She blinks at him slowly, studying him with a measured look and stiffly taking a seat.

"What can I do for you?" I ask her, lounging back in my seat, steepling my fingers in front of my mouth.

"It's..." She hesitates, glancing around at Liam and Ronan. I'm about to tell them to fuck off, but she plunges ahead. "It's about Tiggy."

My eyes snap to her face as she chews on her lip.

"And Tahlie."

My eyes narrow, and whatever is written across my face has Fiona flinching back. Ronan's hand lands on her shoulder, and she jumps, her gaze darting up to his. He smiles kindly at her, tipping his head to me.

"Whatever ye need to tell him, ye tell him," he reassures her, a faint blush stealing across her milky white cheeks at his Irish brogue.

"It's just..." Fiona sighs, shaking her head gently. "Tahlie's been mouthing off. About Tiggy. Unpleasant things. I told the other girls to ignore her, but..." Again she hesitates, grimacing. I lean forward, needing her to get to the fucking point. Anything that concerns my wife concerns me, and if

Fiona's attitude is anything to go by, this should concern me a fucking lot.

“But *what?*”

Fiona actually shudders from the iciness in my tone, dropping her eyes to the desk and cringing back into her seat. Ronan adjusts his stance so part of her is shielded from me by his leg.

If I weren't so fucking intent on knowing what that fucking bitch was saying about Tig, I probably would have found it funny that the Irish Saint appears to have added to his collection of broken things.

“But she started saying Tiggy was getting you to shower her with attention by flirting with your men. By threatening to sleep around with them,” she whispers. Fucking *what?* I see red, rage surging through me. She's a fucking dead bitch.

Shoving away from my desk, I stalk around and out of the room. Liam hurries after me, but Ronan stays put, assuring Fiona that she did the right thing in coming to tell me. She should have fucking come to me sooner. But we can chat about that later.

Striding into the dressing room, my eyes fly around wildly until they land on Tahlie. She's over in front of a full-length mirror, primping her hair. As I stalk towards her, the stupid bitch's eyes meet mine in the mirror, and she has the fucking audacity to smile seductively at me.

She opens her mouth to speak as I come to a halt behind her, our eyes still locked together in the mirror. Whatever she was going to say is lost when I grab her by the throat, spinning



her and slamming her against it, her head hitting the mirror so hard cracks appear like thin spider webs radiating out.

Her eyes are wide and filled with terror, her long, red, talon-like fingers scrabbling against my hand, trying to tug it away from where it is crushing her windpipe.

“What the fuck have you been saying about my wife?” I roar at her. The room falls deathly silent as Tahlie’s mouth soundlessly moves, and she gurgles and chokes, struggling to breathe.

“Jesus fuck, Fitzzy!” Connor’s voice rings out as he appears beside me, Paddy on the other side, trying to wrestle me away from this lying bitch.

Shrugging them off, I tighten my grip. Liam and Ronan join the fray, dragging the lads away. This time, when I speak, my voice is low and lethal, petrifying Tahlie even more.

“Your lies don’t just put my wife’s life in danger,” I tell her as she chokes and gasps, “they also put the lives of my lads in danger.”

Paddy and Connor stop struggling, turning disgusted faces on Tahile.

It’s not an exaggeration. Rumors that Tig might be betraying me could be a death sentence for her, as evidenced by the gruesome manner of her own mother’s death at her father’s hands. But they would also be a death sentence for whichever one of my lads she was accused of sleeping with.

Only Paddy would be safe from the accusations. Everyone knows he can’t stand Tig. Even Connor’s life could be on the line. Tahlie hasn’t just endangered the life of my wife and my

lads. She's endangered the life of my cousin. She's lucky it's me she is dealing with and not Pa.

I don't bother allowing Tahlie to explain herself. When I asked her, her eyes told me everything I needed to know.

Jerking her away from the mirror, I drag her by the throat out of the dressing room and down the stairs to the basement to await Niall's pleasure.

Tahlie screams and begs as I tie her to the table, but I tune her out. Slamming the door behind me, I call Niall.

"Fitzy?" he grunts as he picks up the phone. "I just spoke to Ronan."

"I want answers, and I want her fucking dead."

There is silence on the other end of the phone. I have never asked Niall to kill a woman before, but there is a first time for everything, and Tahlie has earned that privilege.

"As you like, Fitzy."

The line goes dead, and I walk upstairs, my limbs feeling weighed down. Tahlie deserves this, but she's still a lass. An evil, fucked up, sadistic, psychopathic lass. But still a lass.

Paddy and Connor are waiting in my office, an open bottle of whiskey on the desk beside three tumblers. I guess it's going to be a long fucking evening.

Niall appears back upstairs around eight.

"It's done," he grunts, looking and sounding gruffer than usual. I guess even the Reaper struggled with the idea of killing a lass.

I nod, offering him the bottle of whiskey, but he shakes his head, rubbing the back of his neck.

“She figured at the very least ye would set Tiggy aside. I’m not sure what her end game was, possibly to get ye to fuck her again.”

I stiffen at his words. You have to be fucking kidding me. This was all over the possibility I might stick my dick in her again? Thank Christ, the psychopathic bitch is gone.

“Jesus fuck,” I groan, rubbing my eyes. “Didn’t the silly bitch realize she could have gotten Tig killed?”

“I don’t think she cared,” Niall shrugs. “She seemed very fixated on ye, Fitzzy. I think she wanted Tiggy dead.”

Even Paddy looks ill at the idea, as much as he’s still suspicious of Tig and probably always will be.

“You’ve taken care of her?” I clarify.

Niall nods stiffly. “As I said, it’s done.”

I let him go. No one likes killing a woman, not even the Irish Reaper.

I don’t stay long after the door swings shut on Niall, wanting to be home with Tig. Niall didn’t go far. He’s seated at the VIP bar, knocking back a whiskey, saying something to Mellie, who reaches over and taps the back of his hand.

Niall covers her hand with his, lifting his eyes to meet hers, and they silently stare at each other until she clears her throat, tugging her hand away. I know exactly how Niall feels. I need to wrap myself around Tig and feel her body under mine.



# Chapter Eighteen

## TIGGY

I'm so ready for a girl's night out. Unfortunately, my super protective husband has put the hex on that any time soon. The closest I can get is the private bar at Oracle. I'll take what I can get.

I've called in Fiona and Mellie. Mellie should have been here an hour ago, but Fiona and I are now sitting at the bar, sipping vodkas while she waits for her set, and I wait for Seamus to finish up for the night.

Glancing around, I can see that even here, deep in the middle of Oracle, Seamus's crew have eyes on me. Well. They're supposed to have eyes on me, but I'm not currently the main drawcard.

"Ronan's watching you," I smirk at Fiona, who tightens her grip on her vodka, glancing over her shoulder in the direction I'm looking. Her eyes meet his briefly, but she doesn't acknowledge him, turning back to me, giving him the cold shoulder.

"He can look all he wants. It's literally my job," Fiona mutters, taking a slug of her drink.

"He can't keep his eyes off you," I tease her, but she rolls her eyes at me.

"I have no intention of joining his museum of broken things."

I blink at her in surprise. Broken things? Please. The man doesn't want to *save* her. He's looking at her like he wants to *devour* her.

"I don't think that's what it is...."

Fiona flicks her hair over her shoulder, cutting me off.

"That's *exactly* what it is," she corrects me with a frown. "Everyone knows the Irish Saint can't help himself when it comes to saving people like me."

"Even if that was the case," I sigh, "it's not like him saving you would be the worst thing in the world. Look how he helped Liam. He caught him jacking his car and -."

"And inducted him into the *Irish Mafia*," she snorts, and I trail off. Okay, the woman has a point. "I have no intention of being saved or collected. He can find a different broken stripper to stare at."

"You're not broken," I start, choking back the rest of my words when she glares at me. "Sorry, force of habit."

"You're my friend, not my caseworker." Fiona's eyes narrow at me.

"Yeah, sorry."

I'm in the middle of apologizing again when Fiona smirks over my shoulder. I turn with a huffed sigh as Mellie slings herself onto the barstool, tipping her head onto my shoulder.

"I'm sad, Mrs. Fitzpatrick," she sighs, butting the top of her head against my jaw. "You can be *my* caseworker."

"And what can I help you with then, Mellie," I drawl.

She sighs again, resting her chin on her fist, her elbow propped up on the bar as she bats her eyelashes rapidly at me.

“I need to get laid. A nice, *big dick*. You got a case file for that?”

Behind me, there is a choking and spluttering, and Mellie blushes deeply, looking over my shoulder. Turning, I see Seamus, who has choked on his whiskey and is coughing, Ronan thumping him on the back.

“You better not have a case file for that, Tig,” Seamus manages through his choking.

Niall is also flanking them, his face inscrutable, apart from his eyes which are burning suns, laser-focused on Mellie’s face.

“You okay, Seamus?” I smirk at him as he manages to gasp in a breath.

“Yeah.” He coughs again. “I was coming over here to see if you were ready to leave, *leannán*.” His eyes are dancing with mischief. “But I guess I walked in at the wrong part of the conversation.”

So much for girl’s night. Mellie only just arrived.

“I’m ready to go.”

Grabbing my purse, I slide off my barstool. Mellie and Fiona stand as well.

“Do you ladies need a lift home?” Seamus turns to them, but Fiona shakes her head, pounding back her vodka.

“I’m on stage in half an hour. Bye, babe.”

She gives me a quick hug, slapping my ass as she saunters off to the dressing room. Ronan's eyes follow her the entire way, and he drifts over to where Liam is sitting. And then there were four.

"Mellie?" I ask her, but Niall cuts her off before she can answer.

"I'll give ye a lift, Mellie. Yer place is out of the way for them."

Mellie nods, avoiding my eye when I try to shoot her a look. Seamus shrugs, placing his hand on the small of my back, guiding me out of the bar, nodding to Paddy and Connor, who join us on our way.



## SEAMUS

"Good morning, Niall."

He blinks in surprise, his mug of coffee frozen halfway to his mouth as he stares, openmouthed at her. I have to bite back a smirk. God, the Reaper caught off-guard is a fucking funny sight.

"Morning," he finally manages back, his curiosity-filled eyes following Tig the entire time she flits around the kitchen making breakfast.



“Make extra.” I gesture to the eggs as I hand her a mug of coffee. “We have a meeting here this morning.”

Tig nods, whisking up more eggs and putting the bacon and sausages in the pan. The lads trickle in, making noises of appreciation as the smell of bacon hits their noses.

They all blink in surprise as Tig greets them each with a smile and a hello. It would appear she took my words the other week to heart. Good. I want her to feel comfortable with more people than Fiona and Mellie.

Paddy is the last one in, grunting in response to her greeting, his eyes narrowing as I play with her hair and press kisses against her temple.

“Given up the sullen act, have we?” he drawls coldly. I stiffen, but Tig beams at him.

“Seamus didn’t find it sexy when I pouted like a two-year-old,” she informs him teasingly. I have to bury my face into her hair to hide my grin. I think I like playful Tig. She seems more light-hearted when she’s joking around. I want her to feel comfortable enough to joke around. I want her to smile more.

He lets it go as she hands Liam the serving platters to take into the dining room, but as soon as we’re all eating, he glares across the table and starts sniping again.

“Seriously though, why the sudden one-eighty?”

I open my mouth to tell him where to shove it when Tig kicks me in the shin. I hide my grunt of pain by taking a sip of coffee, keeping my mouth shut. This should be interesting. I’m intrigued.

After her initial defiance in bed, I should have realized that my wife is a fierce little thing who wants to fight her own battles. Let's see how she handles Paddy. I'm happy to let her take the lead, but if he crosses a line, I'm sure as hell stepping in and putting him into his place.

Tig eyes Paddy across the table, her lips pursed like she's seriously considering the question.

"Apparently, none of you will ever agree to a gangbang if I'm mean to you. Gotta work to get all that Irish in me."

I'm not the only one who chokes on their coffee, and Paddy looks furious.

"That's not something you *ever* joke about," he spits at her, looking revolted. "You're fucking shaming him with your disgusting words."

I throw a warning look in Paddy's direction, but he ignores me. *I* know Tig is joking, but I haven't told her about Tahlie and her gossip yet, so she has no idea that she is waving the proverbial red flag in front of the bull.

The rest of the table is silent as Tig plucks up her coffee and takes a measured sip, fixing her eyes on Paddy, all seriousness now.

"I would never joke in front of anyone who isn't in this room," she snaps at him, her eyes flashing. "I'm being pleasant because Seamus wants me to be friendly with his friends. That's it. That's the whole dirty, nasty, secret ulterior motive. I'm doing what my husband told me to. So sue me."

They glare at each other until Paddy starts shaking his head at her.

“You need to be very careful,” he hisses at her. “There are a number of people in our organization who don’t trust you, and they won’t care if you’re only ‘joking’. They’ll listen to one crude joke like that and put a bullet through your brain.”

“Yeah, I like to think I’ve learned from my mother’s mistakes, thanks,” she shoots back, and Paddy starts in surprise. They all do.

Tig’s lower lip trembles. Right. That’s the fucking line right there, and Paddy needs to back the fuck away from it. I clear my throat, drawing the attention of the table to me.

“That’s enough, Paddy,” I tell him, letting the order in my voice be heard. “I told Tig I wanted her to make more of an effort with you all. She expressed her concerns that any friendliness on her part might be misconstrued, especially given the manner of her mother’s death. I assured her that I trust every single person at this table, *including my wife*, and I won’t have you question her fidelity.”

I glare at Paddy until he nods, turning his attention to his meal. Reaching over, I take Tig’s hand, stroking my thumb over the back of it. Offering her a reassuring smile, I squeeze her hand and release it.

No one speaks for the rest of the meal. Finally, Niall grunts his thanks to Tig, and the rest follow suit, including Paddy. Liam clears the table, everyone melting out of the room when I tell them I will meet them in the den.

Tig and I sit in silence until we hear them enter the den and the door close.

“So.” I look over at her, and she glances up at me. “You’ve a hankering for an Irish gangbang?”

She flushes, a grin tugging at the corners of her mouth before she swallows it down.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about?” she breathes, standing and moving toward me as I push my chair back from the table, lounging in my seat to look up at her.

“I believe I’m talking about my wife uttering the words ‘gotta work to get all that Irish in me’,” I drawl.

Her eyes widen innocently as she unbuttons my jeans and straddles me, taking my hard dick in one smooth movement until I am fully sheathed. Her eyes glitter impishly as she rolls her hips, drawing a groan from me.

“This is all the Irish I ever need in me,” she whispers, rolling her hips again.

“Feck me,” I groan. Tig shivers at the Irish brogue, so I lay it on thicker. “Ye feel incredible, *mo chroí*.”

“So do you, Seamus.”

Her head tips back as she starts to ride me. My lips find her pulse, sucking gently as she works her hips, grinding her clit down on me, chasing her release. Her inner muscles start to clench. She’s so fucking close.

“I love ye, Tig,” I whisper into her neck. “So much.”

She comes with a moan, tugging my head back so she can look into my eyes.

“I love you too, Seamus,” she gasps, and I come.



# Chapter Nineteen

## SEAMUS

Paddy turns to me when I saunter into the den, feeling on top of the fucking world. My wife loves me. It's a fucking beautiful morning.

"I don't want to fucking hear it, Paddy," I snap at him, shooting him a warning glare when he opens his mouth.

He shuts his mouth again, looking furious, leaning petulantly against the window sill.

"Sean wants us on the weapons shipment. He's antsy since there hasn't been any retaliation from the Bulgarians for Niall's little killing spree." I nod to the Reaper, and he smirks back at me.

I think he enjoyed carving up the men who tried to hurt Tig almost as much as I enjoyed watching them scream.

"Liam, you stay here." I glare at him, expecting a protest, but he just nods. "Tig doesn't leave the house. We clear?"

"As crystal, Fitzzy," he nods, lounging on the sofa beside Ronan. As my eyes linger over Ronan, who shrugs in silent agreement, Paddy speaks up.

"I don't think Sean would like our crew cut down because you're unnecessarily ordering men to stay at your house guarding your wife."

“You think the four of us couldn’t handle the shipment?” I snap at him, and he shrugs.

“I think we could. I don’t see why you’d order two men to stay here. For months, there’s been no hint of a threat,” he snaps back. “You’re being overprotective because you’re thinking with your dick. I don’t know why you’d even trust a woman who can’t tell you she loves you when you tell her all the fucking time.”

There is dead silence in the room, everyone looking everywhere but at Paddy and me. Paddy is glaring at me while I’m spoiling for a fight.

I understand why he’s so suspicious of her. I really do. I was just as guarded at the start of all this, but he’s not privy to Tig’s motives and heart the way I am, so he needs to fucking rein it in.

“She tells me every night,” I shrug, shoving my clenched fists into my pockets, so I don’t sock my best mate in the jaw.

“You said that was only when she thinks you’re asleep,” he scoffs. “She can’t say it to your fucking face when your eyes are open.”

“Well, newsflash, asshole, she just fucking did.”

It’s not the winning point I was hoping for. Paddy scoffs, rolling his eyes. He doesn’t fucking believe her. I can see it in his eyes. He thinks this is the same as her ‘sudden one-eighty’ of being nice to them. Some sort of play to deceive us.

“I don’t have time for this fucking shit,” I sigh. “Liam, you’ll stay. Everyone else, get ready to leave. The delivery is at eleven.”

Tig's in the kitchen, making meatballs when I enter. She glances over with a smile.

"We'll be back in a few hours. Liam will stay here."

I slide my arms around her waist, resting my chin on her shoulder, kissing the shell of her ear.

"Can't wait to eat them."

"I'll make sure I add an extra dash of *love*," she giggles. I press my lips against her temple.

"I'm sure they'll be delicious. Here." I slip a phone into the back pocket of her jeans. "Just in case you need me. My number is programmed in there."

Tig puts down her knife, wipes her hands on a tea towel, and turns in my arms, sliding her hands into the back pockets of my jeans, squeezing my arse cheeks as she grins impishly up at me.

"When you get home, we should take a bath," she breathes, her eyes sparkling the way they do when she has sex on her mind. My mind races through everything I want to do to her body in that bath. We might have to have more than one to get through them all.

"I like the sound of that," I murmur, pressing a kiss to her mouth. She sighs, parting her lips, my tongue licking in as I slant my mouth over hers, deepening the kiss.

"I love ye, Tig," I murmur against her lips as I break the kiss.

"I love you, Seamus," she whispers back, lifting her face for a kiss before I reluctantly step away. "To be continued."



Tig winks at me, turning back to the counter. Before she picks up the knife, I swat her ass. She throws a grin over her shoulder, and I head out with the lads, Liam wandering into the kitchen as I leave it.



## TIGGY

“That smells good,” Liam pipes up from where he is seated at the breakfast bar, messing around on his phone. I shut off the oven, lifting out the soda bread to cool on the countertop, and inhale. It does smell good. Soda bread is Seamus’s weakness, which is kind of cute.

“What’s for lunch?” Liam tries again, his eyes glued to the delicious soda bread.

“Not that,” I scold, waving his eyes off it as they gleam covetously. Honestly, Liam would eat us out of house and home if we let him.

“The meatballs?” he asks hopefully, his eyes darting to the fridge where I have left them to marinate.

“Those are for dinner.” Turning, I start filling the sink. I need to wash up the meatball and the baking things. Liam huffs a sigh, falling silent. It doesn’t last.

“So. You love him.”

I glance over at him, contemplating teasing him back, but he grins. Shit. A sappy smile has crossed my face.

“Fuck, you do!” he gasps. “Seamus and Tiggy, sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G.”

What is he, a fucking five-year-old? Seriously, sometimes it’s hard to remember that Liam is actually a year older than me.

“Oh, shut it.” I roll my eyes at him, turning back to the sink, shutting off the water, and adding the detergent.

A bang in the backyard startles us both. The bottle of dishwashing liquid slips from my fingers into the hot water with a splash. Liam whips a gun out of the back of his jeans, gesturing for me not to move.

“Stay here,” he hisses at me.

I nod, wide-eyed, snatching up the meatball knife from beside the sink with a shaking hand. A knife won’t help me against whatever caused that bang, but it’s all I have.

Liam’s footsteps fade as he moves into the laundry room to get to the backyard. I strain, listening for any sound of a confrontation. Instead, what I hear has me freezing, my heart taking off like a helicopter in my chest. There is no sound from the back of the house, but the front door creaks open.

Please let it be one of the lads. Please let Seamus have decided I need more than one bodyguard, the overprotective ass he is, and have sent someone back.

My luck isn’t that good. I blink in surprise when Ivan strolls into my kitchen. Relaxing slightly, I eye him.

“To what do I owe this pleasure?”

He smirks at me, picking up a piece of mail from the kitchen island and examining it nonchalantly.

“It’s time to come back to the fold, Ylenia.”

I blink at him. What the hell does that even mean? He must see my confusion because he clarifies.

“You’re time slumming it with the Irish is over.”

My eyebrows fly up, my mouth popping open in shock. “Uh, I’m not sure if you forgot, but Seamus and I are married.”

Ivan’s face twists into an ugly smirk as he shrugs. “These things can be taken care of.”

I slowly shake my head. He can’t be serious. He’s talking crazy. Maybe Ivan has gone rogue. Perhaps he’s making a play for the leadership of the Romanian faction, going against my father, and thinks if I defect from the Irish, it would be the nail in the coffin for my father’s leadership. Well, I’m not going to fall for that. And I’m not going anywhere. I’m not leaving Seamus. Not now, not ever.

“That would be declaring all-out war. I’m staying right here.”

Sighing, Ivan rolls his eyes and stalks across the room at me. Acting on instinct, I slash at him with the knife I hold tightly. It catches his arm, and he grabs my wrist. We both struggle. I grab at the wound, trying to distract him with the pain.

He shoves me backward, my bloody hand landing on the cabinets, leaving a smeared handprint. I slash at him again. This time the knife catches him in the leg.

Blood drips down onto my lovely terracotta tiles. Pooling to join the blood from his other wound. So much blood.

Grunting, he punches me in the jaw. My head snaps back as I lose consciousness, the knife dropping from my nerveless fingers, clanging to the ground as darkness swallows me.

Groaning, I blink, forcing my eyes open and squinting at the bright light bringing pinpricks to my sight. I'm lying on a concrete floor with metal walls across from me.

My jaw aches as I sit up, propping myself up with my wrist. My eyes land on black leather brogues. Very familiar black leather brogues. I blink up at my father, standing above me, flanked by two of his soldiers. Two of his soldiers, who both have guns trained on me.

“Slashing Ivan, Ylenia? I expected more from you.” His tone is filled with sadness. “Maybe you're no fucking better than you're whore of a mother. You better think long and hard where your loyalties lie, *dragă*.”

Turning on his heel dismissively, he strides out of the warehouse. The two sentinels with the guns remain, staring at me with hate in their eyes. Like I'm the enemy. If they're keeping me from Seamus, then maybe I am.

# Chapter Twenty

## SEAMUS

There are no issues with the delivery. Everything went smoothly, and Paddy has managed to keep his fucking mouth shut for the last two hours.

I insist on driving, Niall sliding into the front seat, so Paddy is relegated to the back. I catch the look on his face as he climbs into the car. He knows I want to drive to get home to Tig as quickly as I can, but he knows what is good is for him, because he holds his tongue.

We are halfway back to the house when my phone rings. I punch to answer it through the SUV's Bluetooth.

"Liam, what's up?" I ask, and my world stops.

"Tiggy's gone."

That gets the attention of the entire fucking car.

"What do you mean she's gone?" I bark.

He starts talking, panic in his tone. "There was a blast in the backyard. I checked it out, and it looked like someone lobbed a firework in. When I went back inside to let Tiggy know it was a false alarm, the front door was wide open, and she was gone."

Jesus fucking fuck! Where the fuck could she be? I punch the steering wheel. Paddy chooses this exact moment to scoff.

I have never wanted to kill my best mate before, but right now, I will fucking put a bullet in his brain if he makes one comment.

Liam's next words wipe the smug 'I told you so' smirk right off Paddy's face.

"There's a lot of blood."

The engine roars, and the tires squeal as I slam my foot down, willing the SUV to go faster as we fly toward the house.

The smell of burning rubber fills the air as the SUV fishtails to a sudden stop at the curb. I shove out of the vehicle in the blink of an eye, storming into the house.

Liam is waiting for us at the front door, looking like he wants to fucking murder someone. Join the fucking club, lad. My knees buckle when I stalk into the kitchen. I wince as they hit the tiled floor, my legs giving out.

The knife Tig was using to dice vegetables for her meatballs lies in the middle of a pool of blood. A bloody handprint is smeared on one of the white cabinets, and a trail of blood leads out to the front door. I didn't even notice it in my rush to get inside.

"Tiggy's handprint," Niall says, crouching over the pool of blood and examining the mark on the cabinet. I'm shaking with rage. No. Not Tig. Please, not Tig. She's not dead. She can't be. A world without Tig in it wouldn't have a shining sun.

"Fucking find her!" I howl at no one in particular.

"What about the phone I gave you this morning?" Connor asks from near the door into the hallway, his face ashen. "Does

she have it yet? Can we track it?"

The phone. Thank Christ.

"I gave it to her this morning," I grit out, climbing to my feet, flexing my hands. I want to rip someone's head off. I will burn the fucking city down to get to Tig. Hell, I will burn the fucking world down if I have to.

Connor holds his hand out for my phone, asking if I turned on the GPS and 'find my phone' feature. I look over at Ronan, who sorted the phone for me, and he nods. Connor stops tapping around on the phone, standing stock still.

"What?" I snap at him. His eyes are uneasy as they fly up to meet mine.

"Tiggy just texted you," he replies. Relief courses through me as I snatch the phone off him.

**TIG: Come get me stud, if you're man enough.**

As I stare at the message, frowning, an address comes through. Tig has never called me 'stud' the entire time we've been together. Is it a message? Is she trying to send me a message to tell me where she is?

Paddy plucks the phone from my nerveless fingers, snorting as he reads the message.

"You're sure that's blood?" he asks Niall, who slicks a finger through it, rubbing it between his thumb and forefinger, sniffing it.

"Definitely blood, definitely fresh."

I reach out, snatching the phone back from Paddy, reading out the address to Connor, who pulls it up on his phone as I

type a message back.

**SEAMUS: Are you okay leannan?**

**TIG: It's spelled Ylenia. You should probably learn that if you want this marriage to work.**

“Tiggy’s not the one texting,” Connor says as I read the message aloud.

“How can you be so sure?” Paddy snorts, raising an eyebrow.

Connor shrugs. “She asked me a couple of months ago what *leannán* meant. I figured Fitzzy here was getting mouthy when he fucked her and told her it meant sweetheart.”

“I meant *beloved*,” I correct him. Connor smirks, shrugging again.

“At the time, I didn’t want her to get the wrong idea. So I said sweetheart,” he replies easily. “The point is, if she were the one texting, she wouldn’t think you were butchering her weird-ass name.” He squints at his phone. “I’ll make a call and see if we can get eyes on this place. It’s about twenty minutes out.”

“Saddle up, lads,” I snap, stalking to the weapons cabinet in my den, pulling out the guns I want, as the other lads follow suit.

Connor walks back into the room, snatching up two guns as he nods to me.

“Eyes on it. It’s a warehouse, so we are looking through the CCTV from across the road.”

“Let’s go.”



Ronan slides into the front of one SUV, Connor into the other. Niall and Liam join Ronan while Paddy and I climb into Connor's vehicle.

"Seamus," Paddy starts, falling silent as I shoot a lethal glare at him.

"I don't want to fucking hear it right now, Paddy," I snap back. The tires squeal as Connor pulls away from the curb, throwing his phone into my lap. Plucking it up, I stare at the CCTV footage. Occasionally an armed guard will walk into view. Eastern European, by the looks of things.

"Bulgarian?" Paddy asks, craning his neck to look at the phone screen.

"Maybe," I grunt back, assessing how many guards there might be.

We park down the road, grabbing our weapons and moving stealthily until we are flanking the warehouse gates. At my signal, Niall and Ronan make easy work of the guards out the front of the warehouse.

"Romanian," Niall says, nudging the head of one of the dead men with his toe. Romanian. Jesus fuck.

"It's a fucking trap," Paddy hisses. No fucking shit.

"They're texting me pretending to be my wife. Of course it's a fucking trap, genius," I hiss back. "We're still getting my wife back. If you're not up for it, you can take a fucking walk."

Paddy glares at me for a long beat, cocking his gun.

"Let's fucking do this."

That's what I want to hear. We move through the warehouse, taking out guards as quietly as possible. Jesus fuck, they have an entire fucking army amassed. This isn't just to hold Tig. This is to try to take us out.

As we slide into the large, airy main warehouse space, a scream catches my attention.

"Seamus, no! It's a trap!" Tig screams at me.

She's standing on one side of the room, facing five men with guns trained on her. She bolts, running straight for me, and it feels like all my blood has been replaced with ice as the sound of cocking guns fills the air. Jesus fucking Christ.

"Hold your fire!"

Tig leaps at me, wrapping her arms around me tightly, burying her face into my chest, sobbing, as her father steps out from behind the line of armed men, having given the order to stay their hands.

Paddy's gun is trained on Marius fucking Albescu's face, while the other four keep their weapons on the armed men, who aim at us now.

My own gun is pointing uselessly at the floor while I try to tug Tig off me so I can check her for injuries. God, there was so much fucking blood in that kitchen.

She's ignoring what I'm trying to do, clinging to me, talking through her sobs.

"It was them the w-whole time, Seamus. I'm s-so sorry. I d-didn't know. They h-h-hired the Bulgarians to ram the car. They want to take you out. The w-whole marriage was a way

for them to get to you so they could orchestrate this. They want you d-dead.”

“Stop, Ylenia!” Albescu’s cold voice cuts through her words, and she falls silent, unable to do anything other than obey her father. “Stop crying!” he snaps at her. “You bring shame on our family.”

Her sobs cut off with a choking noise, and she steps back, finally. I quickly run my hands and eyes over her, sagging with relief when I can’t see any damage to her clothing. There is some dried blood on her, but I don’t think it’s hers.

Relief courses through me as I tug her to my side, wrapping my arm around her and turning my eyes to her father.

“We are leaving, and we’re taking my wife. You’ll pay for this Albescu.”

He sneers at my words, pointing a finger at Tig.

“Ylenia, *dragă*,” he commands. She lifts her head to look at him, her cheeks still wet with tears. “You come over here right now, and you won’t be hurt.”

There’s silence, and Tig nods, driving a fucking dagger to my heart.

“That’s right,” Albescu coaxes, “just walk over.”

Before my world can shatter around me, Tig’s hand slides up my back as she puts her arm around me.

“I’m right where I should be, Father,” she calls back. “You asked me if I was like my mother, and the answer is no. I’m nothing like her. I’m loyal to my husband and no one else.”

“Last chance, Ylenia.” Albescu’s face contorts with anger. “You stay there, and I will order my men to shoot you along with the Irish scum.”

“Then I’ll die with them,” she says loudly, her voice barely wavering. An immense surge of love and pride courses through me. Of course, she’s not getting shot here today. That’s not an option.

“It looks like you’ve lost this one, Albescu,” I call back to him with a cocky smirk.

“Have I?” he drawls, snatching a gun from one of his men and pointing it at us. Time slows to a trickle as he fires, Tig spasming and collapsing beside me.

The room erupts as everyone opens fire, taking cover behind whatever they can find, mainly tin barrels and old industrial furniture. I crouch over Tig, shielding her with my body as I try to staunch the wound at her shoulder while she whimpers in pain and shock.

The sounds of gunfire slowly die out as combatants hit the ground, and the smell of gunpowder and blood tinges the air. I don’t fucking care about any of that. My entire world has contracted to the bleeding woman in my hands.

“It’s going to be okay, *mo mhuirnin dílis*. We’re going to get you out of here.”

Her hands move up to clutch at mine. “You have to get out of here, Seamus,” she chokes through her pain. “I need you to be safe.”

“I’m right where I should be, *a chuisle mo chroí*.” I lean down, brushing my lips over hers, my hand pressing hard

against the wound in her shoulder. “I’m not going anywhere.”

“Enough!” the word roars through our little bubble, and I glance up, frozen into a statue, my breath cold at my nostrils.

Albescu looks to be the last Romanian standing, and he’s managed to get a fucking gun to Paddy’s head. My heart is torn between my bleeding wife and my best mate, with the barrel of a pistol pressed against his temple.

I stand slowly, turning as Albescu drags Paddy over to the door. I try to shield Tig with my lower legs the best I can, wanting her to be out of Albescu’s line of sight.

My gun lies on the ground at my feet, where I abandoned it to take care of Tig. I don’t need a gun right now. I need to use my legendary silver tongue to talk the fucker down.

Raising my hands, I try to calm the situation, bargaining for Paddy’s life. At my command, the lads all drop their weapons too.

Paddy’s mouthing off, as usual, shooting down any offer I make Albescu for him to release Paddy and walk away from this. Obviously, Paddy is ready to die right here, as long as Albescu dies alongside him.

“Paddy! Shut the feck up and let me bargain. Ye’re making this worse!”

“There’s no need to bargain. We can end this right now. Shoot the fecker!”

“I will kill your man, Fitzpatrick, don’t think I won’t!” Albescu’s fingers tighten on Paddy’s throat. Fuck.

“Safe passage out of -.”

A gunshot rings out, my words cutting off, the air silent and still around the reverberating sound.

Albescu drops, blood spilling from his head and the large hole where his right eye used to be. I'm looking around wildly, trying to figure out where the fuck the shot came from when I see Paddy, who is staring in horrified fascination at my feet.

Looking down, I stare in shock at Tig sitting up, blood pouring from her right shoulder, my gun gripped in her left hand, raised, pointing at Paddy, where she's just shot her fucking father through the eye to save Paddy's fucking life.

"That was a fucking risky shot, Tiggy," Paddy breathes, staring down at her. My fucking wife smirks up at him, though it's more of a grimace through the pain of the fucking bullet wound in her shoulder.

"Less risky when you don't care if you miss," she drawls, smiling at Paddy, who stares at her for a beat and smiles back at her. The first genuine smile the lad has ever bestowed on her.

"Good point."

He nods, crossing to where Niall has moved to staunch the blood flow at her shoulder.

"Through and through," Niall grunts, whipping off his T-shirt to wrap around her shoulder. Once the bullethole is covered, Paddy helps me lift her so we can get her to a fucking doctor.

# Chapter Twenty-One

## TIGGY

They take me to Sean Fitzpatrick's house. Again. Apart from one dinner party, the only times I've been here is because my father organized for me to be injured. Not great for building fond memories of the place.

The doctor they summon isn't Sean Fitzpatrick's lover but a surgeon. I have never been shot before – and hope I never am again – but I think this might be overkill.

He pokes and prods me, examining the wound and the front and back of my shoulder, and affirms Niall's opinion that it was a through and through.

I grip Seamus's hand tightly as the surgeon stitches me up. He also dopes me up on painkillers, which makes me feel removed from reality.

As I'm spacing out, lying on the sofa, Seamus's fingers swirling circles over my hand, the rest of the lads come in. Seamus made them all leave when the surgeon cut my shirt off. Niall, Paddy, Seamus, and I are now all wearing shirts Sean Fitzpatrick has provided, as all our clothes were blood-spattered. Sean and Darragh follow them in, so I know I'm not about to be allowed to drift off to sleep. Boo.

“What happened, Tiggy?” Sean asks, taking a seat in a wing-backed chair across from us. Darragh is standing behind

him, Paddy sitting in another armchair while the rest of the lads stand around the room.

I tense, and Seamus sighs, lifting me into his lap and cradling me, my head resting against his shoulder as his fingers stroke through my hair and his lips skim my hairline.

“There was a bang in the backyard, and Liam went to look at it. He told me to stay where I was, and I had my kitchen knife. It was I-Ivan.” My voice wavers, and Seamus’s grip tightens on me. “He told me that my marriage to Seamus was over, and it was time I went back h-home.”

A low, angry growl rumbles out of Seamus, his face flashing with darkness. Sean throws him a warning look, and he grits his teeth, burying his face in my hair.

“What happened next, *leannán*?” Seamus murmurs.

I grimace. All the blood. That’s what happened next.

“I told him I wasn’t going anywhere. He didn’t like that and tried to grab me. I was h-holding the knife....”

My voice trails off, the silence in the room broken by Niall.

“Why was your handprint on the cabinet?”

The scene flashes in front of my mind, and bile rises in my throat. I take a deep, shaky breath and nod, Seamus’s lips pressing a kiss in my hair above me.

“I cut his arm and then grabbed it. I wanted to distract him. He grabbed at me again, and I stabbed his leg. I fell over and landed against the cabinet.”

“And they took you?” Sean prompts. I nod, sniffing as a tear leaks from my eyes.



“They knocked me out, and I woke up in the warehouse with my father.”

Sean looks furious, listening carefully as I tell him about my father’s plan to lure Seamus and his crew there and take them out. When I finish, he eyes me thoughtfully.

“Is there anything else ye can remember?”

I hesitate. Yes. But I’d rather not have an audience.

“I’d like to talk to you, Seamus and Paddy alone, please,” I whisper. There is some protesting. Connor and Darragh, in particular, are refusing to leave.

Seamus lifts his head out of my hair. “Everyone get the feck out, right now!” he roars. Niall, Ronan, and Liam leave, shooting me reluctant glares. Connor lingers at the door, only sliding out with a mutinous look when Seamus jabs his finger at the door, his eyes promising violence.

“Darragh. Out.” Sean’s voice is as lethal as Seamus’s eyes. Darragh stiffly marches out of the room with a mutinous glare to match Connor’s, firmly closing the door behind him.

As the door clicks shut, Sean and Paddy turn their eyes on me, and Seamus shifts me, so he can see my face while I’m still sitting on his lap.

I grip Seamus’s hand tightly and focus on my breathing. One, my golden bracelet. Two, Seamus’s face, his dark brown eyes burning into mine. Three, our wedding rings. Four, I falter. Four. Seamus lifts our clasped hands, pressing my hand to his heart. Four, Seamus’s heartbeat. Five, I love him.

“Five?” he whispers, ignoring the others.

“Five,” I agree.

He smiles, nodding encouragingly at me. I turn my eyes from his to Paddy’s and grimace apologetically.

“Seamus told me what happened to his mother and your parents....”

My voice trails off, and I shrink back, waiting for Paddy to get angry that I know his private pain. He doesn’t, merely nodding and gesturing for me to continue.

“He told me your suspicions.” I pause again as Paddy’s face darkens, but he still doesn’t speak. “I asked my father about it. I wanted you all to have closure, one way or another.”

I can’t look at Paddy’s pain-filled eyes anymore, turning back to Seamus, who presses my hand against his lips, his breath warming my fingers.

“Ivan was the shooter. My father’s right hand.”

Seamus’s eyes flutter closed, and he nods. Across the room, Paddy makes a strangled noise.

“Ivan wasn’t at the warehouse,” he spits, cracking his knuckles.

Sean shakes himself out of his stupor of hearing who killed his wife, turning to Paddy and holding up a staying hand.

“Ye’ll have yer blood, Paddy. Ye and Niall can track Ivan down and take him out.”

I remember my father’s words at the warehouse and choke down more bile.

“There’s no need,” I whisper, hoping I’m going to be sick. All eyes turn back to me again.

“What’s the supposed to mean?” Paddy asks at last. I swallow the bile back, clearing my throat.

“There was so much blood at the house after I stabbed him,” I whisper, closing my eyes. I see the blood again, and they fly back open as my stomach roils. “Apparently, I hit the femoral artery. He bled out in the car on the way to the warehouse.”

I fall silent. I killed someone. Ivan is dead because I killed him. A choking sob rips out of my throat, and Seamus carefully cups my chin, turning my face gently so as not to jostle my shoulder as he presses kisses into my hair and murmurs comforting words.

My eyes meet Paddy’s across the room. He nods stiffly, shoving out of his chair and stalking out of the room.



## SEAMUS

Tig is silent the whole drive home. My arm stays anchored around her. I need to get her home and safe. Ronan pulls the SUV up to the curb, and I lift Tig out, careful not to jostle her as we stride up the path and into the house.

She presses her face against my shoulder, not looking at the kitchen to our right. I don’t blame her. My eyes meet Liam’s, and I nod stiffly to the room. He wrinkles his nose but makes

no argument as he walks in, opening the cabinet under the sink to pull out cleaning supplies. I don't want a speck of blood left when we wake up tomorrow. Tig doesn't need to see that.

Ronan and Niall peel off, walking into the parlor as I carry Tig upstairs. They'll stay the night. Doyle's crew dumped Albescu's body on the doorstep of the pool hall the Romanians run in South End. That's enough of a message for them to want to get revenge.

We'll have to sort that mess out, but that's tomorrow's problem. Right now, I want Tig tucked up tight in bed, safe in my arms.

"D'ye want a bath, *mo bhean chéile*?" I murmur, knocking the bedroom door closed with my elbow.

Tig lifts her head, nodding slowly. "Will you come in with me?"

A bath with my wife? The answer to that will never be no. "Sure, and someone needs to keep yer dressing dry."

Tig giggles softly, my heart clenching at the sound. That's what I want to hear – that Tig will be okay. She brushes her teeth while I fill the bath, ensuring it's not too full. My eyes find her as she perches on the edge of the toilet, my gaze following her left hand.

"Ye've been lucky ye keep hurting yer right side, not yer left."

Tig rolls her eyes at me. "I wouldn't call breaking fingers or getting shot *lucky*."

I glower at her as she rinses her mouth and attempts to strip her clothes.

“Let me, *mo bhean chéile*.” Crossing to her, I remove her clothes with infinite care, stripping myself and helping her into the tub. Settling in the warm, fragrant water, I draw Tig down until she’s laying on my chest, between my legs.

“Ye’re not to be getting injured again.”

I grab the washcloth, dipping it into the water and trailing it over her pale skin.

“I’ll do my best.” Her words are dry, and I chuckle against her ear.

“I have plans for this body for the rest of our lives. I’ll need it in pristine condition.”

Tig snuggles her head back, resting it in the crook of my neck as I watch my hand moving the washcloth over her glorious breasts. Tig wriggles her arse, pressing it against my growing erection.

“Maybe wash somewhere else?” she suggests with a giggle.

“No. I’m fine washing ye here.”

Tig sighs, turning her head so she can glance up to see my face. “I’m sorry about my father and his plans.”

“That wasn’t yer fault, Tig. Yer pa was a fecking psycho. Ye are perfect.”

“You didn’t pick me.”

“I would have picked wrong. My Pa knew what he was doing.”

“You don’t mind that you’re stuck with an arranged bride for the rest of your life.”

I look down at her in surprise. I didn't know she worries about that shite? I thought I'd made it obvious how much I love her? How more than okay I am with my future.

"Maybe I would have been if my bride hadn't been ye, Tig. I couldn't imagine wanting to spend the rest of my life with anyone else."

"Really?"

"Truly." Lowering my head, I brush my lips over hers. With a groan, I lift my head, quickly finishing the job of washing her and helping her stand. I want nothing more than to fuck her in the bathtub, but she was shot today – I'm not that much of an arse.

Lifting Tig out of the tub, I towel her dry and help her into her nightgown, taking her into the bedroom.

"Tucking me in?" Tig laughs as I carefully tuck the coverlet around her shoulders.

"Aye. Savor it. It won't happen a lot."

Tig laughs as I slide into bed, curling myself around her. My lips brush over her jawline.

"I couldn't live without ye, Tig. Don't get yerself into a situation like that again."

"I'm not planning on it."

A growl rumbles out of me, my arms tightening around her waist as though I can anchor her to me and keep her safe forever.

"I won't be letting ye get into a situation like that."

Her fingers trace over my biceps. That reminds me. Rolling over, I tug open the nightstand drawer, lifting out the jewelry case and turning on the lamp. Tig blinks, her eyes focusing on the velvet box.

“What’s that?”

“I got ye something.”

“When?”

“Never ye mind.”

Tig sits up, her eyes still glued to the box. Flipping it open, I lift out the necklace, holding it out to her. Tig’s fingers brush over the fine silver chain and the tungsten circle.

“A circle?” Confusion colors her tone. “It’s pretty.”

“Flip it over.”

She does, her fingers tracing the engraving. “What does it say?”

*“Is tú mo shaol ar fad.”*

Tig rolls her eyes. “And what is that in English?”

“Ye are my whole life.”

Pink tinges her cheeks, and she leans forward, pressing a kiss to my lips.

“I love it.”

Fastening the chain around her neck, I settle the engraving against her skin. Tig reaches up to touch it, frowning.

“The engraving isn’t showing.”

“That’s just fer ye.”

Her cheeks darken as she settles down in my arms, and I flip off the light.

“I love you, Seamus,” she murmurs into the dark. My arms close around her, my nose nuzzling into her hair.

“I love ye too, Tig.”

Her breathing evens as she falls asleep, my eyes drinking in her face. I went into this marriage angry and determined to resent her. I almost missed the best thing that ever happened to me. My arms tighten around her. I won't be letting her go again.



# Epilogue

## TIGGY

Seamus and Paddy must have shared what I did to Ivan with the rest of the lads because they all tiptoe around me, except for Liam, who keeps calling me the *Boston Slasher* until Seamus punches him in the face and breaks his nose. Even after that, he still calls me it, but only under his breath so Seamus can't hear.

Paddy is nice to me now. I'm sure it's because I shot my father to save his life. It's not for killing the man who murdered his parents. I think maybe he resents me for that. I think he wanted to be the one to do it, to avenge them, and a part of him feels like I stole it from him.

Niall and Connor stay with us for a few weeks after the shoot-out at the warehouse while the Irish systematically remove the Romanian mafia from Boston. This is exactly what Father said could happen. No wonder he wanted this marriage to happen. Additionally, Seamus refuses to leave my side, so they're here to protect him.

Connor assures me they are here to protect me because no one cares if anything happens to Fitzy's ugly mug. Indeed, apart from when I use the toilet, one of them is always in the room with me. Even when I need to go, Seamus finds some excuse to loiter outside the door. It's completely embarrassing. I have taken to running the shower just to use the toilet without dying of humiliation.

Finally, Sean orders Seamus to leave the house without me, and I seize my opportunity. Liam pales at my request, but he delivers, standing outside the bathroom upstairs. He's supposed to be keeping watch, but he's mainly just calling through the door.

"What does it say?" he calls, hammering on the door. "It is ready yet?" More hammering. "Fuck, Tiggy, what does it say?" A pause. "Jesus fuck, Tiggy, how long does this take?"

Ignoring the cacophony through the door, I stare at the six tests laid out on the bathroom floor at my feet. Pregnant. Pregnant. Pregnant. Pregnant. Pregnant.

The door cracks open. Liam, getting sick of my silence, picked the lock. His eyes are glued to the floor, just in case I still have my panties down. They land on the tests, and he reads them, one after the other, his eyes bugging out of his head as they fly up to meet mine.

"Happy tears?" he asks hopefully.

Tears? I swipe at my cheeks. Fuck. I hadn't even realized I was crying.

"I-I don't know," I stutter. "I'm a bit fucking shocked. I'm on birth control. It's supposed to be 98% effective."

"I, uh, I guess Seamus has super sperm," Liam supplies awkwardly, running his hand through this thick, dark hair.

I blink at him in shock, a harsh bark of laughter erupting from my throat.

"We haven't...." I gesture, struggling to find the words. "Not since before...."

Liam is staring at me like I have two heads. After a moment, he cops to my meaning and blinks, looking angry.

“You were pregnant at the warehouse?” he bites out. “Fuck. You shouldn’t have been going around stabbing and shooting people and killing them. Pregnant women aren’t supposed to have that kind of stress!” he scolds me.



## SEAMUS

The Romanians are done in Boston. We cleaned house, calling on our alliances with the Italians and the Russians. Pa mainly took care of it while I was taking care of Tig, but he wanted me here at the end. Fucking ordered me from my wife’s side. Arrogant fucker.

It’s done now, and I just want to have Tig back in my arms. She still hasn’t got her stitches out. I shouldn’t have left her side.

We all go back to my house. Well, I go home, and the lads follow me there. As we step into the entrance hallway, Tig freezes, looking like a deer caught in the headlights, having been seen creeping out of the parlor for some fucking reason.

“Don’t tell Liam I moved. You didn’t see anything!” she hisses at us, disappearing back into the parlor, snapping the door shut behind her.

Liam comes out of the kitchen, carefully carrying a mug of tea.

“I heard that door, Tiggy. You better have your ass on that sofa with your feet up and a blanket over your knees when I get in there!” he yells in the direction of the parlor, sounding like a pissed-off granny.

Why the fuck is he treating my wife like an invalid. I know she was shot, but coddling her is *my* fucking job. My eyebrows raise, my eyes boring into the side of his face until he turns to me.

I open my mouth to ask him what the fuck he’s playing at when he beats me to it.

“You tell that woman no more running around getting kidnapped, stabbing people, and shooting them. In fact, she should stay out of warehouses altogether!” he snaps.

My eyebrows are attempting to disappear under my hairline now. She’s never going near another warehouse, but that is neither here nor there. Liam is going off like he’s a mooning, pissy little shite. He has no reason to feel so protective of Tig. I don’t like the implication, my eyes narrowing on him as the rest of the lads stare at him like he’s grown an extra head.

Ignoring us, he stalks over to the door of the parlor, wrenching it open.

“Fucking pregnant woman shooting a man in the face, it’s not fucking right.”

The door closes behind him, and there is complete silence in the hallway as we all process his words.

My brain finally makes the connection. Jesus *fuck*. My feet are moving, and my heart is in my mouth as I barge into the parlor where Liam is setting the tea on the end table next to Tig.

She's seated on the sofa, her feet propped up on a footstool and a throw rug wrapped around her legs. On the sofa next to her are six pregnancy tests. Her eyes meet mine, dropping to glance at the tests. Nervously, she turns back to me.

"Surprise," she mutters weakly.

I gape at her like a fucking fish. An expression no doubt mirrored on the four faces behind me.

"You're pregnant?" My voice sounds loud in the silent room and oddly strangled.

"Liam says you have super sperm that smacked down my birth control," Tig says quietly, looking uncomfortable under all the scrutiny. I cross the room, dropping to my knees near her feet, turning to glare at the lads.

"Everyone, get the feck out!"

They all beat a hasty retreat, Paddy snapping the door shut behind them.

I reach out hesitantly, placing my hand on her thigh. She's so quiet and controlled. Fuck, she was on birth control. Does she even want to have a fucking baby?

"Tig?" I speak softly, not wanting to spook her.

She blinks, turning her eyes to me, and I feel like she's kicked me in the fucking gut, her eyes swimming with tears.

“I’m sorry,” she whispers. “I’m on birth control. This wasn’t supposed to happen.”

It doesn’t feel like there’s enough air in the room.

“It’s going to be okay, Tig.”

I force a smile, keeping my hand on her thigh and reaching over with the other one to grip her hand where it lies on the sofa. My eyes dip to her stomach, and despite her shock and sadness, I feel a surge of happiness. I’m going to be a father. My child is going to grow in Tig’s belly. Fuck, I like the sound of that.

My eyes move back up to hers, where she is watching me carefully. I swallow roughly, realizing my face must give away how I feel.

“You want this baby?” she whispers, sounding shocked. I search for the right words.

“It wasn’t planned, but you’re going to be a great mammy, Tig.”

She blinks slowly at me, repeating herself. “You’re....” She pauses, searching for the right word, “*happy* about this?”

I can’t help it. A smile bigger than the fucking sun breaks over my face.

“Fuck yeah, I’m happy about this, Tig.”

She blinks rapidly. “Oh, thank God!” she breathes, burying her face in her hands and sobbing.

In an instant, I’m on the sofa beside her, tugging her into my arms as I pepper her face with kisses.

“You’re happy with this?”

I hold my breath for her response.

“Yes,” she manages through her sobs. “Especially because you are. I thought....” She swallows, attempting to get her tears under control. “I thought you would be upset.”

“Fuck that,” I snort, kissing her deeply, sliding a hand down to cover her stomach.

Liam’s words come back to me, and I freeze, my fingers splayed over her shirt.

“No more shooting people in the face,” I tell her sternly. She stares at me for a moment, letting out a strangled laugh. “I’m serious, Tig,” I snap. “It’s not good for the baby.”

“I’ll do my best to avoid it,” she tells me drily, giggling again.

I lift her into my lap and cuddle her close, burying my face in her hair.

“I can’t believe that you were pregnant in that warehouse,” I breathe, terror washing over me. “I can’t believe someone shot my pregnant wife. Fuck. He’s lucky he’s dead because otherwise, I’d track him down and cut him into pieces while he was still alive.”

“Oh, because *that* would be good for the baby,” Tig snorts into my neck.

“I’m not the pregnant one.” I splay my hand across her stomach again, staring at it eagerly. When I look up, Tig’s watching my face, happiness shining through hers.

“I love you so much, Seamus,” she murmurs, kissing me again.

*“Is tú mo shaol ar fad,”* I tell her simply. *You are my whole world.*

**THE END.**



# Irish Soda Bread Recipe:

## Ingredients:

4 cups all-purpose flour

4 tablespoons white sugar

1 teaspoon baking soda

1 tablespoon baking powder

½ teaspoon salt

½ cup margarine softened

1 cup buttermilk

1 egg

¼ cup butter, melted

¼ cup buttermilk

## Directions:

1. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F (190 degrees C). Lightly grease a large baking sheet.
2. Mix flour, sugar, baking soda, baking powder, salt, and margarine in a large bowl. Stir in 1 cup of buttermilk and egg. Turn dough out onto a lightly floured surface and knead slightly. Form dough into a round and place it on a prepared baking sheet. In a small bowl, combine melted butter with 1/4 cup buttermilk; brush the loaf with this mixture. Use a sharp knife to cut an 'X' into the top of the loaf.

3. Bake in preheated oven until a toothpick inserted into the center of the loaf comes out clean, 45 to 50 minutes. Check for doneness after 30 minutes. You may continue to brush the loaf with the butter mixture while it bakes.

## 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!)

Good night, and sleep well = *Oíche mhaith agus codladh sámh*  
(Ea-wah ah-gah collah solve)

## 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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Find out more about K.S. Ellis' latest releases at [ksellis.com](http://ksellis.com)

Read on to see what happens in Paddy's story, *Bad Blood*, available here.

# Prologue

## Paddy

There's a good-sized crowd tonight, so the takings should be good. My opponent is a big, brutish Russian. Ivor Stravinsky. He's got a good record. Mine's better.

I turn my eyes to where my crew is sitting, lounging off to the side of the ring. Seamus Fitzpatrick, our fearless fucking leader and my best mate for the last twenty years is scanning the crowd. At his side is Connor Fitzpatrick, his cousin, who's trying his luck with one of the gorgeous lasses dotted around the crowded warehouse.

Fitzzy's eyes find mine, and he nods, turning to grin at something his cousin says. Almost the whole crew is here tonight. Liam, the young lad, he's still on babysitting duties tonight. Ronan's a lucky fucker that he's not there too.

Ever since Fitzzy found out his missus was pregnant when she was involved in a shootout, he's been a little over the top in the protective side of things. Needy fuck.

As it is, Ronan is distracted, stalking over to the back corner of the room. No fucking guesses where's he's going. One of the strippers from the club, the little blonde one who is friends with Fitzzy's wife, shows up at these fights every so often. Ronan fucking hates it.

The crowd parts for him like water breaking over a rock, and his little stripper looks pissed as fuck that he has spotted her. To her credit, she's not backing down. It seems like he's trying to convince her to leave, but she's ignoring him, her eyes scanning the crowd. She is probably looking for the fighter she is here to see.

Perry, the announcer, does his little hyped-up spiel about Ivor. The fighter dances his way to the ring, the strains of whatever clichéd anthem he's selected blasting obnoxiously loud as the Russian corner of the room erupts.

He does some shadow boxing once he's in the ring, and the crowd laps it up. The eejit looks like he's in some grand Hollywood production, not an illegal underground fight ring.

When I'm announced, I walk over and climb into the ring. No music, no dancing or playing it up to the crowd. The Irish cheer, the Russians jeer, and Ivor juts his chin at me, a smug grin on his ugly mug.

He's probably got about forty pounds on me. He's solid like a black bear. But we're roughly the same height, six foot three, so it's a pretty evenly matched fight. Fitzzy's got a lot of money riding on this, but I'm just here to fuck cunts up. I don't give a shit about the rest of it.

Perry announces Herman Ford, the referee, who climbs into the ring, says his piece about no eye-gouging, biting, or nut shots, and the bell rings out.

Ivor leads with three sharp jabs and a huge uppercut, going for the immediate knockout. How pathetically predictable. The man starts every single one of his fights the same way. I don't think I've ever seen anyone not see it coming from a mile off.



Dancing out of his way, I clock him with a sharp cross to the jaw, following with a jab to the ribs. He stumbles back, growling, and glaring at me. I let a slow, feral grin steal across my face, jerking my chin in an invitation. It's all he needs. He roars, charging me, swinging wildly.

The fight continues in the same vein. Ivor relies on brute strength, charging, swinging wildly as I dance out of his way, jabbing and parrying, landing some decent shots. My knuckles have split, and they'd be aching if I concentrated on them. I'm not concentrating on them, though. I'm too focused on fucking Ivor up. Just because I can.

Ivor is flagging while I've led him on a merry dance around the now bloodstained ring. We've been going at it for almost fifteen minutes straight, and he's rapidly running out of steam.

His significant blood loss doesn't help his flagging energy. Considering the fight is only over through submission or knockout, I'm going for the knockout.

Darting forward, I slam my fist into his jaw. His head snaps back as he crashes into the mat. He doesn't get back up, and Ford calls the fight.

Irish cheers fill the air to one side, angry rumbling countering it from the Russians on the other. Now the adrenaline has finished spiking; I'm starting to feel the prolonged beating my body has just taken.

The Russians are rowdy now, and I don't bother to acknowledge the crowd, sliding through the ropes to exit the ring, walking past Fitzzy's grinning mug out to the back rooms.

It's quieter in here. There are some private rooms, but I don't bother requesting one of them. I never do. The large dressing-room-style space is fine for me.

The lads have followed me in, and Niall hands me a water bottle to rinse my bloodied knuckles and my mouth. Before Fitzzy can open his mouth, Delic, the promoter, throws me a stack of cash. Catching it, I nod to him.

"Good fight," the swarthy Bosnian grunts, nodding to Fitzzy as he strolls away.

"We cleaned up tonight, Paddy." Fitzzy grins at me. "Good job."

Ronan shoulders his way into the room, alone. I guess he struck out with his little blonde stripper.

"Ready to go?" he grunts at Fitzzy. Connor smirks and opens his mouth. He doesn't get a chance to tease before Ronan flips him off. "Feck off, Lucky."

Surprisingly, his mouth closes again. I don't think I've ever seen Connor willing to forgo an opportunity to stir the shit. The lad is born to piss everyone the fuck off with his banter.

"See you tomorrow, Paddy." Fitzzy nods to me, clapping Connor on the shoulder and steering him out of the room. Ronan starts to leave, shaking his head at Niall as he raises his eyebrows in some question.

Niall shrugs, nodding to me as he slides out of the room after Ronan and the rest of them. I've no idea what Ronan sees in the little blonde stripper either, but after the way Niall sniffs around after the little brunette bartender at the club, I don't think he has a leg to stand on.

Left alone, I shove my takings into my bag at my feet, fixing my eyes on the pair of sky-high, blood-red stilettos that stop before me, turning in my direction.

Running my eyes up smooth, tanned legs, I smirk at the overly made-up, gorgeous blonde woman. She wouldn't look out of place on a catwalk. But she's not on a catwalk right now.

“Let's take care of you, Paddy.” She flashes a sultry smile at me. “I'm Maggie.”

Why do they always insist on an introduction? It's not like I'm going to remember it anyway or like I'm going to see them again. Delic makes sure I get a different girl every week.

“I don't give a fuck what your name is,” I growl, my head tipping back as she kneels between my legs.

# Chapter One

## LAUREN

The scrap of paper lies in the middle of the scrubbed diner table, bright against the dark wood. I know it's just a piece of paper with torn edges, but it's totally looking at me with contempt. Telling me to stop being such a baby and pull up my big girl panties.

“More coffee?” The tired-looking waitress appears beside me, clutching the metal pot. I nod, keeping my eyes glued to the name scribbled on the paper, my heart clenching. It's Josh's writing. This piece of paper is the last thing I have with his writing. How pathetically sad is that?

The name leaps out at me, dark on the smudged, otherwise white paper. Paddy Flynn. I'm supposed to go and find him. That's what Josh told me to do, and I always do what Josh tells me to do. So why am I on my fourth coffee in a twenty-four-hour diner in the middle of the night?

Two reasons. The first is that I'm waiting for Perry to come through with an address. The second... I still don't know if I'm going to go where Perry tells me.

Once my mug is topped up, the waitress shuffles away, and I flick my eyes after her guiltily. I don't have enough for a good tip. She probably doesn't make the best tips at this hour. I think she knows I'm not going to tip big. She refills my coffee and glares at me every hour. Otherwise, she ignores me.

My phone buzzes from inside the duffel bag on the booth seat next to me, and I fish it out. Perry. I pull up our conversation, my eyes skating over the earlier texts.

**LAUREN: Is Paddy Flynn going to be at the riverfront fight tonight?**

**PERRY: Yes. He fights every Tuesday and Thursday night. Why?**

**LAUREN: Where's the fight?**

**PERRY: Why? Why are you asking after Flynn?**

**LAUREN: I just am. For Josh.**

**PERRY: Josh would be telling you to stay the fuck away from Flynn. Do you know who he is?**

**LAUREN: He's with the Irish.**

**PERRY: Yeah, he is. So you should fucking stay away, Low.**

**LAUREN: If you don't send through the address, I'll go to Oracle and sit there until Paddy Flynn comes along.**

**LAUREN: Are you going to give me the address or not?**

The latest text from Perry is an address. The illegal underground fight ring is in a warehouse on the waterfront. Not the fancy riverfront either.

Leaving the phone on the table, Perry's latest text with the address staring at me, also with contempt, as I nurse my coffee, drawing it out.

My eyes flicker over the earlier messages. Perry's right. It's not particularly smart to get involved with the Irish. But I

don't know if I have a choice. Josh made it seem like I didn't have a choice, and Josh would never tell me to do something dangerous. Ever.

There's nothing for it. I have to find Paddy Flynn. For Josh. My decision made, I blow out a breath, drain my bitter tasting coffee and drop my last ten dollars on the table, collecting my bag and hustling out of there.

It's a half-hour walk, the night air holding a tinge of cold. It's only the start of fall, but the breeze is blustery this late at night on the waterfront. Drawing my coat around me, I hug my duffel bag to my chest, hurrying toward the warehouse address from Perry. This is not the safest area, and there are no streetlights.

Eventually, I make it to the warehouse with my teeth aching from clenching them in fear. There is a floodlight out the front, some not-so-great looking people milling around, and a large, scary bouncer lounging against the side of the warehouse, next to the door.

He straightens when I walk up to him, throwing back my shoulders and lifting my chin. I need to look like I belong here.

“You lost, girlie?” he rumbles.

“N-no.”

His eyebrows shoot up at my shaking tone.

“No,” I say again, more assertive this time. “I'm here for the fight.”

His eyes trail over me again, lingering on my jeans, duffel bag, and coat, buttoned to my chin.

“This isn’t the kind of place someone like you should be caught dead at, girlie.”

Yeah. That’s what Josh always said. Unfortunately, this guy is standing between me and where I need to be.

“I’m here to see Perry.”

His eyes flicker to my face, staying there as he blinks with surprise.

“That so? Does Perry know you’re here?”

Damn. That was supposed to work. He doesn’t seem very impressed. I bite back a snort. He probably thinks I’m Perry’s girlfriend or something, here to catch him out with another woman.

I try another tack, flashing him a smile and lifting my hands to unbutton the top of my coat. The bouncer clears his throat, shaking his head.

“Not happening, kid. Beat it.”

Crap. Shooting him a venomous look – which he simply smirks at, asshole – I huff and stomp off to the side, pulling out my phone.

**LAUREN: Outside. The bouncer won’t let me in.**

Perry answers almost immediately.

**PERRY: At least someone has sense. I’m half inclined to agree with the man.**

**LAUREN: You’re going to leave me standing out here without so much as a bus fare?**

**PERRY: Fucking hell Low. Give me a sec.**

A “sec” turns out to be almost ten minutes. The bouncer has his arms crossed, glaring at me. I think he assumes I’ll take a run at him, but I’ve caught at least two head shakes over my shoulder, so I think he might be warning people off from approaching me. Despite my annoyance with him, I feel a rush of gratitude that he’s looking out for me.

Finally, the door behind him opens, and Perry’s head pokes out. The windy breeze ruffles his reddish-brown hair, and his eyes lock on me, resignation there.

“Come on then, Low. Get your fucking ass in here.”

The bouncer doesn’t look happy, but he steps aside, letting me pass. He and Perry lock eyes as I step through the doorway.

“She’s your responsibility in there, Perry,” the man grunts. “I said no.”

Perry nods stiffly, his jaw tight. “I know that, Petey. I got my reasons.”

Eyes rake over me again. “They better be fucking good reasons.”

The warehouse is packed and loud. Perry’s fingers close around my upper arm, his eyes warning everyone away, just like the bouncer was outside. When he leans down to speak with me, his breath washes over my cheek.

“I’m doing this under protest, Low.”

I shrug, looking around with interest. I get that Perry wanted to keep me away from this crowd – just like Josh, once upon a time – but circumstances have changed.



“I need to speak with Paddy Flynn.”

When I look up at him, Perry’s lips are tight. “Why Flynn? You never said.”

Digging Josh’s piece of paper out of my pocket, I give it to him. Perry’s lips press together, and he shoves the paper into my hand.

“All right. Paddy Flynn.”

I relax, letting him tow me through the crowd. He’s going to take me to Paddy Flynn. Thank god.

Craning my head, trying to see what this Paddy Flynn will look like, I’m barely paying attention to where Perry is leading me.

My feet stumble to an inelegant halt when Perry stops moving. We are in front of the makeshift ring. In the front row. There are seats here, not like at the back where everyone is standing, crowding around.

Perry seizes both my upper arms, forcibly seating me in an empty chair between a wicked good-looking brunette guy and an equally hot ash-blonde guy.

They both turn to look at us, their eyes darting between Perry and me. Perry ignores the blonde guy, looking at the dark-haired one.

“Fitzy,” Perry nods stiffly to him. “No one touches her.”

As soon as Fitzy nods, Perry turns, disappearing. I suppose he is at work. He must have things to do. This Fitzy looks me over frankly, his eyes showing zero interest. I’m not surprised.

There aren't many women here, but those dotted around the space are certified stunners.

His uninterested perusal of me finished, Fitzzy turns his attention back to the fight in the ring. Flushing, I quickly lock my eyes on the fight, too, wincing immediately. It's brutal. The ring is blood-splattered, and I don't think all of it was from this battle currently waging.

Wincing again as bone crunches against bone, I fight the urge to look away. Josh told the rules once. He didn't want to, but I pestered him until he caved. They're wicked horrifying. Bare-knuckle. No biting, no eye-gouging, no nut shots – everything else goes.

There aren't any rounds either. It's survival of the fittest. Continuous fighting until it's over by knockout or submission. Josh always came home bruised and bloody, even when he won. When he lost, sometimes he didn't come home until the next day, when he had regained consciousness.

The guy who loses this fight doesn't submit. He really should have, but he obviously has his pride. Well, he did. I'm not sure how much of it is left when he's dragged unconscious from the ring with his face a pummeled mess... but what do I know? The crowd seems to appreciate it, so I suppose that's all that matters.

As we watch the brutal fights, the reason Perry seated me with these guys becomes clear. Though initially annoyed he hadn't introduced me to Paddy Flynn like I asked, at least he's seated me with the Irish.

The sandy blonde and strawberry blonde men sitting in the row behind us have thick Irish accents. Fitzzy has a burr when

he's really worked up and yelling, and the ash blonde on my other side seems to be able to turn his burr on and off, depending on how good-looking the woman he's flirting with is.

"Who the fuck are you?" he asks me, his accent straight Boston.

I shrug, my tongue suddenly thick in my mouth. Ash-blond squints at me, waiting with slowly raising eyebrows for me to speak. Perry clearly sat me here because these guys know Paddy Flynn, and Josh said Paddy Flynn was an enforcer for the Boston Irish Mafia. So that means these guys must be mafia. That knowledge doesn't exactly inspire feelings of conversation. My tongue is still swollen in my mouth. Shit. Ash-blond will melt my face with the glare slowly emerging if I don't speak soon.

"Lucky, you place your bets yet?"

I'm saved by the swarthy, middle-aged guy who stops to talk to Ash-blond. He shifts in his seat, twisting to speak to the guy standing beside him. I catch a glimpse of the butt of his gun sticking out of the waistband of his jeans at the back.

It's not exactly a relaxing nothing, but I think I might be in the right place. A bunch of armed Irishmen sitting ringside at an illegal fight? I think I've definitely found the Irish Mafia.

Ash-blond, or *Lucky* as I now know him to be called, hands the guy an eye-watering stack of cash.

"Do I even need to ask?" the guy chuckles.

"Not if ye value yer life." They laugh, but I feel Lucky might only have been half-joking. He has his Irish burr back,

but his eyes aren't laughing when his mouth does.

The guy pockets the cash. "All on Flynn, then."

Nodding, the guy leaves, and Lucky turns back to me, his narrowed eyes fixing on my face again. I swallow, gamely meeting his eyes, hoping my shaking knees aren't obvious to anyone but me.

"Seriously, who are you?" Lucky asks me again, nudging me with his arm. Fitzzy tears his eyes from the ring, looking over my head at his compatriot.

"Strictly hands off this one, Lucky," he drawls, turning his attention back to the ring, where a truly massive *monster* of a man climbs in.

"Jaysus feck, that's a big lad," Strawberry blonde behind me mutters.

"Paddy can take him," Fitzzy mutters back.

Paddy. I think I'm about to lay eyes on the elusive Paddy Flynn for the first time. I straighten, my eyes locked on the ring where Paddy Flynn is about to appear. This is it.

"Paddy better be able to take him," Lucky mutters. "I've got a fucking mint riding on this fight."

Perry's booming voice rings out over the speaker system, echoing in the cavernous space. "Ladies and gentlemen, Paddy Flynn."

That's it. No flourish, no nickname, no music. Not what I was expecting after the other fights tonight.

"Let's go, Paddy, lad!" Fitzzy cheers. Either Sandy or Strawberry blonde behind us lets out a piercing whistle, the

other yelling something in Irish, the strange syllables ringing in my ears.

“Yes, Paddy!” Lucky cheers, clapping loudly. “Do us proud, lad!”

The Irish men around me aren't the only ones catcalling, and cheers ring out around the room. Paddy Flynn doesn't acknowledge any of them. He walks out of a door over the side of the room, through the crowd as they part for him like Moses and the Red Sea.

The ring is on the ground, right in front of us, and Paddy slides through the ropes, standing there in one corner. He doesn't acknowledge the cheers. He doesn't acknowledge the catcalls. He doesn't even acknowledge the bear of a man standing in the other corner, pointing at his face and yelling insults. Something about hitting him so hard his mother feels it in her ovaries. Charming.

My cheeks heat up, and my mouth is dry as my eyes drink in the sight before me. Paddy is dressed in a pair of low-slung, loose-fitting trousers and nothing else. That's a sight I won't forget any time soon.

Paddy Flynn is just plain gorgeous. He has thick, tousled dark brown hair, dark brows, and dark stubble. He wouldn't look out of place in a five-star hotel if he were in a suit. But he's not in a suit.

Thank goodness, because it would be a crime of the most serious nature to cover up all this deliciousness. Broad shoulders taper down to a slim waist, a defined V cutting down into his trousers, which are low-slung enough for a hint of dark hair to almost be showing.

You could cut yourself on his abs and pecs. I can't tear my eyes away. Beside me, Lucky laughs.

"Do you need a tissue, lass?"

My eyes snap away from Paddy Flynn's mouthwateringly bare torso, meeting his. My cheeks are now hot enough to fry eggs on. A tissue? Is my nose running? I lift my hand to brush my face, but it drops back into my lap when he speaks again. Screw eggs. A nuclear explosion would be cooler than my cheeks.

"To catch your drooling," he smirks, dropping his arm around my shoulders, and tugging me close. Uh, this is new. Girls who look like me don't get *snuggled* against guys who look like him.

"D'ye think our lad can win?" He winks as his Irish burr colors his voice. I blink, staring at him. What's happening here?

"Lucky." There's an edge of warning in Fitzzy's tone. "Leave her alone."

He doesn't have to. I don't particularly mind. Not that I'm about to *say* that. I am going to savor this for as long as it lasts.

"Jesus fuck, Fitzzy," Lucky snorts, his arm still hanging loosely around my neck. "I'm not about to seduce her. I'm making conversation."

Fitzzy's eyes move over my face carefully. I quickly school my face into a neutral expression, blinking at him. I really don't mind. His arm is just around my neck, and I don't have any illusions that he's doing any other than having a spot of fun.

“You tell me if he’s bothering you,” Fitzzy tells me, turning back to the fight, ignoring me again.

I’m still staring at him when he nods in the direction of the ring. Right. Paddy Flynn.

Turning my face back to the front, I realize Paddy is looking over at him. They must have shared a nod. Paddy’s eyes slide over to me as I watch the ring, dipping to take in Lucky’s arm over my shoulders, coming back up to my face.

I’m blushing like all get out now, his eyes burning into mine. They are a rich, chocolate brown, and almost hypnotic. I certainly can’t seem to look away. I fight the urge to squirm as heat pools between my thighs.

Lucky’s breath brushes my ear. “Stop distracting him. I don’t like to lose.”

I blink, the spell broken. Lose what? The spell isn’t only broken for me. Paddy looks away, his attention returning to his opponent.

Perry’s voice booms out again. “Our referee for this fight, Joaquim Rodriguez.”

A tall, tanned man with long dark hair tied into a ponytail climbs into the ring, moving to stand between the two men there. He speaks with the two men, low enough for us not to be able to hear. They nod, both shaking their heads.

In the last fight we saw, the two fighters fist-bumped before they started despite its brutal end. Not these two. They glare at each other.

“Your *mammy* will weep for you tonight,” the big guy sneers, his Boston accent jarring for some reason. On either

side of me, Fitzy and Lucky suck in a breath.

“Jaysus feck,” one of the men behind me breathes. “The lad has a death wish.”

Paddy Flynn raises one eyebrow – I really wish I knew how to do that – and there is a lull in the crowd, everyone eager to hear Paddy’s response.

“Ye take that up with God.”

There is a roar as the referee steps back. I wonder what Paddy meant. Like, is his mother...dead? Or is this guy about to die? It was an ambiguous comment... and a little ominous.

The crowd is baying now as the bear of a man charges at Paddy, and I suck in a breath, my hand coming up to my mouth. I hope Paddy Flynn doesn’t get beaten to a pulp. It might be hard to put my request to an unconscious man.

I don’t think I have anything to fear. Josh never let me come and watch him fight, but I did get to see him train sometimes. Josh had a grace about him when he fought, but Paddy Flynn is poetry in motion.

His movements are fluid as he dances around the ring, his strikes swift and devastating. It takes eleven minutes. I count every blood-filled one of them.

The knockout blow comes from a sharp cross as the beast of man crumples at Paddy’s feet. The air is filled with Irish phrases, the men around me surging to their feet, roaring their approval.

Paddy doesn’t celebrate. He simply turns and climbs back out of the ring, heading through the crowd into the back room.



“That’s us done,” Fitzzy tells me, turning to crane his neck, peering through the crowd, clearly looking for someone. “Where the fuck is Perry?”

I don’t respond because I have no idea where Perry is, probably in his announcing booth. Fitzzy doesn’t need a response, climbing to his feet and walking in the direction Paddy left. Like Paddy, the crowd parts easily for him. That must be nice. I always get squished in crowds.

My heart thuds, my mouth dry again. Are they just going to leave me? How am I supposed to talk to Paddy Flynn if I lose the Irish? Maybe Perry will come back. Hopefully, Perry will come back.

Fitzzy must be someone important. The sandy blonde man behind us is flanking him, eyes darting around the crowd like he is a bodyguard.

“Let’s go, Lucky,” the strawberry blonde guy says, pausing beside us. Lucky stands, and my heart sinks. Crap. Maybe I should ask him to pass on my name to Paddy? Before I can start to panic, he saves me.

“Come on.” Lucky tugs me to my feet, draping his arm around my shoulders again, picking up my duffel bag, and steering me behind the other two.

“Yer funeral, Lucky,” strawberry blonde mutters, falling in step behind us to the left. Like he’s Lucky’s bodyguard. I fight the urge to shiver. Just who has their arm around my neck?

As they reach the door, Fitzzy turns back, his eyes searching until they land on us. His eyebrows raise as he takes in Lucky’s arm around my shoulders.

“What the fuck, Lucky?”

“She’s my lucky charm,” Lucky bleats. “I didn’t lose a single wager while she was sitting with us.”

Fitzzy rolls his eyes and keeps walking. Hey, if it gets me to where Paddy Flynn is, Lucky can call me whatever he likes.