



# CARELESS



z e p p h o r a

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Book Cover by Ever After Cover Design

Editing by Ryder Editing & Formatting, Never Too Taboo Editing, and Bearly Vanilla Proofreading

 Created with Vellum

*For Riley,  
You can stalk me anytime.*

<3

Because I'm obsessed. I'm addicted, and I will gladly cross every single line if it means making this girl mine. If it means forcing her to be mine.

H.D. CARLTON, HAUNTING ADELINE

{We all love Zaddy here)

# SHOPPING LIST

Careless follows Sorcha and Rian on this dark, twisty, and sexually explicit ride, which includes but is not limited to the following:

- Degradation Kink
- CNC
- Murder
- Ass Play
- Praise Kink
- Stalking

For a full content list, please visit the authors website at [www.zepphora.com](http://www.zepphora.com)

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# PROLOGUE

Tears leave streaks on my dirty face as I stare down at the scarlet lines of blood peeking out from underneath the mud caking my knees. The mud makes the cuts sting, adding to the tears that I'd normally hold back until I'm alone in my room. However, today the kids were super mean and actually pushed me.

They must have not been from around here otherwise they wouldn't have laid hands on me. I'm the only daughter of the ruthless Nigel O'Reilly, they would've run in fear if they knew that. People are scared of my daddy, but they shouldn't be. My daddy is super sweet. He watches my favorite shows with me and goes to all of my ballet practices. He keeps everyone from laughing at me. But he isn't with me today.

"Sorcha?"

The sound of my name has me turning my head. My brother's best friend is thundering toward me.

"What happened?" he asks with worry evident in his eyes.

I can't remember a time when Rian wasn't my brother's friend. I also can't remember a time when he cared about what I was doing. The only reason I even see Rian is because he tags along with Finn when he is watching me.



“Leave me alone,” I cry as I use the pink, scratchy material of my sweater to wipe away the mud from my knees, causing more pain.

“Who did this to you?” he demands, not taking the hint.

*I don't want him here. I don't want anyone to see me like this.*

I'm an O'Reilly. I'm supposed to be tough, like my daddy and Finn. I'm not supposed to cry like a baby.

I'm the only girl in my family of all boys, who surround themselves with even more boys. The only time I get to play with a girl is when my babysitter, Mrs. Judy, watches me. “You don't care about me.”

Only my brother and daddy love me and care about me. Only those two. My mommy doesn't even love me. She left when I was a baby, so I don't have any memories of her.

“What do you mean? We all care about you,” Rian says as he kneels and examines my scraped knees.

“You do?” I ask in disbelief, tears still flowing down my face.

His dark blue eyes shoot up to gaze at me, and he flashes me a smile.

Rian surprises me again. He always looks so sad. I don't think I've ever seen him smile. I know his mommy has a hard time, so he has to take care of her. That's all I really know about Rian.

Although I see him often, he and Finn have their group of friends separate from me.

“Of course, I do. We all do, kid,” he answers as he pulls a water bottle out of his back pocket. He twists off the cap, then

pours some on the cuts on my knees. The sting is slight and I watch as the liquid turns pink as it mixes with the dirt.

“We’re the same age. Don’t call me kid,” I pout.

He chuckles and shrugs his shoulders as he wipes away the mud with his bare fingers. “You’re my best friend’s little sister. I’ll always call you *kid*, kid.”

I glower at him. I hate that he always calls me that. I may be a little kid, but so is he and all of his friends. Finn is the big kid in *The Families* as my daddy calls us.

“Now,” he pauses to catch my eyes, “are you going to tell me what happened, or do I have to beat it out of you?” he jokes.

I know he’d never hit me. But if he did, my brother and my daddy would have his hide for it.

“Some kids were being mean to me,” I shrug like it’s not a big deal. He frowns. “They said I’m fat and ugly, then they pushed me down,” My tears begin to subside as I recall the event. I hate crying in front of people. I have to be strong, always, like my daddy and my brother.

I’m a little chubbier than the other girls my age, so it makes me a target sometimes when kids are feeling mean.

My daddy says I have an illness, and that’s why I’m bigger than the other girls. It’s not my fault.

I go to doctors all the time, and Dr. Harper says it would be impossible for me to be small like the girls in my class.

My body doesn’t work like theirs.

“You’re not ugly, kid, and you’re not fat. Have you seen my mom? She’s fat,” he says seriously.

A laugh falls from my lips, which I try to hide, but it ends up coming out in spouts of giggling.

Rian's mommy is a big lady, but she's still very beautiful. She always looks so sad, though, just like Rian.

"Your mommy is pretty," I tell him.

"Yeah, she is, but so are you. You're not fat. You're... chunky at worst."

"Chunky?" I stare at him, confused.

"That's how my mom describes how big I was as a baby. Chunky. Not fat, but extra meat on the bones.. If some people think you're fat, who cares? Those people don't matter. If they don't take the time to get to know you before they judge you, they're not worth your time."

Rian's words hit hard. He really means them. Rian thinks I'm pretty just the way I am. He said he cares about me—and it's not just him, but all of my brother's friends, too.

My heart skips a beat, and it has nothing to do with Tiernan, Colin, or Eoghan. My heart skips a beat because it's Rian telling me this.

This is the moment when I developed my crush on Rian Walsh, my brother's best friend. I didn't know it as a child, but this is the moment that will alter everything about my life.

The good.

The bad.

The deadly.

# CHAPTER **ONE**

**T**he oxygen squeezes and stabs around in my lungs, demanding I stop. I give them a mental fuck you and keep pushing myself past what my body wants to give. I refuse to concede. I'm so damn close to getting past my personal best.

It's in part to the routine I developed. I wake up early, run through our dilapidated neighborhood, take a hot shower then make a healthy breakfast. The only thing that changes is if I go to school, or dance practice before going to the gym.

I've known since I was a little girl that I need to work harder than the other girls. I was diagnosed with hypothyroidism at a young age, which means it's difficult to lose weight or keep it off. I will always have to fight this battle but I'm strong. I push past any obstacles and exceed expectations. That's part of being an O'Reilly.

Dad and Finn don't care if I'm overweight but I'd be lying if I said I felt the same way.

I wouldn't call myself fat. My weight is on the edge of what doctors consider *overweight*. If I lost thirty pounds, I'd be on target.

I want to wear what all the other girls in my school wear, crop tops and short shorts. However I'm too self conscious and I feel like everyone would cringe at my curvy figure.

I can't eliminate my condition, so I do my best to combat it. It takes effort but I try to make the best out of it.

The slap of my pink running shoe's soles muffle as I hit my front yard. My racing heart calms a bit as I take a deep breath.

One second higher than my fastest time.

It's something to celebrate. If I keep working hard, I might be able to make the track team in college.

That's if I get a scholarship and get accepted into a university. I'm in the top ten percent of my class, but that's not saying a lot being from Grove Hill. I'm always flirting with the ever sought after 4.0. If I wasn't so busy with my running and other activities I'm sure that I'd have straight A's.

I sent in my application to Rice and the University of Houston a few months ago, but I haven't received a response.

I don't want to be far away from home, so those two universities are my only options besides my local community college.

Regardless of where I go, it will be a big deal for my family as I'll be the first to attend college. Education hasn't always been a top priority in my household, I had to force Finn to go back for his high school diploma. Speaking of school, I need to get ready.

I stroll into the house and quickly make my way to the kitchen. The scent of coffee fills my senses shortly after I hit the *brew* button on the coffee maker. I prepare a grapefruit and plain oatmeal to go along with it, for Dad. For me, I settle on scrambled eggs and a bottle of water.

When they say it's the most important meal of the day, they mean it, and I take that very seriously. I always eat a good

amount of protein for breakfast or I am sluggish all day long. I need my energy for school, and getting through the grueling dance practice Coach Hatcher puts us through.

“Morning, sweetheart,” my dad mutters as he drags himself into the kitchen. He scratches his fingers through his salt and pepper hair then does the same to his matching stubble. Pulling out the chair at our small kitchen table, he takes a seat in front of the plate I prepared for him. “Thank you. What are you doing up so early?” he asks, like he has no idea what today is.

During the summer, I sleep in on days when I have nothing to do, but I don’t have that luxury during the school year.

“It’s the first day of school, Dad. Senior year,” I explain as I plop down and stab my fork into my eggs.

“You don’t need to be so hard on yourself, Sor. You can take a day off from your workouts every once in a while.” His icy blue eyes meet mine over the rim of his coffee cup. I purse my lips. My dad means well, but he doesn’t understand. How could he? He’s physically fit and joins me when I work out more for vanity than health. If he would just stop drinking...

My brother is the same way. Both of them have high metabolisms and work out for the sake of six packs, not to regulate their weight. They don’t understand my struggle.

My dad says the doctors think my health issues were caused by my mom’s drug problems when she was pregnant with me—she couldn’t stay clean. It’s possible, but I won’t dwell on the cause. I like to focus on the solution.

This is an issue that I will have to deal with for the rest of my life and I fear the day when I’m no longer able to keep up

with my regime. I don't want to become disabled due to my weight when I get older .

“We need a new microwave.” I veer the subject in a different direction, eyeing the worthless box.

“I'll fix the turntable after breakfast,” he comments and follows my gaze to the counter.

That's his motto for almost everything.

*I'll fix it.*

He only buys replacements as a last resort.

I fork more eggs into my mouth to keep from saying anything. I know it will get me a lecture. He must see the irritation on my face because the lecture comes, nonetheless.

“The easiest way isn't always the best. We have more than we need, Sorcha. Our fridge is always full. We have running water, air conditioning, and a roof over our heads. We buy everything we *need* and nothing more. If more people in this fucked-up world lived the way we do, it would be a much better place. I give whatever money I have left over at the end of the month to those who need it more than us. We all make sacrifices for the greater good, and that's the way it's supposed to be. You work as hard as you can, and help those less fortunate.” The points he makes are valid, but after getting this lecture numerous times over the years, I tune him out.

I've offered in the past to pay for stuff like this, but he refuses to accept the help.

“I got the reminder for your appointment this afternoon with Dr. Garza. You'll need to go there right after practice,” he says before taking a bite of his oatmeal.



I shovel the last of my eggs into my mouth. “Thanks, Dad. I need to take a shower,” I say with the least amount of spittle as possible. After rinsing and putting my plate in the dishwasher, I grab my water bottle and pause in the doorway to glance back at my dad. He’s already busy on his phone, probably looking up how to fix our shitbox of a microwave. It makes me smile, how he’s always looking out for everyone but himself. Sure I get annoyed with him every now and then but I wouldn’t change anything about him.

---

“HEY, GIRL, HEY!” Kia cheers as she practically knocks me over when she suddenly appears beside my locker.

Kia has been my best friend since she moved to Grove Hill two years ago. She knows everything about me, including details about who my family is. She’s even been to my house a few times, but still hasn’t met my dad.

“Morning,” I say with a genuine smile.

“Sor, your brother is smoking hot,” Kia says as she fans herself and slumps against the lockers.

It takes everything in me not to gag at her words.

“Kia! He’s my brother!”

“Even better! If I marry him, we would be sisters! Besides, you’re used to skanks throwing themselves at him like he’s Casanova reincarnate. Face the facts, Sor. Everyone wants to fuck your brother,” she sasses.

“Are you calling yourself a skank?” I tease right back. “Sorry to break it to you, but he seems to be smitten with another.”

Kia stares at me, confused. “What do you mean? I never see him with the same girl twice.”

I have no clue how everyone is so oblivious, or maybe I pay close attention to my brother.

“Look!” I insist.

Finn sits with Rian and Colin as they laugh and talk quietly. A pretty girl is perched on his lap trying to get his attention.

“Who? Blonde McTitties over there?” Kia scoffs.

“No. Watch.” A moment later, Francine Gray turns down the hall by herself, a part of her routine through all four years of school, holding her books in her arms, blonde curls falling down her shoulders.

As if Francine was blowing a dog whistle only Finn could hear, he senses her presence. Instantly, his gaze turns from Colin and narrows in on his prey. She juggles with her belongings as she slips her yellow, light weight sweater off her shoulders to put in her locker. My brother stares at her, a look of contemplation etched across his face.

“Oh my god! Francine Gray? Isn’t she dating the quarterback, whatshisname?”

“Duncan Malloy. Duncan is a nice guy, but I never see any chemistry between them. Well, at least not on Francine’s part.” I elbow her in the stomach. “Watch this and tell me if Duncan is the one that has her heart.”

“Watch what?” She scowls at me while exaggeratedly rubbing the spot where I viciously attacked her.

“This!” I hiss and nod toward Fran. She has visibly stiffened as if she senses eyes on her. She turns and faces my

brother, but he has already averted his eyes. She stares at him for a long moment with more emotion than I have seen her give Duncan in the previous years, combined.

Does she know how much he watches her or is she completely oblivious? He has been doing it so often that she'd have to be blind not to see it.

She blinks several times as if to clear her thoughts before she closes her locker and walks away.

"Holy shit. What the hell is going on there?" Kia asks.

"No clue. Anytime I ran into Francine this summer, for some reason, my brother was not far behind. That can't be a coincidence. I'm inclined to think those two are having a little love affair. It's the only thing that makes sense," I explain.

She laughs. "Unless he's stalking her," she jokes.

"Finn isn't a stalker. He doesn't need to stalk," I laugh at the idea.

"Come to think of it, I think I've seen that look before," Kia retorts, a sly smile stretches across her face.

Slightly distracted, I ask, "You've seen Finn staring at someone else?"

"Nooooo." She laughs, "I've seen that look on Rian."

Completely grabbing my attention, I need clarification. "What? You've seen Rian looking at Francine?"

Her laugh gets louder and she returns the elbow nudge to my gut.

"Rian looks at you the same way Finn looks at Francine. He's doing it right now," she tells me. She has to be teasing. When I say Kia knows everything, I literally mean *everything*,

including my highly unrealistic crush on my brother's best friend. It's a pointless crush though. Not only would Rian not date his best friend's sister, he's emotionally unavailable as well as self-destructive. He finds something that makes him happy, enjoys the high for a while, then hates himself for being happy.

It's never-ending.

He wasn't always like this. He used to show his heart to the people close to him, but not since his mom killed herself. That muscle is locked down tight and nobody can reach it.

I've known Rian my whole life, and I want nothing more than to reach the little boy hidden deep inside him, but Rian won't let him out. That breaks my heart. He's stuck on pause, and I fear he'll always be.

Regardless of thinking Kia's wrong, my heart hammers. I know better than to hope Rian is staring at me. He'll have a warm body in his bed tonight and I won't even be a distant thought.

Rian has never hinted that he wants me, and I'm not going to embarrass myself again.

Rian is unattainable, not to mention my brother would kill him if he touched me. It's a miracle that I'm not still a virgin.

Finn probably thinks I'm *untouched*, and I'd like to keep it that way. There's only one guy that has shown interest in me, and he wasn't from this school.

Jason *freaking* Woods.

He's the star athlete at Carson, our rival school. Football, wrestling, baseball, soccer, Jason's a real jack of all trades.

And I gave him my virginity.

I'd be the enemy of Grove Hill High if anyone knew about that. We were only together once, one year ago and I still get random Facebook messages from him, trying to see if I want to hook up again.

I can't say for sure if Jason was good in bed or maybe mediocre, but when you've only been with one person, it's hard to judge. It was painful, but I had something to prove to myself. I needed to be able to say that my feelings for Rian didn't completely ruin me for anyone else.

I liked Jason. He's funny, charismatic, and... safe. However, anyone compared to Rian is *safe*. If Jason has a body count, it's in regards to the amount of girls he's slept with, not with the amount of people he has killed.

I don't know much about Jason Woods but I know he's smart, kind and respectful. I'm fairly certain that he would want a relationship with me that goes beyond sex. He seems like a great guy. Unfortunately I don't have romantic feelings for him.

"Really? Let him look," I respond after a long pause.

It's not like Rian Walsh is watching me because he finds me attractive.

And that knowledge always breaks my heart, so I have stopped being a hopeless romantic when it comes to Rian Walsh.

# CHAPTER **TWO**

“**M**an, come on. Chelsea Downs is throwing one of her wild parties this Saturday. I can’t go without you.”

Tiernan expects me to be his wingman when it comes to chasing pussy. I’m sure Eoghan or Finn would be way better, but for some reason, Tiernan favors my company over the others.

Too bad he’s on the phone and can’t see the classic eye roll playing on my face. My shoulder holds my phone to my ear as I tap my fingers on the steering wheel of my Charger.

“Ask me again on Saturday. I might be in a partying mood then,” I grumble as my eyes stay focused on the forest green door of the O’Reilly home, waiting to see if she emerges.

Of course she will. Sorcha never takes a day off from her workout routine, not even when she’s sick or on her period.

And, yes, I pay such close attention that I know when that is. I get this information not by merely watching her pull a tampon from her bag before going into the bathroom. No. I pay attention to the subtle inclinations. The discomfort, her pulling that bottle of Advil out of her bag every four hours, and how she closes her eyes and rubs her stomach when a cramp comes on. Regardless of her cycle, she is truly

dedicated to her workouts and her resilience is something to admire.

“Please tell me you’re not looking at that green door, Ri,” Tiernan groans through the phone.

He’s not an idiot. He knows exactly what I’m doing. Luckily, he’s the only one.

He laughs. “You’re obsessive as fuck, man.” I don’t fight him on it because he’s not wrong.

The word *obsession* seems too trivial to describe how I feel toward Sorcha. I am beyond obsessed with Sorcha—have been for years. I can’t remember exactly when the unscratchable itch crept in on me but even when I try my hardest to ignore it, I can’t. She’s always there in the back of my mind, lurking in my thoughts. The closest I come to eliminating that irritating tickle is by watching her.

She’s like a physical form of poetry, her laughter brings people more joy than a blunt brings a pothead. Her eyes get so bright when she smiles that I have seen people stop in their tracks just to marvel at how beautiful it makes her. Her innocence in this fuck-up world captivates me.

“You know, when Finn finds out about this, he’ll kick your ass,” Tiernan states the obvious.

The front door opens and I perk up, dislodging my cell and nearly dropping it on my junk. Sorcha strolls out of the house, her charcoal gray tank top clings to her full breasts and the curves of her stomach. Her spandex shorts leave very little to the imagination when it comes to covering her ass. I don’t know if I should make her change them so others can’t perv on her, or just sit back and perv on her myself. She might as well have walked out of the house naked with how much she’s



revealing. However, she could wear a potato sack and my dick would still be hard.

“Then, keep your mouth shut if you don’t want to attend my funeral,” I say as Sorcha jumps off the steps and takes off running down the street.

I’d like to say safeguarding her is because she’s my best friend’s sister, but that’d be a lie. I’m ridiculously protective of her—even by my own standards. I follow her just about everywhere she goes, the spectacular view of her body is just an added bonus. The element of forbiddenness makes it even hotter. It’s a game of cat and mouse, and hopefully, much like the cat, I get to put my mouth on my prey.

“Why the fuck are you doing it? This has been going on for so fucking long, Ri. If you want to fuck her, do it already. I didn’t peg you for being a scared bitch.” he taunts.

He knows I hate being called a bitch, but I’m not going to fall into his trap.

“First of all, you’re never gonna peg me. Second, who said I want to fuck her? I don’t find her attractive,” I lie.

Just because I want to pin her down and fuck her until I can’t feel my legs doesn’t necessarily mean I think she’s pretty. Shit, I can’t even lie to myself. Sorcha is sexy as hell. The weird part is she has no idea how much of a temptation she is. I guess a bit of that is my fault. I’m the one who black-listed her to all guys in Grove Hill.

The first time I caught someone giving her *that* look, I almost catapulted across the cafeteria tables to slam Chase Bradford’s face against the cinder block walls. I wanted to kill him. He learned real fucking quick not to even look at her. I

think the asshole's nose still has a slight bend in it from when I beat his ass after school and ordered him to spread the word.

*Sorcha O'Reilly is off-limits.*

Logically speaking, I know that makes me a raging douchebag. Especially considering I'm fucking random bitches every night. Sorcha isn't my girlfriend or my fuck buddy, I know it's not fair that I'm getting laid while she isn't. However, if I didn't take my sexual frustrations out on arbitrary women, I wouldn't trust myself around Sorcha. If I skipped fucking for a week, I can guarantee that I'd take Sorcha and have her on her back real quick, with my tongue deep in her pussy. Her hands pulling my hair, me sucking her dry, licking her cunt and every other inch of her body. I tried alleviating stress by tapping into my psychotic murdering side, but after killing more guys than I have fingers and toes, it barely takes the edge off anymore.

I'd find an asshole who has made Sorcha cry, made fun of her, or even looked at her sideways then I'd treat them to a night of fun. Take them for a ride in my black 1978 Charger. Sure, they'd be in the trunk, tied up with an angry rattler roaming free but I'm not a complete twat waffle...I'll give them a pillow.

This is one of the only things I hide from my friends. If the guys knew I have a side deal with Donatello, our clean up guy, I'd be the next mutilated body he cleans up. If Finn and his dad knew why I was doing it, they might be a little forgiving of my extra curricular dalliances. The level of protectiveness I have toward Sorcha makes me uncomfortable, but I have no choice. It's as natural as breathing.

I'm not supposed to want her.

I'm not supposed to need to know she's safe at all times.

I'm not supposed to lose control and just take what I want from her.

Yet, she's the only oasis in this minefield of my reality, which is the most amazing feeling in the world.

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SHE DOESN'T NOTICE ME, just like every other time I watch her practice from the safety of the shadows under the bleachers. I'm here supporting her and she'll never know about it.

She's a great dancer, and yet, I see how she struggles. She tries to hide it, but she gets winded more easily than the other girls.

An annoying shrill breaks through the crowd. "Come on, Sorcha. Pick up the slack. Just because you had three months off doesn't mean I'm going to cut you a break. Drink some water and get back in there." Fuck, that coach is a bitch.

It takes everything in me not to charge over there and stomp her ass to the ground. I've never laid my hands on a woman out of anger, but if she keeps talking to Sorcha like that, I will.

"Got it, Coach," Sorcha acknowledges before moving back to a blonde teammate that's giving her a sympathetic smile.

"Don't listen to her. If you look at her when the wind blows, you can see the horns hidden in her hair," her friend jokes when the coach's back is turned.

Sorcha chuckles to herself. "Oh, definitely. She's such a hardass sometimes."

"Let it roll off your back. You're easily the best dancer on this team and she knows it," the girl encourages, which seems

to lift Sorcha's spirits.

"Thanks, Francine." She sends the girl one of her brilliant smiles.

Inwardly, I thank her. I hate seeing a frown on Sorcha's face and it makes my trigger finger itch when someone puts it there.

Sure, Sorcha and the team had the summer off, but you wouldn't realize it by watching my girl. She's a hard worker and that bitch coach needs to shut the fuck up. I patiently wait out the practice, mesmerized by Sorcha as she dances. I yank at the crotch of my jeans when the team does a round of jumping jacks, making her tits jump and strain beneath her tight shirt. I curse the coach again for ending my show when she blows her whistle, signaling the end of practice. The girls run to the gym to shower and change. I take my time and stroll to my car, waiting for Sorcha to appear while eyeing my trunk and envisioning the dance coach in it.

Half an hour later, she emerges with the rest of her team, hair wet and cheeks flushed from her shower. She smiles and waves at them as she folds herself into her car then slowly drives out of the school parking lot. When she's about to exit onto the main street, I turn on my car then follow her out.

I expect her to go home, but she drives in the opposite direction. I follow several car lengths behind, but she seems to be oblivious. I'm going to have to change that somehow. Her right blinker activates right before she pulls into her doctor's office parking lot.

*Right. I forgot she had an appointment to get her blood drawn.*

It's the perfect time to show my face at my house, throw people off the scent if they suspect me of being the biggest stalker in Grove Hill.

Sorcha will be safe in the doctor's office, anyway.

I walk into the house and am confronted with a half naked girl from the gymnastics team laid out on the coffee table with lines of coke down her stomach.

My best friend has always been a bit of an exhibitionist when it came to his conquests, and this slut is no different.

"Seriously, man?" I groan, really wishing I could just sleep. Every day is exhausting. The restraint I use to not touch Sorcha is enough to have me drinking Red Bull non-stop. Fighting sleep is a daily battle.

Every aspect of my life is dictated by my obsession, from the hours I sleep to who I fuck. I'd love nothing more than to pin Sorcha down to my bed and shove my cock inside her virgin pussy. The women I take to my bed look nothing like her. It's a bit irrational but fucking a girl with dark hair, fair-skinned, and/or is thick between the hips would almost seem like I'm cheating on her. Everyone that comes to my bed is the complete opposite of her. I can't allow myself to come close to that line as it would lead to me destroying it. The line between fantasy and reality is very thin and getting thinner everyday. That fucker is almost translucent.

The only difference is the *have not's*. I have *not* fucked Sorcha O'Reilly. I have *not* tasted her teasing lips. If you take away the *not*, it's reality. One single step is all it takes to change it from a fantasy into an event.

I can't take that step. I will destroy her if I do that. The depths of depravity she would have to dive into wouldn't leave

her with a clean soul.

“Fuck off, man. I’m having fun.” Finn growls at my look of annoyance, like the big old grouch he is before snorting the coke off her stomach.

It’s not a secret why girls come to our house. They come here to get screwed. Well, every girl except for Sorcha. We’re not the kind of men you take home to meet the parents. We’re the kind that fuck hard and fast, giving the girls memories to dwell on for years. Too bad we typically give them only one ride, even if they come back begging for more.

Not my problem.

I pay them no mind and head straight for my room, closing the door behind me. I pace, burning the rubber from my shoes into the tarnished wood. I try like hell to think of something other than the beauty who plagues most of my thoughts. I groan as I give my head a few hard whacks with my fist. I want her out of my head, but I know it’s impossible. She’s been tattooed on my brain since we were kids, and there’s only one thing that vanished her temporarily, but I can’t think about it here. Thinking about it makes me break things and crack skulls.

---

I CHARGE into the makeshift gym I built behind my dad’s place. It’s sheets of corrugated steel barely held together by bolts, and it contains all of my darkest thoughts—my trauma brain physically manifested.

Dirt and dust particles dance in the rays of sunlight that bleed from between the cracks of the makeshift walls. The ground is compacted dirt except for random blades of grass

that cultivated from a pointless place, devoid of any other life or possibilities, only to be stomped on when the blade finally reaches the sun. The sandbag I hung from an arch I built, sways slightly, hundreds of photos cover the walls.

This is the place I go to escape Sorcha, and Sorcha is where I go to escape this place.

Memories assault me as I hastily rip the shirt over my head, throwing it to the ground.

“Hey, Mom,” I growl at the photos before hurtling punch after lethal punch into the sandbag.

*“That’s my boy.”*

My mother’s voice filters into my mind as my jaw tenses. She was such a selfish cunt. What the fuck was so horrible about our life that she had to hang herself in the bathroom? Did she not care that I would be the one to find her?

She had no reason to leave us. My dad loved her, I fucking loved her, and she left us.

*Selfish. Ungrateful. Evil.*

She knew we needed her, and she didn’t fucking care.

Rumors were plentiful and circulated unheeded throughout our town as to why she did it. A contender for most popular is that maybe being the wife of a Walsh was too much for her. Honestly, I don’t remember much about her relationship with my dad, but I remember her smile. How can someone be sad when they smiled so fucking much?

The sound of her laughter breaks through my thoughts, tinkling like a wind chime, as my fist slams harder into the bag, tears drenching my face.

I recognize that anger is an easier emotion to feel than grief. I can understand why she did what she did. This is a crappy life, its only for those not faint of heart and my mother was fragile. She could smile bigger than anyone I've ever met and cry a river of tears in a five-minute span.

Thinking of my mother always grounds me and reminds me exactly why I can never have Sorcha Rae O'Reilly. She's meant for a better life, and all I would do is screw her up like my dad did my mom.

The Bastards are toxic and I am, in deed, a bastard.



CHAPTER  
**THREE**

**T**he gray tile is cold against my forehead as I rest against it, eyes closed and my breathing in the heavy air. The boiling water runs in rivulets down my face, streaming into my nose and seeping into my mouth. My tears only add to the tributaries, as if in tandem, agreeing to do their best to drown me. It's doing little to extinguish the sharp needles stabbing at my brain. Every second is pain, and I try to block it out, but sooner or later, all the self-doubt, body shame, and my failures come to the surface, and I can't fight it anymore.

Why was I born like this? Why couldn't I be like all the other girls? Girls like Francine. She's so nice and everyone loves her, but she doesn't struggle like I do. Whispers of hateful words swirl around me whenever I look at my reflection in the mirror. Words uttered by friends and family. I fight and fight every day, all day long, and for what? For a doctor three times my age to tell me I've gained weight and I must be doing something wrong. I eat right. I exercise every free minute I have, and still, I have nothing to show for it.

Screw this pity party. I'm not giving up. I'm an O'Reilly, which means I come from a long line of fighters. I'm not going to just roll over and accept defeat.

I switch off the water and gingerly climb out. Haphazardly, I dry off then throw on my jogging pants and sports bra. Twisting my hair into a ponytail, I manage to sneak out of the house with Dad passed out on the couch.

My feet pound the pavement as I run as fast and as hard as I can. I take a sharp right onto an unpaved path; the dirt kicks up and hits my back as I run, but I ignore the light sting.

I will not yield. I'm a fighter, a Bastard, a true warrior. I will work hard to get what I want.

Jet black hair and icy blue eyes flash in my mind and my heart speeds up. Rian. That's my only unattainable desire. No matter how hard I fight, I will never win, and that has to be okay. I can fantasize and dream about him all I want, and know in the morning that at least he's in my life in some sort of capacity.

Sometimes there are fights where you have to be satisfied with being second place.

---

MY LEGS and lungs burn like a red-hot fire poker is stabbing them repeatedly, but I don't stop. I don't care if I'll be so sore I won't be able to walk. I refuse to lose this battle.

My stomach aches and my head pounds as I round the corner. A pair of headlights shine right into my eyes, and I'm temporarily blinded, my feet getting tangled in the chain link fence next to me. I stumble to gain my balance but it's a hopeless endeavor. The metal jangles as I bounce against it.

"Fuck," I hiss as agony pierces my ankle from the unnatural way it landed.

“Sorcha? Sor, what the fuck are you doing?” a familiar voice rings as I rub my eyes to force the focus back into them. A moving shadow disrupts the stream of light and after a few seconds, I’m able to make out the lines of Rian Walsh’s tragically handsome face.

I love seeing him under any circumstance, but he’s still the biggest pain in the ass. The only person who thinks he knows what’s best for me more than my brother is this idiotic man whore. Why the hell does he have to be so beautiful, though?

“What am *I* doing here? What are *you* doing here? At least, I live on this street. What’s your excuse?” I hiss at him as I struggle to catch my breath, pain radiating up my right leg. Yes, my ankle hurts, but I’m thinking of dealing with the excruciating ache of running away rather than shrink under Rian’s scrutiny.

“You shouldn’t be out here. It’s three in the morning, kid,” he growls as his gaze zeros in on my ankle.

“Don’t call me kid.” I’ve been on his ass for years to stop calling me that. We’re the same age and it makes me think he views me as a child, not like the woman I’m on the cusp of becoming. “I’m running. What does it look like? I couldn’t sleep.” I lie, and I know he’ll see through it. He always does.

“You’re hurt,” he assesses, his dark blue eyes blazing into me.

“I’m fine,” I deny as I step forward to prove my point, but my knee buckles from the instability of my ankle. Thick, strong arms catch me, as my head spins, the muscles of his forearms digging into my back, but the pressure feels good. Any time he touches me, it’s welcome.

I tense when the ground is pulled out from under my feet. When I realize Rian lifted me and is carrying me in his strong arms, I relax.

“Stubborn brat,” he grumbles under his breath, but I’m too drunk off of the combination of spice, leather and cigarettes to care.. His scent is so masculine and full of everything tempting in the world. I could lose myself just smelling him and feeling his warm skin against mine.

“You’re the stubborn one,” I groan and close my eyes, grabbing his jacket and snuggling into it. Maybe if I keep my eyes closed, I can create my own reason for him holding me and ignore reality. My body rocks with each step he takes and I tighten my grasp on his coat and on my imaginary scenario. My eyes are closed for so long that I didn’t realize when my imagination morphed into the dreams of a restful sleeper.

CHAPTER  
**FOUR**

**I**t's just my dumb luck that I spend half the night pounding my fists into a sand bag, and come back to the O'Reilly home to find Sorcha trying to kill herself by running through the neighborhood in the middle of the night.

The sidewalk is tricky on a good day with how uneven and cracked to hell it is. Sure, there are street lights lining the sidewalks however the city doesn't pay that close attention to this side of town therefore many of the bulbs are out. She was asking for trouble. I'm surprised she lasted this long without injury.

She can try to lie and say she couldn't sleep, but I saw the haunted look in her eyes. She was trying to run off her own demons. She shouldn't have any fucking demons to wage a war on. That's what I've spent years trying to prevent. Anyone who tried to hurt her died a painful death.

I place her sleeping body in the front seat of my car. She probably exhausted herself. A part of me freaks out, but then she's unharmed other than her ankle. She's soaked with sweat like she's been doing this all fucking night. Was she trying to get herself killed? She's lucky I was the one who found her. I know I should take her back to her house, but what if she tries to pull this again? Nigel is too much of a drunk to pay

attention to her, making her the one that takes care of all household duties, including him. As quietly as possible, I shut the door then hurriedly stride around my car to jump in behind the wheel. Tonight, she's the one that needs to be taken care of, and I'm always ready to take on that job.

---

I'm a bit surprised that I haven't dropped my forbidden fruit with the way I have to carry her to finagle the front door open. Luckily, Tiernan is the only one to witness me carrying our friend's unconscious sister into our house. He raises an eyebrow at me but doesn't move from his place on the couch, a beer bottle in his hand and some reruns flickering on the TV.

The sound of me kicking the door shut wakes him from his study of me and the fucker laughs.

“Let me guess. She was drunk at a party, some guy got handsy, and we should be on the lookout for a frat boy missing his fingers?”

He really needs to lay off the jokes about my stalker tendencies, or we're going to have some major issues if someone overhears him.

“Let me guess, there's a Golden Girls Marathon and you didn't want to miss it?”

The smile falls from Tiernan's face and he shrugs, “You know I have a thing for Betty White.”

“Where's Finn?” I demand as I carefully maneuver Sorcha's limp body.

He smirks before gazing at the stairs. On cue, the unmistakable banging of a headboard against the wall



commences.

Lucky bastard.

I'm stuck dealing with his little sister and her suicidal urges while he's fucking some whore. Not surprising at all. This is how it always turns out. Finn gets to have all the fun while I get stuck on Sorcha duty. Granted, I volunteered myself for the job, but it would be nice to know that her family is looking out for her as well.

I'm not really complaining about this convenient inconvenience since there's only one option for where Sorcha can sleep.

*My fucking bed.*

"Good. Don't tell him she's here. I'll deal with it in the morning," I warn, knowing he's not really going to blab about it, but I feel like it needs to be said anyway.

"You're pussy-whipped by a pussy you've never fucked." Tiernan tries to hide his smile behind the amber-colored glass bottle as he lifts it to his lips.

I've never been so called out in my life. It's not exactly a lie. I covet every inch of her skin from afar. I'd sell my soul to the Devil for one taste of her delicious cunt and to feel it squeeze around my cock as she comes all over me.

I don't respond because we both know it's true. Instead, I trudge down the hall to my room and nudge the door open. I carefully lay her on my bed and she makes the most adorable groan.

*Fuck. I'm in trouble. Big time.*

I slowly unlace and remove her shoes then pull down her jogging pants, not daring to even peek at the juncture of her

thighs. I cover her sports bra with one of my t-shirts then slide a pair of my boxers up the miles of milky white skin of her legs. My hands slow at the elastic waistband resting under her belly button. I run a fingertip under the material, allowing the back of it to brush along her flesh. Ashamed I smoothly release the elastic.

I can't touch her.

I can't touch her.

I.

Can't.

Touch.

Her.

I roughly grab at my short hair and pull on it past the point of pain.

She's so fucking beautiful and she has no fucking clue what she does to me. Sorcha O'Reilly is a damn vision whether she's wearing joggers, a dress, or my clothes. She makes me insane, which explains the trail of bodies I've dropped in her honor.

I release my grasp to gaze over my shoulder at the most important thing in my life. I straighten then reach for the rubber band that is choking her hair into a ponytail. There's no way I'll be able to undo it without waking her. I retrieve the knife I keep in my boot then place the blade between my teeth to hold as I shrug out of my leather jacket, letting it slide from my arms and puddle to the floor. I kneel on the floor beside her, the moonlight glinting on the silver blade as I lightly saw away at the band. It snaps, letting her hair spill around her head. I put the knife back between my teeth as I use both hands to fan her dark locks into a halo around her beautiful

face on the pillow. Her peaceful face. Again, I remove the knife from my mouth. Fingering a thin strand nestled underneath the mass, I pinch it between my fingers so it won't pull on her scalp when I do what I'm about to do.

I pull the sharp silver edge back and forth against the small amount of hair, like a violinist with a bow playing over the strings.

With the nearly black lock free, I shove the knife into my boot then open the second drawer of the nightstand. I place the few items on the floor so I have access to the false bottom. The nondescript wooden box comes out easily and I remove the cover. I grab the black broken hair band, tie it around my stolen prize then lightly place it next to the other souvenirs before putting everything back.

Pictures I've taken of her from afar.

A bright pink thong I swiped from her dirty laundry hamper.

Her school I.D. from freshman year.

A tube of her lotion, cherry blossom scented.

A zip lock bag of twenty-four different people's licenses.

I pull the covers over her, and she lets out the softest moan as she tucks the pillow under her head and gets comfortable in the bed. *My* bed.

It only takes me a minute to disrobe down to my boxers and climb in beside her. Luckily, I'm extremely fucking exhausted, otherwise I may not have been able to control my wandering hands. And my wandering dick, for that matter.

CHAPTER  
**FIVE**

I attempt to roll over, but there's something pressing against my side. I try the movement again, but whatever's behind me isn't moving. I sigh heavily and give up. It's peculiarly comforting, having something solid behind me. The fog clouding my memory is dense as I try to swim through it. This always happens when I try to think while I'm half asleep. An explanation for the unfamiliar weight behind me can't be found in my brain, but I'm pretty sure I didn't go to bed with anyone.

The pressure in my head sharply increases for a moment and I can't help the small groan that claws from my throat. I squirm under the covers, hoping to alleviate some of the pain. It doesn't work. The steel band around my waist tightens.

“Go back to sleep, kid.”

I stiffen at the sound of his groggy voice.

*Rian?*

Why is he in my bed? He can't be. That's impossible. The limbo between being awake and asleep prevents me from thinking rationally. Maybe he's not really here, and this is a dream. Either way, I don't want to waste a second of this.

I tuck myself closer into him and pull his arm tighter around me. Something hard pokes my ass, and I still. This dream is pretty realistic.

*Oh, my god.*

“The only way you can get closer to me is if I’m inside you, so unless you want that, I suggest you stop squirming.” His threat has my panties getting wet. Am I even wearing panties?

Did Rian Walsh just suggest he stick his dick in me? *Holy hell.* If anything could possibly make me feel desired, it’s that. *Yup, I’m definitely dreaming.*

My body relaxes in his arms as he finds my hand resting by my pillow then intertwines our fingers. A smile stretches across my face as I bask in the fantasy of this being real. Soon, my mind drifts back into a state where I no longer question anything and I enjoy the fantasy of just him and me, snuggled in bed. The fantasy I can never have.

---

THE POUNDING in my head intensifies and slowly pulls me from sleep. My hands fly up, gripping my skull.

It’s official. I’m in hell. This is worse than any hangover I’ve ever experienced.

“Someone kill me,” I mumble, not expecting to hear a masculine chuckle in response.

“You already tried that last night. Perhaps you should get a different hobby. Like painting or not being a total idiot.”

My eyes snap open and I immediately regret it when I’m blinded by the blazing sun intruding into my room.

Wait.

It's not sunny in my room in the morning. I sneak an eye open and assess my environment. Dark blue walls covered in rock band posters greet me. A large, wooden dresser sits in the corner, clothes peeking out from closed drawers. Then there's the metal desk where Rian sits.

Rian.

I've never been in this room before, but I know exactly what it is. This is Rian's room. It has his name all over it.

It wasn't a dream.

He's only wearing worn, hole-y jeans with his elbows resting on his knees and the steam from the mug in his hands swirling up to caress the stubble on his chin.

I quickly sit up and regret it immediately when it makes the pounding ten times worse. Gripping my hair, I hiss from the pain and do some breathing exercises to regain composure. When I no longer think I may vomit, I lift up the gray comforter and scan my body.

My legs are bare. Good thing I shaved them yesterday. Why am I even thinking about shaved legs? As if that would really make this less awkward. I'm wearing a pair of Rian's boxers and an old t-shirt of his that I've seen him wear a million times.

"What the—" My eyes widen in disbelief and he smirks with amusement.

He knows what's going through my mind. The bastard.

"Did you change my clothes?" I scowl and wrap the blanket around me, as if that would make me less vulnerable.

“Who else would have?” He chortles. “Your clothes were drenched in sweat. I would have burned them, but you’d look pretty suspicious walking out of here wearing my underwear. And I think we need to talk about your repulsive active wear. A sports bra isn’t a shirt.” He gives me a look that would make lesser females obey. Then, they’d probably get on their knees and beg forgiveness for a crime they didn’t commit. But, not me. I don’t need to put up with him.

Besides, I love my jogging pants and sports bra combo.

“Repulsive? Why? Because, I’m fat.”

His expression immediately changes. I know exactly how to get under his skin. He hates when I refer to myself as fat. He always has. I know I’m not what most people would call fat. I got lucky. Also my weight is distributed evenly through my body. I may weigh more than is considered typical, but I don’t look it.

At worst, I’m mid-sized, but even that doesn’t fit societal norms.

His eyes darken with disgust. “You’re not fat, Sorcha.”

Maybe it makes me a bitch, but it makes me feel better pissing him off. Maybe it’s because I want him to care and can’t stand that he acts like he doesn’t.

“Is that why I’m a senior in high school and have never had a boyfriend?”

The asshole laughs so hard. The coffee in the cup he’s holding between his knees is precariously close to splashing over the rim. “You’ve been blacklisted, kid!” He’s barely able to choke out the words. “Guys aren’t allowed to look at you.”

Blacklisted? No guy is allowed to touch me, right?  
*Goddamn it, Finn.*



“My brother needs to mind his own business.”

Rian’s laughter slowly fades as he composes himself. When he’s finished, he levels me with his icy gaze. “You think it was Finn who blacklisted you?” It’s more of an observation than a question.

“Who else would it be?”

He studies me for a brief moment, tilts his head in contemplation. Then, as if coming to a decision, he answers me, “It was me. I told everyone to keep their god damn hands off of you.”

I think I’m in shock. That’s the only explanation for what I thought I heard. My entire torso tingles as my fingers tremble at the possibility. *Was Rian the one who blacklisted me? Why?* He always acts as if he can’t stand me. He had to do it as a joke. A cruel joke.

Anger fills me. *This fucking bastard. How dare he pull this shit?*

I jump out of bed, ignoring the throbbing in my head and my half dressed state. “How dare you, you fucking asshole!” I sneer as I stride toward him. Rage is flowing through my veins and I need to release some of it. That’s when my eye catches on the mug of coffee in his hands and I strike out, flinging it across the room. The brown liquid splashes against the wall and floor and the ceramic cup clatters to the ground. “Why would you do that? You fuck anything that walks and expect me to be in a state of forced celibacy!” I’m practically yelling from my loss of control. My chest is heaving with fury as he slowly stands. He towers over me, but I’m not scared of him. Everyone else in this town might be, but I know him. Under all the muscles, tattoos, and nearly permanent scowl, Rian Walsh is a little boy who craves affection and denies himself

out of fear. And this mother fucker prevents me from having any kind of romantic relationship. Why? It makes no sense.

Unless...

I square my shoulders, throw my head back to meet his stony stare and whisper my next words as if they were a dare. "If you wanted to fuck me that bad, Rian, you could've just said so."

Something that sounds suspiciously like a gasp escapes Rian's lips and his eyes go wide.

Then, there's no noise at all. Even the high pitch buzz that usually fills the soundless void has forsaken this moment. Our chests heave in simpatico. Mine because of my rage. His? What does he have to be so angry about?

"What. Did. You. Say?" he asks evenly, making each word its own sentence.

*What the fuck is his problem?*

"I said," my temper boiling over past the point of no return. I want to burn him with my words, with my presence. So, I step closer, leaving only a sliver of separation. "If you wanted to fuck me Rian, you could've just said so."

The change is instant and undeniable. There was no refuting that I crossed a line and there's no going back. Eyes that usually shuffled from sky to ocean are now an unidentifiable hue of black. I'm so preoccupied with the color change that I almost miss his hand as it darts to my neck. The pressure of his fingers wrapping around my throat is hot and possessive.

Desire, I realize, is the name of the color his eyes have turned.

I only have a moment to digest this new situation before he turns us and my back hits hard against the wall. He bends to my level, so close I can taste the coffee on his breath. I bite my bottom lip to hold back the soft moan I don't want to grant him. In response, his hips press against mine, his hard cock stabbing me through his zipper.

*Oh, fuck.*

“You listen to me, baby,” he growls as his fingers tighten around my throat. He tilts his head forward, then runs his tongue along the shell of my ear. “If I didn't tell those assholes at our school to leave you the fuck alone, they'd be pawing at you any chance they got. You're seriously blind if you don't see how damn sexy you are.” He buries the hand that isn't around my neck into my hair, yanking my neck back at a painful angle. I grapple at his wrists, not quite sure if I want him to remove his hands, or to anchor them to me. “And if one of them laid a finger on you, I'd have to kill them.”

I finally let that moan escape from me. Obviously he was lying about killing someone, but there's something about the way he said it that made it believable. My head swims with need as his fingers trail down my body, lighting my skin on fire. I was surprised that I could still formulate a sentence.

“But, Rian. Why?”

With a smile he must have stolen from the devil, he speaks the words I never knew I wanted him to reveal. “Why? I didn't make it obvious before, but I think it's time I do now. You're mine and nobody fucks my girl but me. When you're ready, I'll ruin you with my cock. But, that'll be okay because my cock is the only one you'll ever get.”

My head falls back against the wall as his hand sneaks into his boxers I'm wearing and cups my panty-covered cunt in his

hand.

“*This* is mine,” he pushes the point home by running his thumb over the damp material.

A whimper escapes me as he strokes it again and again, leaving me panting for his touch.

“Rian, please,” I breathe, not sure what I’m asking for him to do.

“You’re so fucking wet for me. We shouldn’t let this go to waste.” His teeth run down my throat as I buck my hips against his hand.

“We—we can’t. Finn—”

“He’s not here. We’re alone. You can scream all you want.” Then Rian picks me up, and drops me on the edge of his bed like I weigh nothing, then tugs my boxers and my underwear down my legs. *What is happening right now? This is a dream, right?*

“Rian, we shouldn’t—”

“Lay back, shut up, and let me taste *my* cunt.” He forces my legs apart and runs his tongue up the length of my pussy. Throwing my head back, I cry out from how good this feels. His hands hold my hips in place. The way his tongue touches every single nerve ending makes me dizzy.

He bites my clit and I whimper in pain, but his roughness is just a precursor to the pleasure that immediately follows.

“Rian!” I rasp as he presses a finger inside me, my pussy sucking him in like it’s as thirsty for him as the rest of me.

“Such a good fucking girl,” he growls, then sucks on my clit like a lollipop he wants to salvage. My hips buck with my

impending orgasm. “I’m nowhere near done with your cunt, baby. Relax and let me suck every orgasm right out of you.”

---

RIAN WALSH KEPT me laid out on his bed for an hour while he sucked, bit, and licked to his heart’s content, and he heard no complaints from me. My legs have never felt so jellified in my life. I lost count of the number of times I came all over his fingers and his tongue.

And yet, as soon as we got to school, he went back to pretending like I didn’t exist. Nothing changed, like I always expected it wouldn’t. I’m still just his best friend’s little sister.

He did get me to tell him what last night was about, and I was so embarrassed, but Rian didn’t judge me. He just gave me the answer to a riddle I didn’t realize I was trying to solve. If the method of exercise that I’m using isn’t working, try something else.

He also suggested I have a scheduled cheat day. He said all the guys have one. It tricks the metabolism.

“Where the heck have you been all morning?” Kia greets me at my locker with a scowl.

“Sorry. I had a weird night and morning.”

Her eyes roam up and down my body before they settle on my face. Then, her jaw drops. “You got laid.”

I shush her frantically and she yanks on my arm, shrieking.

“How—”

“Just tell me who it was.”

I stay silent as I close my locker and avoid looking in Rian's direction. I know he won't be looking at me, and maybe what we did this morning was incredibly stupid. It has changed the tolerance we had for each other.

"I'm your best friend. You better tell me." Kia scowls again, making me groan.

"I didn't get laid. Not really anyway."

"So, over the clothes action?"

I whine. "No, he went down on me, okay?" It's so mortifying to say this outloud.

"Who is he, Sorcha?" she presses more firmly, a threat laced in her tone.

"Kia..."

"Yes?"

"It was... Rian." I drop my face into my hand as my cheeks flame with embarrassment.

"As in Rian Walsh? Damn, I told you he wants your pussy, and you didn't believe me. Was it good?"

A smile tries to fight its way across my face as my stomach tingles with the memory. "It was incredible, but... I don't know." I frown as my shoulders sag. "I have no clue what to think. I thought it would change things, but he's not behaving any differently, which is kind of a good thing. On the other hand, I wish it would change things."

"Honey, Rian Walsh is a player. You can't put your heart on the line for him unless he gives you a valid reason to think otherwise." She squeezes my arm reassuringly, and I nod.

“He did say some things that I doubt he says to every girl he gets in his bed,” I admit.

“Really? What was it?”

Grabbing her arm, I tug Kia into an empty hall before turning to her. “First, he admitted that he was the one who blacklisted me from other guys in Grove Hill.”

Her skin pales as she blinks at me. “Rian blacklisted you? Not your brother? His best friend was the one who did it?”

“Yeah, it was a shock for me, too. Then, it pissed me off, and I said something stupid.” I grimace, remembering the words that fell from my mouth.

I like getting under his skin, but that was a bit too much.

“Well... don’t leave me in suspense. What did you say?”

I pause to retrieve the words from my brain. “If you really wanted to fuck me that bad, you could’ve just asked.” A shudder runs through my body from the words. They were said in anger. If it was that I was flirting with him, I wouldn’t be so weirded out by them.

I’ve *never* flirted with Rian. Have I flirted with other guys? Sure, but not him.

“And you guys did it after that?” she presses, wanting as much information as possible, but she’s going to be disappointed.

“We didn’t do it, okay? He just went down on me, but he said that I’m his, like claimed ownership of me.”

His words echo through my mind as my cheeks redden.

*You’re mine and nobody fucks my girl but me. When you’re ready, I’ll ruin you with my cock.*

*Holy hell.* That shouldn't have been as hot as it was. Even just thinking about it has my body all revved up and ready to go. But, he made himself clear. He expects me to wait on him, but that's bullshit. What kind of sense does it make for me—the one who's only had sex once because of him blacklisting me—should have to wait for him to say jump when he's the one who fucks everything that moves?

“Well, that's something for sure.” She loops her arm through mine and leads me back toward the main hall.

“Screw that,” I say, irritation flaring.

“Sorcha?” She gives me a sideways glance.

I'm a fucking O'Reilly. I shouldn't live by anyone else's rules but my own, and I'm definitely not going to sit around waiting for Rian fucking Walsh to get sick of screwing his way through this town before eventually making his way to me.

If he wants to be my one and only, I have to be his. Until then, I'm going to piss him the fuck off.

“Is your cousin throwing one of his parties this weekend?” I ask as I squeeze her arm.

A devious smile tugs at her lips. “Hell, yes, he is, and he keeps asking about you. He thinks you're absolutely smoking, as he should. You're a gem.”

Although Dominic likes to party, he is a real sweetheart. He's a freshman in college but lives at home. Lucky for him, his parents are never home so he always takes advantage and throws parties. “Great!” My mind starts going a mile a minute with possibilities.

I grin as she pulls out her phone, clicking away with sending her cousin a text. A minute later, her phone dings with a response, and a shriek quickly follows.



“He’d love to see you again,” Kia waggles her eyebrows..  
“But, we need to go shopping for the sluttiest dresses we can find.”

I laugh off her innuendo about her cousin.

“Sluttiest, huh?” a male’s voice interrupts our conversation.

My skin prickles as I fight the reaction my body has to his deep, sultry voice. I turn to face Rian, who doesn’t look happy at all.

*Good.*

“Yup. We have plans this weekend. Come on, Kia.” School has ended, which means we can prepare for the fun we’re going to have this weekend.

His hand shoots out and snaps around my wrist, using this hold to push me against the locker, the rivets in the metal digging into the back of my head. My scalp stings, but the way his eyes turn nearly black and zeros in on me like I’m his prey, makes an epiphany ring through my mind.

I like the pain and the prospect of him causing more. But, not just from anyone, only from this man. Am I really admitting to myself that *I want Rian Welsh to hurt me?*

Yes, please.

He cages me against the lockers with his arms blocking me in, the jealousy rolling off him in waves—a riptide of an unforgiving energy.

“What do you think you’re doing?” he growls in a mixture of anger and confusion.

I’m under his skin, exactly where I like to be. If I’m under his skin, it means his attention is on me, even if I’m not in

front of him.

“What? You and your friends can go to parties and get fucked up, but the rules are different for me?” I taunt him. I’m not backing down.

His jaw clenches. “You know the fucking rules, Sorcha. If you go to a party, one of us goes with you, and you sure as fuck don’t go wearing something *slutty*.” He’s seething, but I can see right through him. He’s not angry. Rian is jealous. Apparently, he wants me to just sit around and wait for him. *Selfish caveman*.

“Thank you so much for the concern, Rian, but I don’t need a chaperone. If I want to go to a party with my best friend and hang out with her cousin, I can, because I’m an adult and... unattached.”

His nostrils flare and the heat of his breath washes over my face. “Un... attached?” he nearly sneers the words, his frustration clear from the throbbing vein visibly pulsing in his temple.

I’ve never seen him so... primal. He’s barely hanging on.

I shrug dismissively. “If a guy isn’t one-hundred percent mine, how could I be his, right?” My point is made clear. He can’t claim me as his if he’s acting like nothing has changed, and expecting me to sit back and accept him screwing other girls.

I’ll only settle for equality, even from the tragically beautiful, sad boy who has owned my heart since I was too young to understand it. I won’t take scraps.

My heart—he has it completely. My body, on the other hand? He can’t claim that. Not yet, at least. I have more self-respect than that.

“Now, if you’ll excuse me,” I say as I push him back.

He lets me. I’m not under any disillusion that he couldn’t easily keep me pinned against the lockers if he wanted, but if my brother saw us in this position, he’d know something happened between us.

Rian isn’t willing to risk that.

Rian steps back, the possessive energy rolling off him in waves, as I grab Kia’s arm, looping ours together.

“Let’s go get you something sexy. Dom has really missed you,” Kia adds, stoking the fire just right.

“You’re not going, kid. Get the idea out of your head.”

I don’t turn my back to Rian, thrusting my middle finger in the air, as we walk out of the school.

The heavy glass doors close behind us before Kia starts gushing. “Oh my god! I’m loving this bad bitch energy. You are officially my new spirit animal.”

I laugh. “If he wants me, he’ll have to work harder than just eating me out for an hour.”

Her eyes widen as she squeezes my arm, excitement sparking in her eyes. “An hour?” A grin spreads across her lips. “You lucky bitch. You better know what you’re doing.”

I can’t help my smirk as we walk toward my car. “The only person who knows Rian Walsh better than I do is my brother. Trust me. I know *exactly* what I’m doing.”

We get in my car and it turns over, purring like a newborn kitten. “I need a new form of exercise. What do you think I should do?” I ask, veering off topic, but she doesn’t seem off-put by the subject change.

“Oh, I was going to talk to you about this! My neighbor teaches a pole-dancing class in town. She swears it’s great for confidence and weight loss. Apparently, she has some type of thyroid disorder and lost a bunch of weight learning to pole dance.”

That catches my attention. *What are the odds?* I have a thyroid disorder.

“We could take it together! It would be so much fun.”

I was going to suggest the same thing. I guess it’s true what they say about great minds.

CHAPTER  
**SIX**

**S**he's such a fucking brat. Sorcha is testing me and she's doing it consciously. It's not like when she talks to a guy in the hall about some mediocre assignment. No, those times she got under my skin unintentionally.

It's worse when she does it on purpose, as it not only gets under my skin, it gets in my blood and makes it boil. I can't focus on anything other than her threat of going to this party to meet the guy her friend said *can't wait to see her*.

*Fuck.*

Tiernan is right. I'm whipped, and all I've done is taste her sweet cunt. I should've just fucked her—tied her down and fucked her all day instead of trying to be smart about our situation.

I'm never smart when it comes to her. Smart would've been walking away when she said I could've asked for her pussy if I really wanted it. Smart would've been ignoring her conversation with her friend. Smart would've been fucking a random slut like I always do when she gets under my skin.

Did I do any of those things? No.

I lose all rational thoughts where Sorcha is concerned. I think with my dick, and it's not serving me very well.

I wanted to stay away from her, keep her out of my fucked-up world, but the second I touched my tongue to her skin, I couldn't turn back. My only saving grace is I want to ease her into everything.

I'm going to take her virginity, but I'm going to do it the right way. I'm taking this slow. I can't let my libido destroy her first time.

Then, I will ease her into everything else, test out what she likes in bed, before I give her the full depths of my depravity. I can't wait to fill all three of her holes and have her tears and cum soaking my sheets.

The lack of relief is driving me so crazy, I might kill her when I drive my cock into her tight cunt for the first time.

It doesn't matter what she says about it. Sorcha is *mine*.

Finn may get flack from the guys for being a kinky bastard, but that's only because they have no idea what I'm into.

Colin and Eoghan stare at me like I've lost my mind as I walk to the kitchen and grab a beer from the fridge.

"Who pissed in your coffee?" Colin laughs as Finn strolls in behind me.

"Fuck off," I growl as I bite off the beer cap and my best friend chuckles under his breath.

"Ain't it obvious? He hasn't had his dick sucked today."

Yeah, pick on me all you want. Nothings worse than having to let Sorcha walk away earlier, knowing she was going to buy a provocative dress to wear for someone else.

My muscles clench.

*If a guy isn't one-hundred percent mine, how could I be his, right?*

Her words echo in my head as I chug the beer. She was making a stand, which fills me with pride and pisses me the fuck off.

She wouldn't be doing this if I hadn't given her a reason to in the past. I thought I could ignore this—fight it—but I can't and now, it's coming back to bite me in the ass.

The image of tears in her eyes and heartbreak written across her face vibrates in my memory as I try to push the outline of her from my vision.

I can't go to that dark place right now. Not around everyone else. I have a lot of secrets I keep from these guys, but nothing is as dark and deeply buried as the way I've hurt Sorcha.

It was always a way to protect, but the pain I caused her is my biggest regret. Sometimes, I look at Sorcha with her big blue eyes and dark hair and I see my mom, and I want like hell to protect her from the same fate, protect her from guys like me.

She's my best friend's little sister and that should be the only reason I want to protect her, but it's not. That reason is far down my list. The first reason is one I can't even think of. Every time I try to, I end up on a downward spiral because I'm not supposed to feel this way about her. I made a pact with my friends and forced this way of life onto them.

It pisses me the fuck off that all the pain and suffering has come to a head and it's all for nothing.



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*I GRIP her bare shoulders tight as I pin her in place against the wall, my fingers are sure to leave bruises. I stare down into her big blue eyes, hoping she can understand the thoughts that are running through my head that I can't give voice to.*

*"What the fuck are you on?" I growl, but I can tell she's hardly listening to me.*

*"Chill out, Rian. I only had a few Jell-O shots. I'm a lightweight. You're not my dad or brother. Don't you dare ruin this for me." She's not taking me seriously. Instead, she meets the heat in my eyes with her own and it blazes down to my soul. She's begging me to do something neither of us should be thinking about. "You're so bossy. Has anyone ever told you that?" her words slur together. Her breath is hot on my face and I know that from this moment on, I will always equate the smell of Jell-O shots with this vision of Sorcha, of how she is dressed in this moment. She's wearing a tight as fuck silky tank top. The dark blue matches her eyes, but I highly doubt any dude at this house party is looking at her eyes with how much cleavage she's showing. It takes everything in me not to tug it down and let her tits pop out so I can devour them with my eyes and mouth. She's wearing a skin tight black leather skirt that is stretched tight across her juicy ass and leaves nothing to the imagination. Then, there's her shoes. They could totally carry the plot of any porno. They have thin black straps that wind up her long legs. The heels are high and spiky.*

*Lightning webs across my stomach as her hand delves under my shirt. Her fingers wreak havoc on my senses as she discovers every dip and divot of the muscles spanning my torso.*

*God, her touch is so electric, and my cock throbs in response.*

*“I’ve never seen this side of you. It’s a bit of a turn on, Rian,” she whispers as she licks her lips, nearly seducing the pants right off me.*

*Nearly.*

*She wants me to lose control, take her into one of these rooms, and fuck her senseless, but I haven’t had enough to drink to lose control.*

*“You only flirt with me when you’re plastered,” I throw the accusation at her.*

*“It’s the only time that I have the courage to. Besides, you like it when I flirt with you. I bet you’d like it even better if I —” She trails her fingers over my belt and flattens her palm over the steel monster in my jeans before squeezing it. I could’ve so easily given in. Let her drop to her knees and suck me right there, but the shame hits hard, and I grab her wrist, prying it off my dick.*

*“You want me to fuck you? Is that it, kid? You want me to pin you down and fuck your tight cunt until you can’t walk. Are you trying to be my whore for the night?”*

*Her eyes widen as they stay locked on mine.*

*“Because that’s all it ever is. I never go back for seconds. I’m a one and done type of guy. But there’s no need for you to beg for my dick. You’re never getting it.” I don’t need to get any closer to see the rejection in her eyes. I intentionally planted it there, but the shame won’t leave me. “I don’t fuck girls that look like you.”*

*I regret it immediately. Heartbreak and betrayal distort her features as she blinks in shock. Tears begin to form and it only*

*takes a moment for them to fall.*

*“Because I’m fat? Fuck you, Rian.”*

*What? No. That’s not what I said at all. How could she think that? The truth is I don’t fuck girls who look like Sorcha O’Reilly. Not curvy girls. Not brunettes. Not girls who dress modestly and wear practically no makeup except to dress up for parties. Not girls who are inexperienced like her.*

*I don’t do it because I’m not attracted to girls like her. I do it because it would make this need I have for her feel like it’s okay.*

*“I didn’t say—” my words cut off as she pushes me aside and runs down the hall. Her shoulders are shaking from her sobs like that one sentence completely destroyed her in every way possible.*

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I CRACK open another beer as I dodge the others and head to my room for some self-enforced isolation. None of them would understand, not even Tiernan. He may know about my stalking and my obsession with Sorcha, but he doesn’t know about the damage I’ve inflicted.

That party was the last time Sorcha ever flirted with me or even looked at me without hurt in her pain. After that, anytime I drove her to a party, she wouldn’t even look at me, much less engage with me in a conversation..

The thing that sticks out most from that night is when I found her all alone on the back porch. She was still sobbing, and it broke my heart that I couldn’t hold her in my arms. Tell her how beautiful she is. How much I want her. I just stood

near the door and listened. If I had a soul, that night it would have decayed into rot and ruin.

I chug down the rest of my beer before almost ripping my shirt off. I need to take a long ass shower in an attempt to wash away the images of her crying that night because of what I said. Because of what I am. My door crashes open to reveal an anxious Finn gripping his cell to his ear.

“What the fuck, man?” I snap, scowling at the intrusion.

“Just stay on the phone. We’re coming, okay?” He nearly drops his phone as he tries to dial numbers. His eyes meet mine. They’re frantic and wild. “I need backup.”

“For what?”

His next words have my spine going straight and my heart trying to beat its way out of my rib cage. “My sister.” Those two words have the ability to revolutionize my world. Sorcha *never* calls Finn for help, and he’s never looked so freaked out.

That means two things. One, she’s in trouble. Two, I’m spilling some asshole’s blood tonight for messing with my woman.

I grab the shirt I just discarded and yank it on, not paying attention if it’s backwards or inside out. I stalk to my dresser drawer and grope around until my hand comes in contact with cold, hard metal. I pull out my Glock, check the chamber to make sure it’s loaded before tucking it into the back of my jean’s waistband. The only time I leave home with it is when some serious shit is going down. I’m fine with relying on my knife. Plus, I enjoy the hands-on experience that a bullet just can’t satisfy.

“I’ll drive,” I declare as I stalk past Finn, his phone still glued to his ear.

I don't know who did what to Sorcha, but shit's about to go down. If it's a punk ass student, it doesn't matter who their parents are. No one makes Sorcha uncomfortable except me. I know I'm a bastard for thinking that way, but when it comes to my woman, there's no room for rational thought. Bottom line is whoever is the cause of Sorcha's distress won't see tomorrow.

CHAPTER  
**SEVEN**

“Oh, this is cute!” Kia gushes as she flashes another dress at me. It’s a strapless gold shiny number with a black underlay. However, like most of the things she’s shown me, it looks too small to fit.

Earlier today we went to sign up for the pole-dancing class then Kia suggested we shop at this cute little thrift store, but all they seem to have are high-end prom dresses. Not exactly the *house party* attire.

“It would look great on you. Too bad it doesn’t go well with my skin tone.” It’s the truth. I’m about as pale as you can get without anemia.

“Oooh! This would look great on you!” she exclaims as she studies a white lace crop top paired with a black skirt.” Kia tosses them at me before nodding at the shoe area. “Now, let’s get you some killer red heels!”

This will work. It’s a little skimpy, but it’s not like Rian or my brother will see me wearing these. If they did, they’d probably lock me up.

Once we make our purchases, we leave the shop and head down the street to a taco truck. Today will be my cheat day and I love tacos.

It's pretty deserted, except for the three guys I recognize from school, sitting at a picnic table off to the side. Lucky for us, there's no one else around so we don't have to wait in line. We both order the same thing, carne asada tacos with all the fixings, and within moments, our food is ready.

We find our way to a hard, weathered picnic table and discuss our plans for Friday night. It's nice to sit and talk to Kia and forget about Rian and his tongue for a while. I pluck a stray piece of the seasoned steak and pop it into my mouth as motion from the corner of my eye catches my attention. Two of the three guys from the other picnic table appear next to us and slide in on each side of me, sandwiching me in.

Darkness descends over Kia's face and her lips pucker in disgust. My whole body stiffens at the intrusion into our little bubble. I feel like that little girl Rian pulled out of the mud all those years ago—vulnerable and dirty.

There were three guys sitting over there and I know which one didn't come over. Christian is an asshole for not stopping this, but not the same kind as his brother, Dez—the one who started this whole thing.

The meat that I had been chewing turns into a hard lump as I try to swallow it. "Sorcha, you're looking delicious as ever," Dez rasps in my ear, but I don't respond. I lift my eyes to Kia and am intercepted with the apologetic ones of Dez's friend on the other side of me.

"Thanks, but I'm eating, Denzel." Or rather I should be, but him sitting this close just makes my skin crawl.

"I have something you can put in your mouth."

I struggle not to gag at the image his words inflict.



Dez is one asshole who doesn't know how to take a hint. Or he doesn't care enough to pay attention. He constantly flirts and tries to touch me. Every time I ignore him. He's not bad looking, but his personality makes him dog ugly. You know that feeling in the pit of your stomach when you can tell something isn't right, that's the feeling I get every single time he comes near me.

“Go away,” I growl. I wish I could ignore him or walk away, but for fucks sake, **SOMETIMES A GIRL WANTS TO EAT HER GOD DAMN TACO IN PEACE!**

“Listen to her, or I'll call her brother,” Kia warns a moment before snatching my phone off the table.

“Oh, I'm so scared.” Dez laughs and I envision elbowing him in the mouth, knocking out his perfectly straight, white teeth.

Very few people know Finn is my brother and I'm not sure why that is. We run around the same crowd. I've always assumed it's because we don't look similar. He looks like our dad, and I look like the insufferable cunt who birthed me.

A hand lands on my back and slides down my spine. Dez stops when he reaches my ass and stays there. He keeps it there like he owns it.

“Leave me alone,” I hiss. My whole body freezes except for my fingers. They tremble so I fold them and place them in my lap.

*Stop touching me, please. Just go away.*

He caged me in like this so I can't escape him. I know it. That's why he made his friend sit on the other side of me. Unless I want to slide under the table, I can't run.

“I’m calling!” Kia announces as she taps my phone a few times before putting it to her ear. “Get your fucking hands off her, you stupid pig!” Kia’s face is red with anger.

I nudge his arm away, and he drops it, but only to grab my thigh with his other one. His fingers are precariously close to my crotch.

“There’s been talk of you coming and going from the Bastard house lately. Girls go there for only one reason, Sorcha.” He leans in even closer, like he has a secret to tell me. “Are you fucking one Bastard in particular or are they tossing you around like a common whore?”

This guy is disgusting. He makes my entire body crawl. Then, he tightens his fingers on my leg and tears collect in my eyes from his forceful grip.

“How much do you think I would have to pay Finn in order for him to let me have my way with you? I’ve heard drugs are a good enough trade for pussy.”

He’s so disgusting. Finn would never sell me. My brother loves me. The way Kia nods tells me he’s on his way. My brother lives only a few blocks away but that doesn’t stop me from my inner plea.

*Please hurry, Finn.*

The noise of my heart pounding in my ears gets louder at each passing second. I see Kia’s lips moving, but I can’t make out a single word. I don’t know if seconds pass or if it’s minutes. When a hand cups and squeezes my tit, I jump, instinctively trying to get away from the invasion, but Dez’s friend won’t budge. I have nowhere to go.

The table rocks as Kia stands and points at the guys with her free hand. “Get your hands off of her, you shit licker!” She

directs her fury toward Dez. “And you!” Her eyes now blaring at his friend on the other side of me, “Move your nitwitted gargoyle ass!”

I grasp at his wrist. “Stop it, Dez. I’m not a whore. I go to that house because my brother lives there, you freak. Get your hands off of me. Otherwise, I’ll file harassment charges against you,” I threaten, but his response is to just laugh. He pulls me closer, his fingers digging into my arm.

“Please. How could you be related to a Bastard and the entire town not know about it? Nice try, but you’re a slut, Sorcha, and it’s time for you to get acquainted with my dick.” My throat runs dry at his words. Whatever is about to happen next isn’t going to be good. “You’ve been playing hard to get for a long time, and I’m done playing nice.” His hand squeezes my wrist and forces my hand against his crotch. I nearly vomit on the spot.

“Fuck you, asshole!” I yank my arm, but it’s like there’s a steel band holding it in place. My hand is still on the prick’s... prick. I glare into the shit brown eyes of the guy who thinks he has a right to my body. The tears I had been trying to blink back begin to spill and I hate myself for it. I hate that Dez knows he can pull this kind of emotion from me.

But then, I feel it. I feel *him*. And with tears crawling down my cheeks—I smile. The look of confusion that takes over his face is retribution for my tears. What is about to happen next is retribution for everything else.

“Get your mother fucking hands off her.”

In an instant the pressure around my wrist is gone and the place Dez had occupied is empty. The crunch of cracking bones accompanies this new circumstance and its music to my ears. Dez’s feet fly up into the air as he tumbles to the ground.

Rian's shadow looms over the prone man. My eyes settle on Rian, his face so red with anger I'm surprised steam isn't billowing from his ears.

The tinkering of a giggle flits across the table. I take a quick look and find Kia hugging my phone to her chest, her smile takes up most of her face.

"Hell, Rian. I usually accept greetings in handshakes, not punches to the face." Dez laughs as he stands, rubbing his jaw.

"Don't you dare fucking touch her," Rian warns, the venom in the words flowing off his tongue are full of hatred. "The only reason you're not unconscious is because you were too close to Sorcha. Otherwise, you'd be lying on the concrete for so long, the buzzards would be making dinner out of your eyes."

*I should've known Finn would bring him.*

Finn steps up a moment later, no less angry. Maybe even more so because with the way he's glaring down at Dez. I can tell he wanted to be the one to lay him out. "Why would you be so stupid as to touch my sister?" he grits out between clenched teeth. I expect Dez to cower in fear because everyone does, but he has bigger balls than I gave him credit for. He laughs openly before looking at me.

"Holy shit. You pimp out your own sister? What do I have to pay for an hour with the slut?"

I cringe but not because of what he said. I'm used to Dez calling me vulgar names. I do it because Rian lunges, murder is clearly written in their depths.

Finn moves fast and grabs Rian's biceps from behind before he has a chance to get his hands on the asshole. Dez would be dead if he did.

“Calm the fuck down and let me handle this,” Finn snaps at the seething man in his hold.

Rian closes his eyes for a brief moment and sighs deeply, obviously trying to gain a semblance of composure. A few short moments later, he shrugs out of my brother’s hold and stomps in my direction, blocking my view of whatever Finn does.

“Listen, dipshit,” the gravel in my brother’s voice permeates the air around me. “I don’t usually give jackasses like you a second chance, so listen closely. You ever touch my sister, or even speak one word to her again, that will be it. I’ll destroy you. No one messes with my sister and gets away with it. If I do to you what I want to do, they won’t ever find your body. You grew up in Grove Hill. You know what can happen. Touch my sister again and you won’t get away with it, period. I will gladly break any rule to keep my sister safe. Is this in any way unclear?”

“Seriously, Dez!” Christian finally cuts in, shaking his head at his younger brother. He stands from the other picnic table. “I’ve told you to leave Sorcha alone for months.” I know Christian is trying to help, but he has inadvertently just gotten me in trouble.

I curse under my breath as Rian fixes his ice cold, hard gaze on me, the muscle above his brow twitches, but he stays silent. His friend stands and joins Dez as they make their way to Christian. He pauses for a moment to look at me before leaving, the blood dripping from his nose and split lip gives me a sense of vindication. Rian got him good. Serves him right for touching me like that.

“You alright, sis?” Finn asks as he approaches.

I nod. “I’m good.”

“No, you’re fucking not,” Rian growls. I cross my arms at him defiantly. “That asshole has been fucking with you for *months*? Why the hell didn’t you say anything?”

“Because I’m not a child, and I can take care of myself just fine,” I snap back at him before standing, squaring up to him.

On the outside, this probably looks ridiculous. I’m only five-three while Rian is six feet tall, but I’m not afraid of him.

“Obviously you can’t, kid.”

“Stop calling me kid!”

“Maybe if you stopped acting like one, I wouldn’t need to,” he snarls right back, and I’m barely able to stop myself from punching that smug look off his handsome face.

“Jesus Christ! Talk about blaming the victim, Rian. She did nothing wrong. Why don’t you pee on her so everyone knows she’s yours?”

Finn doesn’t seem fazed by Kia’s comment, but I suppose he doesn’t know her well enough to determine if she’s joking.

“Are they always like this?” she asks me as Finn plops down next to her. Although she’s my best friend, she hasn’t really gotten to see Rian and me interact.

He shrugs. “You get used to it.”

“Grab your shit, Sorcha. We’re leaving,” Rian demands before turning on his heels, expecting me to obey and follow him like one of his many one night stands. But, I stand my ground, raising my chin. Who does he think he is?

“No.”

His head whirls around so fast I’m surprised it doesn’t snap right off his neck. “No?” he asks incredulously.

“No. As in not happening. I’m having a late lunch with my best friend. Thank you for the assistance, but you can fuck off now.” I hold my head high, making sure my stance is known. I’m not his little lap dog. If he says jump, I’ll ask him *How high*, then complete the sentence with *would you like my foot up your ass?* I can tell him no if I want. He has no claim on me.

I don’t know what I expected him to do next, but it wasn’t for him to grab me and throw me over his shoulder like a damn caveman.

I screech as I fumble with the back of his shirt, desperate not to fall on my face, but his arms anchor my legs to his chest.

“Rian, put me down!” I wail at him as much as is physically possible with a shoulder in your gut. This is disrespectful and dehumanizing. I am not a sack of potatoes. He can’t just toss me around whenever he feels like.

“Shut that bratty mouth of yours,” he hisses before the asshole slaps my ass, like my brother isn’t standing a few feet away.

“Finn! Do something!” I beg, trying to pry myself from Rian’s death grip, but it’s impossible.

Why isn’t my brother kicking his ass? Apparently, his loyalty to his friends is stronger than his loyalty to me. I’m able to get a glance at him through the hair hanging in my face. He, along with Kia, are strolling to my car. Kia has a wide, idiotic grin on her face while Finn is...

...EATING MY GODDAMN TACO!

Rian stops walking once we reach my brother’s truck and sets me on my feet. I narrow my eyes on him before I try to

bolt. Of course, he's expecting this sort of maneuver and grabs me. He spins me around then pushes my front against the closed passenger door. I squirm when he pulls my arms around me and leans his chest into my back. He whispers into my ear, "Stop fighting me or I will fuck your ass right here where everyone can see, and I'll make you like it." He bends my arms in a nearly painful angle as I fight him.

"Fuck you. I'm not your property. You can't treat me like this!" Then, the cold kiss of metal wraps around my wrists and I hear the click, a gasp falling from my lips.

*This bastard just handcuffed me.*

I can feel the rumble of his laughter against my back. "You most definitely are my property. After the ways you've pissed me off today, I'm going to need to show you again. Immediately." The sound of gravel getting kicked up by tires draws our attention and we watch as Finn drives my car out of the parking lot. A sharp pain seizes the side of my neck as Rian's teeth bite down. His hand runs up my rib cage then grabs my breast as he rocks his hips against my ass.

"Mine."

Oh, fuck. I need to piss him off more often. It's like he automatically knows what I like without me even being aware. He's an asshole, but he's an asshole I want to fuck me.

"Rian," I moan as he slowly unbuttons my shirt enough to sneak his hand inside, slipping it into my bra. His thumb connects with my nipple and I whimper as he touches the barbell.

He stiffens. "You have your nipples pierced?" The gravelly tone sends a shiver through my body. "When did you have this done?" He tugs on the barbell and I hiss, my breath fogging up



the truck window. My body keeps reacting to Rian's manipulations without my consent. I press my ass back against him again.

"I did it on my... birthday." I'm practically panting from how turned on he has me.

"Fuck," he growls as he rolls my nipple between his fingers, tugging and twisting it to perfection. "I'm going to kill whoever did this. No one gets to see your tits except me, baby."

And that is exactly why it's a good thing he doesn't know about Jason Woods. If he knew we fucked, Rian would definitely maim Jason.

"I'm not yours, Rian," I mutter, my defiance half-hearted.

The pressure at my back leaves and a cool breeze replaces the heat. His other hand darts in front of me and grabs the door handle. He yanks it open and effortlessly lifts me into the truck.

This is exactly what I mean when I say Rian is hot and cold.

He slams it shut and, seconds later, the driver's door opens. Rian climbs in, glaring at me. Then, his hands are in my hair and he's dragging me across the black leather bench seat to him, my scalp burning in protest.

"I told you that I'm going to punish you for this crap, Sor. Now, open wide." He roughly tilts my head downward so I can watch him undoing his jeans and pulling out his thick erection.

Oh, my god. He's so big. No wonder he gives off BDE so hardcore. I swallow the saliva that instantly floods my mouth.

“Be a good girl and gag on my cock.” He doesn’t give the option of a refusal as he forces my head down. I’m quite literally a puppet and him the marionette. With my hands cuffed behind my back, he uses my hair as the strings, manipulating my body.

The idea of putting that thing in my mouth freaks me out. I’ve never given head before. *What if I screw it up? His dick is so big. What if I can’t fit it in my mouth, or I totally suck at this?*

I don’t open my mouth fast enough for him so he pinches my nose closed. It doesn’t take long for me to open and he takes full advantage. He forces his way past my protesting lips and down my throat as I fight the handcuffs and try to pull back.

Flames lacerate up my throat as tears blur my vision.

*I’m going to be sick. I’m going to puke all over him.*

“Fuck, yes,” he rasps as he forces me all the way down his length before pulling me back up.

I cough hard as sputum sprays from my mouth, but he barely gives me a second before he’s pushing me back down.

“Rian, stop. I don’t want to—” I protest, as he takes that moment to thrust back into my mouth.

“It’s polite to return the favor, Sorcha. I licked your delicious cunt until you soaked my sheets. The least you can do is let me come down your throat.” How can he talk so calmly as he’s literally choking me on his cock?

The tears spill faster and faster as Rian takes more and more, forcing himself deeper and deeper until his pubic hair tickles my face. I fight to breathe as I also fight to not throw up. I concentrate on the actions, not my reactions. The feel of

my tongue along his shaft, the soft skin of his head. Before I realize it's happening, my scalp is no longer burning. He has let go of my hair.

It takes me a moment to realize that he's not fucking my face. I'm actively sucking him in and out, running my tongue over his length, gulping him down deeper and deeper. My stomach muscles work as I bob, my hands useless as they are still bound behind me.

*Fuck, he tastes so good.*

“Be my good girl and choke on it, Sorcha.”

I whimper and press back down his cock, the tears fall from how hard it is to swallow him into my throat. It surprises me, but I like the struggle, the pain, and how it makes me feel when he calls me a good girl.

I break free from his cock and gulp in air like a drowning person finally getting on dry land. Rian has other ideas though. He's not even giving me a break from this. He tightens his grip on my hair at the scalp. “You don't get to breathe until I say so. You do what I want you to do. And baby...” He thrusts his hips up, stabbing the back of my throat. “...that mouth feels too good.” My heart flutters at his praise.

My larynx is going to swell shut by the time he's done with it. He drives in, over and over, the cab of the truck fills with his groans and grunts mixing with my gurgling and choking. “I should've put you on your knees long ago. This mouth was made to be wrapped around my cock.. And I'm going to make good use of it. Do you like me fucking your face, taking it because I want you that fucking bad? Do you like being bad for me, sucking my cock in your brother's truck?”

Judging from how wet those questions just made me, I'd say he hit it right on the mark. I like being bad with him.

With his free right hand, he runs it past my bound hands then slides under the waistband of my jeans. He glides over my ass then runs his fingers through my slit. He lands on my throbbing clit and pushes down on the nub, hard.

“So fucking wet for me.” He growls as he gets rougher, fucking my mouth faster, stroking my clit harder. “That’s right, baby. Make me come down your throat.”

I want to rock my hips into his touch, but this position makes it impossible. I struggle to breathe through my nose from how quickly he’s thrusting into my mouth.

I’m drowning in my own saliva and tears, but I don’t think there would be a better way to die than Rian fucking my mouth.

Suddenly, my pussy shudders at his touch and I moan around him, the sound vibrating down his shaft until he roars with release.

He pulls my head back just enough, so his squirts of hot cum land on my tongue. One after the other until it has no choice but to flow down my throat.

“Fuck, yes!” he groans as the last of his orgasm leaves his body then releases his grip on my head. I bounce up, taking in a ragged breath, his cum dripping down my chin. I cough on the much needed oxygen, but the exertion has Rian’s fluids nearly coming back out. Once I’ve gained some composure, I meet Rian’s eyes, only to see them on my chin, darkening with something akin to desire and pride. At the slight tickle on my chin, I realize he’s staring at his cum that didn’t make it into my mouth.

“Clean up the mess on your face.” His demand is low and gravelly. He’s not talking about my tears or the drool. He’s talking about his cum. I’d wipe it off if I had the use of my hands, but I’m still handcuffed. Instead, I make use of my tongue, swiping it across my chin, lapping at the salty treat. He’s unblinking, like I mesmerized him with my action.

Rian dips his finger inside me one more time before he removes his hand. He looks at his glistening finger for a moment. I’d blush at his deed. However, after what just happened in the cab of my brother’s truck, there’s not much that can embarrass me now. He takes the finger coated in my juices and wipes it on my fucking face. Satisfied, he puts his half-hard dick back in his jeans, before turning the vehicle on and leaving the scene of our debauchery.

CHAPTER  
**EIGHT**

**A**s much as I don't want to, I drop Sorcha off at her house. My dick wants to follow her inside and fuck her tits, then come all over those barbells. However, my rage is dictating my next move, telling me it's time to hunt. I haven't had to do it in a couple months, but this one is way more important than all the others. Denzel Slater didn't just upset my woman or look at her strangely. He put his hands on her, sexually harassed her, and I fucking saw it. The only reason I'm not covered in blood and behind bars right now is because Finn stopped me from murdering him in broad daylight—in front of Sorcha, her friend, and a few other witnesses.

The few people that were there would be smart enough not to report me to the police anyways. Why? Because nobody likes that prick. He's one of the people in this town with parents who think they're untouchable.

The Gray's. The Slater's. The Black's. The Walter's.

They're all scum who think they can buy anyone and get away with everything. Just because the O'Reilly family lives on the bare minimum doesn't mean they are lesser.

Anyone that touches her is lucky if they can walk away. Dez may think he's one of the lucky ones, but little does he

know, sometimes the fear evoked from the hunt can be just as satisfying as the death.

He dies tonight. I already texted Donatello that I'll have another body for him so his cleanup crew should be on standby.

I park my car down the street from the Slater house and climb into the back seat. The back windows are darkly tinted. The only way anyone can see me is if they get up close and personal, but no one is stupid enough to do that. Once the sun sets, my black car will fade into the shadows, granting me more cover to stalk my prey without being spotted.

If someone sees my car, they'll just assume I'm in the area for a booty call and no one will raise an eyebrow. Everyone in this town knows about my... promiscuities.

My phone buzzes in my pocket and I pull it out. I roll my eyes when I see who it's from. I thought I got rid of Clara Malloy when she came around seven months ago claiming to be pregnant with my kid.

I didn't believe her. Why would I? She hadn't been the first to try to use that line to make an honest man out of me, but she was the first to be annoyingly persistent. I laughed in her face and told her I didn't believe the kid was mine. I'd need proof, like a DNA test, before I'd fall for something like that. It would be so easy for a girl to let me fuck her, then go fuck another guy five minutes later. Even if the kid was mine, a girl like Clara has no chance of caging me.

I'm not gullible enough to let anyone pull the wool over my eyes, but the words that scroll across the screen has me second guessing myself.



**Clara**

You don't need to worry. I gave the baby away. It was a girl, if you're curious. She was born late last night. Have a nice life, Rian.

A steel ball forms in my gut at her words. If she had been planning on chaining me to her, why would she give it away? Or keep up this facade until after the baby was born? The inclination that this baby is actually mine grows. Rage bubbles inside me at this possibility. The only one I want having my kid is my woman, and that's not Clara fucking Malloy. I wouldn't have demanded Clara to have an abortion or for her to give the baby up for adoption. If Clara wanted to have the baby so badly, I would have taken the baby and figured out a way to raise her. It reminds me of the tales surrounding Sorcha's mother, the woman who left the hospital and never looked back. The reminder makes me want to rip Clara's tongue out.

The girl was born last night, which means, unless something went wrong with the baby during delivery, she's probably long gone by now. This story won't end the way Sorcha's birth did. This one has a sad ending, much like the rest of my life.

After rereading the text several times, I shove my phone in my pocket and focus on the task at hand. This is something I can control. I can get rid of Denzel and keep Sorcha safe. Retrieving my possible daughter from the clutches of the foster system is somewhat out of my hands and that will haunt my dreams forever.

---

THE TANGERINES and pinks created by the sunset are long gone, giving way to a starless sky .A few minutes into the darkness, Denzel's car races around the corner, headed for his house. I don't waste a second of time. Even as I climb out of my car, I check my surroundings for witnesses. This is a neighborhood where all the blinds are pulled shut to hide their dirty little secrets from the world. No one will notice me taking Denzel unless he screams, but that's the point of my weapon. He won't scream.

As I charge down the street, I pull up my black hoodie and zip it to my chin. My hands clench and squeeze with anticipation. I stay in the shadows that the trees provide. Denzel is none the wiser as he stands in his driveway without a care in the world. I can't help the smile that stretches across my face as I stalk him.

If this was Five Families business, one of the guys would be with me, watching my six. Denzel didn't do enough for it to appear on their radar. He would've had to try to remove Sorcha's pants for that. That's their line he would've had to cross. He crossed my line when he looked at her. I won't ever let anyone get away with touching my girl.

Sorcha is mine. She always has been and the only hands that get to touch her are mine. My cock will be the only one to come near her mouth, her ass, and her delicious pussy. I'm hard just thinking about tasting her again, popping her cherry, being the first and only one to bury my bare cock deep inside her.

It won't be long until I can't hold myself back anymore.

Once I'm inside her. I'll own her, dominating every aspect of her life until she can't tell where I end and she begins. She'll be just as desperate for me as I am for her. She'll beg

for every inch of me, even if it's just in her heavenly mouth, and the taste of me will be enough to make her come. I'll embed myself so deep under her skin that just the sight of me will make her wet, and she'll submit to the depravity I'll show her. She'll learn to crave it, and gentle lovemaking won't be enough to satisfy the beast I'll brand into her being.

I make it to the asshole as he clicks the lock button on his fob. I pull out my gun as the car chirps, slamming it into the back of his head. The dense fucker manages to flip as he crumbles to the ground, blood dripping from the wound onto the pavement.

This, right here, is one of my favorite moments—watching my prey's eyes as they realize who's hands their life is in. The main emotion I typically see is surprise. Pain, fear, anger and/or disbelief are the usual additions. With Dez, his dark eyes widen as he turns white as a sheet, rivaling the ivory skin tone of the woman he tried to touch—tried to claim as his own. Surprise and fear are the winners tonight.

*Sorcha is mine.* Too bad he won't live long enough to learn that lesson.

“Get up,” I growl at him.

“What are you—”

“Shut your hole and do what I say or I'll shoot you right here, Slater. Get up off your ass.” My eyes narrow to slits as my jaw grounds so hard I worry my teeth will crack.

I can tell the exact moment when he sees my darkness trying to claw its way out of me, as if it's a separate entity. My point is made clear, and he's petrified.

“We can work this out.” He stumbles over his words and his feet as he tries to stand.

“Oh we can?” I ask, widening my eyes in mock relief. My once tight jaw morphs into a fanatical smile and I itch my right temple with the barrel of my gun. “Don’t you worry, little buddy. We will work everything out by the end of the night. Now, I’m gonna need you to walk to my car and get in. We’re going to go for a ride. If you’re good, maybe we’ll stop for ice cream. My treat!” My tone is almost comical, but leaves no room for argument. Yet, the dumbfuck still tries.

“I could yell for help,” he threatens, but he’s practically shaking in his boots. His forehead shines from perspiration as his hands tremble.

“You could, but then I’d have to kill your family and everyone else who lives on this street.” I tilt my head from side to side as if weighing my options. “Plus, I won’t spring for sprinkles. Now, that’s a lot of pointless bloodshed. Come willingly or I’ll bring an end to your family name tonight. What’s it going to be, pretty boy? You or you *and* everyone you give a shit about? Do I need to add whipped cream and a cherry?”

He examines my expression for a moment, trying to figure out if I’m bluffing.

Spoiler alert: I’m not.

We both know his mother is cooking dinner while his father reads the newspaper, and his big brother is on the phone trying to search out a slut desperate enough to suck his cock with his parents in the next room.

I’ve had plenty of time to hack into the security cameras inside the Slater home to check up on the family before this piece of shit returned home.

The hope visibly dies in his eyes as he looks longingly at his home one last time, his shoulders sag in defeat. That was easier than I thought. I was sure I'd have to follow through with my threat. It wouldn't be the first time I slaughtered a household to keep a predator away from Sorcha O'Reilly. I'll admit, I'm relieved. I don't find pleasure in killing moderately innocent people, but it doesn't bother me.

I make sure they knew it wasn't because they broke the rules, either. Everyone I came for knew it was me and why I wanted them dead. That made them even more petrified of me.

There's a big difference in levels of crazy from a man killing because his duty tells him to and someone doing it out of their own free will, because they want to. I'm that level of crazy.

---

"COME ON, MAN!" Denzel thrashes his body around in the backseat as I cruise the speed limit out of his neighborhood. The last thing I need is to get pulled over for speeding with a man tied up in my backseat.

*I should've gagged him, too. But, the whole reason he's not in the trunk is because I was having too much fun hearing him beg. Plus, I couldn't find a rattler.*

"What is this even about?" He groans as his head knocks against the window. *That probably hurt like a bitch. Bulletproof glass is nearly impossible to break.*

"You know what it's about. Now, shut up," I sneer.

"You mean the girl? Fuck, Rian. Sorcha is fucking easy and everyone knows it. She's about as much of a slut as her

brother is.”

Red swallows my vision in waves of pigmentation. He called my girl a slut. If it wasn't for me driving, I'd kill him right now for those filthy words. Keeping my eyes on the road, I reach back at Dez with my right hand and come in contact with his hair. I grab it and slam his head into the passenger head rest. The music of his nose cartilage breaking, and his whimpers of pain satisfies my bloodlust by a small percentage. *Can you break your nose twice in a day?*

“Ow! What the fuck, man? I'm not the only one. Everyone thinks it. It's a small town. People talk. You know Kia's cousin, Dom? Her and Kia always go to his parties in Houston. She gets wasted and fucks randoms guys that don't even know her name. People only go to these parties to hook up.”

My knuckles turn white from my tight grip on the steering wheel. It's not true. I know that. Sorcha isn't dumb enough to go to parties without one of us, much less let anyone touch her. She knows if anyone touches her, they will die. Kia did mention that the party Sorcha wanted to go to was hosted by her cousin, but that's probably a coincidence.

But, do people actually think this about Sorcha or is Dez just trying to get under my skin? If people think Sorcha is getting her rocks off with random guys at parties, it explains a lot of the wandering eyes where my girl is concerned.

“Where in Houston?” I demand, trying to control my anger. One way or another, Dom will understand that Sorcha isn't welcome at his parties. And, if Sorcha is there when I do it, I'll drag her out and spank her ass so hard she won't be able to sit for a week.

“I don't fucking know, man. I've never been to one. If you live in Grove Hill, you only get to these parties if Kia invites

you.”

I can't help, but roll my eyes at how I let this fuckface rile me. He's never even gone to a party. He doesn't know shit. “Shut the fuck up or I'll shoot you before we even reach The Ship Channel.”

---

THE NIGHT AIR is fragrant with dry grass as I drag Denzel into the musty warehouse. As futile as it is, he fights me, digging his heels in as we go. I slam the heavy steel door behind me and force him into the nondescript, folding metal chair. You wouldn't know by looking at the benign item, but many a woman and man have died upon it for committing similar crimes.

“Man, please. Let me go. I didn't break your stupid rules,” he pleads as tears fall down his face, but his annoying voice just earns him a punch to the temple. I know well enough what that hit can do. It causes disorientation, so it will take him a bit to recover.

I take the opportunity to untie his wrists and handcuff him to the chair before repeating the task with his legs. He's fully restrained and completely helpless.

“Rian, please!” He sobs like a newborn baby, and I haven't even started torturing him yet.

“Do you seriously think this is about the rules?” I huff as I grab the Bowie knife from my tray of tools and toss it from hand to hand. “You may have stayed within the Bastard's rules, but you broke *my* rules. I had Sorcha blacklisted for a reason, yet you thought it was okay to touch *my* girl.”

The red hue cloaks my vision again as I glare at him, only seeing how he reduced my spitfire to a trembling mess when he touched her. Drawing upon that rage, I slam the knife into his thigh with all the force my body possesses. The bone stops it from going all the way through, but that's to be expected. I step back to get the full picture of my handiwork. Blood gushes from around the blade before slowly seeping into his jeans. Dez throws his head back in a tortured wail that would alert any nearby witnesses. However, we are completely isolated.

“Fuck! Man, I didn't know she was yours. If I did, I never would've messed with her. I swear!”

I grab the hammer off my tray and can't help the sinister grin that pulls at my lips. Dez's eyes widen as I bring it down on the knife's handle, tapping lightly. The weapon barely sinks any further, but that's the point. Metal against bone is a whole other sensation as the vibration can be felt throughout the whole body. He wails again as snot and drool combine with his tears. It runs down his clenched face as he tries to focus on me with his bloodshot eyes. This little fucker has never felt real pain in his life. I bet he's never even broken a bone. Well, not until today.

“Rian, I promise I'll leave her alone,” he sputters out. “I won't even look in her direction. Just, please, let me go.”

I believe him. He would probably run in the opposite direction if he ever saw Sorcha again, but this isn't about teaching him a lesson. If it was, I would've just kicked his ass. No, this is about putting him in as much pain as possible before ending his miserable existence.

There are no second chances when it comes to my woman.



I twist the knife in his leg and he screams, convulsing like he's having a seizure. I yank it out as ungracefully as possible when I'm done, blood quickly pooling in the gaping hole and pouring freely.

God, he's a such a fucking pussy. If it was me, that cut would barely make me flinch, but I've conditioned myself to be able to block out the pain. My life is pain except for a few glimmers of light, most of which come from my woman.

"Are you done? You're... going... to let... me go?" He asks his ridiculous question on a wheeze, struggling to see past the pain in his leg.

Is he really that stupid? I guess he is, or maybe he's trying to cling onto the smallest shred of hope.

I revel in it, waiting a few seconds before I completely shatter that hope. He's stuck in a limbo of my creation and I can't help but bask in space where hope goes to die. "Now, why would I want to do something like that? Did you not put your hands on my girl? That can't be erased. Everyone who touches her, dies. Anyone who looks at her funny dies. Anyone who accidentally bumps into her in the hallway dies. You haven't seen the extent of my madness. You did the one thing that guarantees you a one way ticket to hell. And I promise you, the hell I create is way worse than your darkest imagination could ever muster. Denzel Slater, it's going to be a long death, and it's going to be excruciatingly painful to the point you'll pass out. Then, I'll pump you full of adrenaline to keep you awake and keep destroying this shell you inhabit. You won't die until I think you've learned your lesson."

Intense terror stills his body and his mouth opens on a loud gasp. I give him the most deranged smile I can muster, successfully scaring the shit out of him.

I take the dripping knife and cut his shirt down the middle, folding the fabric open before making work of carving up his skin, tossing the flesh onto my tray. I don't bother with gloves, there's just something about being able to feel someone's blood leave their body. His throat strains as he yells at the top of his lungs. His terrified eyes are drawn to the slivers of crimson covered flesh on my tray as he tries to fight the restraints, but it's futile. The more he thrashes, the faster his life ends and drips to the cracked cement floor.

"You're a fucking psycho!" he yells with his hoarse voice, but I just laugh.

"Stop squirming or my knife might slip." I'm not taking all the skin on his chest, but he's probably confused by the markings. The sharp blade slices through his skin like paper. The oozing blood is both calming and invigorating. It's a drug I can't get enough of.

"What?" he manages on a groan. His last bit of flesh hits the metal tray with a satisfying slap. "Do you want a closer look?" It doesn't matter if he does. He'll look anyway. I'm quite good at carving skin and I'm also quite meaningful with the messages I leave.

He'll need to take a good look at himself in a mirror to appreciate my penmanship. Very methodical, however I may try for comic sans font next time. I put down the knife and grab a rag from the tray and haphazardly wipe my hands before pulling out my phone. I click on the camera app, flipping the focus view and holding it at eye level so my victim can see what exactly the words on his chest spell out.

"Is that clear enough for you? Do you get the message yet, Denzel? What does it say?" The blood running in rivulets makes it a bit hard to decipher, but by the anguish on his face,

he can read it loud and clear. I put my phone back in my pocket, enjoying the heavy silence. It doesn't last for long though.

“I already said I'm sorry. What else do you want me to say?” he demands as if he has any control over this conversation. “That I wish I never touched her? Fine. I wish I never looked in her direct—”

I grip his hair at the root and yank his head back before screaming in his face. “What the fuck does it say?!”

“She's your woman,” he barely utters the words through his trembling, broken speech.

“Whose?” I enunciate my point by tugging on his hair again, and he groans.

“Yours.” I watch as his soul shatters, and he accepts that he isn't making it out of this warehouse alive. The death of his hope tastes almost as sweet as Sorcha's dripping cunt does.

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THE BLISTERING water of my shower does its best to rinse away the blood and sin of the night. But, I know that I will never get clean of it all. It's a reality I accept with arms wide open. After a few moments of letting the spray beat at my tense muscles, I climb out of the shower. My door rattles as someone beats it with a fist and I know what's coming.

Finn steps inside without waiting for an invitation and gives me a knowing look.

“What?” I ask as I drop my towel, not giving a fuck if my best friend sees my junk. It's been a long night and it's fucking

cold. I just want to put on my pants and crawl into bed. I took my sweet ass time killing that fucker and I'm exhausted.

"Where have you been?" he asks, arms crossed against his chest, looking mighty suspicious.

"Getting my dick wet." *I wish*. "Where else would I be?"

"I was listening to the police scanner and someone called in about that guy from yesterday, Denzel Slater. He was reported missing," he says as he steps closer, rubbing his palm along his jaw.

"Was he?" His parents must have found the blood by his car when leaving for work. I grab my hoodie and pull it on, pretending like I have nothing to hide.

He raises an eyebrow and studies me for a moment. I already knows the question, but he asks anyways. "Is anything going to blow back on you?" He knows it was me, but he can't prove it. No one can.

"No," I answer honestly.

"Good." He nods and turns to leave, but pauses in the doorway. Finn faces me before sending me a warm smile. "Thanks, man. My sister is lucky you care that much."

I tilt my head in acknowledgement and he shuts the door behind him. I don't correct him to tell him that it's more than *care* that I feel for his sister. I'm pretty sure it would piss him off if he knew the extent of my feelings so I keep it a secret for now. I just hope I don't have to keep it a secret forever.

CHAPTER  
**NINE**

## HER

**I**t's been two days since Rian fucked my throat raw and nothing has changed, except my ability to swallow without being reminded of being in my brother's truck. Whenever we pass each other in the school hall, he ignores my existence. Except for that one time when I had excused myself from class to go to the bathroom. I had been washing my hands when Rian came barreling in. He strutted up behind me, pinning my hips against the sink. I met his eyes in the mirror. I could feel them just as much as I could feel his hard dick grinding into my ass. He slid one hand under my skirt and cupped me between my legs, the other went up my shirt to pull on my barbells. I wanted to scream with pleasure and aggravation at the pleasure I knew was fleeting. When he whispered how he couldn't wait for me to sit on his face then licked my neck, I debated on leaving school early to take care of myself.

Yesterday was my first pole-dancing class, and today my limbs feel like noodles. I used muscles I've never used in dance or while running. However, the biggest change I've noticed is an emotional one. I feel more confident, maybe even sexier. I'm definitely going to be adding it to my workout regime.

I slip on the clothes I bought with Kia before fixing my hair. I settle on leaving it down and curling it into beach

waves. I finish my look with smokey eyes and light contouring, a red tinted lip gloss for a little shine.

Stepping out of the bathroom, I find Dad sprawled out on the couch with a newspaper in hand, watching tv. “Where are you going all dolled up?” He barely gives me a glance and doesn’t acknowledge how revealing my clothes are.

“I’m going to a party with Kia,” I explain as I walk past, expecting him to tell me to cover up or something, but he’s not my brother or Rian.

“Does that *boy* know about this?” He folds the newspaper and taps it on his knee.

“What boy?”

He flashes me an all-knowing look. “Finn may be blind, but I’m not. I know I wasn’t hallucinating when Rian Walsh walked in here the other day with you over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes. He carried you to your room, like he’s been there a million times.”

I thank my lucky stars that he didn’t say anything about the handcuffs that were still attached to my wrists. Rian has been at our house about a hundred times to drop me off when I was drunk. Dad doesn’t know this though. However, I don’t think he has ever been in my room.

“Are you... going to tell Finn?” I ask tentatively. If he says yes, I need the chance to warn Rian in case my brother gets pissed and wants to kick his ass. I can’t even imagine what he would do if he found out what we did in his cab.

“He’s my son. I don’t have to tell him anything.” He tosses the newspaper on the coffee table and picks up what appears to be his fifth beer.

I let out a deep breath of relief. “Thank you.”

“You need to be smarter than this, Sorcha,” he says before giving me a stern look. “Rian is a good guy, but he’s not good for you. I also don’t want to see him get your brother’s wrath or your brother ends up on the Scarfoni roster.”

A shudder runs through my body. I know who exactly the Scarfoni family is, and what they do for the Five Families. They clean up the bodies.

“Dad—”

I can’t stand the image of Rian or Finn being gone. Individually, their deaths would devastate me, but losing them at the same time would kill me.

“I know this isn’t fair to you, sweetheart. You have no control over your brother’s actions or how protective he is of you, but you are the only thing good in his life. It’s understandable that he wants to keep you that way, but Finnick’s anger will be the death of him one day. He has no self-control and, if he finds out what you and Rian have been up to, you know he’ll kill him, even if he doesn’t mean to do it. Then, Finn will have to be dealt with. You know it would kill Eoghan, Colin, and Tiernan to have to put your brother down, but those are the rules, and no one is an exception. Not even your brother.”

I love my brother, but I hate having to be the one punished for his actions. I’ve always done everything I’m supposed to, and it’s been nice to be so careless for once in my life.

I like putting my hands on Rian’s body and feeling his hands on me, but nothing is worth losing him for good.

Tears assault my eyes as I cave into my emotions, leaning into the wall. My dad’s voice breaks into my thoughts. “Sweetheart, I’m so—”



I can't listen to him tell me how sorry he is. It will be too much for me to take.

"I'll be okay, Dad. I always am."

That's a lie and my dad knows it. I've been madly in love with Rian Walsh since I was a little girl, and I always dreamed that he would return my feelings. Now that I know he does, nothing can come of it. My dreams are crushed once again. The last time they were crushed to this degree was so devastating that I nearly lost myself.

I went a year without even being able to look at him for fear of breaking down.

The day he told me he didn't fuck girls that look like me hurt, but that wasn't what nearly destroyed me. What did it was when I returned to that party and watched him walk up the stairs with Clara Malloy. I'm not proud of it, but I followed them. When I reached the top of the stairs, I saw him go into a room with her. Before closing the door behind him, he looked at me with the most careless set of blue eyes I had ever seen.

He knew I knew what he was doing when he went into that room to fuck a girl almost half my size. And he didn't give a damn how much that hurt me.

Clara is prettier, nicer, and skinnier than me. Everyone likes beautiful and blonde cheerleaders like Clara. Girls like that have a ton of friends and have guys asking them out all the time.

Not me.

"Have fun at the party," my dad says. I'm not sure how to decipher if there's an underlying meaning to his words.

I nearly give him a morbid laugh, but I hold it in.

The excitement I had going into the night turns into a bucket of ice water that pours down my spine. “I’m not in a partying mood anymore.” I need to be alone. I can’t hide the heartbreak from anyone, much less Kia.

I return to my room and plop on my bed, slipping off my heels. The tears flow as I grab my sweatshirt from earlier and pull it down my body, not bothering to remove my party outfit.

I hate this. I fucking hate this. Why does the universe insist on punishing me repeatedly?

I finally let the sob fall from my lips as I pull out my phone. My fingers feel like lead weights as I type out a quick text to Kia, canceling tonight.

Then I send a second text to smooth things over so she doesn’t ask questions.

**Sorcha**

I’m sorry. Something happened. I’ll explain later.

**Kia**

No worries. Have fun getting dicked down. 😊

Of course, she thinks this is about sex. I don’t bother correcting her. I wish it had been, but it’s about the responsibility of other people’s lives being forced on my shoulders.

I’m still wrapped up in my pity party when the doorbell rings. I try to wipe away my tears, but they keep falling. *Why the hell can’t I stop them from falling?*

“I don’t give a shit how pissed you get about it. You’re not going to that—”

My heart nearly crumbles at the sound of Rian's raised and angry voice. I take a few more swipes at my face, then look up when I hear my door opening. He's standing in my threshold wearing his black motorcycle boots, dark fitted jeans and black tee. He looks beautiful. And furious. I know why he's here. He wants to stop me from going to that party, but jokes on him because I already decided I'm not going. I wish he wasn't here, not because I hate how controlling he can be, but because I'm not ready to face him with everything Dad just threw at me.

I thought we could avoid the consequences and sneak around, but if Dad knows, it's only a matter of time before Finn figures it out. This thing between Rian and me shouldn't have even started.

"You didn't need to come over. I'm not going, okay? Just go home, Rian." I nearly whimper the words as I wring the hem of my sweatshirt, hoping the tension in my fingers will help get my emotions under control, but it doesn't.

"What happened?" he growls, like there's some huge offense that has been committed against me.

*No one can hurt me as badly as I hurt myself, Rian.*

"Please." More tears fall, but he doesn't leave. The opposite, actually. He steps further into my room, his eyes honed in on my every move.

"No," he refuses as my eyes meet his stare.

I want to strangle him. *Why can't he ever just do what I say?*

Anger starts to replace my sadness. "Get out. I'm sure there are a few girls in this town you haven't screwed yet. Why don't you bother them?" I know it's a low blow, but it

falls like an avalanche from my lips. I can't stop. "Or, are the only ones left girls that look like me?"

I try to forget, but I can never erase the memory of him saying that he doesn't fuck girls that look like me. What did that even really mean? He's never around girls that aren't perfectly toned and bordering on anorexic. Is that what he meant?

"Stop it," he groans as he grabs my arm, my face slams against his chest as he tugs me to him.

I want to stay wrapped in his arms and never leave, just block everything else out. Ignore our reality, but it's impossible. Finn is my brother and Rian's best friend. He will always be a part of both of our lives, and this thing between us has to end if I'm to keep both of them.

"Just go away, Rian. For once in your miserable life, do what I tell you," I cry, plead and beg, but I can't bring myself to push him away. I know I have to, but my arms only tighten around him.

"I'm not going anywhere, kid," he whispers in my ear, making me want to bury myself in his arms forever.

*No, I can't do that. Goddamn it. Be strong, Sorcha.*

I dig deep into myself and pull out all the strength I can muster. "No!" I duck out of his arms and glare at him. "Get out!"

"No!" he challenges right back, standing his ground as firmly as I do.

I don't care if Dad can hear us. I'm pissed and hurting.

"Get the fuck out, Walsh!" I wave my hands in the air and scream like a tantrum throwing toddler, but he's still standing

there.

“Not until you tell me what’s wrong!” he yells right back in my face. I think this is not much different from our normal arguments until I see it. Naked, unadulterated terror. It’s a sharp edge that cuts deep and leaves behind scars. It leaves behind bodies. That’s what’s different in his icy blue eyes.

Rian Walsh hasn’t been this scared out of his mind since....*Oh my god. His mom.*

I didn’t see her the day she died, but Rian did. He only talked to me about it once and I haven’t forgotten a single word. She was crying when he left with his dad to go to the doctor. He had been sick and had an appointment. Otherwise, he would have stayed home with her. He was the one that found her. I think she had meant for it to be his dad since she had locked the door. But after pounding on the door for a good amount of time, he found the key, then found her. I’ve known since that day the trauma he endured would never leave him, and this is further proof of that. As irrational as it may seem, he’s scared that if he leaves, he won’t be there to stop me from killing myself. As if he could have done something to save his mother’s life.

I would never do something like that. I may get depressed at times with my situation and the stuff happening around me, but I love my family and friends too much to leave them behind. Rian knows this logically, but his trauma brain won’t allow him to take the chance.

I return to him and slowly wrap my arms around his shoulder, burying my fingers into his hair as he holds me against him, breathing me in. I bet he can smell my lilac shampoo and my orchid and cherry blossom scented body spray from the way he presses his nose against my neck. I can

definitely smell the leather accents and manly musk that is all his own.

Like everything else about us, we smell like polar opposites, but I still crave everything about him. His touch, the feel of his hair between my fingers, how deep his voice is, the way he smells.

How can anyone expect me to give this up, especially when it's so obvious that Rian needs this, too? We are what each other needs. It's not fair at all.

His lips caress my pulse pounding against my neck and my breath catches. He runs his hands under my bottom and lifts me up. Instinctively, I wrap my legs around his hips as he kicks the door closed and struts over to the bed. In the next moment he's lying on top of me. Rian doesn't crush me with his weight, only holds me against him.

We shouldn't be doing this. I should kick him out, or call Dad in to remove Rian, but I can't when he's like this.

Rian kisses up my throat, giving my skin gentle pecks until he meets my jaw.

*Please, don't stop.*

His fingers knot in my hair as he tilts my head back with his grip. Then, his mouth is on mine, stealing our first kiss like he steals everything else.

I never offered my heart to him. He just took it like he does with everything else he wants. Like when he went down on me and then claimed my mouth with his cock. He takes everything, including this.

I whimper against his hypnotizing lips as his tongue pries mine open and owns me. He has always owned my heart. Might as well let him claim the rest of me.

These thoughts race through my brain as he settles himself between my thighs, adjusting my leg over his hip. His fingers dig into my thigh and I hope he leaves marks.

It seems quite poetic, this circumstance I find myself in, to end this thing between us with our first-time having sex.

# CHAPTER TEN



**S**orcha is my fucking everything. I can't take my hands off her. I devour her fuckable lips and grind my hips against hers.

Her moans fill the room every time I break the kiss to catch a breath. Breathing seems so unnecessary when it comes to her. I'm surprised Nigel hasn't barged in here to pull me off his innocent daughter. He knows I'm here, so if he hears her, he knows who's making her feel this good.

The thought of anyone hearing the sounds I pull from her makes me smirk. I can't imagine what someone would think if they heard these noises. She is so responsive to my manipulations, and I'm just using my mouth and hands. I can't imagine what she will sound like once I get my dick inside her. As if she heard my thoughts, her nails dig into my scalp.

*Fuck. Do that again, baby.*

I want her wrapped around my cock, screaming for the mercy I will not give. Not yet, not when we could potentially be interrupted. I know once I sink my dick deep inside her, I won't be leaving for hours. I've waited too long to have these trivial things hold me back, and I'll kill anyone who pulls me away from her heat.

"Rian," she moans as I sink my teeth into her collarbone. I want to mark her in all ways possible. I take the edge off my

hunger by kissing down her throat. I'm dying to get a taste of her tits and those piercings.

I roughly yank her sweatshirt over her head, only to reveal a whole ass outfit underneath. "Is this what you were planning on wearing tonight?" I snarl. She's wearing some white lacy top and a short, black skirt. She's displaying too much skin, showing off what's mine. She'll be starring in too many asshole's fantasies.

"Ye....yes?" It's more of a question than an admittance. I take one look at her face and can't help but forgive the judgment I have put upon her. Not when I see the drunken expression of desire in her heavy lidded gaze.

"Take off your shirt," I demand as I push the flimsy material up her stomach.

"No, we need to stop." She half-heartedly presses her fingers against my chest. As if that would stop me.

Although I don't want to, I acquiesce. Her eye makeup is dark and smeared from her recent crying episode. I don't want her to group me in with the reasons that made her cry. I may be an insensitive prick, but I'm not about to go out of my way to hurt her more than she already is. Devouring her body can wait if time is what she needs.

"What's wrong?" I ask breathlessly as I stare down into her dark blues, watching the pink flush wind its way down her cheeks and disappear into her shirt.

"We can't do this. *This* has to stop." The pain in her eyes steals the breath from my soul and nearly knocks me on my ass. Or it would if I wasn't on top of her.

"Why?"

“You know why,” she whispers, but she doesn’t push me away.

Fuck. Of course. I know the reason, but there’s part of me that will always hold out hope that the reason is benign and not worth a second thought. However, it always comes back to this one roadblock. If it was just sex, there wouldn’t be such an internal fight. Too bad the both of us know it is so much more.

Her brother. My best friend. The most protective brother in the world.

I groan as I hang my head, wanting to bury my fist in the damn wall.

“You heard what he said,” she adds, her expression souring. “*You ever touch my sister, or even speak one word to her again, that will be it. I’ll destroy you. No one messes with my sister and gets away with it,*” she repeats what Finn had said to that fuckwad who messed with her, but we both know it was a generalized statement. It wasn’t just because Sorcha didn’t want that asshole to touch her.

For the longest time, Finn and I agreed that we didn’t want anyone touching her, ever. If she died a virgin, my mission would be complete, but things changed. Now, I can’t imagine not touching her—however that would make me a victim of my own creation.

“Hey—” I start, but she interrupts me.

“He’ll kill you if he finds out, Rian.” She sits up and trails her fingers along my jaw as she moves in closer, tears lingering in her eyes. “Then, the others would have to kill him. I have a responsibility to make sure that doesn’t happen. I can’t...” she trails off as fresh tears gather in her eyes.

I'm not afraid to die. I grew up knowing that this was always a possibility. It's part of being a Bastard. I take risks every single day that could lead to me bleeding to death in a ditch. But, the raw emotion she's giving me from just thinking about my end has me conceding from the fight I could put up.

"Look at me, Sor," I say as she wipes at her stubborn tears, but refuses to meet my gaze. I lean in and kiss her salty tears away. Not able to hold back for long, she wraps her arms around my neck and I let her hold me.

It feels so good to be surrounded by her. Having her in my arms—against my body, has to be enough. Even before that thought fully evolves, I recognize the impossibility of it all. I will never be satisfied unless I have all of her, claim all of her. I don't want to let her go. But I have to.

"Okay," I say as I drag her up my thighs and press her center against the thick rod in my jeans.

She's so receptive to everything. She gasps and lets out a loud moan as she arches into me before grinding her hips down, riding my cock through our clothes.

"Rian," she whimpers as her fingers dig into my shoulders.

I love how she loses control with me.

"I'll go and I won't pressure you again, I promise you. But, not yet. I'll leave and we can go back to how things used to be. Just give me tonight, baby," I practically beg as my woman grinds down harder against me. Slipping my hand under her shirt, I slide it up her soft stomach until I reach her breast and cup it, loving its weight in my hand.

"Tonight," she whimpers as I sneak into her bra and circle her nipple with my thumb. "Oh my God."

"That's it, baby. Let me make you feel good."

“Are you going to fuck me, Rian?” The question comes out with a pleading edge, mixing with a desperate moan.

“Not tonight.” We both know that we have shitty self-control when it comes to each other. It’s one way we align. I know without a doubt we’re going to end up fucking. It might not be today, tomorrow, or next year, but at some point, my cock will be deep inside her, and I will lose all control. I’ll fuck her for hours, maybe even days. However, there are many mountains that will have to be moved to allow for that to happen.

“Let me kiss you, baby.” I push the hair out of her face and her heated eyes blaze through me.

“Are you asking? I thought you took what you wanted.” And, there’s the massive brat I have a complicated relationship with.

“You’re the only one I’ve ever kissed,” I admit as I flop her onto her back.

Her eyes widen from the confession as her fingers run through my hair. “Only...me?”

“Only you, baby.”

She sits up as best she can and presses her lips against mine before quickly pulling away. I watch closely as she pulls her revealing top over her head then tosses it to the floor.

I’ve seen her in very little before, but this bra accents the size of her full tits and they look like they’re seconds away from popping out. So full and tempting.

Her fingers glide tantalizingly slow across the fabric to the clasp that holds her bra together. With a snap of her fingers, the bra falls apart, exposing the only part of her skin I have yet to lay my eyes on. If I wasn’t looking closely, I wouldn’t have

seen her nipple piercings. They are tiny, just a small barbell through the light pink bud and such small balls at the ends that could easily be confused for the bumps of her areola if her nipples were hard.

“Fuck,” I groan and bend down to wrap my tongue around her nipple. I pull her closer to me, trying to get her as close as possible.

Her head falls back and the breath that falls from her lips is drenched in ecstasy. The sound is purely addictive. I need to record it and play it on repeat when the night is lonely and I only have my hand to satisfy me.

I fumble with the full length zipper of her skirt then toss it over my shoulder. I look down and salivate at her exposed pale thighs along with those sinful panties.

I want her naked all night—nothing between us at all. I have her all to myself and I’m going to make the best of the limited time we have.

Switching to suck on her other nipple, I press a finger into her tight cunt, circling her clit with my thumb. Fuck, she’s so wet for me.

“Rian!” she cries out, and the noise eggs me on. I love how enthusiastic she is when I touch her. It doesn’t take much for her to be panting and moaning, rocking her hips against my fingers. She’s greedy for what only I can give her.

Her fingers work at my belt and my zipper as I feast on her glorious tits, sucking, licking, and biting at her perfect peaks. “Please. I want you inside me,” she begs.

A groan falls from my mouth as her fingers wrap around my cock. “I *am* inside you.” I tease her G-spot with my digit, and her arousal floods my palm.

She cries out and her cunt forcefully clamps down on me. She got her orgasm first, and I'm in no hurry for reciprocation. We have all night together before I have to pretend this never happened.

CHAPTER  
**ELEVEN**



## HER

I wake up to the sensation of Rian kissing my cheek, but don't open my eyes. It's soft and sweet in the way his lips caress my skin, but his breath is harsh as he pulls back.

"I love you," he whispers, making my heart clench.

Rian Walsh loves me. Even though it's everything I've ever wanted, it doesn't change anything. He still has to leave and act like he doesn't love me.

*I love you, too.* I tell him, hoping he can read my thoughts.

As soon as I hear my door close, I clench my eyes tight and I cry into my pillow. I'm so grateful I got one night with him, but I'm also pissed because now I know how it feels to be in the arms of the man I love and that loves me.

My body shakes from my uncontrollable sobbing, I am so sick of crying. Everything aches, but I know it's a side effect of the hurt in my chest. This isn't Rian's fault, and it's not mine either. We're paying for a crime we didn't commit—being born. We're being punished for something that had nothing to do with us.

I almost lost my brother years ago in the car accident that took his mom. Finn loved his mom fiercely, and he hasn't been the same since she died. He used to be a happy kid, even if

occasionally solemn. That day my brother became a new person, one that was quick to temper and slow to delight. Sure, over time he got a little better, but it's always barely hidden beneath the surface, laying in wait, like a cobra ready to strike at any perceived misgiving, ready to destroy lives. I thought maybe him taking Dad's place in the Bastards would help, but it hasn't.

This explains why Finn is so protective of me. The only other woman who has ever been important to him disappeared from his life in the literal blink of an eye. The guys always say I'm the only person my brother is capable of loving, but I don't believe that. I just don't think he has anyone else to give his love to.

Until Francine, that is. I see the way he looks at Francine. Maybe if he would get off his ass and pursue her like a normal person, things may finally start working out for him. That's what I'll keep telling myself.

If that happens, at least one of the O'Reilly children can end up with the one they want.

CHAPTER  
**TWELVE**

## HER

**A** nguish colors my world and yet I have to keep smiling as if I'm viewing everything through rose tinted glasses. Pain is everywhere and I act like nothing's wrong, like I don't see everything Rian does to pretend we never happened, to pretend that he doesn't love me.

I see the girls, the drugs, the alcohol. I see it all and it breaks my heart as the days turn into weeks.

And the dreams I once had turn into nightmares.

CHAPTER  
**THIRTEEN**

## HER

I was right about Francine. Kia had to eat her disbelief when it was made known to everyone that my brother was sneaking around with her. I can't be certain, but I think she was cheating on Duncan with my brother. Finn publicly denies it, but that doesn't necessarily mean much. I know he doesn't care about his reputation so the only reason he would do it would be to save Francine's.

When I saw Francine and my brother walking to the principal's office together, it gave me hope that maybe she'll be the one able to calm him down.

I feel bad that I might've been a bit aggressive pushing her toward him, but I saw it in her eyes. She was barely holding back. She just needed the right push, and I hope I gave it to her.

I want my brother to have that light in his life, and I'm sure the bubbly, sweet girl Francine is will give him that.

If I'm honest with myself, there's also a sense of envy mixed in.

Finn has his lady, although the longevity of the relationship is fragile, but I still have to watch Rian pretending that he didn't completely change my life. I pretend I'm not

bothered by him going back to the way things were before he pinned me to the wall in his room, and called me his.

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“WHAT ARE YOU DOING, KID?” Rian groans as I dig around the fridge, grabbing a twelve-pack of beer, before standing. I didn’t miss the way he ogled my ass when he thought no one was looking. But, when Tiernan steps into the kitchen, he has to look away.

“I’m stealing your beer. You guys drink too much, anyway.”

“Where are you taking it? Got a boyfriend you’re going to party with, Sor?” Tiernan asks as Eoghan and Colin stroll in. It’s as if their spidey senses picked up on the phrase *I’m stealing your beer* and they came running.

I notice how Rian stiffens at the mention of a possible boyfriend, but I don’t bring attention to it.

I roll my eyes at how idiotic these boys can be. “No, I’m going to Francine’s house.”

“You’re hanging out with Harley?” Colin asks at the same time Eoghan adds on, “We’re coming!”

*Harley? Who is Harley?* I scowl at Eoghan as I put my hands on my hips, ready for an argument. “No, you’re not. It’s a girl’s night, and last I checked, all of you dicks *have* dicks.”

“Dicks? You’ve never seen inside my pants, Sor. It’s a fucking tentacle,” Colin quips with a lopsided grin. “Please let us come!”

“No, I’m going to have a good night with my friends with no chaperones, and for once, I’m going to get drunk off my ass

with no guys hovering over me, so shoo. I need to get in my car and head over there before Nyla starts the party without me.”

Eoghan’s ears perk up at that. “Nyla’s there? Awesome.” He snatches the beers from my hands and sprints out the door as Colin slumps his shoulders. That doesn’t stop Tiernan from dragging him after Eoghan. Before exiting, Tiernan sends a look to Rian and a private conversation passes between them. Before I can ask Tiernan about it, he’s gone, and I’m left alone with the man I know I shouldn’t be.

I grab onto the closest thing next to me, the counter I think, as *it* happens again. Shadows blanket my vision almost like the transparency sheets used on the old projectors at school—the ones teachers wrote on with dry erase markers. It was a projection of a picture, the lines were always fuzzy and no matter how hard you tried, it was always a wee bit out of focus. I’ve grown used to these shadows. They come and go, but they always look like hieroglyphics when they appear. I used to write them down, but trying to decipher the code was a mind-numbing task that would make the world’s greatest scholar lose their mind. Luckily, I gave up years ago. Now, I just rub my eyes and they disappear, much like the shadows in the corners of the room when I look at them head on. Maybe I’m a little crazy, but isn’t everyone? Doesn’t every person have that one thing they hide from the world, that one thing that if they told anyone, they’d think they need to be locked up? Well, everyone in my family does, anyway. It’s what’s considered normal for an O’Reilly. At least I don’t kill people.

My vision clears and Rian stares at me expectantly like I didn’t just completely zone out.



“What?” I ask, unsure of why he isn’t saying anything. “Aren’t you going to try to tell me I can’t go or I need an escort?”

“What good would that do? You would just tell me to go to hell. I’d rather just skip all the screaming and go straight to pinning you against the wall and fucking your mouth with mine.” He tries for a humorous air so I can’t tell if he’s seriously flirting with me or just teasing.

If he used that technique previously, I would have attended way less parties. The only time Rian has ever kissed me was when we were already in bed. Tfderrhat was supposed to be the last time as well.

He steps into my space and cages me against the counter. Rian has been keeping his distance, and it’s for the best. On a good day, it’s hard to look at him, let alone speak to him, and this is no different. So why is he breaking the rules now?

Even though he told me he loves me and admitted I’m the only girl he has ever kissed, he went back to screwing other girls and acting like he doesn’t want me. That’s not showing someone you love them.

“Stop,” I say as I struggle to rein in my emotions. Sometimes the ones with the greatest power to hurt us are the ones we love the most.

He leans into me as if he’s about to kiss me, but stops short and runs his knuckles down my cheek as he presses his forehead against mine. “I’ll drive you home tonight. You shouldn’t get behind the wheel when you’ve been drinking.”

I try to come up with some lame excuse to avoid being alone with him, like spending the night with Francine, but his

closeness makes my brain short circuit somehow and I end up nodding at his request.

“What’s wrong?” he asks, his eyes softening like they did the night we spent together, but this is different. It’s not with care, but an undeniable concern.

*Is he stupid? How can he ask me that? Doesn’t he know how bad I hurt every single day?*

“Stop with all of this, please.” I wave my arms as much as I can in the limited space allotted to me. “All this does is make everything else worse, okay?” I say, dropping the facade of the happy girl everyone wants to see. I’m miserable, and every day is full of pain and disappointment. How could he not understand how hard it is to watch him act like I don’t exist when others are around, but is now touching me like I’m his when it’s just the two of us. Day after day, I watch him betray his vow of love in the name of self-preservation. Rian turned *love* into a four letter word and he has the nerve to ask me *what’s wrong?*

“What?” Incredulity weighs heavy on his brow. He drops his hand and steps back. He only concedes a few inches, but it allows me the ability to finally breathe and straighten out my thoughts. “I can’t touch you now?”

“You weren’t supposed to touch me in the first place. Remember?” My voice probably sounds cold, but it’s the only way to keep myself from crying. Him touching me is how we ended up in this mess. If he hadn’t touched me, my desperation for him wouldn’t be so strong in this moment. Instead of sharing my anguish, Rian touches other women. After all, my brother doesn’t have a problem with his best friend touching women. Just me. Rian gets to find reprieve in

another woman's snatch while nothing comes close to soothing the ache in my chest.

I doubt any man could heal this wound, not even the man that inflicted it.

"You know this is how things need to be," I add, before looking into his eyes. Eyes that hypnotize me and wound me daily.

"Doesn't mean I have to like it," he groans as he attempts to take my hand in his, but I snatch it away like his touch burns me.

It did. Only it's a mark no one can see.

"Sorcha—"

"You didn't seem to mind it much yesterday, or pretty much every other day." I know the circumstances aren't his fault, and I don't want him to hurt as much as I do, but the fact that he can even stomach anyone else touching him makes me mad. He could make more of an effort to not rub his "distractions" in my face.

"Hey," he grumbles, trying to...do what? Smooth things over? Explain his actions? I may be acting irrational, but I don't want to hear anything he has to say. It won't change anything.

"I have to go. They're waiting for me and I'm sure you have someone waiting for you." I move out of his reach and barely make it out of the kitchen before I hear a loud bang. If I had to guess, I'd say he kicked the wall or maybe the fridge, but it's not my circus.

Rian Walsh isn't mine. Maybe he was never meant to be. With how bad my luck is in this life, I must have done something incredibly heinous in a past one.

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“HEY! YOU MADE IT!” Francine smiles as I step into her kitchen with the beer in my arms.

I’ve known these girls for years, but we’ve never been close. Francine has never been one of my close friends, more of an acquaintance. Francine, Willow, and Nyla have always been nice to me, which can’t be said for all the pretty, rich girls in Grove Hill. I’ve always believed my only friends live on Mason Road—the road my brother and Kia live on—only a few houses apart.

If I’m going to survive this Rian thing, I need a trusted circle outside of them. Somewhere I can get a bit of unbiased advice and share my thoughts without fear of consequences, somewhere safe—even if it’s with the girl my brother is screwing.

“Yup. I brought Dos Equis,” I declare with a flourish as I set the beer down. “I’m surprised Eoghan or Colin didn’t try to send you with arms full of party supplies,” she teases with that smile in place. It seems so genuine, like she’s actually happy I’m here, and didn’t just invite me to earn brownie points with my brother.

I laugh. “Oh, they tried, and they also tried to invite themselves along.” I stop when I remember the name Colin mentioned that I didn’t recognize. “Question, who is Harley?”

Francine blushes. “Um, me. They started calling me that today. I think what Colin said is that I’m *a whole lotta pretty and a whole lotta crazy.*”

She’s definitely pretty, but crazy? The image of her covered in blood, walking into my brother’s house last night,

races through my mind and leads me to believe...maybe? I have no clue whose blood that was, but after giving her a quick visual inspection, I saw no cuts on her.

Okay. Maybe Francine isn't as sane as I originally thought, but she's not a complete psycho. She has a big heart. I've seen it.

“Oh my god. Harley Quinn. I get it. I was wondering why they were referring to my brother as Mr. J. Now, I get it. You do give off the whole pre-acid bath vibe,” I joke. “Where did you see Colin?” She specifically mentioned seeing him today, and I remember her leaving the house before Donatello last night.

“Finn took her to his house,” Nyla says in a sultry tone, hinting at some carnal reasoning.

“Wait. I think I'm missing something. The last time we *talked*, you said you wanted nothing more to do with my brother.” It's true. We haven't had a real conversation since Finn asked me to give her a ride home from school. She was giving some real *I hate him, but also want to kiss him* vibes. I knew she wouldn't be mad at him for long.

She opens her mouth to respond, but nothing comes out, embarrassment clear across her face. I've never seen her so speechless.

Nyla doesn't have that same ailment, though. “He changed sweet Francine's mind with a little cunnilingus.”

Francine gasps as her face pales. “Nyla!”

“It's true. You and Finn were pretty hot and heavy when I interrupted you at the beach. I could feel the sexual energy coming off you two from outside of the tent.”

I'm barely holding in my laughter. It's clear Nyla loves torturing Francine with embarrassment.

"She's his sister," Francine hisses as the redness in her cheeks reaches her scalp. Poor thing.

"So? It's not like she doesn't know about her brother's... promiscuities," Nyla utters.

Finally, the laugh barrels through me, a sound I haven't made in weeks, and it feels so good. In this moment, I'm back to the girl I was before everything went to shit.

"It's okay. I grew up around the Five Families. They're all crass, and I'm very well aware of how much my brother gets around."

I have the mental scars to prove it. I will never forget the one time I walked in on him. I couldn't look at Finn for weeks. If I go the rest of my life without seeing him like that again, I will die a happy woman.

"He definitely wormed his way into Francine's bed." The words roll right off of Willow's tongue and my eyes widen.

Did they have sex?

I know Francine and my brother have been... something, and she told me she and her ex never went that far.

Does Finn know? Does he know she gave him her virginity?

My eyes fall on Francine as I sit down at the table, and she looks absolutely mortified.

"Oh. My. God."

"It's not a big deal," she tries to deflect, but I know the truth. It is a big deal.

Virginity is such a big deal for girls like us. I still feel the burn of shame that I didn't give mine to someone I love. I wanted to give it to Rian, but I knew I would never get the opportunity.

*And the sadness returns. That didn't last long.*

“Yeah, it's never a big deal when you let the guy you're *exclusive* with pop your cherry,” Nyla teases before her and Willow laughs at my expense.

That one word catches my attention like a moth to a bonfire.

“You're... exclusive... with Finn?”

My sadness ebbs just a smidge at this news. This is incredible. I really am happy for my brother and Francine is good for him, but I know this also means he's going against the pact he has with Rian. I had the feeling Rian would've done the same with me, but I've also noticed a tension between Finn and Rian lately. Rian is not happy with my brother, and I can't help the feeling that it's because of me. I'm the one hurting their friendship, but Finn seems oblivious to the changes happening.

“Uh, yeah. We had a whole discussion about it officially this afternoon.”

I bring my attention back to Francine and decide to celebrate this win. It's small, but maybe at some point my brother will be so happy in his Francine bubble that he won't care what I'm doing. At least, that's my working theory.

“Oh my god! That's amazing! My brother has never been exclusive with anyone, like ever. You're practically my sister now.” I pull her into a hug and she relaxes like she was worried about what I would think of this new development. I

couldn't think of a better girl for my brother. "Just don't tell Rian you guys are exclusive. He will flip his shit," I warn, but she rolls her eyes.

We settle down and commence our girls night, starting with cracking open some beers. We chat away, and I pull my party favor out of my pocket, a decently sized bag of weed.

"If we get drug tested, we'll be kicked off the dance team," Willow says nervously.

"God, don't be such a killjoy. It's just pot!" Nyla protests.

"I smoke all the time and I've never failed a drug test," I retort as I pull out a lighter.

"How?" Willow presses.

"Water pills. They flush everything out of your system. I wouldn't be able to handle Coach Hatcher without my little friend, Mary Jane. I would've gotten expelled by now."

Francine laughs. "I wish I had this before now. She makes me want to pull my hair out."

Coach Hatcher is a pistol, but she just wants us to be our best. However it would be nice if she wasn't so bitchy all the time.

"Amen to that, sister," I say before lighting the joint. I take a drag before handing it over to Francine.

"How about we play a little game?" Nyla suggests.

"What kind of game?" Willow asks.

"How about Truth or Dare? It'll be fun."

I'm happy to join in on the fun. I'm just glad Francine thought to include me.



“Okay, I’ll go first!” Willow squeals with excitement as she pours herself a shot of tequila. “Sorcha, truth or dare.”

She wants me to go first? I’m a little nervous, but happiness outweighs any nerves. “Truth. I’m an open book.”

“If you could, who would you want to roll around in bed with? Has to be someone you know and not a celebrity. Go,” Willow pushes, and I suddenly feel lightheaded. Damn, she really went for it.

She could’ve asked me any question in the world, but that’s the one she goes for? A lead rock forms in my gut and now, I regret accepting the invitation. Kia is the only person that knows about my feelings for Rian.

“Um, pass. I’ll take a shot.” I hate tequila, but I’d rather take a shot of that than expose that part of myself.

“What happened to being an open book? You can’t just pass!” Nyla exclaims with suspicion in her nearly black eyes.

I groan, blushing. “Fine. Um... if I could choose anyone, I’d pick a guy named... Rian Walsh.”

The second his name leaves my mouth, Francine chokes on the cloud of smoke in her mouth, almost dropping the joint on the pristine white marble flooring.

“Rian? As in Finn’s best friend?”

I shrug. “He’s hot. Have you seen him with his shirt off?” It’s not a lie. Rian is ridiculously hot, but it’s better than admitting how I feel about him, and how my brother is the only reason we aren’t together.

“But he’s an asshole!”

“So is Finn,” Nyla pops off. “It’s the assholes who always get you.”

*Amen, sister. A-fucking-men.*

I take a long, even swallow of the bitter liquid until the can is completely drained. I'm in for a long, painful night and am not nearly drunk enough to deal with it.

CHAPTER  
**FOURTEEN**

Nyla and Willow left an hour ago, complaining about their curfews, which left me and Francine alone.

“Are you really okay with me and Finn?” she asks as we pass another joint between us.

“Of course. I’m glad my brother is happy.” I fake a smile, but I can tell she sees right through it and me. She knows something is up, but I’m not ready to talk about it. “Thanks for inviting me, but I don’t want you to feel like you have to just because you and my brother are together.”

Her green eyes widen before she scowls at me. “Is that what you think? Don’t be ridiculous. I invited you because we’re friends, Sorcha. If I wanted to invite someone to appease your brother, I would’ve invited his insufferable—” she’s cut off by a knock at the front door, but I’m really curious about what her answer was going to be.

“Are you expecting someone?” I ask as we stand from our seats on the couch. I put out the joint in a crystal dish Francine set out on the coffee table as a makeshift ashtray.

I follow close behind as she heads for the front door. “No. My mom went out earlier, but she has a key.” Her voice slurs slightly as she looks through the peephole before she laughs.

“What?” My voice nearly matches hers.

“Speak of the devil,” she groans before unlocking the door.

*Is it Finn?*

She pulls it open and I stifle a gasp. Nope. Not Finn, but it was a pretty close guess.

“What are you doing here, Rian?” Francine throws her hands up in exasperation and groans as she glares at him.

He’s completely unfazed as his eyes scan over me.

“I’m Sorcha’s sober ride.”

I completely forgot about that. It’s not like I asked him to be my sober ride, and I didn’t text him.

“Right,” I mutter before I amble back into the living room. Being around Rian is hard enough, but being alone with him in the confines of his car would be absolute torture. Earlier today can not be repeated. But what choice do I have?

I gather my phone and wallet from the table before making my way back to the door, where Francine glares at Rian like he’s a cockroach she wants to crush.

Man, she really doesn’t like him.

“I thought you drove yourself?” Francine says, almost as an accusation directed at Rian. She peeks around his imposing frame and sees my car at the curb.

“I’ll pick up her car later,” Rian says before giving me a pointed look.

*Wow. I guess they both just can’t stand each other. What happened there? When did this happen?*

“I’ll just have her brother return it to her when he gets off work,” Francine quips.

Rian's eye twitches, a slight tick to show he's pissed. *What the fuck is going on?*

"Come on, kid," he grumbles.

It takes everything in me not to bite his head off. He knows how much I hate it when he calls me that.

"I'm the same age as you, asshole. Stop calling me a kid." I step out of the front door and send Francine a fake smile. "See you at school."

"I'm suspended, remember?" Her voice slurs and, for some reason, I giggle.

"Oh, right. You mouthed off to Principal Douche Canoe."

She shrugs. "He deserved it. And, Sorcha?"

I hum as I struggle to meet her eyes in my inebriated state. I can't help my smirk at the sickly sweet smile on her face. Yup, she's drunk or high. Or both.

Yep, we're both.

Both. I run the word around my thoughts until it loses meaning.

"Yeah?" I can't help the snort that accompanies my question. *Both* is a funny word.

"I meant what I said." I know exactly what she's referring to and it immediately sobers my disposition.

She sees me as her friend and my brother has absolutely no influence on that title.

"Thanks. Don't tell him that, though. I'd hate for you to deflate my brother's ego," I joke, but nearly trip over my feet.

I definitely drank way more than I thought I did, or maybe it's the combo of alcohol and weed that's messing with me.

“Woah, feisty pants.” Rian’s arms hook around my waist, preventing me from busting my ass.

Feisty pants? Well, I do have a knack for fighting with him.

“I’m not wearing pants,” I grumble and wave at my skort.

“You’re plastered.” The words are nearly a growl on his lips and I straighten my posture in response. Apparently I equate good posture with being sober? Anyways, who does this guy think he is? He’s not my dad.

Or my brother.

Or mine.

Anger starts to color my mood, “I am not!”

“She didn’t drink a lot, but she did smoke a bunch of weed. She’s crossfading big time.”

I glare wide eyed at the tattler, Francine. Sure, I know Rian wouldn’t believe that I’m not messed up, but she didn’t have to rat me out like that. Plus, I ate pizza, so it’s not like the alcohol will last long and the high of weed is very fleeting.

“Bye!” Francine waves enthusiastically as I give her the middle finger. She blows me a kiss and damn her, I can’t stay mad at her for long.

Rian is a different subject though.

I try to calm myself and drag in several gulps of the crisp night air. It doesn’t help. Rian’s grip on my arm is tight as he tows me to his car. He releases me to open my door. He raises a brow at me expectantly when I just stand there. I squint my eyes in response.

*What a fucking gentleman.*

As gracefully as possible, I settle upon the leather seat. I reach for the seatbelt, but grab Rian's hand instead as he already has it in his grasp. I pull my arm back as if I had just been bitten by a snake. Apparently, he doesn't trust me to buckle my own damn seatbelt.

*Damn control freak of a fucking gentleman.*

Soon, we're on the road and the car is completely silent except for the engine turning with each press of the gas. I close my eyes and inhale the leather and musk that dances around me. I need to break the silence before it becomes too much.

"You didn't have to come pick me up," I whisper. "I was going to wait it out."

"No, you weren't. You were going to drive yourself home, and that's not happening when you're drunk."

I can feel him grinding his molars from over here. He's angry? Two can play at this game.

My jaw tenses in anger and my voice rises. "Don't pretend you know what I'm thinking or planning."

I hate this. I hate that we've turned into this. I hate that I can't just look at him or talk to him without feeling this ache deep inside.

We hit a red light as I stare out the window, avoiding looking in his direction. There's no other car around, the lights are usually on a timer this late at night.

"Do you know why I said I don't fuck girls who look like you?" His fingers drum heavily on his leather steering wheel to a song only he can hear. He stops abruptly and his pained voice breaks through. I need to stop from lashing out at him for even bringing this up.



The last thing I want to think about is him screwing other girls. It almost makes me want to bring up Jason, but I don't. I know Rian would never hurt me, but sharing this info with him while driving probably wouldn't be the safest thing to do.

“Because you're the one I really want, and that's a slippery slope. I'd end up picturing the girl was you and I know I wouldn't be able to control myself. Just the fact that I know what you taste like makes it hard to be around you and not lick your pussy.”

A sharp pain stabs at my heart and I rub it with the heel of my palm. His confession is physically painful and tears spring to my eyes. “Stop,” I demand softly. He takes a hand off the wheel to run it through his messy hair.

“I fucking hate thi—”

“I said, stop!” I yell as I turn my hard eyes on him, ignoring my lingering tears. “You knew this was how things had to be before we ever did anything.”

“Then, why have you been acting like you're pissed at me?”

Acting? That was not acting. “Because I am, asshole!” I barely hold in a cry. The worst part about drinking is how uncontrollable my emotions get. “I heard what you said that day when you thought I was sleeping. That was the most selfish thing you could've possibly done, Rian.”

His expression sours as he turns his face away from me to examine the red light.

“To say something like that to me before going back to screwing half the town makes you the biggest jerk *in* this town.”

I've had enough. I'm so hurt and angry and intoxicated that I quickly unbuckle my seat belt, throw the door open, and climb out before the light has the chance to turn.

Maybe I'm not making smart decisions and maybe getting out of the car in the middle of the night is one of them, but I don't give a damn. If I stayed in that car one more agonizing moment, I was going to slap the shit out of him.

"Sorcha!" Rian yells my name, but all I can do is let out a frustrated groan as my hands ball into fists.

You can't say you love someone if you're screwing other people.

*You did the same thing. You screwed Jason two years ago.*

That was different. I didn't think I ever had a chance of having a relationship with Rian. Besides, he hurt me. He's always hurting me and I'm tired of hurting.

Suddenly, a strong hand wraps around my wrist, snapping me around to face him.

"Stop running away from me, goddamn it!" He growls, the anger clear in his eyes. His chest is heaving with pent up fury and unsaid words.

I yank my hand but his fingers just tighten. "I should've run away from you years ago!" I scream in his face, my breathing quickening to match the staccato of my heart. His nostrils flare from the idea I just spat out into the night. But then his free hand delves into my hair and he clutches a large chunk of it at the roots, pulling me into his hard body. His eyes dart between mine for a few moments as if he's trying to read my soul. He won't find anything in there because he has it. Finding the answer to whatever question he was looking to answer, he crashes his lips onto mine.

All the fight leaves my body as he kisses me, his lips and tongue working against mine in a way that feels like a memory.

A memory of a night when he was all mine.

My lips move on their own accord, perfectly mirroring his. The ache in my chest loosening bit by bit until an explosion of euphoria replaces it.

*Rian. Oh, Rian.*

Wait, no. We're not supposed to be doing this. It's everything I want, but we can't.

Reluctantly, I pull away from him and frown. "You can't do that."

He only lets me take one step away until he pulls me back against him, holding me like I belong to him. "I don't know what you think has been happening, but I haven't fucked anyone since I laid you down in my bed," he confesses, rocking my world to its core.

"What?" He hasn't been with anyone? But, what about the parties at the house and the girls hanging on him at school?

"You said to make it look like nothing happened between us. That's *all* I've been doing. I can't touch anyone else now that I know what you taste like, how it feels to have your cunt wrapped around my fingers. I only want you, baby."

My entire body purrs at his words, and I want to fall into him. I want to ignore our reality and create our own, but I can't.

"Rian, we can't," I whimper as his hands smooth down my neck. "If Finn—"

“Fuck Finn. I’m sick of us torturing ourselves just because he *might* be mad. How is that fair, baby? He gets to be with the Gray girl, and I can’t even touch you.”

If we didn’t live in this town, it would be a much different story, but this is where we live. I hate this as much as he does, but I have a responsibility as Finn’s sister to protect him from himself and keep Rian alive.

He swivels his head, indicating the emptiness of the road. “There is no one around and your brother is working,” he says as he shoves his hands into his pockets. As if on cue, a black truck speeds past us, heading in the direction of where we came from.

I gasp and jump away from Rian, his head snaps around, watching the same truck I do.

We both know whose vehicle that is. My brother.

“Get in the fucking car,” Rian hisses and shoves me in that direction. He had pulled it up onto the sidewalk, next to a parked SUV, because apparently rules don’t apply to him. I hurry to get inside, but Rian lays the passenger seat down, motioning for me to get in the back. Why the back seat? “Get in.”

I bite my tongue and scrunch into the small space. I peer out the back window, watching my brother’s truck tail lights disappear around the corner. I wait on bated breath, praying he doesn’t realize he just passed his sister and best friend making out.

The bench dips under Rian’s weight as he climbs in beside me and closes the door.

“What are you doing?” I hiss. He should be in the driver’s seat, getting us the hell out of here.

“Chill. That giant ass SUV blocks anyone’s view of my car. Plus, my windows are blacked out. If he drives back around, there’s no way he will see us.”

Then, as if our lives aren’t in danger, Rian grasps my waist and pulls me into his lap. He adjusts my legs so I’m straddling him. What the hell is wrong with him? He knows this is a risky situation, and he’s taking too many risks.

I place my hands on his chest. “You said you wouldn’t push things,” I say as he tucks a stray hair behind my ear.

“Are you surprised I’m breaking that promise, kid?”

I have always felt that this nickname was demeaning, but this time, it takes on an affectionate tone.

He trails his mouth down my throat, ripping a moan from my lips. Rian’s fingers trail along my waist, and I lose myself in his touch. God, there’s nothing better than being completely caught up in him—in what we could be together.

“Fuck, I’ve missed you,” he rasps against my damp skin as he grabs my hips and pulls me down on his hard length then slides my core against.

“I didn’t go anywhere,” I whisper as he lifts his hips for better friction.

“Yes, you did. You went into your head. You stopped fighting with me and giving me that sexy smile.” He tugs me closer, flush with his body, and he takes my mouth again.

“We need to stop,” I murmur between kisses, but he doesn’t let me go. Rian uses one hand to push my skirt up around my waist as he grabs my hair again, angling my head to deepen the kiss.

“You don’t want that.” He groans before he assaults my throat, biting at the flesh like he wants to eat me alive. “Say yes and I’ll fuck you right here. I’ll sink my cock into your tight pussy. I’ll give it to you, baby.” He pushes his hand into my panties and runs his finger along my slit, teasing me in a way that should make me concede to whatever he wants.

The difference is my mind is starting to clear from the alcohol and weed.

“We can’t,” I nearly cry out the words as he runs his teeth over my pulse point.

Rian pulls his hand from my underwear and straightens my skirt. Instead of grabbing my waist like he did before, he wraps his arms around me and presses his face into my neck. If he can’t be in me, it seems he will settle with being as close to me as possible.

“I really hate you sometimes,” he grumbles like the grumpy pants he normally is.

I laugh. “No, you don’t.”

“Fine,” he growls. “But I really don’t like not getting my way.”

Now, there’s the truth. He can’t stand it when someone else wins or he has to let them win. We both know if he pushed hard enough, I’d break and would have sex with him, but I’m trying to do the right thing for everyone. The smart thing.

That’s just really hard when a big part of me wants to do the irresponsible thing, throw caution to the wind, and accept everything Rian wants to give me. All I would need is to slide his zipper down, pull my underwear aside and slide down that thick and long pole of his. I can’t help the shudder of goosebumps at the thought.

“You said you love me,” I say as his arms tighten around me. This is the first time I’ve let myself even feel a modicum of happiness about those words he said. They just made me sad before, but not now.

“Don’t let it go to your head, kid.”

I giggle like a little girl from his chosen rebuttal. He didn’t deny it. Such a grouch. I run my fingers through his soft locks as his hands slip up and down my spine, tracing patterns across my back.

I want to see those words fall from his lips again. I want him to watch me as I say them, too. But knowing him, he’ll just use it against me to make me give in to him. That will just make things worse and accomplish nothing.

“I really do need to go home.” I sigh, and in a few minutes, we’re back on the road.

---

THE HEADLIGHTS SHINE against the garage door as Rian pulls up to my dad’s house. I don’t wait for an awkward goodbye and jump out of the car. I’m surprised and a bit aggravated when Rian follows suit.

“What are you doing?” I demand, but he just grabs my hand and pulls me against him.

“Let’s just hang out in your room and talk. Nothing else. I promise.”

I choke on a snicker at the impossibility of *nothing else* happening. Just talk. It may be hard, but I have to try. If anyone asks, he drove me home. There’s a perfectly logical

explanation for him being in my room and we're not doing anything wrong by talking.

“Okay.” I smirk as he tucks a stray hair behind my ear for the second time tonight, almost like an unconscious move, but I sense the affectionate trail his fingers leave behind.

He gives me a rare smile as we walk through the gate and on to the porch.

“Sorcha?” A voice that isn't Rian's stops me dead in my tracks. All the heat I had experienced from being in Rian's presence diminished, replaced by ice cold water.

I turn in the direction of the female voice to find *her* sitting in Dad's chair on the porch, cloaked in shadows and yet I can still make out her features.

And in that moment, any sliver of happiness that remained morphed to madness, feeding into my need to really hurt this woman.

“You.” An animalistic growl is ripped from my throat. What about our last interaction gave her any reason to think I would be willing to see her again?

“Please, I just want to help you.”

“You... help me?” I laugh at the stupidity of that. I want nothing from her, never have and never will.

Rian must sense my frame of mind because he takes a little step in front of me, creating a protective barrier between me and the intruder. “I'm sorry. Who are you?” Rian asks as his hand remains in mine, holding me in place slightly behind him. Her mahogany eyes move from me to him and she offers a kind smile, but that strange feeling I sometimes get from people is rampantly snaking through my brain. Warning bells



sound just like last time she showed up. Luckily, Dad was there to make her leave.

“You must be Rian. You look like a perfect mixture of both of your parents,” she offers, trying to seem polite, but I don’t buy it. “My name is Carmen Muerte. I’m Sorcha’s mother.”

Rian stiffens beside me. He knows the story of what happened to my mother, how she abandoned me at the hospital when I was born. If a good friend of Dad’s hadn’t been working at the hospital that night, I would’ve gone into the system, and never would’ve known any of the people that are so important to me.

She didn’t want me, didn’t care about me, and I’m not about to give her a chance now. It’s eighteen years too late.

“Leave, now,” I demand, but Carmen doesn’t move.

“Darling, I just want to help you.”

That’s the same recycled line from years ago. It didn’t work then and it won’t work now.

“I don’t need your help with anything. Leave or I’ll have you removed.” Done with this exchange, I turn to the front door, but her words stop me in my tracks.

“Have you started seeing the shadows, darling?”

A cold sweat gathers at the base of my neck as I stare at the cracks in the front door.

*She knows about the shadows? How the hell does she know about them?*

“Ahhh.” Triumph drips from her acknowledgement of my visible reaction. It is answer enough. “You’ve had the visions, too, haven’t you? You see things in your dreams that make no sense until it’s too late to do anything to stop it.”

*How does she know these things? It's impossible.*

“Sorcha?” Rian mutters, concern and confusion in his voice, bringing me out of my state of befuddlement.

I squeeze his hand as I turn to face Carmen. That buzzing sensation in my brain increased tenfold. Something isn't right.

“I have something I can give you to make them stop. That's why I'm here, to give this to you. I know that I can't expect you to accept me as your mom after the way I left. I want to at least give you the peace I didn't have at your age.” She reaches into the pocket of her black trench coat—because what else would you wear when sulking in the shadows to confront your long lost daughter—and pulls out a pill bottle with the label torn off. The singular porch bulb works like a spotlight, amplifying the lone capsule filled with blue liquid. “Just take it, and you'll never have to see me again, Sorcha. I'll leave and that will be the end of it. I promise.”

*I don't see her for years then she shows up, offering me drugs, and I'm supposed to take it?*

My gaze flickers between the bottle and her pleading eyes. I don't trust this witch as far as I can throw her, but I have a feeling I need to take the bottle from her.

I step forward and quickly snatch it out of her hand then open the door, pulling Rian in behind me.

“You can leave now.” I slam the door behind me, not giving my egg donor another look. With the door securely between me and my past suddenly, all the strength in my body evaporates. I barely make it to the couch before my body drops. Rian is right there, his arms pulling me close.

“What's wrong? Talk to me.” His voice is low and soothing, deft fingers smooth back my hair as I cling to him.

His scent soothes the hurricane of emotions raging inside me as he trails kisses along my hairline. “That’s it, baby. I’ve got you.”

He’s always got me. Ever since he picked me up from that muddy puddle, Rian has been my Prince Charming, the one I always look for when I’m scared.

“Rian,” I whimper his name before pressing my lips against his. The kiss is quick, soft and full of love as he works to erase all my nightmares. “Thank you.”

“What was she talking about? Something about shadows?” he asks as he squeezes my fingers and gives me his full attention.

“I don’t know how she knows. I’ve never told anyone because I know people would think I’m crazy.”

“You’re not crazy, kid. I know crazy and that’s not you.”

My heart swells from his words, but he wouldn’t say it if I told him my truth. I take a deep breath and exhale my secret. “Sometimes I see things that aren’t real, Ri. I always have. I don’t know why but I know it’s not real. There are shadow type objects that blur my vision, they kind of look like signs and symbols. If I want them to go away, typically I just need to rub my eyes then ignore them.”

He’s unaffected, listening closely. I know this next part will change everything. He’ll leave me and that scares the shit out of me. But it’s something I need to do.

“Since I was little, I’d have these dreams. They were vague scenes that wouldn’t paint the full picture. Random numbers, a dripping faucet, and the creek of stairs was one of my dreams. I never know what they mean until it’s too late, and it’s usually something bad that I could’ve stopped.” Tears

trail down my face at how I've failed the people I care about. If only I could decipher these dreams, I might be able to help them.

“You have premonitions in your dreams? When did they start?” he asks, his blue eyes full of...curiosity. No trace of disbelief or an underlying question of my sanity.

I hold back the sob and continue with what needs to be said. “A month before... your mom...” I trail off, knowing what mentioning her does to him. It's a trauma he hasn't dealt with yet.

His eyes darken as I watch the breath catch in his chest, the sudden intake breaks my heart. He pulls his hands away and squeezes them into fists in his lap. His eyes shift away from me as he takes a minute to compose himself.

“You saw my mom killing herself in your dream?” His tragic blue eyes move back to me as guilt swarms my chest, tightening around my lungs. Suffocating me. But I have to continue.

“No, it didn't happen like that. Her death was horrible for you, but it also was a huge loss for your friends, for me.” We all lost his mom. She was the person who treated me like I was her own daughter. She taught me that kindness goes a long way, that love is beautiful and true love lasts forever. I still love the woman that brought this man into my world. I'll always be grateful to Judy. “I'm so sorry, Ri.”

He dips his head for a moment as if to clear his thoughts. Then he shushes me as he pulls me into his chest, holding me as I break apart.

“You've done nothing wrong, baby. Do you hear me? Not a damn thing.”

*Oh, Rian.*

His arms tighten around me and he brings his lips to mine. I want to get lost in him, let him sweep me off my feet and forget everything, but I can't. Even though I'm raw and just confessed my deepest, darkest secret to him, I have to be strong.

I pull out of the kiss and look at the bottle still clutched between my fingers.

The drama and stress aren't over yet. Not that I don't trust Rian. It's too simple. Nothing is this easy.

My mother showing up has sobered me, and now I'm thinking clearly.

I shake the bottle, making the single pill rattle in its cage. "I need to talk to T," I declare as I move to my feet and extract my cell from my jacket pocket.

"T? Why?"

Isn't it obvious? Tiernan McGowan is the biggest science nerd in Grove Hill. He manufactures illicit drugs daily. If anyone can tell me what's in this capsule and why Carmen wanted me to take it so badly, it's him.

"I need his geek brain," I say before typing in his name and clicking the call button.

"Uh, someone better be dying, Sor," Tiernan grumbles on the other end of the phone. I probably woke him up, but this can't wait. My gut is screaming at me, and if it's right, Carmen will be in the wind soon and time is of the essence.

"I need your help, T. I know it's late, but it's really important."

“I need more info than that, sweet cheeks. Someone better have a bullet wound to get me out of bed at two in the morning when I have to be in the shed at five.” I can never tell if he’s joking or serious when he says stuff like this.

“My mother just showed up.” I know that’s all he needs to know.

“On my way.”

“Can you bring your little mini-lab thing?” I ask, the desperation obvious in my voice.

“Got it.”

I hit the end button and slip the phone back in my pocket. I look to see Rian staring at me with suspicious eyes tinted with jealousy but he doesn’t question me. He’s made it clear he has jealousy and possessiveness issues when it comes to me, but he has nothing to worry about. I don’t want Tiernan. He’s like another, less protective brother.

I hold up the pill bottle in my hand. “She was desperate to give this to me and I don’t trust her. I need to know what’s in it.”

“Okay,” is all he says.

Rian takes me in his arms and I bury my face in his thermal, taking in lungfuls of his intoxicating scent. It’s so relaxing, and I yawn against him.

“Tired?” he asks with a chuckle.

“More like the stress has drained me.”

He runs his hand down my hair, soothing me with his gentle touch.

“Why don’t you lay down? When T gets here, I’ll give him the pill and get him set up, okay?”

I let out a small hum in response, too relaxed to say anything else.

Rian lifts me from the couch and carries me bridal style down the hallway to my bedroom. I’m asleep before my back hits the bed.

CHAPTER  
**FIFTEEN**



## HIM

I softly close Sorcha's front door and stand guard on the front porch. I make sure Sorcha's mother is gone and wait for Tiernan to get here. Sorcha was so out of it when I carried her to her bed. I don't know if I'll be able to wake her when needed. A part of me worries about how toxic her mother is to her mental health. I've never seen her pass out so quickly, not even when we were kids.

I don't know what the point is her mother was trying to make, but I trust Sorcha's instincts. If she thinks her mother's intentions aren't so pure and is doing the opposite of helping her, I will do everything possible to make sure we find out what her true motives are.

I shouldn't get involved in this. I should leave her be, but I'm too psychotic and self-destructive to give her space. I need her, and needing her could get me killed and her hurt. I should be doing everything in my power to shield her from all of this. I've always been way more involved with her than I should be but tough shit.

The high beams from Tiernan's van fly around the corner. The tires screech as he slams on the breaks, nearly plowing into my car. Good thing. He knows I'll kick his ass if he

messes up my car. It's not anything special, but it's the first car I ever tinkered with, and it has nostalgic significance.

As soon as Tiernan steps onto the porch, I open the door and wave him in. He grins at me and waggles his eyebrows like he knows exactly why I'm here.

*Nosy fucker.*

"You're just a glutton for punishment, aren't you?" he jokes, and I roll my eyes.

"Shut up." I pull the bottle out of my pocket and hand it to him. "Her mother gave her this and was pretty adamant about her taking it. But, of course, Sorcha is suspicious. Who delivers a single pill in the middle of the night if it's not illegal?"

"Where is Sorcha?"

"In her bed." He gives me a knowing smirk, but I just glare at him. "I didn't fuck her, if that's what you're thinking."

He shrugs like it's inconsequential and none of his business. As if that happening wouldn't affect everyone in the house he's living in.

Tiernan is the only one who knows how much of a hypocrite I am. If he hadn't caught me watching Sorcha's dance practice a year ago, he probably wouldn't have caught on. After that, there was no point in hiding my obsession with my best friend's little sister. I've told him about how much that girl consumes me. He's probably sick of hearing me lament about my obsession. I use the word *obsession* and not *love* because it's so much more. Ten times as addicting. I'm too selfish to call this feeling love. I'd put her needs above my own if it didn't require taking her away from me. I'm not so stupid to think Sorcha isn't isolated and doesn't crave love and

affection outside of her small bubble. Still, I'm more likely to chain her up in a dark cabin in the woods before I'd ever let her love someone who isn't me.

She's fighting her feelings for me now, but eventually, she'll give in. She wants to protect me and Finn. I can respect that, but I'm not going to allow us to be separated because of his anger. He'll get over it. Plus, his little slut is proving to be a decent distraction for him. For the past couple of weeks, she's kept him entertained, even if he didn't know I noticed. I'm not the only Bastard with stalker tendencies, and I've seen it.

My friend just isn't as obsessive as I am. The most obvious clue is that Duncan Malloy is still alive. That kid has been putting his hands on the Gray whore for years.

Tiernan sets his stuff down and takes the proffered bottle. "What do you think is in it?" he asks as he twists the top off. He carefully dumps the capsule in his palm. He lifts it between two fingers and holds it to the light, squinting with concentration.

"Her mother doesn't seem like the type to offer her daughter any real help, so I'm guessing poison of some sort." It's not very likely, but I wonder if there is some kind of microscopic tracker or something of that sort in it. I have no clue what we're dealing with, but I know one thing for sure. "Sorcha has good instincts, and that's enough for me."

"Especially if you know the backstory of Carmen Muerte."

I'm taken aback by this admission. It's shocking to me that he not only knows Sorcha's mother's name, but also some of her history.

"Back story?"

“Yeah,” Tiernan says as he straightens and puts the pill back in the bottle. “Woman is a psycho. She tried to do everything in her power to kill Sorcha before she was born. Even stabbed herself in the stomach when Nigel got a court order to stop her from having her pregnancy terminated. Used a butcher’s knife, too.”

Not many people are so determined to end someone’s life that they’ll gladly take themselves out as well. I’m not even that psychotic. I’m not going to lie. I want to end Carmen just because she wanted to hurt my woman, even if she doesn’t anymore. Sorcha almost didn’t take her first breath because of that wench.

“Why do that, though?” I wonder out loud, not really looking for a response.

“I overheard my dad talking about her once.” Tiernan rubs the back of his neck as if the subject physically pains him. “He said the bitch would walk around screaming about how Sorcha was evil. Lots of mumbling, didn’t make sense to most people. I think she called Sorcha a prophet, something about her eventually seeing visions of the future that would make her go mad and kill innocent people.” He pauses mid-knead of his neck and meets my eyes with that last tidbit.

I open my mouth, getting ready to ask more questions, but that stops any further words from leaving my mouth. Sorcha does have premonitions in her dreams. How the fuck did the bitch who birthed her know that before Sorcha was even born? This is suspicious as fuck.

“After she stabbed herself, she was hospitalized and strapped to a gurney until Sorcha was born. She signed papers to have Sorcha handed over to the state, but luckily, Nigel has friends all over the place who stalled the process until he could

claim Sorcha.” His face sours as his eyes dart down the hall to where the bedrooms are. Making sure the doors are closed, he leans in close. “My dad’s lips always get loose when he drinks. I’m not sure how accurate his information is, but from what I gathered, Sorcha isn’t even Nigel’s biological daughter. There’s a rumor that they had a paternity test done when she was born and there was zero chance of the two being kin. After that he had the paperwork buried, so he could take custody of her.”

Well, that’s one big crazy piece of information I’ve never heard whispered in town. I was under the impression that the biggest scandal of Sorcha’s life was her crazy mom abandoning her. This other bit is something much bigger, and much more private.

If it’s true, Carmen is a much bigger piece of shit than everyone thought. Only Carmen holds the answer to the identity of Sorcha’s biological father, but if it turns out it’s not Nigel, Sorcha will be devastated. Her family is important to her, so important she was willing to throw our future together away over it.

“Thanks, man,” I say dryly.

Tiernan nods as he slides the bottle in his front pocket, then bends and grabs his bag off the floor. He turns and heads for the door.

“Wait, are you leaving? Where are you going?” I question as he steps off the porch.

He turns to me, “This is going to require my full lab. I’ll let you know when I have the results.”

I know the longer I hold him here, the longer until we can provide Sorcha with some peace of mind. I don’t stop him or

ask any more questions. The rest of my questions will have to wait until I have Carmen in my warehouse and can torture all the information out of her before I kill her.

She freaked Sorcha out, and that alone is enough of a reason for me to end her. Now knowing that she's tried to kill my woman before is just the nail in her coffin. The fact that Sorcha hadn't taken her first breath is the only thing that saved Carmen from The Five Families back then. I have my own set of morals. They don't always align with my predecessors or my comrades.

I close and lock the door before making my way down the hall, but before I can pass Nigel's room, a muffled voice calls to me through the crack in his door. I could have sworn it had been shut when I put Sorcha to bed.

I stop dead in my tracks as the door slowly opens and the man steps out of the shadows. "Now, you know the truth." He crosses his arms over his chest. I've never had a problem with Nigel, but then that was before he confirmed the validity of Tiernan's words.

"So It's true then?" I ask, but it's more of an acquisition. *How can this be?* I've never suspected that Sorcha wasn't his daughter. He's always cared for her and looked out for her best interest, so this is mind-blowing.

"Yes. I didn't know she wasn't mine until after she was born, but it doesn't matter to me. She's still my daughter, and I'll never stop doing what's best for her." His words are an encrypted warning as he glares daggers at me.

"Sir?"

"I'm not blind, Rian. Anyone with eyes can see your... *attachment* to Sorcha." He stresses the word like it's a horrible

thing that I'm always here for her, no matter what. Why would he have issues with that? With me? It's never been so blatant and now my eyes are wide open.

“And?”

“You're a good man, Rian. Anytime my daughter needs help, you're always the first one to volunteer, and I appreciate that.” Why do I feel a *but* coming on? “But... Sorcha is *not* sticking around Grove Hill. She's not going to become like the rest of us. She's going to graduate high school, go off to some big college out of state, then hopefully she'll meet someone, get married, have a family, and do more with her life than anyone this side of Grove Hill ever has. She's going to beat the statistics and find happiness far away from this town. I'm not going to let you stop her. Do I make myself clear?”

Everything he just said is everything I want for her and I have no plans of getting in her way. However, the only man she will be getting married to is me. The only man she will be starting a family with is me. It will be my cock that fucks kids into her. I know I'm supposed to stay in Grove Hill, but if Sorcha leaves, so do I. I'll follow her wherever she goes and support her no matter what path she wants to take.

She's mine and what he says doesn't matter, but I'm not about to start an argument with him.

“Crystal,” I say, letting the dark hallway hide my eye roll before I head further down and sneak into Sorcha's room.

My girl is laying in her bed, but now her pants and shirt are gone, leaving her in the sexiest lingerie set I've ever seen. Black lace with red trim. Her tits are nearly bursting out of it.

I run my tongue over my bottom lip as I engage the lock, keeping Nigel out of here.

I've been so hungry for my girl and she's dangling a steak in front of the lion. She better keep her voice down as I eat her alive.



CHAPTER  
**SIXTEEN**

I'm lulled from my dreamless slumber by gentle kisses on my shoulder. The musky scent of Rian surrounds me as his hands leave a trail of fire down to my waist. God, waking up to Rian's heat feels so good. I don't want it to ever end.

"Ri," I moan as he unsnaps the latch between my breasts, pushing the cups away from my milky flesh. I take one in each hand and squeeze, wishing my hands were his.

He growls. "Shh, baby. Go back to sleep and let me have my fill of you." His words tickle my neck as he lifts my knee, settling himself between my thighs. Pressing his thick, jean covered cock against the crotch of my panties, he grinds against me, groaning in time with his thrusts. "Fuck," he drawls out the words as a whimper falls from my lips.

"Please." Everything he's doing feels so good. I don't want it to stop even though the voice in the back of my head says this is just a self inflicted torture and nothing can come from it, but I'm trying my hardest to ignore that.

"Please what?" he asks before stealing my lips in a heated, demanding kiss.

I don't know, but I need this. His touch, his kiss, and his fat cock.

He kisses down my neck. “Are you awake now?” he asks as he takes over squeezing my breasts in his hands, then runs his tongue over my nipple.

“How do you expect me to sleep with you doing that?”

He leans back and his hands reach over his shoulders, pulling his shirt over his head. Damn. Why does he have to be so dang sexy? The muscles, his tattoos, every inch of him drips in sex appeal. He should come with a warning sign. Maybe something blinking in neon pink and green saying **May destroy panties in less than a heartbeat.**

Suddenly, Rian grips the waistband of my panties and roughly tugs them down my legs, nearly ripping it in two.

*Yup, he's a panty destroyer alright.*

My cunt weeps as he forces my thighs apart with his large hands. In seconds, his tongue finds me like a heat seeking missile, searching and teasing like an expert. I barely hold in a moan as I grip his hair between my fingers.

Rian should've been named Trouble. That's exactly what he is. Trouble. My dad is probably sleeping in his room. All it would take is a squeak from me and he would barge in to investigate.

He grabs my wrist and rips my grip from his soft strands, taking a few hairs with me. “What?” I ask, slightly confused as he lifts his face from my pleading center.

“I'm a man, baby. I prefer to eat without assistance.”

*Holy shit, that's hot.*

Rian buries his face between my thighs again and my body vibrates with desire as he teases me with his tongue, lashing my clit before trailing over my slit. Every touch is electric.

Stifling and euphoric at once. I want to touch him, put my hands on his skin, but I keep them knotted in the sheet as per his request.

My hips don't want to obey, though. I grind them against his face, my chest constricting with the struggle to keep breathing through the waves of pleasure Rian is trying to drown me in.

"That's right, baby. Take what you want," he rumbles before sucking my clit into his mouth.

Golden streaks of stardust explode across my vision and I grab for a pillow and slam it over my face, muffling the screams from my intense orgasm.

Suddenly, the pillow is yanked from my face and Rian's face looms over me. "Don't you ever do that again," he demands in a gruff voice.

"Whaa...what?" I ask, thoroughly confused and still drugged from my orgasm.

"Don't hide your face from me when I make you cum. I want to see it all."

I can't help but smile at his order.

The devil in his eyes is satisfied with my response so he returns to his place between my trembling thighs. "That's my girl. You come so good for me." The sensation of fabric moving up my calves has me struggling to lift my head. I watch as he pulls my panties back up my legs.

"What?" The word escapes without my permission. I'm shocked. After what Rian just did, I expect him to ask for me to return the favor, or least consent to us fucking like rabbits. I was literally moments away from pulling him on top of me and saying "fuck you" to all the possible consequences.

I want to feel him inside and give all of myself to him, more than he already has. I want to be connected to him in every way possible.

“Come here, baby,” he demands as he gets off my bed and stands, his jeans still in place.

It’s a struggle considering my legs are still partially jello, but I get up to stand in front of him, ready to hurl myself off the edge of a cliff if he’ll just give me everything he can. I want to be his.

Instead of taking what he wants, he pushes my bra straps up my arms, his brilliant blue eyes intent on his task. Even though his massive cock bulges in his jeans, his gaze isn’t lustful. He’s concentrated on the mission at hand, as if he’s more concerned with caring for me than satisfying his sexual cravings.

I watch his features as he ignores his body’s reaction to his desire. He snatches his shirt off the bed, pulling it down over my head.

The concentration doesn’t leave his expression as he straightens out the cotton shirt. Amazement fills me as his cock turns flaccid before my eyes, almost like a slow-motion fight scene in a movie. Slow and dramatic. Cue the cheesy music.

“How do you do that?” It doesn’t take a genius to figure out he has no intention of fucking me or pushing for more than what he just did to me.

His eyes find mine, blue meets blue, and he takes a ragged breath, knowing exactly what I was referring to. I know Rian is attracted to me, yet he lost his erection while still staring at my half naked body. He has considerable control.

His brows knit together. “I think of things that piss me off,” he explains. He bends and lifts me into his arms.

I wrap mine around his neck. “Like what?”

“Like someone hurting you.” The short explanation is full of venom, like he’d burn the world down before he would ever let anyone touch me. “If that doesn’t do the job, I picture you fucking someone else. Either way, it works.” He manages to fix the covers with one hand and lays me down on the sheets. He brings the comforter up to my chin and tucks me in. Satisfied, he moves over me to my other side and lays on the covers. Once situated, he pulls me to his chest.

He’s emotionally torturing himself to keep from misbehaving, but really—does he consider stripping me naked and going down on me while I’m asleep as behaving?

I can’t believe he actually pictures me with someone else to get rid of his arousal. It sounds like the worst torture. I’ve never actually seen Rian fuck other girls, but I’ve heard guttural moans coming from his room while fucking some random chick. Hearing it was bad enough. It probably would’ve broken me if I’d actually witnessed it, even just once.

That’s the thing about love. It can give someone the power to build you up or completely shatter you with one look, one touch, or a single act.

Just the thought of it would make anyone wonder why the hell I always return to Rian, no matter how much he trashes my heart again and again. Maybe a part of me doesn’t mind the pain as long as I know I’ll get to feel his touch or the weight of his stare when he looks at me like I’m the most perfect creature in the universe.

It's an intoxicating mixture of desire and irritation. It's hilarious, delectable, and addicting.

"Close your eyes and go back to sleep," he orders as he pulls me closer, holding me like I'm a delicate heirloom. His fingers trail through my hair as I press my face into his pecs.

I don't want to bring it up, but I know I have to. "My dad will be pissed if he finds you in here," I say as a stray yawn forces its way through my lips.

"He knows I'm in here."

My body stiffens as my eyes widen in response. "What?"

"He stopped me in the hallway and threatened me, but that had nothing to do with being in your bed."

My dad did *what*? Why the hell would he threaten Rian? Everyone loves Rian, especially my dad. He suggested I stay away from Rian, but I know that had to do with Finn and his anger issues.

"What was that about?" I ask before sitting straight up, glaring at him. *My dad had to have a good reason, right?*

"Lay down, kid," he grunts, sending me the menacing look he's so fond of using, but I cross my arms over my chest, defying him with all my might.

"Tell me, Rian, or I'll go ask him myself."

He groans before messing up the blankets and flipping on top of me. I squeak in surprise. My lips fall open in shock before I start laughing. I expected him to do something in retaliation, but I didn't expect him to get on top of me. Irritation slowly leaves his face and soon he's cackling along with me. I forget how this all started and am captivated by the

beautiful sight of Rian carefree and laughing. I want to kiss him, but that would interrupt the dazzling sight.

Almost as if he can read my thoughts, he leans down and presses his lips to mine.

I've been transported to another life, one where I'm happy and we're together. God, I never want to leave, ever.

His tongue pushes past the barrier my lips create and crashes against mine, his fingers tangling with my hair.

Everything I've ever wanted is so close. I can practically taste it as clear as Rian's tongue, but it's not real. It's just my imagination and the hopeless romantic in me. I'd kill for Rian to really love me, for my brother to accept us being together, and for us to be together forever, but it won't happen. We can't stay in this bubble for long before someone will burst it.

His lips slowly pull back and I'm panting from how bad my body tingles from his touch.

"You can't distract me, Walsh," I say and his lips nearly split from how wide his grin spreads.

"You're such a firecracker."

"Is that a good thing?" I ask.

He shrugs. "Depends on how you look at it."

"And how do *you* look at it?" I make the insinuation clear.

He purses his lips in deep thought before frowning, the light gone from his eyes again. He's so hot and cold it gives me whiplash. "You're the bane of my existence."

If that's not the biggest slap in the face, I don't know what is.



I try to move out from under him. He does this all the time. I think he'll say something sweet and possibly romantic. He never fails to make me feel like shit.

He doesn't let me move, though. Instead, he presses a kiss against my cheek, like it will completely erase what he just said.

*Bane of his existence? Fuck him.*

"And the object of all my desires," he adds as he trails his nose along my jaw.

The butterflies race through every molecule of my body, and a pleasant buzz settles over me. Goddamn him.

He positions himself behind me as I lay on my side and trails kisses down my arm from the start of my shoulder, slowly descending like it's a simple, mind-numbing task.

"Nigel wants me to stay away from you, but it has nothing to do with Finn," he admits as he pulls my body into his. My flesh forms to him like I was made to fit perfectly against his chest.

"Why?" I ask, unable to stop myself from prying further.

"Because he wants you to leave Grove Hill behind after you graduate and he thinks I'll prevent that."

Leave? Why does he want me to leave? That's never been the plan. Granted, I've never told anyone about my plans, but I didn't realize that anyone else had an interest in them.

"I wasn't going to leave," I inform him and his arm tightens around me. "Grove Hill is my home. The furthest I would travel is Rice or Prairie View, but that's just for college. I've never wanted to run away from here."

His body relaxes as he hides his face behind my neck, running his lips along the skin exposed there.

“You wouldn’t have been able to outrun me anyway, kid. And hiding would be pointless.”

Something about those words is comforting, even though the thought should be scary. No sane person wants to be chased, but I’ve never been normal. I’ve always wanted Rian to chase me, and not just the stereotypical type of chasing.

The image flashes through my mind of running through the woods just to be grabbed by Rian. He’d push me up against a tree, his hand pinning me in place, as his eyes rake up and down me with blatant desire.

*Fuck, yes.*

Maybe that makes me weird, but growing up around psychos has rubbed off on me.

“I’ll always find you,” the words murmured against the back of my neck, voice soft. Rian’s arm loosens around my stomach as I turn to face him, his eyes drooping with exhaustion.

At this moment, I pray I’m capable of loving someone else. Loving Rian is a painful and terrifying roller coaster. One moment it’s great and we’re laughing, but then it changes and I’m struggling to pick up the pieces.

Rian Walsh himself is the biggest obstacle to us being happy. My brother has never hurt me, and it wasn’t for lack of being a massive jerk from time to time. The only one who could ever do long lasting damage is the man in my arms, but still, I can’t push him away. Even when I do, he comes crashing through my barriers like a tsunami directly created by Poseidon’s hands to smite me for defying him.

No matter what, we always end up back together, facing off like two opposing forces ready to wage war, but I'm always the one to surrender. Maybe that makes me weak. Maybe I don't care.

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RIAN SITS at my kitchen table as if this is the most natural thing in the world, and like my dad isn't staring daggers at him. I would be highly embarrassed by the awkwardness weaving around us if Rian didn't tell me last night that my dad knew he was in my room.

However, I'm too pissed at my dad right now to recognize any other kind of emotion. Was he being manipulative when he said that Rian and I being together would end in both his and Finn's death? If I ask, he won't tell me the truth, and that leaves an unsettling sensation in my stomach.

Although I know the truth, I don't want to hear him lie.

I set a plate of eggs and toast in front of my dad, and put another one before Rian. He sends me an appreciative look as I place down two mugs of coffee in the middle of the table.

I've always been the person feeding everyone who walks through the door. It's something I learned from Judy.

The Walsh household was always full of snacks and premade food so everyone who walked through the door left with a full belly. Judy was an amazing cook, and I'm still a novice.

I grab the cereal and milk, all the while sensing eyes on me.

The clank of my dad's fork hitting the wood table breaks the weird silence. "What are you doing?" he asks in an incredulous tone.

Pulling a bowl from the cupboard, I respond. "It's my cheat day." I fix up my cereal with milk and a dash of sugar. I'm not that worried about it, my cereal is on the healthy side, supports heart health and has a lower carb count than the others.

I take a seat at the table as my dad continues to stare at my cereal, like it's about to sprout legs and dump itself on its head.

"Since when do you eat cereal?" he demands, giving Rian an accusing look.

But, Rian? He just takes a big bite out of toast with pride, knowing that he's the one who helped me.

"I've started having one cheat day a week for about a month now. It's good for my mental health. You're usually not around on those days."

Rian and I would have ran out the door this morning and gone straight to school to bypass this awkwardness. However, there's no way I'd be able to concentrate. I want to be readily available when Tiernan gets the results from testing the blue pill. "Mental health... is important." My dad's eyes shoot to Rian, narrowing like he's waiting for Rian to go off the deep end.

*Is he bringing up Rian's mom? Rian isn't that damn fragile.*

I take a big bite of my cereal and nearly moan from the sweetness on my tongue. *Yup, cheat days are the best.*

Finally, my dad stops looking at me like my mind has been taken over by a parasitic alien, and focuses on his food.

I bring the spoon to my mouth for another bite but am interrupted by two different ring tones going off. Rian and my dad snatch their loud phones off the table. Rian's expression is blank while my dad looks confused.

"What's wrong?" I ask as my dad gives me a sideways glance before he taps on the screen.

"Tiernan just sent out a code red. He's directing everyone here. Why is he doing that?" Confusion has my dad scratching at his stubble, but I can't move. My lips are frozen and my entire body turns cold. I have to swallow my bite of cereal that wants to come up as my head spins.

"Because he has the results," Rian says and gently touches my arm. His contact pushes me through the frozen state I'm in.

"Let me guess. Carmen tried to kill me again."

The shadows creep in and I can feel the shadows' long, slender fingers skating across my bare shoulders. They want to drag me under and do what Carmen failed to do.

What once was gray now shifts to black in my vision, but I can't tell if it's an illusion or if I'm about to faint.

"Sorcha." My dad's voice tries to tie me to the present, but it's the sound of another voice that anchors me and saves me from the darkness.

"Kid, look at me." Rian's voice breaks through like a hurricane and blows away all the spots threatening to destroy me.

His ocean blues pierce into mine intently as he grasps my shoulders tight. He grounds me in this moment where I almost

completely lost myself.

After a few calming breaths, I respond. "I'm okay," I say, more for myself than anyone else.

I don't need to know what Tiernan says. I know the results down to my core. I also know what this means for Carmen since she tried to kill me with that pill. She's on the Five Families chopping block.

CHAPTER  
**SEVENTEEN**

**W**ithin five minutes, the living room of the O'Reilly home is jam-packed with people from The Five Families.

O'Reilly, Walsh, McGowan, Connelly, and Kennedy. We are all descended from the original settlers of Grove Hill. Those men created the rules and we still uphold them over a hundred years later.

I think some guidelines need to be updated, but the old timers block every motion ever brought forth. However, concerning this issue with Sorcha's mom, I'm in complete agreement with the rules.

*Carmen Muerte needs to die.*

A loud, intentional throat clearing quiets the soft murmuring wafting through the room. "What was the code red signal about, son?" Oisín McGowen asks, running a hand down his tired face. Maybe if he didn't drink his life away, he wouldn't be so exhausted. At least the others can keep their wits about them.

Tiernan's gaze shifts to Sorcha, and he nods before she breathes deeply.

She's rattled by all of this. I wish I could take her in my arms and tell her everything will be alright, but there's way too



many prying eyes.

We're all seated around the room based on what family we were born into. The Walsh family is on the opposite side of the room from the O'Reilly's. I have to stay way over here during this meeting, and it fucking sucks.

"Why is Sorcha even sitting in on this meeting?" Mr. Kennedy asks, looking uncomfortable beside Eoghan.

Eyes flash around the room, looking for answers to this question.

"Maybe you should head to school, sis," Finn insists, but she shakes her head with defiance in her eyes.

"No."

"Come on—"

Red is crawling up her face. "I said no, goddamn it," she growls at Finn for the first time in our lives. I love seeing her finally stand up to her brother, but I hate that I've never seen her so on edge.

Sorcha stands then steps to the middle of the room, her chin tipped up.

"I'm at this meeting because I got a visit last night from my biological mother. She showed up after all these years, wanting me to take this pill. Of course, I don't trust anything she gives me. I asked Tiernan to test it. That's the only thing this could be about," she explains before looking at Tiernan, exuding strength through her pores.

I've never been more proud of her than I am right now. That's my girl.

Tiernan strides over to her, putting his hand on her shoulder in an obvious show of support. Then his eyes roam

around the room, briefly making contact with everyone in attendance. It takes me a moment to catch on, but then I realize he's trying to convey to everyone that he's standing Sorcha.

“The pill was pure ethylene glycol,” he says.

By the perplexed faces around the room, I can tell that I'm not the only one who has no clue what that means. Everyone looks at him with confusion except Sorcha. Her eyes clench shut, anguish clear as day on her face.

That expression is enough to fill me with rage. It courses through my body and is as deadly as the pill Sorcha's mother wanted her to take. I'm going to rip the skin from Carmen's flesh. I'll make her death last for hours, maybe even days. I'll do worse to her than I did to the Slater guy who touched her.

“It's an ingredient in a lot of household chemicals, but it's better known for being the main component of antifreeze. It's a poison that kills a person within seventy-two hours. The death is excruciating. Carmen Muerte's intentions were clear. She's trying to kill Sorcha, which means she broke the rules at a code red level.”

If the rules are broken, there are three levels: red, yellow, and green.

Green is theft of property. Yellow is threat of bodily harm. Red is murder or attempted murder. All three have the same outcome, but green and yellow don't require us to bring in the last generation of protectors, but a code red does. Code green alerts are rare because the people in Grove Hill know if we find out who did it, they'll pay for it with their lives. Nothing anyone steals is worth their lives, and they know it.

Murder is blatantly written all over his face matching my own expression, I'm sure. I want to invent new ways to torture that bitch, but for more reasons than just putting Sorcha's life in danger. I was right there when Carmen gave the bottle to Sorcha. I could've killed her right then. And, what if Sorcha had taken that pill?

Bile rises and I quickly swallow it down lest I throw up all over the members that make up The Bastards. Who in the world would automatically assume their mother—who claims she's offering help—is actually offering death? My girl would've died, and I would've had to sit there and helplessly watch as she died an excruciating death.

Thank God Sorcha has good instincts, a sixth sense, or even common sense.

“We need to track her down,” Nigel says, determination and anger in his voice.

“How are we going to do that? Carmen comes and goes like the wind. We won't catch her unless she wants to be caught,” an irritated Mr. Connelly says as the front door opens. We all train our eyes on our newest guest.

It's the impeccably dressed rodent I need to squash.

*Nice fucking entrance, bitch.*

“Ain't that the truth, Arthur? And yet here I am. I don't feel like playing your little game of cat and mouse, so I surrender.” She lifts her hands, palms up, as if to mock us.

*What the hell kind of game is she playing at?*

Finn stands, ready to charge, but Nigel manages to hold back his furious son. Finn's attention may be on the threat, but mine is on the victim.

Sorcha's eyes are locked on her mother, but I can tell from the slight tremble in her fingers that she's scared. This woman already tried to kill her twice. What's stopping her from trying again, right now?

Without even thinking of the repercussions of it, I speed over to Sorcha and put her behind me, where her fingers dig into the back of my shirt.

*I've got you, baby. I won't let this bitch hurt you.*

Then, she traces her finger on the back of my shirt, something she used to do when she wanted to say something she couldn't make herself say out loud. I concentrate on the pattern until the words become clear.

*I got this. Don't worry.*

I can't help worrying when a snake has entered the lion's den, taking everyone by surprise.

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ODDLY, Carmen didn't make any moves toward Sorcha. Instead, she calmly followed the Bastard's instructions and went to the car with Eoghan and Colin and drove to the warehouse with the rest of us following behind. Finn took his own truck with Tiernan, and Nigel drove Sorcha to the location. She was adamant she had to be there and wouldn't back down, no matter how many times she was told to stay behind.

I'm the dumbass who got to drive by himself. I'm surprised my steering wheel didn't bend in half with how hard I was gripping it. I pull up to the warehouse barely putting it in park before jumping out and heading inside. I storm in on

Finn, Nigel, and Eoghan fighting about who gets to kill the bitch. The only thing that stops me from jumping in is the look on Sorcha's face. She can say she's unaffected by this, but I see it on her face. Her heart is breaking.

Although the woman who brought her into this world wants her dead, she's probably still upset that Carmen has to die. Regardless of how you look at it, this is a shitty situation, courtesy of Sorcha's mother.

"She's my damn sister. It's going to be me," Finn growls, and I can't help the scowl I throw his way.

"Man, shut the fuck up!" I hiss at him as I pass to Sorcha, who gives me a lingering glance full of pain before her gaze returns to the evil bitch sitting in the chair, like we are all here just for her entertainment.

Everyone quiets at Sorcha's deep breath. "Let Rian do it," she finally speaks, shocking everyone. I figured it wouldn't matter to her who performed the action, but she elected me.

"What?" Finn nearly growls. He's seething, but I don't give a shit.

"I'm the one she tried to kill. It's my choice." She gives her brother a look of indignation.

I gotta say, her defiance is pretty hot.

It takes a lot of restraint on his part, but Finn nods and takes a step back, only to pace along the side. There's no way for me to put into words how honored I feel that Sorcha picked me out of everyone here.

I thought she would choose Finn or even Nigel—even though he's not supposed to participate—but I'm the one that she's giving her faith and trust to. Nothing is more sacred to me.

I step forward to do as she has asks, but she stops me with a press of her hand to my chest. I could easily remove Sorcha from my path, but not in this situation.

“Not yet,” she softly pleads with her bright eyes.

I want this woman in my arms so I can shield her from everything, including the unfeeling demon who gave birth to her, sitting a few feet away.

This is her show, so I nod and take a single step back. This gives her space, but I’m close if she needs me.

Sorcha looks down and her dark hair falls in front of her face, as if she’ll find the answers written somewhere on the dirty, hard ground. Everyone looks at her in complete silence. Then, her head lifts and I see her.

My girl.

And I smile.

This is the girl that no one knows but me. The warrior that fights every day regardless of the shit life throws at her, and now by the whore in front of her. “Why?” Sorcha demands of the demon. For a long moment, a cruel cackle fills the space where an answer should be.

“*Why?* That’s the question you want to ask? I figured it was obvious, darling.” She sits straight, her shoulder length hair, the color of her daughters, sways with the movement. She has the audacity to hold her head high, giving off the airs that she’s above this, that she’s done nothing wrong.

*Fucking cunt.*

“The only thing obvious is that you wanted me to take a pill you knew would kill me. Why? You haven’t been a part of

my life since the moment I was born. Is this the same reason you tried to visit me years ago?"

Carmen's expression sours. "Yes. I planned to kill you then. Is that what you want to hear?"

"I want the truth," Sorcha demands with tears in her eyes. I'm barely holding myself back from intervening. She thinks she can handle this, but this would break anyone. She's a strong woman, but this is her mother, the woman who birthed her. Deep down, I'm sure Sorcha was hoping for Carmen's intentions to be pure.

Sorcha is decent, kind, and has a good heart. She shouldn't have to deal with this.

"Why do you hate me?" Sorcha's voice turns small, full of self-conscious energy, and it even seems to affect Carmen. The snake's expression turns blank as she lets out a ragged breath.

"I don't hate you, Sorcha. I've never hated you. I have my reasons for the things I do. It's not personal. You and me and every other woman in our family, past and present, live with a curse. Back in my village, Comala, they call us Mujeres de Muerte."

Sorcha's eyes widen. "They call you the Women of Death?"

Pride stretches Carmen's lips into a genuine smile. "Sí, bonita. You know your Spanish. Good for you." Anger had blinded me earlier, so I didn't realize how thick her Spanish accent was. The words are so pointy, it's like a stabbing pain with each syllable. "When my sister Lucia and I came to this country, we took the Muerte name as a reminder of where we came from—a place where its citizens thought the mere sight of us was bad luck. We would be dead if we hadn't escaped.

People are superstitious, especially where death is concerned. They called us Mujeres de Muerte because wherever one of us goes, death follows. Bad luck, as they say. Where a Muerte goes, people die and when you try to warn someone, suspicion falls on you. Your abuela tried to warn our neighbor about a fire in their barn, and when the barn burned, they hung her for it. A *fucking* barn.” This is my first glimpse of Carmen actually portraying a human emotion. But the sadness is fleeting as she shakes her head and schools her expression.

“Our family agreed that we shall never birth another Muerte woman, mija. The men in our bloodline are safe from the curse as it only passes to the women. So as soon as I found out I was pregnant with you, I did all the tests I needed to. I needed the peace of mind that I wasn’t cursing another woman to live the same cursed life as the generations of women before me. All the tests and myths swore you were a boy, so I was able to relax and could enjoy my pregnancy. Then the doctor changed everything and told me you were without a penis, a girl.”

I still don’t get it. So what if the women in her family have premonitions? That’s no reason to try to kill Sorcha.

Nigel speaks up from my side. “Is there a point to this?” he demands with as much frustration as I feel. Carmen glares at him like she can’t stand the sight of him.

Her onyx eyes narrow into slits. “I’m getting there, cabrón.” I have no clue what she just called Nigel, but I have the feeling it was some colorful language.

Her gaze turns back to Sorcha, and softens. “I didn’t want you to suffer like I have, so I tried to put an end to my pregnancy as early as possible, hoping you wouldn’t feel anything and just drift away. But Nigel intervened when I tried



to take care of it myself and had me placed in a psychiatric hospital until you were born. I prayed every waking hour that you would be a stillborn. I knew if I left you at the hospital, Nigel would come for you and you would be under the watchful eye of these people.” She does a slight head tilt at the men surrounding her.

Why does it matter if we were watching Sorcha? What does this bitch think Sorcha was going to do?

“If you wanted me dead so badly, why did you leave me at the hospital? If you had taken me, you could’ve killed me then.”

“The hospital wouldn’t let a mentally unstable person leave the hospital with a newborn.” Carmen’s lips quirk into an odd smile. It’s not threatening, but also not friendly. “Believe it or not, Sorcha, I loved you. I wasn’t trying to abort you because I hated you. I was trying to save you, but I failed. I hate that you’re going to suffer, as will everyone you care about.”

*Stop talking in riddles and just give the cliff notes already. I have my own questions to ask.*

“Suffer how?” Sorcha asks, her expression torn.

“I had a vision of you, mija. The visions don’t always give us the full picture. We get bits and pieces, but as you get older, it becomes clearer. Five years ago, I woke up in a cold sweat from a vision that rocked me so hard I begged for God to take me. The vision was of you, Sorcha. You were covered in blood. It looked like you bathed in it.. Your eyes were so... empty. No soul behind them. I would’ve thought you were dead if you hadn’t been standing there and holding a bloody knife. You had lost your mind.”

*What?* My molars grind so hard I can't hold my tongue.

“Why was she covered in blood?” I bite out, but the witch just shrugs.

“No clue. If I were to guess, it was blood from people she killed. That's what makes having these visions so traumatic. You don't get the answers.”

Sorcha lifts her shoulders in a long sigh before addressing her mother. “I'm not a killer.”

“Not now, you're not, but time will give the answers to my vision. Some can handle these visions while it drives others mad. That's what it did to Lucia. She went so crazy she threw herself off a bridge to stop it.”

Sorcha advances toward Carmen and glares. Despite her warring disposition, her voice is calm and unfeeling. “I'm *not* a killer, Carmen. Rian, on the other hand, is. Your claims of love are meaningless. Your actions are what speak loudest and what you have done to me speaks nothing of love.” Sorcha rubs at her eyes, but it's not to dry away tears, it's in disappointment. Resignation colors her voice as she whispers. “I have my answers or the best I'm going to get out of your mouth.”

Finished with the situation and finished with her mother, Sorcha steps back. In response, Carmen has the gall to yawn like this is all boring. What the hell is wrong with her?

“See you soon, mija.”

See her soon? What the fuck is that supposed to mean? If she's implying Sorcha will be seeing her in hell, she has another thing coming. Sorcha's not going to the same place as Carmen, but I might.

My fingers twitching in anticipation, I grab the same Bowie knife I used on Denzel. I turn my eyes to Sorcha, her big blues dulled by the lackluster exchange. “You should leave.”

I’m not going to force her, but she’ll see and hear things that will live with her forever.

A spark of defiance sparks between us. “Get on with it.” She growls. I shrug before shuffling to Carmen’s side. I take a knee beside her and her dark brown eyes darken, but the evil smile perched upon her face doesn’t slip.

It’s a bit of a confidence boost that I catch her off guard. “Who was he?” I press. I rest my elbow on my bent knee, the knife dangling between my fingers.

“Rian!” Nigel yells, but I ignore him. He knows what I’m doing. I’m not going to waste the opportunity to get answers for Sorcha. She might not be ready to hear them, but her mother isn’t going to be around for much longer.

“He?” Carmen laughs awkwardly. “I don’t know who you’re referring to.” The bitch knows what I’m talking about.

I don’t give her a second to think up another answer before I pin her left hand down flat on the wooden arm of the chair and stab the knife straight through.

An agonized scream rips through red stained lips as tears immediately stream from her eyes. “Motherfucker!”

“I’ll ask you one more time. Who. Was. He.”

Her dark eyes shoot daggers at me and she tries desperately to keep her mouth closed, but another scream rips past her lips as I twist the blade.

“Fine, fine. Okay!” She glowers at me like she wants to rip out my jugular with her teeth.

I yank the blade out, and she whimpers. “I’ll tell you!” she pants. “I’m assuming you mean Sorcha’s biological father?” Her voice comes out choppy and steeped in agony.

*Good. She deserves the pain.*

A movement in the corner of my eye catches my attention. It’s Sorcha and she’s standing ramrod straight. “What?” Sorcha nearly screams. She is so confused and I want nothing more than to hold her in my arms, but now is not the time. “But my dad is—”

Carmen looks between Sorcha and Nigel for a moment before she speaks. “Sorry to break it to you, mija. He may be the man who raised you, but you share no blood with him or his behemoth of a son over there.” She rolls her eyes in Finn’s direction.

This bitch needs to answer my fucking question. “Who is he?” I ask again.

“Gray,” she states.

“First name or last name?”

“Last name. You know his other daughter. Blonde hair, green eyes...” Carmen sends a mischievous grin at Finn, and continues, “You know, the girl. She has horrible trauma that makes her scream into the night. You should hear her screams. She can be found in your bed every night, Finnick.”

The murderous look on his face is enough to say we all know who she’s talking about, but I need to clarify. “Francine?”

“That’s the name I was looking for. Francine. She really is quite the catch. Beautiful girl. Smart, too.”

“Are you saying my biological father is Michael Gray?” Sorcha presses, shaken by this.

Nigel takes a step forward. “That’s ridiculous. Bethany and Michael were already married when you—”

Carmen cuts Nigel off. “Can I get something for my hand first?” she asks, looking at the blood dripping from her stab wound.

A resounding “No!” is chorused by several people at the same time.

Carmen rolls her eyes like she’s more annoyed with the answer than not getting medical attention. “Not Michael. The other brother, the black sheep. *Martin* Gray.” She says the name like it’s one we should all know. I’ve heard it only once, and that was only a few days ago when we brought him here and Francine killed him.

“Martin isn’t Francine’s father. Michael is.” Finn grinds out the words, barely holding himself together. I see a tick in his jaw and am surprised that he hasn’t attacked the bitch yet.

Carmen makes a surprised face before throwing her head back, cackling like a damn maniac. “Sorry. I tend to forget I know things others don’t. Turns out Michael was...unable to impregnate his wife. Bethany and Michael went to see a fertility specialist where they learned Michael was the one with issues. They had to have a child and Nolan, Michael’s father, was adamant the child had to have Gray blood. Nolan offered Martin one hundred grand for his sperm and he accepted. Nine months later, Francine was born. Eighteen years after that, she kills him. How poetic?”

“I’m related to Francine?” Sorcha asks, bewilderment scorching her eyes.

“She’s your half-sister. You may be my only child, but Martin had a couple. Francine and Connor. He’s way older than you, though.”

“Why did you let Nigel think he was Sorcha’s father?” I ask, unable to wrap my head around it all.

“We all know what Martin did to poor Francine... I had a vision of it. It was before I realized I was pregnant. I couldn’t be with a man who would do that to a child, especially his own daughter. I planned on warning Bethany, but my life was in danger here in Grove Hill, so I left. After a while I got sidetracked.” She shrugs like she couldn’t have saved Francine from years of mental anguish.

I don’t know much about what this predator did to Francine, only that it was on level yellow. However the fact that she got *side tracked* and couldn’t be bothered to let Francine’s mother know really shows what a cunt she is.

“Martin saw me pregnant with Sorcha so I lied to him when he asked if the baby was his. I never saw his face again. Well, except in my visions. My visions have shown me many things, but I try to target my daughter. I don’t just see her, but those around her, including you.” Carmen catches my gaze and I know she’s about to say something cunty. I really want to kill her right now, but her monologue has been pretty informative so I curb my bloodlust. “I wonder how Finn would feel if he knew you’ve been screwing my daughter behind his back. Aren’t you breaking some type of Bastard code? That’s pretty dangerous, Walsh.”

Yep. Super cunty.

Well, fuck. I don't look at Finn for his reaction, but I sense Sorcha's anxiety at Carmen's revelation.

I'm not worried about pissing Finn off. I'm worried about sending Sorcha into a panic with everything else that's going on.

"Make her stop talking," Sorcha begs, and I look over my shoulder, watching my broken angel turn her back the scene, shoulders slumping.

I never expected her to watch what happens, but with one look at her back, I know torturing Carmen isn't worth it. This whole thing is draining for her, and the best thing to do is to make this quick.

"Finn, help me finish this waste of life." He knows what I want to do and doesn't waste a moment. Finn stomps over to Carmen, grabs a fistful of her hair and yanks hard. Her neck snaps back so hard it even makes me wince.

A pained yelp leaves her lips as she tries to squirm out of his grasp.

"What? You can't kill an old woman by yourself?" she spits at me. She's trying to get under my skin so I take care of her quickly. Jokes on her, this isn't my first time with reverse psychology. I meet her eyes as I perform an exaggerated yawn. Fuck that. She'll go on my time table, not hers. And it won't be painless. I grab the forceps off of the table of random tools as I make my way to Carmen. The angle Finn has her neck at, it's impossible for her to close her mouth, making it easy to use the forceps to find her tongue. I clamp down on it and pull it out as far as possible without tearing any tissue.

Snatching my knife again, Carmen screams as she catches sight of it. That's it, bit. Did you forget why you're here? With

fear in her eyes, wide black orbs flashing between me and Finn, she fights her constraints.

I can't help myself and hit her in the nose with the handle of my knife. I smile as the blood trickles down her mouth, and there's so much more to come.

While she's still wrapped up in the pain from her nose, I cut through her tongue. I wanted to shave her taste buds off first, but I'm not going to drag this out for too long. The blood splatters my shirt as it squirts from the wound. More gargled screams fill the air as Carmen thrashes so I shove the detached appendage down her throat. I hope it gets lodged, and she chokes on it.

Blood continues to erupt from her mouth, so I slam my hand over her lips clamping them shut, making sure to cover her nostrils. Fear and adrenaline fill her eyes as the teardrops leak down her beige flesh.

She tries to thrash, but after only a few moments, the movement steadily decreases and I clamp down even harder, wanting to kick myself in the ass.

Carmen's head thrashes as she chokes on her tongue and blood. The minimal amount of red that squeezed through my grasp is making it difficult to hold on, but I do. Nothing could loosen my hold on this bitch.

Her thrashing has diminished to twitching, all the oxygen having left her body. My hand covers most of her face so all I see are her eyes, her desperation, her pain. With only moments to spare, I whisper the words that I want her to carry to hell with her.

“You can go suck on Satan's dick knowing Sorcha never needed you. I was the one to protect her all those years and I'll



keep protecting her.” This part I lean in to whisper so Finn can’t hear and her eyes follow me down. “And, we’re going to have lots of kids, hopefully all girls. I already have their names picked out, Aine and Aoife.” I pull back enough to give her a smile. And that’s the last thing she sees.

*Ding dong. The Wicked Witch is dead.*

CHAPTER  
**EIGHTEEN**

## HER

**M**y tear ducts have completely dried up after hours of yelling and screaming at my dad. Finn stood by silently as I did it.

*My father* knew this whole time and never told me. I had no reason to question it. I was born with the trademark black hair and blue eyes that comes with being an O'Reilly. Granted, Finn and I look nothing alike, but that's not a dead giveaway.

I'm not an O'Reilly. I'm just the orphan child Carmen tricked him into thinking was his.

This doesn't change that he's still my dad, Finn is still my brother, and I love them both, but now I'm lost.

Francine is my sister. I've always liked her, and she said just yesterday that she considers me a friend, too.

I sit on the porch and hug my knees to my chest, praying I don't start crying again. The screen door creaks open and the porch groans in protest under the weight of my visitor.

I look up as Finn takes a seat next to me, silence surrounds us. I'm not sure if I want it or if I'd rather hear what he has to say. However, I need to know, does he still think of me as his sister? I don't know if I can ask, but I need to say something.

“Francine can’t know about this,” I say and he stiffens at my pronouncement. “I don’t know what he did to her, but knowing the truth will only devastate her. Let the dead bury the dead. Martin is dead. Carmen is dead. My grandfather, Nolan, is dead. The only ones alive that know the truth are Francine’s parents, Michael and Bethany. If they haven’t told her by now, they’re not going to.”

Finn carries tension in his shoulders as he nods. “Yeah, I know.” He grows silent again. “He tried to rape her when she was twelve, and after the cops took her statement, he tried to gaslight her into thinking she imagined it all. She still has nightmares about it.”

*Oh, my god. Francine, no.*

I thought I was out of tears, but they start anew. “What kind of man does that to his own daughter?”

“A very sick and entitled one.”

I scoff. “I just don’t understand how you can do that to family.”

A smile spreads across his face as the tension in his body relaxes. “You are my family. You’ll always be my sister, Sorcha. This doesn’t change that.”

“Ditto,” I say before accepting his hug and loving how it feels to be in his arms. “Is it weird now that you’re screwing my sister?”

We laugh together at my horrible attempt at a morbid joke. I’m too drained to think of something clever so I go with honesty. “I’m glad you two are together. She makes you happy and grounds you. You need that.” He’s also never smiled the way she makes him.

“I’m not the only one who needs to be happy. You’ve been really strained these past few weeks. Something is up and you’re not talking about it. I’m not going to make you tell me, but you need something that makes you happy.”

Is he about to bring up what Carmen said about Rian and me? Hopefully not. There’s only one thing stopping me from being happy, and oddly, it’s Finn and the roadblock he created for me and Rian. So I’ll just be a coward and tiptoe around the subject.

“Other people think I shouldn’t have what will make me happy, that it will stir things up too much.” That’s the best way I can put it without giving it away.

“Fuck what other people think. If you need something, you go out and get it. Everything else will fall in line.”

If this isn’t a sign, I don’t know what is.

“I know we’re having a little heart to heart—”

“Got somewhere you need to be, sis?”

“Something like that.”

He nods with a smile. “Don’t let me stop you from being happy.”

I look into the eyes of my brother for a moment, just thankful that I can still call him that, that I still have him. Then, I let his words hit me in the stomach like a divine intervention.

*I need to see Rian.*

---

I'M BARELY able to stay within the speed limit as I drive the short distance from my dad's house to Mason Road, the road that both the Bastards and Kia live on, ready to confess how madly in love with Rian I am. It's insane how this morning I was struggling to push him away and now I'm running toward him, unable to focus on anything other than talking to him, kissing him, and finally giving myself to him.

I park in the driveway behind Rian's car and notice Eoghan's Jeep gone, which isn't much of a surprise. He likes to disappear.

Clicking the seat belt release button, I rip the strap off and nearly trip getting out of my car.

I've always needed Rian, like I need the air. I have no clue why I thought I could ignore the way I feel about him or deny my body what it craves.

Or rather, who it craves.

My heart thumps in my throat as I sprint to the front door and shove it open. The house is quiet except for the sound of the air conditioner pumping through the vent. I wouldn't expect it to be loud, not after dealing with Carmen.

I stride through the living room, down the hall, right to Rian's room. Normally, I would've knocked, but the urgency I feel doesn't have patience.

"Rian?" I call as I push open the door. My blood runs cold and my heart turns to ice the moment my eyes land on his bed. My lungs seize, making me choke on my gasp. Everything stands still.

Except for the naked woman under Rian's covers, in his bed, the scent of sex in the air.

“Be out in a minute!” Rian’s voice rings from the bathroom, where I hear the water running. This shatters my trance and I gulp down the much needed oxygen.

“Sorcha, hey. Sorry. We’re a little busy, as you can tell.” I recognize her. Red hair, tan skin, thin as a rail. She’s on the track team.

Everything I’m not.

“Sorry to interrupt,” I say, barely concealing my emotions.

She gives me a smile as if it’s totally normal to be having a conversation with an acquaintance while wearing only a sheet. “Not a problem. Rian just texted me. I’m sure we’ll be done soon.”

Rian texted her? It’s been a little over an hour since I got home from the warehouse and the first thing he does is contact someone else to fill his bed.

“It’s not important. Have fun.” I twirl on my heel and slam the door behind me as I turn my back on Rian and his lies. Sobs rack my chest again and again, but no tears come out. I don’t know if it’s because I’ve cried myself dry or deep down I don’t think Rian deserves my tears. Sadness and anger fight each other for dominance inside of me. He said he loved me, but that was a lie, right? He swore he wasn’t screwing other girls anymore, but Sophia just proved that wrong.

Rian is a liar. He fucking lied to me to get what he wants. What is that exactly? Obviously not sex. He can get that anywhere and I haven’t fucked him. Maybe it’s the forbidden fruit of me being off limits because I’m Finn’s sister.

I guess it doesn’t matter because me sleeping with him will never be an issue.

I run to my car and peel out of the driveway. I need to get away as fast as possible. My vision blurs as I make my way through the street. My head starts to get light with all my heavy breathing. I can barely make out anything, so I pull into a supercenter parking lot, letting loose the ache Rian put back in my chest.

I believed his words, his lies. The moment I was ready to tell the world to fuck off so I could be with Rian, he was thinking about fucking another woman. That was long enough for Rian Walsh to destroy me. Permanently wrecking the person I was.



CHAPTER  
**NINETEEN**

**T**he worst part about killing someone is the blood. You can never be sure you have washed it all off of you. Under my nails is the worst, it's a stubborn thing to get out.

I need to get completely cleaned before Sorcha gets here. I don't want her to see me still wearing her mother's blood. I texted her right after I left the warehouse for her to come over.

I know she's probably pissed at Nigel, but I'll be whatever she needs. A shoulder to cry on or whatever.

I jumped in the shower while I waited. I didn't need the evidence of Carmen's death still hanging around.

Quickly drying myself with my towel, I force my jeans up my legs and tuck in my junk before zipping. I expect to find Sorcha sitting or lying on my bed when I step out of the bathroom, but what I find is completely different and extremely unwanted.

"What are you doing here, Sophia?" I groan as I rub my temple, feeling a tension headache coming on. This is what I get for getting my hopes up.

"You texted me, silly."

Sophia and I fucked once, two years ago, and she has a nasty habit of texting me anytime she's horny, but I was never

tempted.

“No, I didn’t,” I growl and snatch my shirt off the bed before pulling it over my head.

She sits up, letting the sheet slide down her body, exposing her bare tits. “Yeah, you did. You said for me to come over and talk. I figured you were just being coy and really just wanted your dick sucked.”

Now it makes sense why Sorcha didn’t respond to my text. I didn’t send it to her. I accidentally fucking sent it to Sophia. It makes sense. Their names are right next to each other in my contacts and I was still riding the high of killing that witch.

“It was meant for someone else.”

She shrugs and looks disinterested in my response. She’s not at all offended by this. Sophia is a slut, and I mean that in the nicest way possible. She loves sex and doesn’t take it seriously.

“Ah, you meant to text Sorcha, right?”

Examining the tense set of my jaw, Sophia realizes this isn’t going to happen. She’s pulling on her discarded clothes when I ask, “Why would you think that?”

“She showed up while you were in the shower. She looked really upset. I asked her if she needed anything. She said it wasn’t important and left.” With that, Sophia struts out the door with her shoes and phone in hand like she didn’t just seriously screw shit up for me.

*Shit. Fuck. Shitfuck.*

I know why Sorcha was upset. It had nothing to do with Nigel or Carmen. It’s because she saw Sophia fucking naked

in my bed. She jumped to the logical conclusion that I'd probably fucked Sophia.

Snatching my phone off the bedside table, I call Sorcha, but the phone rings twice before it goes to voicemail. I call two more times in quick succession, but it ends with the same result. She's avoiding me and I don't blame her. This is my fuck up. I shoulder the blame here.

While deciding what my next move is, a text comes through from my girl.

**Sorcha**

You're such a fucking liar. Good thing I learned that before I fucked you. Leave me alone.

*Fuuuck.*

I haven't been with anyone except her since that night I found her running in the middle of the night. I didn't lie about that. That night changed everything like I knew it would. Once she was in my bed and in my arms, I knew no one else would ever be good enough and I couldn't hold back any longer.

She's stubborn as a mule. She won't listen much less believe what I have to say and I don't blame her. I have to wait until she's ready and that absolutely sucks because it means unnecessary pain.

Still, it doesn't stop me from sending a text back.

**Rian**

She showed up when I was in the shower. I swear I didn't touch her. The only one I want to touch is you. Come back so we can talk. Please.

Just like I expected, she never replied to my text nor did show up. I washed my sheets to get out any trace of Sophia while I waited. I don't want my bed smelling like any girl that's not Sorcha. So I sit there all day praying into insanity. I made my bed, I guess I deserve to lay in it, too.

CHAPTER  
**TWENTY**

I love the spooky season. I've always been enamored with pretending to be someone else, someone forged from another person's imagination. I used to always look forward to Halloween, but this year is different. This year I'm going to the annual Halloween party at Duncan's house and who is my chaperone this time?

*Rian fucking Walsh.*

Just because he's coming with me doesn't mean I have to talk to him. I'm not on speaking terms with that lying jackass and I don't expect that to change anytime soon. I can handle a lot of things. I can stand hateful words, things done to spite me, but one thing I can't stand is a liar.

Rian tried to lie his way into my pants. He tried to manipulate me, and when it didn't work, he called Sophia to fill his bed.

I put so much trust in him that after this fuck up I almost put my life in a tailspin because of him.

"This is exciting!" Kia shrieks as she bounces into my bathroom. Her witch costume is very sexy, but luckily, it meets school dress code or I'd tell her to put some shorts on under it. A lot of the students like to dress up for the school day when it lands on Halloween. I'm sure I'll have to touch everything up

before the party at Duncan's tonight, but there's plenty of time to do so.

Our costumes aren't that different. Francine helped me design mine. I wanted a sexy Morticia Addams look, but one that wasn't too risqué for school. She's incredible at costume design.

I still can't wrap my head around us being half-sisters, and I wish I could share my newly discovered relationship with her. Now that I know, I guess I see a resemblance. We have the same jawline and lips. My nose is a little smaller and her eyes are a little bigger. She takes after her mom a lot and I look too much like Carmen.

"You're thinking about him again, aren't you?" Kia asks as she frowns.

I'm constantly thinking about Rian. I don't know what pisses me off more: what he did or that I can't stop thinking about him, even if just by proxy. I think of Francine being my sister and it connects back to Rian getting that information out of Carmen. He's everywhere, and I can't escape him.

"Who?" I lie as I finish applying my black lipstick and top it with my glittery lip-gloss.

"You know who." She frowns at me in the mirror before crossing her arms. "I'm your best friend, and I don't think I'd be doing my job as your best friend if I didn't say—"

"You're taking his side," I groan.

I told Kia what happened as I cried over a beer and she consoled me. I left out a few details, like the deal with Carmen and my new half sister, but she knows how badly Rian hurt me when I found Sophia in his bed.



That's pretty damning proof that Rian is a lying scumbag, or somewhere close to that colorful term. Asshole? Jerk? Or maybe Colin's favorite of them all. Asshat. Yup, Rian is a lying asshat.

"I'm not taking any sides, okay? I'm looking at everything as an unbiased party and that's what you need right now. You've got enough Rian hate swirling in your head for the both of us, and I get that. You're hurt, but I also think there's a piece you might be missing here. I know Rian is a man whore, but texting Sophia doesn't make sense. I saw the way that man looked at you and continues to look at you, and I just don't see him doing that. I don't know Rian very well, and he is a fuckboy. Everyone knows that. I'm just saying that you should think about hearing him out. He's been texting you, right?"

Damn her. She knows he texts me every day, begging me to hear him out, but what could he possibly say to fix this? I don't get why he hasn't just cornered me at school if he's so desperate for me to hear him out. Maybe he's not desperate, he just likes getting under my skin. That's always been our love language anyway.

"Hear what he has to say about what? How Sophia just magically appeared naked in his bed while he was in the shower. Oh, maybe she's a crazy stalker, and she touched herself in his bed, which is why his room smelled like sex," I nearly growl the words in frustration and slam the vanity drawer shut.

Kia can give me her pity all she wants, but I doubt she'll ever fully understand how bad this hurts.

"I know this sucks, but you never know until you hear what he has to say."

Yeah, whatever. Rian can try, but I'm never speaking to him again.

---

“CAN I just say you look smoking hot?” Kia asks as we stop at my locker.

I do look hot. This costume is incredible. It's long sleeved with lace on the arms and a hundred slits in the fabric. The skirt matches the top. It has nude cotton fabric beneath it, to give the illusion of revealing skin through all the slashes in the black fabric. I'm wearing black shorts and a tank top under it so Principal Jordan won't bother me about how revealing it is.

For once, I actually feel sexy, and I'm not going to let anyone ruin it for me, especially not an opinionated troll who butts his nose in all of my business, like Rian.

“Happy Halloween.”

My heart skips a beat and I nearly hiss at the sound of his voice. I turn to try to escape him, but I bounce right into a hard chest which sends me back a step.

“Be careful, darling.”

*Fuck you, I'm not your darling.* My eyes slowly trail up his body leaving a fiery trail in their wake. Rian is in an all-black suit, his hair gelled back with a side part and fake mustache. It was no secret that I planned to dress as Morticia for Halloween and, of course, since I won't give him my attention any other way, he steals it by dressing as Gomez Addams. Morticia and Gomez Addams have one of the most iconic love stories created by Hollywood. Ours is more like Mr. and Mrs. Smith with Brangelina.

God, he does fill out this suit like it was made just for him. He's manipulating me again, and that pisses me off.

"You look beautiful," he says as he sends me that sinful smirk of his, his icy blues glowing with appreciation.

I want to slap that smirk right off his face. Instead, I scowl and move around him, a renewed hatred for him burning in my chest.

"Well, that didn't work out well for him," Kia groans as she follows me. "You have to admit that's a great idea. You two would've been such a cute couple dressed as Gomez and Morticia."

I only respond to Kia with a glare. I already know she's not taking my side in this, but she doesn't have to piss me off more.

"Fine," she concedes.

I only stop with my angry strut when I see Christian staring at the flyer pinned to the bulletin board. It's his brother Dez's yearbook picture with the words *Missing* in bold underneath.

Dez disappeared the night of our confrontation. All I know is his car was abandoned in his driveway, his keys on the ground next to the vehicle.

As soon as the news surfaced, I confronted Finn to make sure the Bastards weren't involved. He swore Dez hadn't broken the rules, so they weren't allowed to touch him. I thought Rian didn't have anything to do with it, but it seemed suspicious that Dez vanished so soon after Finn warned him away from me.

"Hey, Christian," I say as I stand beside him, the sadness in his eyes burning in my chest. It may make me a horrible

person, but I'm not upset that Dez is missing. What makes me sad is that Christian has to deal with the loss.

"Hey, Sor." He frowns.

"Still nothing?"

"No." He answers then puts his hands in his pockets and leans back on his heels. "I don't get it. I was on the phone with him as he pulled into the driveway. He hung up and then poof. How can someone be there one second and gone the next? It makes no sense." He squints away the tears. "I know he was shitty to you, but he was still my brother."

"I know." I put a sympathetic hand on his arm. "My brother has done bad things, but that doesn't mean I wouldn't miss him if he disappeared. Your family should be important to you, and Dez is lucky to have you as a brother.

Christian's hand squeezes mine as he leans into me, but we both know this touch isn't intimate in nature. "Did you ask?"

"Finn said it wasn't them. Dez didn't break the rules. He has to still be out there. Have faith and try to have a Happy Halloween."

He smirks at me with appreciation gleaming in his eyes and gives me a hug. "Thank you for your help. You didn't have to go out of your way for me, and it could've gotten you in trouble with your family."

Guilt eats at me as I hug him back. Even if Finn and the others were responsible, I would've told Christian the same thing. I know if I told him they killed his brother, he would report them, and I wouldn't blame him.

I pull back and send him a smile. "See you at the party tonight?"

“You bet.” He looks me up and down, seeing my outfit for the first time. “Are you a witch?”

“Morticia Addams, actually. What about you?” I ask, taking in the strange paper wings taped to his Nikes and the leather satchel over his shoulder. And... is that a kilt?

“Hermes? As in Messenger of the Gods?”

I blush at how obvious it would’ve been if I actually thought about it. “Oh, right.”

“Don’t feel bad. I thought you were a witch.”

I smirk. “Morticia *is* a witch. She’s just very dark and morbid, like Wednesday, but with a smile,” I joke. “You know, Wednesday is always like this.” I give my best Wednesday Addams impression, which has been called scary. I lower my chin, look up at him, and drop the smile. “And Morticia is like this.” I pause for a few moments then go back to my normal expression and Christian laughs.

“Wow. You’re really good at that.”

I shrug. “I have to be good at something, right?”

His brown eyes roll. “Come on. You’re good at a lot of things. You’re easily the nicest girl in school. I’ve seen you dance with the team. You’re incredible.”

*Wow. That has to be the nicest thing anyone has ever said to me.* I can’t help but smile at his compliment.

He says I’m the nicest girl in school. Maybe that explains why Rian thinks he can drag me along and lie to me all the time. I’m too nice.

“Come on, man.” Duncan pops up and slams Christian’s shoulder.

“Ow, dude! I’m sensitive,” he faux whines while vigorously rubbing his arm.

I barely hold in a laugh at his words. Christian does seem sensitive and charming.

“See you guys tonight, yeah?” I ask, directing my question at Christian.

Duncan nods noncommittally and I turn to walk away, but then Christian calls out for me. “Hey, Sorcha!”

“Hm?” I turn to him and watch the smile stretch across his handsome face as Duncan drags him away.

“Save me a dance tonight?”

Christian is the kind of guy I should be interested in. For one, he doesn’t kill people, do drugs, or drink. From my observation, he’s not rude and doesn’t stand for bullying. He stood up for me against his own brother.

*That sounds like the beginning of all good love stories, right?*

Rian doesn’t deserve me and I’ll never give myself to him now. I might as well try with someone else, and Christian doesn’t seem scared of Rian if he’s asking me to save him a dance.

“Sure.” I return his smile and then give him a wink before turning, and running right into the one I’m trying to avoid.

*Damn. That black suit looks really good on him. The angry and territorial aura surrounding him only adds to his mysticism.*

“What are you doing?” he demands his words clipped, his eyes narrowing to slits.

*What is that even supposed to mean? I haven't done anything wrong. He's the fuck up here, not me.*

I try to swerve around him, but he grabs my arm in a vice grip. I'll surely have bruises. Good thing my sleeves cover it.

"Don't you dare walk away from me, kid. What the hell were you doing with *him*?"

I scowl, on the verge of spitting in his face. "Leave me alone. I'm not talking to you. What I do with my life is none of your business." After Rian invited Sophia to his bed and lied to me about whoever else he has been screwing, he lost the right to be in my life. I don't care if I have a gang bang in the middle of the school hallway, it's not his place to tell me anything.

"If you'd answer my call or not hide when I try to talk to you, you'd know nothing happened with Soph—"

I can't control my fury any longer and I erupt. "Bullshit!" I slap him across his face. He doesn't even flinch. I'm not sure if he even noticed by how unaffected his expression is. "I'm not just mad that you fucked her, asshole. I'm mad that you lied to me when you didn't fucking have to. You lied to my face when you said I was the only one you wanted and when you said you weren't screwing anyone. Sophia told me that you asked her to meet you at your house, Walsh." I can barely hold in the tears. I'm not mad that he did it, but that doesn't mean it hurts any less.

"I didn't tell her to come over. It was a mistake."

I huff. "Now the truth comes out."

"No! I mean, yes, it was a mistake, but not like—"

"Save it, Rian. I don't want to hear your excuses. You were assigned to take me to the party tonight. After that, never

“speak to me or look at me ever again. You can go fuck yourself and whoever else you please. Except me.”

I know he could've forced me to stay there, but he didn't. His fingers slowly release their grip on my arm, but before letting me go, he gives me the most heartbreaking look I have ever seen on anyone.

*It's all fake. It's not real.*

If I keep telling myself this, hopefully I will end up believing it.



CHAPTER  
**TWENTY-ONE**

**T**he party is in full swing as I weave through the grinding, drunken bodies. The air is heavy with sweat and cheap beer and I am too sober to be here. Especially when I feel his eyes stabbing into my spine like a hot poker. It's like he's spent his entire life doing this—watching me.

“Hey, sis!”

My eyes snap to Tiernan as he appears by my side, a goofy, happy smile on his face.

I miss being like that, just happy and not feeling the weight of the world on my shoulders.

Carmen was right about my dreams, getting more vivid and intense. I've barely slept the past week because every time I close my eyes, all I see or feel is fire. Burning hot flames that aim to destroy their target. Last night, a new detail emerged.

A baby. A screaming, crying baby. I can't see it, but I hear its wails of terror and pain. I keep looking, but get lost in a maze of smoke. The baby needs help, and I don't know how to save it.

I'm so scared I won't be able to. I've been waking up in a sweat and not being able to go back to sleep.

Tiernan has always called me sis. Colin is the youngest of the bunch so maybe it's because I'm the only girl in their group. Me, Rian, and Eoghan are the same age. Tiernan is a year older, and Finn is a year older than him. Colin is two years younger than me.

I give him a boop on the nose then ask, "Hey, T. Are you here with Willow?"

"Does a chicken crow?" he jokes as he returns the boop then pops the top of a beer bottle open and hands it to me.

Duncan always has rules for his annual Halloween party. Only bottles and cans are allowed. No kegs. He's proactive about open containers and drink safety. He's all about fun.

A voice booms behind me. "Sorcha, hey!" Suddenly, Christian appears with Duncan stumbling behind him. Looks like he got an early start on the drinking before anyone else.

"Hey!" I smile at him as he wraps his strong arms around me in a big hug. I'm consciously aware that not only is Tiernan watching us, and although Christian is hugging me, the physical touch is respectful. "Great party, Duncan."

He nods, his glassy eyes full of sadness and hope. "Is Francine here?"

My heart hurts a bit for this boy. "No. I think she went to a party in Houston with my brother."

I feel bad for Duncan. I know he messed up with Francine, and cheating is never okay, but he seems so sad and heartbroken. It's clear he really loved her.

Breaking up the pity party, Christian asks, "How about that dance?" He presses with an eagerness in his eyes that's infectious.

“Hold on, cowboy,” Tiernan starts. “Give us a minute, would ya?” He places his hand on my shoulder and gives me a gentle tug toward him.

“No problem.” Christian shrugs and grabs his own beer before walking away, sending me a smile over his shoulder.

“Sis, do you have the slightest comprehension of what you’re doing?” he asks, concern coloring his face.

“What do you mean?” I blanch, dumbfounded.

“Christian and Rian is what I mean.”

“There’s nothing between me and Rian. I don’t know where you got that—”

“Sorcha.” He gives me a *get real* look. “I know way more than you think. You’re playing with fire.” His eyes jump across the room, where Rian is leaning against the wall, jaw set and arms crossed, seeming more like a bodyguard than an actual attendee. “Finn may be clueless, but I’m not. You might not feel the same way he does, but that doesn’t change that you’re going to get Christian killed.”

*Get Christian killed?* That’s insane. Rian wouldn’t kill Christian over me, would he?

“You think I don’t like Rian?” I ask, feeling foolish. Why does it matter? He hurt me beyond compare and things are done between us.

“If you do, why are you leading Christian on?” He arches a brow in challenge and I groan.

“I’m not leading Christian on. I’m trying to *move* on because Rian is a lying, sleazy fuckboy and that’s never going to change. He doesn’t care about me. He just wants in my

pants and doesn't want anyone else to be there." I frown as the darkness seeps into my soul, changing my whole entire mood.

"Is this about the Sophia thing?" he presses more firmly.

I raise an eyebrow and take a sip of my beer, "You know what happened?"

"Yeah. He sent a text to Sophia that was meant for you. She took it as an invitation to get naked in his bed while he was in the shower. You walked in right after she got there."

A text that was meant for me? I never received a text from him.

Looking him dead in the eyes I ask, "Did he tell you that?" I cross my arms defiantly.

Rian was probably lying. It sounds too stupid to be real.

"He told me she showed up while he was showering and Sophia ran you off. I thought it sounded weird, so I asked her. I didn't want to kick his ass without all the facts. She admitted that she thought he texted her for a hook up, which shows how stupid she is. He doesn't do callbacks for hookups. It's one and done when it comes to his hook ups. That's her fuck up. She should have known better. She admitted that Rian told her the text was meant for you and he kicked her out when he saw it was her and not you. If you want to ask her, I think she's upstairs."

I mull over this new tidbit of information. I believe it coming from Tiernan. He has no reason to lie. We're closer than the others. Maybe it's because we relate to each other on an intellectual level, but Tiernan has always stood up for me, even when I'm against Rian and Finn. I believe he would kick Rian's ass if he hurt me.

I consider going to talk to Sophia, but I realize I don't need to. "No, that's okay." The crowd parts as the cheerleaders bring in bottles of liquor and my anxiety peaks. I squeeze Tiernan's hand. "Get a real drink with me. I need some liquid courage."

No need to say more. He knows exactly what I require the courage for.

"Yes. We'll have a toast to mending your... situationship? Is that the right thing to call it?" He tries to hide his sly grin, but I catch it.

"Don't read into it, McGowen."

Tiernan grabs two empty red solo cups straight from the package and pours drinks, rum for me and whiskey for him.

One shot turns into two and before I know it, I have no clue how many drinks we downed, but I feel as light as a feather. It isn't long before I feel the shadow Rian casts over me, intensifying until I'm bathing in his scent and electrified by his energy.

"Don't get her drunk, dumbass." His voice is tense. It's the first thing I've heard him say since our fight today at school, and it's not as angry as those words were.

"Hey! I feel more comfortable with getting her drunk than *you* getting her drunk. You'd probably take advantage of her," Tiernan jokes with a big, toothy smile across his face.

I scoff. "I'm not drunk. Just a *little* tipsy."

"You *are* drunk," Rian insists instead of acknowledging Tiernan's claim. I meet his gaze and feel almost naked under his observant watch.

He's guarded, his walls built so high I don't know if I'll be able to scale them in my lifetime.

I did that. I wouldn't hear him out and refused to speak to him for weeks. Maybe we are too broken to fix.

Tiernan jabs him in the ribs with an elbow. "That wasn't a no." I shift my eyes to Tiernan, and we burst out into a laughing fit.

"He needs to try that drink you were telling me about. What is it called again?" Tiernan asks.

"A Vegas Bomb," I answer. "It's so good, but I don't see any Red Bull or cranberry juice." I frown. Tori, a blonde girl with thick glasses that amplify her big brown eyes, rounds the counter.

"Did I hear you say you want a Vegas Bomb? They are so good," Tori pipes in before reaching under the counter and pulling out a case of Red Bull.

"Yes!" I cheer. "Do you think there's cranberry juice in the fridge?"

"Let me see." She turns and opens the fridge before lifting a small Ocean Spray bottle.

I clap my hands in anticipation and cheer. "Great!"

"I'll make us both one," she volunteers, making her my second favorite person in the world, behind Kia. But, she finds Rian standing next to me and I nearly bite her head off when she gives him a sexy look.

I purse my lips in thought. If he had screwed Tori in the past, he would at least say hi to her, using her name. His eyes aren't even lighting up with recognition.

It's obvious that Tori wants him and I told him earlier to fuck whoever he wants. I don't know if he's interested in her, but I need to put an end to this before it even starts.

I don't know what comes over me, but without thinking it through, I grab Rian's tie and pull him down to my level. I kiss him for everything I'm worth. He responds with as much fervor as I'm giving. Sparks pulse up and down my body with every swipe of my lips against his. I know a million eyes are watching us, but I don't care as his fingers tangle in my hair and his urgency overpowers my own. He's pulling me as close as possible so he can devour my mouth.

*God, I missed his kisses.*

He leans back for a brief moment. "I thought you weren't going to talk to me again?" he rasps before reclaiming my mouth, wrenching my body deeper into him. His other hand glides down to the small of my back to anchor me against his hardness. My nipples tingle from the friction against his chest as he swallows my moan. He stabilizes me as my body tenses and quakes with each move of his lips.

Fuck. I don't want to stop. I want to rip off our clothes and ride his massive cock all night long. I need him so badly and I won't be satisfied until he's inside me.

"I'm sorry," I whisper the words to him and sense as his body slightly relaxes.

"Later." His voice is thick with desire. Desire that I put there. Desire for me.

We'll talk about it later. I can handle that. I can wait to talk as long as he knows I still want him.

"Okay." I give him one last, lingering kiss before turning back to the counter. Tori gives me a blank look, but I can sense



the jealousy brewing.

*She can fuck right off. Rian is mine. All mine.*

I concentrate on the array of beverages before me. “First, the whiskey,” I say as I grab the bottle and pour the right amount in each of the four cups. Then I grab the next bottle. “Peach Schnapps.” I pour that into the cups. “Cranberry juice.” I continue through the list in my head until finished.

I hand Rian his cup and he just stares at it, like he’s never seen alcohol before. I know that’s not the case. He and the others drink a ridiculous amount of beer.

With a shake of his head, he tilts the drink away from him. “I’m driving, kid.”

“That doesn’t have very much alcohol. You’ll be sober before we leave,” I say before raising my cup to my lips and taking a big sip.

Not as good as Kia’s Vegas Bombs, but close enough. This is way better than straight alcohol. I could get fucked up if there were only Vegas Bombs at this party. They are so good.

“This tastes like a fruity beer,” Tiernan says with a twist of his face, his expression full of disgust.

“Haters gonna hate,” Tori jokes before slamming back her entire drink in one go. Then, she skips off without saying a word.

Weirdo.

“T, let’s dance!” Willow bounces over, wearing a sexy, dead cheerleader costume, looking like a complete showstopper. “Sor, I love your costume. It’s so cute!”

I wasn’t going for cute. I was going for sexy, but that’s what I get for not taking off the tank top under it.

“Watch this,” I say as I hand my drink to Rian, knowing I’m about to piss him off.

What can I say? I like getting under his skin.

I spin in place until the slits in the skirt and my legs are on display and watch the way Willow’s jaw drops.

She gives me a huge smile. “Oh, my god! That’s awesome.”

I return the grin before looking at Rian. I expected him to be pissed, but his eyes darken with need as they dance across my legs.

My heart races as Willow prances away with Tiernan in tow to join everyone else who is dancing.

“Are you going to dance with me or am I going to have to take Christian up on his offer?” I shouldn’t tease because I know he’d rather set himself on fire than let someone else touch me, but I can’t help myself.

His chest rumbles with a growl as he grabs my waist, pulling me against his hard body. “He’ll keep his hands off of you if he knows what’s good for him.”

“I’m pretty sure he’s not scared of you. I think he might have balls of steel.” A stinging pain spreads across my ass as he grabs me, snarling in my face.

“Talk about another man’s balls, and your ass will be red before the night is over.”

My cheeks flush from his threat as heat floods my body. Rian is too much, and not enough in the same moment. I want him to push for more, demand more.

Take more.

So I take a step back.

“So touchy.”

“You’ve gone weeks without speaking to me for something I didn’t even do. I have reasons to be touchy.”

Guilt grips me as he tucks a stray hair behind my ear.

“I’m sorry, okay?” I whisper in shame. “What the hell was I supposed to think? She was naked. In your bed. You were in the shower, and she said you invited her there. The room even smelled like sex.”

He chuckles, a rare smile on his face. “First off, if the room smelled like sex it was because I had just gotten done jerking off while smelling your underwear.”

My eyes widen. I had to have misheard him. *What?* “My underwear? Did you steal my panties?”

“You don’t remember me taking them the night we spent together. I put them in my jacket. You watched me do it.”

Oh, yeah. I was wearing those when he got me all worked up. He made me come in those panties before he took them and put them in his jacket.

“Right,” I admit, blushing at the thought of him using them to get off.

“Second thing is that the text she got was supposed to go to your phone. I was a little out of it, so I guess I hit her name in my contacts instead of yours. Lastly, Sophia is a bit of a nymphomaniac and has been trying to convince me for months to fuck her again.”

“And you never go back for seconds?” That’s what he said the first time I came onto him and he rebuffed my affections.

“Not with anyone but you,” he confesses as he grips the hair at the base of my neck, holding my head in place. He bends at the knee a little so we are eye to eye, his icy blues sparkling. “You’re the exception to the rule, kid.”

“I am?” We haven’t had sex. How can I be the exception?

“I’ve had my tongue in your cunt three times and I’m still ravenous for you.” He nearly growls the words as he purposefully darts his tongue across his lips. “No amount of time with you will be enough, baby.” Then his mouth crashes against mine, once again claiming me for everyone to see.

Any of these people could run off and tell Finn what we’re doing, but I don’t care. Finn was right. I need to do what makes me happy, and that’s Rian.

Doing him sounds like an incredible plan.

Once he releases me from the kiss hot enough to make my knees weak, Rian looks around the room and I wonder what he’s looking for. Is he looking for someone specifically?

“Fuck this,” he growls then effortlessly tosses me over his shoulder like I weigh nothing at all, the pressure of his shoulder against my stomach making it ache.

“Rian!” I screech as his arm wraps around the back of my legs and he walks through the crowd of drunk teenage dancers. “What are you doing?” I demand.

“I’m getting you out of here. You’re too much of a temptation in this sexy costume of yours.” He says it like this is a huge nuisance to him.

“Jealous much?” I joke, knowing his problem is with other people looking at me.

“If someone touches you, they lose a hand. If someone looks at you, they lose an eye. You’re mine. If there was any doubt after tonight, I have no problem claiming you in front of everyone. But then I’d have to kill them all.”

CHAPTER  
**TWENTY-TWO**

**R**ian pulls his car in front of my house and hastily turns it off. “Where’s your dad?”

It’s unusual for my dad to not be at home this late, except for the past week. He’s gone out every night and tonight is no exception. However, he must have special plans tonight because he told me I shouldn’t expect him back until morning.

“I have the house to myself all night,” I say with a smile I hope comes off as salacious, and from the twinkle in his eye, I think it worked.

“Want some company?”

“Do you even need to ask?” I tease.

The night is cool so I’m grateful when we climb out of the car and he wraps an arm around my shoulders, guiding me up to the front door.

The last time we were here, Carmen interfered. We won’t have that problem tonight.

I may be a little drunk, but that doesn’t change how I want tonight to end—with us in bed together.

I click the deadbolt into the lock position and we head to the kitchen. I grab him a beer since he remained relatively sober at the party, and get one for myself. He’s not going

anywhere so he can drink as much as he wants. We make our way to the living room and sit together on the couch, chatting about everything that's happened these past few weeks. Granted, I had planned to rip his clothes off and ride him as soon as we got home, but being with Rian is just so natural that I don't realize how much time passed while we were just talking. After an hour and a few more beers, I'm feeling a bit more inebriated, but I love it.

"I've really fucking missed you," he admits, showing that sliver of vulnerability in his baby blues. His fingers trace the freckles near my cheekbone, and a blush crawls up my neck to my face. I don't know if it's from the alcohol or how Rian affects me.

"I missed you, too." I bite my lip.

His eyes zone in on the act and his gaze darkens, his grip on my knee tightening with tension.

"What did you miss about me?" he rasps. Fuck, I want his hand to touch more than just my knee.

Other than the obvious answer of his tongue and magical fingers? "I missed fighting with you and pissing you off," I admit, unashamed.

He raises a brow as if my answer stunned him into silence, but then he tilts his head back and chortles. "I knew you did that shit to get a rise out of me."

"Not all of it," I confess. "But, a good portion was to piss you off. In some ways, that was the only time when you showed me any kind of emotion. Plus, I may just be a little bit of a brat."

"I could've told you that, kid."



“What did you miss about me?” I ask, wanting to see what his answer will be.

“Your smile,” he answers so quickly. I wonder if he even had to think about it. “The way your laugh sounds when it’s genuine and you’re not just doing it because other people are. I miss the way your body responds to my touch, the feel of you writhing under my hands. I missed kissing you, touching you, *tasting* you.” My breath catches as he runs his thumb over my bottom lip in a wicked tease. “I missed the way you taunt me, Sorcha. The way you drive me crazy with your every move. I want to devour you, to taste every inch of your body, to consume you.” I moan, desperate for his touch, as he continues to tease me with his words. “Is that what you want? He whispers, his breath hot against my ear. “Do you want me to consume you?”

“Yes,” I whimper, surrendering myself to his seductive game.

The word barely has time to leave my lips before his crash into mine, his fingers digging into the flesh of my thighs. Our teeth clink against each other from the urgency of this moment as he drags me to him and pulls me onto his lap, straddling his waist. Without a second to adjust to the new position, Rian is grinding into me, trailing his kisses across my jaw and down the column of my throat.

My core tenses in anticipation as I run my fingers through his hair, moaning at the contact my body has craved and been deprived of for weeks.

His hips buck against mine as his cock tries to bust through his jeans to reach me. So close, but not quite there yet.

“Ri, I want you,” I admit as he groans against my neck.

“What part of me do you want? My tongue or my fingers?” He reaches beneath my dress and grabs the lining, pressing his thumb against my clit. Instantly, I yelp with pleasure, and his ministrations speed up, ramping up the ecstasy.

“Oh god. Everything, but right now, I want your cock. I want it so bad. Please, Rian.”

His teeth bite into my throat, and I moan from the lick of pain branding my flesh like a tattoo of pleasure. We’ve only just begun and I’m completely soaked.

I’m beyond ready to take him. Luckily, I’m intoxicated enough not to give a damn if it hurts, because his cock is uncomfortably large, but I don’t care. I just want him.

He doesn’t say a word, just molds his lips to mine in an intoxicatingly sultry choreograph. He stands with my legs wrapped around his hips and guides us through the house, bumping into walls and furniture on the way until we hit my threshold.

My heels fall to the floor as he slams me against the door. Suddenly, my arms are pinned above my head, and Rian is grinding his hips into mine, building the ecstasy higher and higher until I’m ripping my mouth away from his, crying from the intensity of it all.

“Stop teasing me,” I pant, as he glares at me. I can’t tell if I’ve pissed him off or if I just make him this horny.

He drops my wrists and wads the skirt of my dress in his hands, pulling until the fabric rips. The cloth unravels at the seams until I’m left in my tank top and my panties.

I should be mad that he destroyed my dress, but I’m more in awe of the strength it must’ve taken to accomplish such a feat.

He fumbles for the door knob and it slams open. Lips connected, we stagger into my room. I'm not so engrossed in this moment that I don't notice him kicking the door shut and locking it. His lips latch onto the swell of my breasts as his legs eat up the distance to my bed.

Rian drops me on the mattress and I watch as he nearly tears off his clothes. I've never seen him in a bigger rush.

He nods at my remaining garments. "Get those off before I rip them off as well."

His gaze matches his heated words. He makes quick work of his suit jacket and tie as I pull off my tank top.

His eyes don't leave my body as I sit forward on my knees and pull his belt through the loops as he pushes the dress shirt over his shoulder. He barely has the shirt past his elbows when I take out his massive dick and run my tongue up the length.

"Sorcha," he warns as I suck on the head, feeling it pulse and swell against my tongue.

"Yes?" I'm able to whimper around his shaft, looking up at him through my lashes. I stroke his cock, tugging and jerking him with each move of my wrist.

"Do you want me in your cunt or your throat? In less than a minute, one of them is going to take me. Choose now." How is it that a threat can be so sexy?

I made my choice before we even got to my house. Without any more convincing, I release him and scoot back on the bed, my legs spread wide for him. He gets rid of his pants, boxers, and shoes before kneeling on the bed.

Even now, his wide, long erection is nerve-inducing, but I'm not backing down. I want it deep inside me. I don't think I could be any wetter than I am at this very moment.

“Wait. Condom,” I breathe the words, unable to speak above a whisper as he kisses across my shoulder. He grabs my legs and pulls me down until the apex of my thighs is inches from the crown of his dick, a glimmer of cum drips from the ruddy head. He lines us up, but not before snaring me in the dark web of his soul that flickers undeniably in his eyes.

“No condom.”

And he slams his dick inside me.

Pain slices through my core as I throw my head back, a scream ripping through me like his length does.

*Damn, why does this hurt so much?*

I’m wet. It shouldn’t be this bad, but he is really big.

“Fuck.” He drags out the word and tears spring to my eyes, my legs tremble. He slowly pulls back and I can feel each inch leave my body. Then, he slams back in. The same pain radiates through me, but on a muted level. My body is adjusting, but god, it still hurts.

*It didn’t hurt like this when Jason took my virginity.*

“Take me, baby. Take my cock,” he growls and noticing the tears streak down my face, he leans down and licks the proof of my pain.

“Rian,” I whimper, but I’m not going to ask him to stop. I want this. I want him, even if it hurts.

That’s the way our love has always been. So exquisite, even when it’s painful.

“You’re so tight and all *mine*,” he murmurs as he once again pulls back then plunges deep into me.

His fingers wrap around my throat, squeezing the words from my mouth.

“Yours.”

“Mine—” Thrust. “—all—” He pulls out completely. “—fucking—” Then, he plunges back inside me to the hilt. “—mine.”

The culmination of pain, pleasure, claiming, dirty words and finally—FINALLY—having Rian inside of me is too much and I sob as my orgasm hits without warning. I grapple for purchase and clutch onto the comforter. He must feel my insides quivering because his fingers dig into my hips so he can keep his pace steady. Wave after wave of a feeling so potent I’ve never come close to experiencing it before washes over me. Euphoria, bliss, ecstasy... whatever it is, slams into me until I’m fully emerged. I’m drowning and I don’t want to come up for air.

“That’s it, baby. Keep coming on my cock. Show me how good my cock is for you.” His hips piston forward, rocking into me with an unstoppable force. He won’t take his eyes off of my face, as if needing to capture each emotion in a lockbox in his mind.

“Rian,” I shriek and he bends down to lay kisses across my chest, twisting my nipple between his expert fingers. “Fuck.” My hips buck from the aftershock.

This is insane. No one should be this good at sex, right? This has to be an illusion. You can’t jump from excruciating pain to indescribable pleasure.

“Good girl. *My* good fucking girl.” His lips crash down on mine, his pace loses rhythm and I cling to him, not wanting to let go of this moment.

I chant his name in my head as his tongue probes past my lips.

I don't want this to stop, even if it drives me insane, and I live the rest of my days in a padded cell. At least I can have this on repeat.

He pulls back and roars so loudly. I'm surprised his jaw doesn't unhinge with the force behind it. Then, I experience the unique sensation of being filled by Rian's cum. He shoots into me, spurt after spurt. He thrusts until my core milks every last drop of his release inside of me, then he stills, clutching me close.

"Ri," I whimper as he strokes my sweaty skin, lulling me away from the cliff he dangled me from.

"Shh, baby. I got you. Just breathe." He doesn't mind the sweat as he kisses my cheek and down to my shoulder.

It takes a moment to regain any semblance of clarity, but I eventually get there. "No... condom?" I struggle to use words after how he rattled my brains like an Etch-A-Sketch.

His voice takes on a serious tone. "No condom. Not with you."

"Why?... What if... I wasn't... on birth control?" I slowly catch my breath as he strokes his fingers down my chest until his fingers tease my nipple piercing, which already feels sensitive from him playing with it.

"That would've been even better," he confesses as he lets me go and rolls onto his back, his girth slipping out from my highly abused cunt.

I turn toward him, watching him struggle with the aftermath of our lovemaking as much as I am.

I blink in confusion. “How?” He chuckles before pulling me back into his arms as if he can’t *not* touch me. He holds me in a way that relaxes every inch of my body.

His fingers trail along my cheek, peeling the hair off of my sweaty face, a mischievous smirk gracing his lips. “I always planned to put my babies inside you. If that happens today or ten years from now, it doesn’t matter, but I’ll have loads of fun doing it.”

Did he just suggest that he *wants* to get me pregnant? We’re still in school. He’s deeper into this relationship than I realized. I’m about to ask him about it, but a wave of exhaustion washes over me and next thing I know, everything goes black.

CHAPTER  
**TWENTY-THREE**



“S orcha!” My name breaks through the tranquility of my sleep, but I can’t focus. My body feels like it got hit by a zamboni and the weight on my body only lessens the pain slightly. “Sorcha, are you up?” the same voice sounds again.

I try to open my eyes, but everything is blurry. I blink a few times, trying to understand what I’m seeing.

Or rather, who I’m seeing.

Last night flashes through my mind, a kaleidoscope of memories running by so fast I can barely decipher them, painting an abstract picture. It assists me in understanding why Rian is in my bed and naked at that.

Last night, Tiernan explained what happened. I forgave Rian, he drove me home, we kissed, and I gave myself to him. Oh, he took what I gave and more, and I loved every second of it.

“You here, Sorcha?” A knock sounds on my bedroom door, making me sit up quickly and Rian’s eyes snap open.

My dad is home.

Rian’s car is still outside.

And Rian is in my bed.

*Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.*

“Yeah, I’m here!” I call back, panicking when the knob starts to turn. “Don’t come in. I’m getting changed!”

When my dad said he wouldn’t be back until the morning, I didn’t think he meant first thing in the morning.

I flash Rian a stern look and his eyes shift to the door before cursing under his breath. He detangles from the sheets and climbs out of bed. I follow close behind him in my venture for clean clothes.

“Do you know why Rian’s car is outside? He isn’t in there, is he?”

My hand trembles as I clasp my bra. I look at Rian, anxiety swallowing me whole. I catch sight of Rian’s form and god, he looks so good, fixing his pants and pulling on the black button down from last night.

*Jesus, Sorcha. Focus. Get sex off the brain. Your vagina can’t take more attention today.*

“Rian? No! He’s not in here.”

Rian sends me a teasing smirk, which gets him a dirty look from me.

“He drank a bit after the party, and Tiernan gave him a ride home. He’ll probably pick up his car any minute,” I say loudly enough for my dad to hear on the other side of the door.

“Are you okay?” My dad’s question is slightly muffled from behind the door. I yank on a tank top and a stray pair of jogging pants as quickly as possible.

Rian smirks and pulls me against his hard body. God, I’d love to get lost in him again, but I’ll be mortified if my dad finds Rian in my room, especially after I told him my

forbidden fruit isn't here. I've never lied to my dad before and it creates a strange feeling in my gut, but it's best if he doesn't know that I had a wild night of sex with the man I'm supposed to be staying away from.

"You need to go." I silently mouth the words to him right before he steals my lips in an intense, mind-blowing kiss that makes me want to say fuck it and drag him back to bed. *Yeah, that's not a good idea.* With a clear head on my shoulders, I pull out of the over-the-top kiss. I push him toward the window and carefully unlatch it, hoping it doesn't make a sound.

"Sorcha?" my dad calls again.

"I'm fine, dad. Just really tired and... hungover." And I'm not now. I've never been hungover before. I've gotten drunk off my ass and made a fool of myself many times, but I always remember everything.

Our relationship has been strained for the past few weeks since Carmen revealed that he's not my biological father. What makes it worse is my dad knew this the whole time. I can hold a grudge like no one else, and he's been trying to get back in my good graces, but it's not going to work anytime soon.

"Okay, sweetheart. Are you hungry?"

*God, just go the fuck away!*

Rian raises the pane carefully before turning to me, and leaning into my ear, whispering softly. "I'll text you later."

I nod as he climbs out of the window with so much grace I wonder if he's inhuman. He lands on the soft soil silently and strolls to the front of the house, like he doesn't have a care in the world.

“No, I think I’ll just go back to bed.” I’m definitely going to need some Tylenol and a hot bath later, but for now, I’d rather fall asleep and dream about Rian while forgetting about my issues with father.

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I DIDN’T WANT to come off as needy or overbearing, so I didn’t text Rian. I left it up to him to reach out, but that doesn’t mean my eyes didn’t stay glued to my phone.

And I waited.

And waited.

I waited all day and all night.

The fuckwad decided not to text me until the next morning.

The shrill of my phone receiving a text forces my eyes open. Rian’s name blares across my screen like a visual siren.

I fumble for the phone and read the screen.

**Rian**

We need to talk about what happened. Pick you up in an hour.

Rian Walsh has his cycles. He finds something that makes him happy, he lets it make him happy for a while, then he destroys it so it can never bring him happiness again. I’ve always thought he was punishing himself, atoning for some grandiose sin, but I really don’t know why he does it.

Is that what this is? Is this the part where Rian destroys me so thoroughly that I’ll never be able to look at him without crying?

We had a good night—incredible even—and now what? Did I really think Rian would turn in his fuckboy card and make an honest woman out of me? Why do I think I am any different from the other woman he has slept with? Dumb, wishful thinking always gets the best of me.

**Sorcha**

Sure.

I don't know why he wants to pick me up, but maybe my brother is home and he doesn't want to go there to talk. Maybe he thinks I'll cause a scene and everyone will know that he rearranged my organs after the party.

I climb out of bed and go straight to my attached bathroom to get ready.

Kia always says to put on a good face, so you look good when you're burned into their memories. The sentiment is more for one-night stands, but I'm using it for this occasion. I might never be able to look at Rian again, so when he remembers our time together, I want him to remember me as pretty and put together. I don a baby blue dress that makes my eyes pop, and fit my make up around that.

I slip on a matching hair band, leaving my dark tresses long and wavy.

The anxiety racing through my system amps up as the minutes tick by and it gets closer to showtime.

Is this too much? The dress and makeup?

I don't have time to rethink it too much before another text comes through.

**Rian**

I'm early.

Of course he is. I toss my phone and wallet in my purse before sneaking out of my room and into the hall. I'm pretty sure my dad isn't here, but I'm not going to tempt fate. Like I suspected, he's already gone. Guilt inches its way in for not making him breakfast and checking to see if he's actually sober this morning.

I grab a sweater and walk out the door. Rian is parked at the curb, and a part of me wants to run back into the house, barricading myself inside to avoid this. If I don't acknowledge the end, does it really end?

No, I have to face the music.

I climb into the front passenger seat and discover a stone-faced Rian. His eyes are glued straight ahead, his jaw tight. He doesn't acknowledge my existence at all. With my seatbelt firmly in place, he says nothing and drives away.

*No hello. How are you? Has your pussy shrank down to a normal size since I rammed my huge eggplant up into it?* Nothing.

My anxiety gets the best of me and I break the silence, barely getting the words out. "Where are we going?" I ask, hardly above a whisper.

His nostrils flare as if I just said something really offensive. "Somewhere we can talk," he grumbles the words and goes back to his silent internal battle.

Rian maneuvers through town and gets onto the highway, heading away from our city. After many tense minutes, we enter farm country and pass miles of cornfields. The only

businesses I see are gas stations and fast-food chains. Soon the businesses lessen in frequency until we pass the exit for Hempstead and Bryan. We pass the small farmer's market and turn down the street next to the Chevron gas station.

The dirt road twists and turns. He turns into a large park next to a big pond. Judging by the level of disrepair, it seems to have been abandoned for years, maybe even decades.

I slip off my seat belt as he turns off the engine. I want to get out of this small space, made even smaller by Rian's silence, but I remain in my seat.

The silence is killing me. I want him to say something, but he still has a death grip on the wheel and looks ready to hurt someone.

Is this how it happens? Is he going to explode on me, and kick me out of the car, abandoning me miles from home? I don't think he would do that, but I have no clue what he is thinking.

He finally breaks the silence and I kind of wish he hadn't. "I fucked up so bad." His features are tense with regret.

*What is he talking about? Did he screw someone else? No, don't go there.*

How can I not though? Rian has a history of hurting me and screwing other women. Until Halloween, it was his whole M.O. I shouldn't have thought he would change just because we had sex. Also, I don't think one night with me would reverse four years of damage. It can be worked through, but it doesn't go away.

"What do you mean?" I ask, sounding timid and brittle, like a broken child.

“You know what I mean,” his growl steepens in anger and I flinch at his tone. I’m used to getting under his skin and pissing him off, but this is different. This is concerning us. “Fuck. I’m sorry. I shouldn’t be yelling at you. I’m the one who fucked up, not you.”

I nod slowly as my fingers braid together in my lap. That’s progress, right? I doubt he ever apologizes to anybody so at least I get that.

“What did you do?” *Please, don’t say you were with someone else.* I want to believe in Rian, but I don’t think I can trust him blindly. There was a time where Rian was my hero and he could do no wrong, but that was before parties, women, and drugs.

“You know what I did,” he all but accuses. “You were right there. Were you so drunk that you don’t remember?” he questions as he twists his grip around the steering wheel, probably as a way to calm his anger.

Confusion swirls in my mind. “I don’t remember you doing anything wrong that night, and I remember everything perfectly fine.”

He groans and finally meets my eyes. They are filled with so much emotion that it’s hard to identify any of them. “I fucked you. Do you remember that?” The language he uses is crass and so is the tone behind the words.

I remember that. How could I forget? *Does he regret it? No, don’t go there, Sorcha. You can’t possibly guess what Rian is thinking.*

“Of course, I remember that.” My answer is rife with indignation.



His shoulders shrug in defeat. “I’m so fucking sorry.” His tragically handsome face is twisted with guilt.

My heart picks up speed as the sensation of an invisible hand wraps around my throat, squeezing, blocking my airflow.

It’s not real though. There is no invisible hand. It’s just my anxiety, but this situation is real. I gave myself to Rian, and he regrets taking what I offered.

“Um, okay.” *Do not cry, Sorcha. You knew this was a possibility with how flaky Rian can be.* I will not cry in front of him. Slamming my eyes shut, I take a calming breath to relax my racing heart. “Are you going to take me home now? If not, I can call myself an Uber. Whatever is easier for you.”

I’m trying out a new path. I don’t want to be that girl who runs away crying every time Rian hurts me or I hear something I don’t want to hear. I need to be better—be stronger. *It all starts with baby steps, right?*

“What are you talking about?”

I tear my gaze from his confused one to look out my window. I remind myself to keep breathing, don’t get too emotional, and don’t look at him. If I do, I will cry.

“You regret that we had sex. I get it. I just—”

Rian’s snarls like a wild animal caught in a cage. “I don’t fucking regret it. Why the fuck would you think that?”

My eyes snap to his in surprise. I can’t help the confusion in my voice. “Well, didn’t you just say you are sorry we had sex?”

His icy blues glare at me like I’m the biggest idiot he’s ever encountered.

“What?” I retort, in no mood for .... Whatever this is.

“I’m not sorry because we fucked, kid. I’m sorry because of how rough I was with you.”

Was Rian rough? Yeah, but why is that something for him to apologize for? I figured he was rough with every girl he fucks.

“Okay. You were rough. So what?” I liked the pain as it mixed with pleasure. It made everything ten times better, even if my body disagreed the next morning.

“So what?” he gapes at me.

I would laugh if I wasn’t still trying to fit the pieces together. “The last thing I wanted to do was hurt you. I should’ve started slow, and I know that. I didn’t want to make your first time hurt worse than it needed to.”

My face pales as my heart stops for a moment. I guess it’s time to let the cat out of the bag. “Rian, I, uh, wasn’t a virgin.” Yep, I’m completely mortified.

I had to hide my sexual history from Rian and Finn for obvious reasons, but I didn’t think he’d be so stupid as not to ask or just assume that I was a virgin because he blacklisted me.

His eyes widen from my confession and immediately narrow into slits with overpowering rage. He releases the steering wheel, turning to me completely. “What?” he roars. “You let someone else touch you?”

“What kind of question is that? It’s not like you were interested until recently. You made it clear that you didn’t want me or anyone who looks like me.” I throw his comment from that party back in his face, how dare he insinuate that somehow I betrayed him.

“Who was he?” he demands and tightens his hands into fists.

“None of your business. We were together almost a year and a half ago, Rian, and I’m not going to let you go off half-cocked and put Jason in the hospital.”

He grinds his molars as he looks out the windshield. “A year and a half? Before or after you came on to me at that party?”

My cheeks flush with embarrassment at having to talk about this. “Obviously, it was *after* the incident.” That’s what I call that horrible night where I put myself out there to Rian. He not only rebuffed my affections but also said he doesn’t fuck girls who look like me. It doesn’t matter what he really meant by that. What matters is I thought he was saying it was because I was fat and he would never want me. Maybe that’s also my intrusive thoughts getting the best of me, but what else was I supposed to think? That fucker had me crying for hours. The next night, Kia took me to one of Dom’s parties, where I met and had sex with Jason. “Why are you doing this? You have no right to be angry with me.”

“Yes I do, because you’re mine.”

Fucking asshole. “I wasn’t yours then, Rian. In fact, you said you didn’t want me.”

“No, I didn’t!”

“Really, Mr. *I Don’t Fuck Girls That Look Like You?*” I huff as tears spring to my eyes and I look away from him. “You can’t get pissed that someone else wanted me when you acted like you didn’t.”

This would be the part where any sane guy would apologize for being a dick, but Rian has never been sane.

Instead of being a levelheaded, calm individual, Rian grabs me by my hair and drags me across the bench seat. He shoves my head down toward his crotch and my heart crashes against the barrier of my flesh. His fingers tighten on my scalp as he drags down the zipper of his jeans, pulling out his hard cock, drops of pre-cum falling down the length.

“You need to be reminded that only I’m allowed inside you.” He doesn’t ask me to open my mouth for him. He doesn’t need to. He’d break through my teeth if he wanted, but pushing against my lips is enough. I open my mouth and he doesn’t give me a moment to adjust to the mouthful. “Take it all the way, Sorcha. You’re my little whore. Now, act like it.”

If that doesn’t give me the motivation to ignore my gag reflex, nothing will.

I open up as wide as I can and he presses past my tongue and down my throat as he flips up my hem, exposing my panties.

My eyes snap shut as tears appear from the lack of oxygen, bile rising in my stomach at the intrusion. The stretch is painful, but when his hand rips my underwear, I’m distracted instantly. *What is he going to do? His cock is down my throat.*

He pulls my head back and thrusts past the barrier of my throat in the same moment that his hand comes down hard on my bare ass. My spit sprays past his length at the surprise and arousal at the touch.

“You’re so bad, baby. You were supposed to save yourself for me. Your cunt was supposed to bleed for me and only me. I’m going to need to get that blood somehow.”

If I was stronger than his vice grip on my hair, I would pull back and yell at him for expecting something like that from me

when he was screwing half the town, but then he does it again. Timing his thrust with the hard slap of my ass, I moan against his cock. It's a real jerk move, but I can't deny the dark part of me that I've never been able to explore is enjoying this.

"Did you suck his cock? Did you let him be the first to fuck your face like this, my slut?" He rams his cock down my throat again to accentuate his point, and I gag again.

Even with all his forcefulness, I don't try to push him away. I don't fight it at all. My hands grip his outer thigh as I'm leaning over, and my nails dig into him with each thrust of his hips and every slap of his hand on my ass.

"Did you?" he hisses as he pulls my head back, and I take a deep breath of fresh air, coughing from the sudden intake of oxygen.

"No," I admit as tears roll down my face, but I catch the victorious smile on his.

"Good girl. Did you let him go down on you? Did you let him taste my sweet little cunt?"

"No," I cry.

*It was just sex, and it was only once with Jason. Why does it matter now?*

"Did you let him fuck your ass?" he presses, searching for more to be mad about.

"No!"

He pulls my hair back even more so we can make eye contact. "Did you kiss him, Sorcha?" His words are sharp as his eyes darken.

*Fuck. Don't ask me that. Jason and I had sex. Kissing is involved with that. I'm not the weirdo who doesn't kiss the*

*people he screws. That's Rian.*

He saved his kisses for me. He saved one thing for me, and he thinks that means he has ownership of all of my firsts. Well, he doesn't. Jason will always have a claim on two of them. My first kiss and my virginity.

His eyes darken further with dominance. "Answer me! Did you kiss him?"

"Yes," I whimper the syllable, and no matter how hard I try to stop it, a sliver of shame races through me. I didn't know Rian wanted me. I thought the exact opposite.

Suddenly, he pushes me back to the passenger side, my back colliding with the door handle. "Out of the car," he demands, his tone as sharp as a knife, before opening his own door. He doesn't even bother to put his monster cock back in its cage before stepping out.

Is he insane? It's broad daylight. What if someone sees him? They'll call the cops and this isn't Grove Hill. Those cops know to turn a blind eye to the things Rian does, but not here.

Before getting out of the car, I adjust my skirt, my underwear nowhere to be found. I look around for any onlookers as I close the door. Rian roughly grabs my arm and drags me to the front of the car. "Rian, what are you doing?" I hiss.

"Shut the fuck up. You've pissed me off enough for one day," he growls before yanking me into his body, crashing his lips against mine. This isn't one of his normal kisses. Those are hard and dominating, like he wants to consume me. No, this is rough, like he wants to erase Jason's lips from mine.

I'm barely able to acclimate to the kiss before he yanks me around and clamps his mouth onto the back of my neck, sucking hard. His hands go straight for my breasts and he squeezes them with the same forcefulness as his mouth. His fingers clamp onto my nipple piercings through my bra, and I scream at the intense stab of pleasure coursing through me.

"What if someone sees us?" I tremble beneath his touch.

"They'll see me taking what's always been rightfully mine. I'm going to erase that bastard from your cunt and you're going to love every second of it, like you did the other night. Won't you?" He yanks my dress and bra down over my shoulders until it constricts around my waist. The metal of my barbels glints from the sun's direct rays.

"Rian," I try to refuse, but he ignores me and bends me over the hood of his car. I grab the grill for support as he kicks my feet apart wide enough to stand between them. He picks the hem up and tucks it under the rest of my dress that is tight around my waist. Now my ass is exposed as well while Rian is completely clothed. That's not fair, but I think being bent over his car right now to pay for sins that I didn't commit is proof that he doesn't play fair. The unmistakable touch of his cock running up my inner thigh makes me shiver, and there's no denying I want him. "What are you doing?" I gasp when he gets to my clit.

"You're leaking. I'm just wiping up your mess."

God, I want him, but not like this. Not out here. "Please, don't—"

He's not listening. And thank god. "Your mouth says no, but your body..." he trails off, letting me fill in the blank. He's right. My hips rock against him, begging him to fuck me,

coating him in my arousal. Even though there's no one around, we're outside and anyone could see.

Rian grabs my hair, pulling it back, anchoring me in place. He surges forward, filling me instantly. My cries fill the air as I look around frantically. I shouldn't be so scared about someone seeing us, this place seems pretty deserted, but there's always a chance.

God, his cock is magical. He smacks my ass again, the pain stinging across my cheeks as he thrusts again, this time harder, matching his strokes.

The ache of him stretching me is dulled from last time, but it's still there, and the pain is exquisite.

"Rian!" I moan as he ruts into me like a man on a mission, unstoppable with desire.

"Does my little whore want anyone else fucking her cunt like this?" I should be pissed that he just called me a whore, and I'm mortified as I realize my core weeps for more, clamping down with each thrust of his length.

"No, never. I only want you!" I cry from everything my body feels.

The agony. The ecstasy. The humiliation. The fear.

All of it eats me alive.

"It better fucking stay that way because, if it doesn't, I have no problem killing someone for touching you. It wouldn't be the first time," he grunts as he thrusts harder into me, my hair getting pulled with each motion.

Wait. What? My heart stops for a second as I take in his words. Rian has killed someone for touching me? How is that



possible? Jason is still very much alive and messages me almost daily. Rian made it clear he has no idea who Jason is.

Then, it clicks.

Dez. He disappeared the same night that he tormented me, and Rian came to my rescue. Rian *killed* Dez, and he did it because Dez touched me.

The threat he made against Christian seems so much more viable now. Christian touched me. It was just a friendly hug, but it was still touching. If Christian was interested in more, he kept a respectful distance.

All of my blood rushes south as the abuse Rian gives to my g-spot escalates and my knees shake. “Oh, go—” I whimper.

“Unless you are calling me your god, I don’t want you screaming that name when you come. That orgasm is mine. That praise is *mine*. I’m your God, whore. Fucking say it.” He pulls out and slams his cock back inside me as I scream out.

“You’re my God!” Then, I completely shatter around him, screaming as he fucks me even hard.

My body goes slack and I lay my chest on the hood. He releases my hair to allow for my position and moves his hand around the back of my neck, holding me in place as he rams harder into me. I close my eyes and lay there, letting him use my body. It feels so good, but I can barely focus on my breathing with the euphoria clouding my mind.

I almost don’t catch the sound of harmonizing, but when I realize what I just heard, I open my eyes. Off in the distance, there are two little girls staring at us. I close my eyes and force them open again. The girls have disappeared.

Two little girls that look identical with pale skin, big blue eyes, and jet-black hair to their shoulders.

Who were those girls, and where did they go? Where did they come from? We're in an abandoned area.

All thoughts of the mysterious twins leave my mind as I close my eyes and surrender to the pleasure and depravity of Rian's will.

CHAPTER  
**TWENTY-FOUR**

## HIM

**N**owadays, Nigel is gone most days, which is okay in my book. That means I get more time with my woman, and I don't have to dodge him and his glares. I'm not scared of Nigel O'Reilly, but Sorcha is worried about disappointing him.

She doesn't have to say it for me to know.

Closing my eyes, I breathe in this moment. I never thought I would be in Sorcha's room, running my fingers through her hair as she sleeps, her head on my chest. I still haven't been able to get the full name of the prick that took her virginity, but it's just a matter of time before he's strapped to my chair.

Jason. That's all I have to go on. His first name. He won't get away with touching my woman. Not if I have something to say about it.

Sorcha is all mine. My woman. My heart. My home.

It's the middle of the night on a Friday, which means I would normally be out partying, but I'd rather be here with her. She didn't feel like partying tonight, which isn't a big deal at all.

We spent the night in. We drank, ate pizza, and watched a few B-rated horror films. It was insanely domestic, and I...

enjoyed it. I can't remember the last time I actually had fun staying in.

I tolerate things and people. Some people are less annoying than others, but I haven't gotten real pleasure out of anything since I was a kid. Everything is cloaked in darkness, except for when Sorcha brings the light.

It's more than just wanting her. I need her. She's a beacon that guides me through the obscure when I can't navigate it myself. That's what she did that night she was crying in her room and tried to kick me out. She saw me suffering and helped me.

My obsession with her is unhealthy, but as long as she doesn't know how sick I am, I can live with it. But, this goes beyond being just an obsession. Maybe it always has.

Sorcha moans in her sleep as she adjusts her position, and I relax back against her pillow. The only time I don't struggle to fall asleep and stay asleep is when I can feel her. She can't disappear on me. She's where she's supposed to be, and now that I finally have her, I will rip out the throat of anyone that comes in between us.

"Ri?" she mumbles under her breath as I tuck her into my arms.

"Go back to sleep, baby."

Like most things I tell her to do, she fights it, but eventually succumbs to the pull of a peaceful slumber.

CHAPTER  
**TWENTY-FIVE**

HER

**T**he excruciating agony of the scorching flames sears my flesh as I try to work through the labyrinth of my subconscious.

*It's not real, Sorcha. It's a vision. You're here for a reason. Find the reason.* I can't allow myself to wake until I know why I keep getting pulled back into this moment.

The baby wails as fire carpets the ceiling, black smoke dances around the room, rapidly filling it.

I look down at the infant in the playpen and swallow my tears.

*I want to save you, but I need to know where you are! I don't know how to find you.*

My visions have become so clear it's like watching a movie. Also like a movie, it never changes, no matter how much you want it to have a happy ending.

Suddenly, the door bursts open and a small woman runs in, a hood pulled over her head.

This is new. Maybe she's the mother, but then who is the dead woman in the corner of the room?

*Who are you? Let me help you!*

Almost like she hears my pleas, she looks up, and I scream when I recognize her face, the hood falling off her head.

Green eyes, short spiral curls framing her face, and brown hair with blonde roots poking out.

No! No, no, no!

My heart jumps to my throat. *Francine, get out of here!* I scream as she runs to the baby. My sister, even if she doesn't know she's my sister, can't be here. It's too dangerous. She could get hurt, or worse, killed. Why is she here? *Get out! Save yourself!*

Francine crouches and grabs the baby, sticking the bawling child in her zip up sweatshirt, before heading back to the front door.

Steps away from the threshold, the beam above breaks and drops to the floor, blocking her escape. More smoke fills the room as she looks around, but all hope is lost.

The room spins, the colors merging into one hue. Black. I peel my eyes open and all I see is a pair of tragically beautiful icy blues staring into mine.

"It's okay. It was just a dream," Rian coos as he tries to soothe me, but my heart is racing too hard and fast.

"It wasn't a dream," I sob as he strokes my hair. "It was a vision. It's Francine. She's in trouble. I have to go—"

"Babe, it's the middle of the night. You're not going anywhere."

"I have to!" I try to push his arm off, but he's too strong for me to fight. My sister needs me. My friend needs me. That poor, innocent baby needs me.



“Calm down, okay? I’ll call Finn. Just chill the fuck out. Take a deep breath.”

I nod as tears fall unrestricted down my face. Rian pulls me against him, letting me hold him for comfort, as he grabs his cell off my bedside table.

“Hey. Sorry for calling, but Sorcha had a vision and is freaking the fuck out... It’s about Francine. That’s all I’ve been able to gather from her... Thanks, man.” He hangs up the phone and places a soft kiss on my temple before whispering. “You’re lucky I like you, or I would be kicking your ass for waking me up like this.”

With that, Rian climbs out of the bed, and to pull on his jeans and his shirt.

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FINN STORMS in the front door to find me and Rian on the living room couch, both of us exhausted from lack of sleep. I’m also emotionally exhausted as well.

Finn still doesn’t know we’re together, but Rian and I have always had a non-traditional brother’s best friend kind of relationship. He has always been a part of my close circle of trusted individuals, so it shouldn’t surprise Finn to find Rian here, or that Rian already knows about my nightmare.

“What is this about?” Finn complains as he plops down on the couch adjacent to me, the dark circles under his eyes intense. “It’s three in the morning. I have to be up for work in two hours *and* I left Francine alone in my bed. If I’m not there when she wakes up, she’ll flip out.” He’s uninterested and only here to humor me, if anything.

Tentatively, I start, “I had a vision. I’ve been having them every night for a few weeks. It shows a room on a fire. There’s a dead woman on the floor in the corner and a baby screaming in a playpen.”

My brother’s eyes focus as he narrows them on me. “What about Francine?” he asks.

“She ran into the room. I think she was there to rescue the baby, but something went wrong. A beam snapped, and the room caved in. The door was blocked. She couldn’t get out.” I pause when the memory of what I saw becomes too much and the tears fill my eyes. “I think I saw the way she dies.”

Finn flinches at that last comment, but continues his study of me, a pensive expression passing over his face, before he groans.

“It was just a bad dream, sis. You don’t have *visions*. That’s the most insane thing I’ve ever heard. This is the real world and you can’t let Carmen get in your head like this.”

My flesh feels clammy as I gape at him. My brother... doesn’t believe me. He thinks I’m crazy to believe it’s more than a dream.

My dreams are very different from my visions. I don’t feel the heat from flames in my dreams. I don’t feel anything. Only in my visions. There’s a big difference.

“Carmen didn’t mess with my head! Francine is in danger!” I take a deep breath and try to compose myself. “Let’s play devil’s advocate for a minute. Let’s say it was a dream. Why didn’t she look the way she does now? Her hair was different. It was dark.”

Finn rolls his eyes. “Are you sure it was Francine? Her mom looks just like her, except her hair is brown.”

I ponder that alternative idea. I've met Bethany a few times. The resemblance between the mother and daughter duo is uncanny, but I can tell the difference between them.

"No, it wasn't. Bethany's hair is natural. Francine's blonde roots were showing. When she dyes her hair dark, you'll know I'm right, and that I'm not crazy."

Finn stands, gives me one more look. He says nothing and walks out the door, a yawn falling from his lips. I understand he's tired, but he doesn't need to be an ass about this.

"Babe." Rian tries to soothe the emotions he sees I'm trying to hide and touches my arm, but I yank it away, my self-consciousness getting the best of me.

"I know what I saw. I'm not crazy," I snap.

He gives me a sympathetic look before stroking my hair. "I don't think you're crazy, kid. I believe you, but he isn't as open-minded as I am. Plus, he's protective of Francine. He can't let himself believe that something bad is going to happen to her that he's not there to protect her from."

I catch the irritation on his face and it nearly makes me laugh.

He's jealous that Finn can be free to express his emotions for Francine so openly, and we can't. They have been open about their relationship, and overly affectionate. I've sworn a couple times that it looked like they were about to screw on school property.

Gross.

We aren't hiding our relationship, if that's what you call this. We go out together and Rian spends a lot of time here, but we're respectful of how others would feel. We aren't an affectionate couple, only when we're alone. I think us staying

quiet about being together is really gnawing at his agitation toward Francine and Finn being together.

We're held to different rules than they are. Finn did say for me to do whatever makes me happy, but I still have that fear that when he finds out that Rian and I are together, my life as I know it will end. Finn and Rian will both disappear, and I'll lose everything.

I was supposed to do what was right for everyone by staying away from Rian, but I couldn't. Everything changed completely on Halloween night. Since then, Rian has been by my side constantly, and I really like having him around.

I find safety and comfort in his arms and don't even get me started on the sex.

"We'll talk to him later about it. Like you said, she hasn't dyed her hair, so there's no need to panic right now." Rian soothes my worries, and presses a sweet kiss to my lips.

"Thank you," I whisper when he releases the kiss.

"Let's go back to bed." He pulls me to my feet and lifts me into his arms as I lay my head on his chest. Rian carries me down the hall and to my room, closing us back inside our haven.

The thoughts of what's to come still plague me, but I can rest easy knowing whatever we have to do, Rian will be here to help me.

---

"OKAY, ladies. Listen up closely because I'm only going to say this once," Coach Hatcher announces as the entire dance team stands together, waiting for instruction.

I sneak a peek at Francine, who rolls her eyes like none of this matters at all. I wish it didn't matter, and I didn't care what our coach has to say, but I love being on this team. It took a lot of hard work to get here and this is our last year together. I plan on dancing after high school, regardless of if I get into Rice or not. Hopefully, if I get accepted, I'll join their dance team. If not, I'll find somewhere to dance.

Maybe Marion, my pole dancing instructor, will have some ideas for that.

If I didn't have the most possessive man in history constantly up my ass about anyone seeing my body, I'd seriously think about being an exotic dancer. I don't mind people seeing me naked and I love pole dancing. I'm fairly new to it, but Marion says I'm a natural.

I wouldn't do it my whole life, but it could be a fun way to get an income while in school. No one would have to know.

But, there's Rian, and being as trigger happy as he is when it comes to me, I'd probably lose all customers within a few days, *if* anyone was stupid enough to hire a Bastard's girlfriend.

When the coach is satisfied she has everyone's attention, she starts, "The closing season's show is at the beginning of December. That gives you a little over a month to get your routine down. The school has authorized the concept that you girls get to come up with the routine yourself. I thought that was a rather stupid idea, but I was outvoted. Principal Jordan wants to see a routine and song choices that tackle problems facing women today, a way to show that he supports feminism. You'll be practicing and meeting privately. He doesn't even want me knowing what you ladies decide to do."

What? Full creative freedom? Is he even allowed to do that? Well, he is the principal, so I guess he is.

“Get to work,” Coach Hanson says before shaking her head. “Fucking airhead with a god complex,” she mumbles under her breath as she stomps from the soccer field.

We all look around at each other in confusion.

“Sounds like fun,” Sonia, a girl with light skin and a pixie haircut, says, a big genuine smile across her face. Her glasses accent the glee in her eyes.

“Really? Won’t we get in trouble no matter what we do?” Willow asks, looking more sad than disappointed, like something really bad has happened, and it’s dampening her mood.

“No. Principal Jordan made the ruling. If they don’t like what we do, it’s *him* who gets in trouble, not us. Plus, fuck him. It’s dickheads like him that keep women slaves to the patriarchy. He just wants to make it look like he supports feminism and women’s right when he is probably one of those douchebags who cheered when *Rowe v Wade* was overturned.”

I blanch at Sonia as the others ignore her like they usually do. I never really thought of that. It was a huge tragedy when the Supreme Court made that ruling, but I feel like we all try to just ignore the truth.

Sonia probably thinks this is the principal’s mediocre attempt at pacifying the “feminists” of this school, but she doesn’t hold the male species in high regard, and I don’t blame her. Sonia’s story is one everyone knows and why people avoid her.

Sonia De La Rosa’s father was a big name in sex trafficking. Some even think her mom was one of the girls he

was trying to groom to sell, but that he decided to keep her for himself. No one knows if Sonia knew anything about her father's dealing, but we do know that her mother turned on him and got him arrested. He's currently serving several consecutive life sentences.

She has looked in the face of evil, hugged it good night, and trusted it to keep her safe.

"We should use it as a lesson," I say, grabbing everyone's attention.

"A lesson for what?" Nyla asks, looking at me like I've lost my mind.

"The horrors of being born as a woman or transitioning into womanhood. We go through things no man has to go through. I have PCOS and I've never heard of a man having too much pain in his junk to have sex."

It really sucked having to turn down Rian for sex because of the pain from my condition. He was very understanding, but it sucked nonetheless.

"We have to deal with yeast infections, oral contraceptives, sexual harassment, and being shamed for however our bodies look. We're trying too hard if we get dressed up and put on makeup, but if we go outside barefaced in a hoodie and sweatpants, we're lazy. No man gets judged the way we do, and we're supposed to keep our mouths shut about it. It might not change anything, but we should do this as a way to show how hard it is to be a woman."

I look at Sonia and kind of feel like an asshole. Unlike when everyone tried to ignore Sonia, they don't ignore me and I don't know why. They listen. She always has valid points or

input. Francine especially avoids talking to her or listening to what she has to say.

*What is everyone's issue with her?*

“I couldn't have said it better myself,” Sonia pipes in with a big smile on her face.

We come to a conclusion to choose three songs for the performance. Once we have the songs picked, we'll be able to figure out the choreography. Willow made the suggestion of choosing a girl to *sing* all the songs, but it just made me nearly gag.

I know I can sing, but I've never done it publicly, and now everyone thinks it's a good idea to make everyone on the team sing a song they prepare to determine who is the best. This whole thing went from an opportunity to a nightmare waiting to happen.

*Fuck me.*

Everyone gathers up their things at the end of the hour, and Sonia approaches me.

“Hey. Thanks for having my back. Most people just ignore my existence entirely,” she jokes, but I can see it bothers her. My heart hurts a bit for her.

“I completely get that. Half this school acts like I'm Medusa getting ready to turn them to stone.”

Granted, that's probably Rian's fault. He did blacklist me, and since we're not open about our relationship at school, I still look like one of the black sheep of Grove Hill High.

“People are so judgy,” Sonia groans as we stroll off the soccer field.

“You said it, sister.”



“Bye, Sorcha!” I look over my shoulder as Francine heads to her vehicle. “Don’t expect your brother home for dinner,” she jokes as she gets in her car.

I love Francine, but *eww*. I know what goes on between them when they are together. I roll my eyes. She calls the house on Mason Road home since every time we see each other outside of school, it’s because I’m there. Finn suggested I move in to get away from Dad, because he doesn’t think it should be my responsibility to parent my father but me living under the same roof as Rian *and* Finn is a recipe for disaster.

“Finn is your brother?” Sonia asks, confusion in her eyes.

“Adopted,” I explain. This is the typical response because we don’t look alike, which now makes sense considering we just found out that Finn and I aren’t actually related.

“Awesome. Finn is cool.”

I know my brother is cool. Even though my brother can be a dick, everyone loves him, and yet if Rian is an ass, which is most of the time, all anyone knows him as is an ass. I don’t know what the huge difference is in everyone’s mind.

We get to my car and I get an idea. “Hey. My... well, don’t really know what to call him. Boyfriend doesn’t seem right. My man and I are going to Santiago’s with Kia Brown. You should come with us.”

Granted, Kia doesn’t know Rian is coming, and I’m not even really sure if he is, but Rian likes to pop up at random and join us for things, like eating dinner.

“Really? You don’t mind?” Her eyes widen.

“Not at all. It’ll be fun.” I smile, completely convinced everything will be fine.

---

“WHAT THE HELL is Sonia De La Rosa doing here with you?” Kia nearly hisses as Sonia treks off to the bathroom while we wait for a table. Luckily, Kia didn’t say anything in Sonia’s presence, but now, with her gone, Kia feels perfectly fine opening her mouth.

“What’s the problem? She’s on the team and I feel bad that everyone pretty much ignores her.” I shrug it off.

“That’s for good reason. Her dad was a sex trafficker, for fuck’s sake!”

“And my dad is a serial killer. What’s your point?”

I can see the wheels turning over that fact for a minute before she groans. “You made your point. Fine, but if she says something weird, I’m out of here.”

*Well, that resolved itself quickly.*

Once Sonia comes back from the bathroom, we sit at a table and order some appetizers. The conversation is casual, but I can tell Kia is trying to be nice for my benefit. I don’t understand why she has such a big issue with Sonia. It’s not like Sonia chose her dad. Besides, her dad is in prison. I didn’t know what my dad was doing until Finn took over and he told me they were killing bad people which, knowing this, has helped me sleep at night. “I’ve never actually been here before,” Sonia says before sipping her lemonade.

“We make sure to come once a week for Sorcha’s cheat day,” Kia says as the door behind me chimes. Her eyes lift at the noise. “And here comes Sorcha’s loverboy. Why am I not surprised?” She waggles her eyebrows at me and I squint mine

at her. The chair next to me slides out and Rian sits. “Why do you have to be such a stalker, Rian?”

Kia is constantly teasing me that she thinks Rian is stalking me, but that’s ridiculous. Rian may be a bit crazy, but he’s not a stalker.

*Right?*

“It’s what I do best,” he mutters as he throws his arm along the back of my chair.

“Rian! What’s up, man?” Sonia and Rian fist bump like they’re old friends, and Kia sends me a look. It’s not suspicious, but more comical.

*So serial killers and sex traffickers know each other?*

I snicker from the look she gives me.

“What’s up is apparently, I’m stalking my woman.”

*My woman.* It sends euphoria shooting throughout my whole body every time he calls me his, and I can’t help the way it makes me smile and blush without fail.

“So, you two are... together?” Sonia asks, looking genuinely surprised, and I’m not offended by that. We don’t look like we’d fit together. Him with his nearly constant grumpy disposition, tattoos, and piercings. Me with my *church on Sundays* clothes as Colin so eloquently puts it. I don’t have tattoos, but not because I don’t want them. My dad doesn’t want me to get any. He thinks I might regret them later.

Doesn’t mean I can’t get any he won’t see. There’s an idea.

“Talk about taboo, right? Her brother’s best friend,” Kia teases.

I roll my eyes. “That’s taking it a bit far, don’t you think?”

“Fine,” Kia groans. “It’s forbidden for a reason.”

I glare at her. Why are we discussing my relationship with Rian, anyway?

Rian reaches in front of me and steals one of my empanadas so I turn my glare on him. “Hey! That’s mine.”

“Mine now.” He chuckles before taking a big bite out of it.

“Asshole,” I curse. He must have a death wish. You don’t take a girl’s food on cheat day.

“Brat,” he throws back at me.

I grab my last empanada and stick my tongue out at him, showing off my brattiness. I take a big bite and savor the taste of fajita meat and veggies as my mouth waters around the deliciousness.

I went so long without doing cheat days that I live for them now. The deliciousness of food I shouldn’t be eating is highly addictive.

There’s only one thing more addictive, and it’s sitting right next to me.

CHAPTER  
**TWENTY-SIX**

**T**here's one question that has haunted my dreams lately. The words have been spelled out in the shadows of my vision, taunting me to succumb to the fear within them.

If this were a story, would we be the heroes or the villains? Was it some form of heroics that led Rian to kill Carmen in order to protect me, or was Carmen right all along? Am I evil? Will I eventually bring my friends and family down with me?

I know there's something dark inside me, something that begs to wreak havoc, but I keep it locked away inside me. Maybe it's my conscience trying to eat at me. Death surrounds me. My boyfriend, my dad, and my brother are practically serial killers. My own mother tried to kill me to protect the world from what she thought I would become.

In her vision. I was holding a bloody knife, covered in blood. That's not who I am. I've never even had a murderous thought, unless you include imagining stabbing Rian's hand for touching my food. It wouldn't kill him, just wound. I'm pretty sure it would piss him off, but it wouldn't stop him. My enchiladas al cabron are here, and he keeps trying to steal bites.

"Get your own damn food!" I hiss at him, but he just laughs in spite of me.

“There’s no way you could eat all that. I don’t want you to waste food.” He motions to my nachos and my enchilada plate. It’s a lot of food, but I’m starving. I barely ate any lunch and breakfast was just a bowl of cereal.

I glare at him, giving him the full strength of my indignation. “I am.”

Rian returns the look with amusement and suspicion. Suspicion because he’s hoping I’m eating for two. It’s not like I’m pregnant. No matter how much Rian tries to convince me to get off the pill, I’ve refused and held my ground. Plus, it’s just an extra line of defense. I have PCOS, which can cause fertility issues, but I haven’t been diagnosed with any. I’m not having my fertility checked. Rian is just crazy. Our relationship is a secret from my brother and this nut job wants to get me pregnant? He belongs in a padded cell.

Granted, I know if Finn ended up killing Rian for finding out about us, I would be grateful if I ended up pregnant, because I’d still have a part of Rian. I’m not going to let him actively try to knock me up though.

“I get one freaking day a week, and I’m not going to let you mess it up.” I stick my tongue out again before taking a bite of my enchiladas.

“You guys are so mean to each other,” Sonia says, barely holding in a laugh.

“Oh, that’s nothing,” Kia adds with a cackle. “You should’ve seen the time they were screaming at each other in the hall on Halloween. I thought weapons were about to be drawn.”

She’s not talking about this Halloween. No, this was *last* Halloween when he overheard me talking to Kia about going

to the party as a Playboy Bunny. Rian flipped out on me.

Sonia looks a little disturbed as she looks between us. “Fighting is our foreplay.” I shrug nonchalantly.

“And, I don’t know a single guy who wouldn’t say something when their girl is talking about going to a party dressed in lingerie.”

“It wasn’t lingerie!” I gape at him. “It was a Playboy Bunny costume.”

“That’s even worse. You wanted to dress as a sugar baby running around in lingerie,” he points out and I scowl at him.

“Being a Playboy Bunny is about femininity and being sexy.”

“You’re not making your case any better, babe. The *sexiest* costume I’ll let you wear in public is what you wore this year.”

My gaze hardens at the audacity of his words. “Let me?!”

He smirks at me like there is nothing misogynistic about what he just said.

“Yeah, *let* you. Have you forgotten how easy it is for me to rip off your clothes?”

My cheeks flame from the dirty words he just said out loud in front of Kia, Sonia, and this entire restaurant.

*He really does have a degradation and humiliation kink, doesn't he?*

“I swear, one of these days I’m going to accidentally on purpose kill you,” I mumble out my threat as I rub my temple.

“I’d like to see you try, babe.” He chuckles like he thinks this is funny.

Asshole.



“They get worse than this?” Sonia asks Kia who shrugs.

“Much worse.”

“God, you two are so mean to each other,” Sonia laughs before picking up her glass of iced tea.

“That’s nothing. You should see the way I fuck her.”

My jaw slacks from his crassness. “Rian!” I screech, my face heating even more.

“Now that’s a sight.”

I slap his shoulder, completely mortified by the things leaving his mouth. “Shut. Up.” I emphasize my words in case he suddenly developed a hearing issue.

Instead of backing off, he gives me the degrading look he gave me when he bent me over the hood of his car and fucked me until I couldn’t walk.

Maybe I am a brat with a degradation kink because, holy hell, that look makes me so hot and ready to go.

*Yup. I have a degradation kink.*

Is this whole fighting thing we do a part of that, or is that part of me being a brat? I have so many questions about myself.

He leans in and whispers in my ear, his voice so deep and penetrating. “Be a good girl and you can be my naughty whore later.” I take in a sharp breath and freeze. I think I need to change my panties after that comment. He notices my reaction to his words and a cocky grin plays on his lips. “Good girl. Because I want you sitting on my face tonight.”

*Holy shit.*

My thighs clench from his seductive threat. It's a struggle not to do or say something that might continue the argument, so I just shove a nacho in my mouth. Sonia looks back and forth between us with confusion and a bit of accusation toward Rian.

I'm sure the exchange on the outside probably looked borderline abusive, but Rian wouldn't actually hurt me. I only stopped because it might jeopardize the prospect of having sex later.

I really like having sex with Rian. We have a very healthy sex life.

"Well, how was practice? Was Coach Hatcher a total cunt?" Kia asks, drifting the subject away from Rian's inappropriateness.

"It was great. We didn't actually practice though," Sonia says as she sets down her tea. "Principal Jordan gave us full creative freedom with our final performance, and we're making something epic."

"Except Willow had the idiotic idea for one of us to sing the three songs we perform." I groan in irritation.

"Why is that such a bad thing?" Rian presses as he sits back in his seat, his hand resting on the back of mine, lazily twirling a strand of my hair in his fingers.

"We all have to perform a song for the others and kind of try out to determine who is going to be the lead." Sonia shrugs like it's not a big deal at all.

Picking up on my irritation, Kia asks, "Why are you so butt hurt over it, Sor?"

"I'm not butt hurt. I just don't sing in front of other people, ever." I'm really not upset about it. Just chaffed. I don't want

to sing in front of others, but I really want to be a part of this performance.

“Like stage fright?”

“Or you *can't* sing?” Kia adds to Sonia’s question.

“No, I *can* sing. I just don’t, and it’s not a matter of being scared. I don’t like doing it. There’s too much pressure. Everyone expects people to sound like Lady Gaga or Beyonce without any training at all. I don’t want to be judged more than I already am, but the group decided this is how it will be, so it is. Besides, it’s just one two-minute song. How bad could it actually be?”

---

WE ARE STEPPING out of Santiago’s as Finn’s bike drives into the parking lot. My immediate instinct is to hide, but we’re not doing anything wrong. Rian showed up while I was having lunch with my friends, that’s all.

Finn pulls into a parking spot and Francine climbs off the back of his bike, grinning.

“Hey!” She tosses her helmet at Finn before giving me a hug. “What are you doing here?”

“I come here every Wednesday,” I answer, squeezing her back.

She leans into my ear. “Are you and Rian on a date?” the words are soft enough that only I can hear them.

It just came boiling out of me, and I had to tell her about my relationship with Rian.

“No, not a date.” I shake my head as she pulls away.

I know Francine well enough that she would've concocted some huge lie to cover our asses if my brother asked why the hell me and Rian were here, but Finn never asks.

He doesn't ask why Rian's here, why I'm here, or why we're together. His attention is almost completely on Francine at all times, and I'm thankful for that.

"Hey, sis," Finn mutters and throws me a small smile. "Don't do anything I wouldn't do."

"That isn't much," I quip as the two of them laugh and disappear into Santiago's.

Like I said, Finn never asks questions. He used to, but that was before Francine.

"If they're here, that means they're not at the house," Rian whispers in my ear before letting out a domineering growl that shoots heat down my spine.

"And your point?"

"I want you on my face, then my cock in your cunt. I'm going to get you in my bed and fuck you until you can't walk. Then, I'm going to fuck you again for added measure."

My entire body shudders with desire and I'm sure everyone who looks at me can see it in my eyes. Blood rushes to my pussy, and my thighs clench in anticipation of the main event.

"I have to take Sonia back to her car," I say, explaining why going straight to the house on Mason Street isn't possible.

"I'll drive her. You go to my house. I expect you to be naked and in bed by the time I get there. If you're not, I'll bend you over and spank your ass until you can't sit." His threat is laced with a growl, which overtakes all my senses.

I know I should be stronger than this, demanding the freedom to take my friend to her car and come back to him for sex in my own time. Probably any other woman would be. The thing is, I like this dynamic we have and the urgency involved in it, the forbidden nature of every interaction.

“Okay.”

---

I CAN'T RELAX. I have so much energy I need to burn off, and I don't even know where it's coming from. Rian and I went several rounds yesterday after Santiago's so I should be somewhat sedated. Plus, I had my pole dancing class after school. I should be out of it, but I'm not.

I climb out of bed and throw on my black leggings and a tank top before adding my tennis shoes.

Marion knows of my struggles with my body, so she offered up her studio to use whenever I needed. Considering what happened the last time I went for a run at night, it seems like the safer option.

I traipse into the living room, expecting to have to explain to my dad what I'm doing, but he's passed out on the couch.

Grabbing my keys, I exit my house and go straight to my car. The drive to the studio is short. All the lights are out, signaling that Marion probably left for the night.

Luckily, I have a key.

CHAPTER  
**TWENTY-SEVEN**

## HIM

I really fucking hate nights like these, nights where I'm forced away from my woman, nights where there is no way for us to be in the same domain. I contemplated sitting outside her house in my car like I used to. The idea comes with a sense of nostalgia, like stalking her was a rite of passage. But, these assholes demanded my presence.

I know why they want me here. It's not because I'm rarely around. It's because the date is creeping up on us. In a week, it will be the six-year anniversary of my mother's suicide and they think I need their support to get through it.

What I need is to be buried deep in my woman. When I'm inside her, nothing else matters. I won't need to even register what day it is if the world would leave us alone so we could just be us.

Sorcha is my safe space—my home.

My instinct is to say fuck everyone and be a hermit for the next week, but that's a cycle I need to break. My girl needs me to be present, and if I give into old habits, I'll lose her. I'll hurt her again and she won't look past it this time. She's given me more chances than I fucking deserve, but I don't think she would be willing to give me another.

I don't want to fuck this up. I just want to be good enough for her, and I'm getting there.

The spouts of joy have been few and far between, but the moments are getting closer together less sporadic.

I am better prepared to deal with life and it's all because of her. She makes me happy and brings a light to my life I don't think I could live without.

"Pass the fucking joint already!" Colin complains as Finn takes the longest drag in history.

"Get your own," Finn teases the youngest of our crew before passing him the joint, grinning. The smoke leaks between his teeth before he blows out billows of smoke. He looks like a psycho out of an old horror movie.

I'm glad my best friend is happy. I really am, but a part of me wants to strangle him because he's also an obstacle to my own happiness.

When Finn is around, I can't just grab my woman and pull her into me. Sorcha is still scared of Finn's reaction to us being a couple. She wants to be respectful, yet Finn practically fucks Francine whenever he sees her, regardless of where they are. He can't keep his hands off of her and it doesn't matter if there's an audience.

Finn is the brother Sorcha was raised with, while Francine is her half-sister. If anything, Finn should be considerate of Sorcha's feelings.

I'm sick of walking around on eggshells. It's been weeks, and it's time we just come out about us being together. I won't do that on my own. It has to be me and Sorcha.

Honesty is the best way to go about it. It's better that Finn finds out from us rather than from some rumor created by



people seeing us together.

My phone vibrates in my pocket, so I pull it out as Eoghan brings in the stack of burgers he finished grilling for us.

It's a notification from the tracker I installed on Sorcha's car. It's the middle of the night. *Where the fuck does she think she's going?*

I open the GPS app and watch the dot that signifies her vehicle as she drives out of the neighborhood.

"Aren't you hungry, man?" Tiernan bugs me as he waves a burger in my face.

Honestly, I'm starving, but nothing holds my attention like my woman does.

"I gotta go," I announce as I stand from the couch, throwing on my jacket.

"Come on, man," Colin complains.

"I ditched Francine so we could hang out!" Finn argues.

"I just made these burgers, asshole!" Eoghan adds.

"Appreciate it, but unless one of you is going to suck my cock tonight, I've got other places to be," I joke dryly as I grab one of the burgers and shove it in my mouth.

*Eoghan makes some good burgers.*

"Not it!" Tiernan declares, throwing me a grin as I pocket my cell. He knows if I brought up fellatio, that means there's only one person I'm going to see. He's not at all offended that I'd rather be with her than them.

*That is a true friend.*

Colin all but pouts. "Get your rocks off some other time." Colin is the least *promiscuous* of us all. He could bed any

bitch in this town if he wanted to, but he doesn't. He's levelheaded, and if it wasn't for the pact, I could see him being the one of us most likely to make a relationship work. I could see Colin being a good father and a solid patriarch of his family.

He's not crazy like the rest of us. He's never gotten his hands dirty.

If I was just going off to get laid, they might be able to guilt me into staying, but this is my woman. It's never just about sex, even when she texts me and tells me she's horny and needs my cock. I always stay for more than just sinking my cock into her drenched heat.

Fuck. Now, I'm hard. Just thinking about her is enough to get me going.

I hurriedly get in my car and follow the GPS signal which comes from the upper east side of town. The closer I get, the more confused I become. What the fuck is Sorcha doing in the business sector of Grove Hill at ten o'clock? This seems too shady, and my woman doesn't do shady.

I follow her trail until it stops at a small strip of businesses.

Her car is parked in front of a dance studio, but the lights are turned off, except for what looks like a red light deep inside the studio.

Parking my car, I get out and head to the front door. It's unlocked, so I pull it open and stroll into the dark studio, but not before making sure the deadbolt is in the locked position.

The sound of dropped bass and a seductive song calls to me, pulling me in the direction of the red light. I'm careful with how I approach, completely unsure of what I'm going to stumble upon.

*What the hell have you gotten yourself involved in, kid?*

The bass gets louder as I approach, my heart pounds in my chest. I stand at the edge of the threshold, the crimson hue oozing around it like a bloody mist.

I turn the corner. I'm ready for anything.

But not this.

My heart drops to my groin as my eyes fall on the woman dancing on one of a dozen stripper poles in the room. She's in her fucking underwear, twirling around the pole like a seductive goddess born only for the purpose of bringing millions of men to their knees.

Instinct has my eyes scanning the room, my jealousy at the thought of someone here watching her tears me apart from the inside out. Luckily, no one else is here. Just me and her.

My hackles relax as my eyes are drawn back to her. She hooks her leg around the pole, and swings around it. She starts to shimmy her ass against it, but then her eyes find mine. She stills.

"Rian!" She cries my name as I lean against the doorframe, my arms crossed over my chest.

She's like a doe caught in headlights. Her eyes are huge from shock, and fear, and.... Mortification? I glare at her. "Well, isn't this a surprise?" My voice is gruff and strained as it comes out. The song ends and she side steps behind the pole like it could conceal her near nudity. What's the point of hiding? I've kissed, licked, and sucked every inch of her body. I've become so well acquainted with her flesh, I could draw every dimple, stretch mark, and freckle from memory alone. I could probably do it blindfolded, too.

“What are you doing here?” she demands as she snaps from her fog.

So we’re resorting to deflection, are we? She’s in a dance studio, in the middle of the night, by herself, dancing like a stripper, practically naked—and she wants to know why I’m here? This was a dangerous move on her part, especially considering she didn’t even lock the front fucking door. What if someone came in here and hurt her? She needs to be smarter than this. First, the run in the middle of the night and now, erotic dancing in an abandoned studio?

“I have a tracker on your car and I followed you here. Good thing I did. Do you realize that the front door is unlocked? Look at yourself. What do you think someone would do if they came in uninvited and saw you like this?”

Her expression hardens as her eyes narrow. “You put a tracker on my car. Are you fucking crazy?” She glares at me, and I nearly laugh at the stupidity of her rebuttal.

“You knew I was crazy long before I fucked you, baby.”

She swallows whatever sassy retort she had because she knows I’m right. She fell in love with me, despite the fact that I’m psychotic, jealous, and possessive.

Or was it *because* of all that?

“I’ll ask you again. What the hell are you doing here?” I challenge and she aims her eyes at the floor, hiding her feelings from me. She thinks she can hide anything from a predator like me? *Silly little mouse.*

She’s timid when she answers. “This is where I take a pole dancing class with Kia. Two days a week. It’s my new exercise method.” I can see a flush spreading over her already reddened

skin. She's still avoiding my glare. *That's not going to help her.*

I storm over to her. "You dress like this for your classes?" I snarl out the words as I lean over her. She knows she's on thin ice, so she doesn't talk back. I reach out and pop her bra strap, loving the sound of the snap against her flesh. She jumps from the contact, but still doesn't look me in the eye.

"No. I wear my normal exercise clothes and the class only has women in it, so you can stop the jealousy thing you're doing." She finally snaps out of her timid persona and thins her gaze at me. She's not quite glaring, but it's close enough to piss me off.

"This is not fucking jealousy. I'm beyond pissed, Sorcha. You put yourself in a dangerous situation *again*. You ran off in the middle of the night *again*. You put me in a situation where I feel like I have to babysit you *again*. Do you have any clue how much of a target you are?" I step into her, and wrap my fingers around her throat, forcing her to look at me.

With each sentence, her brattiness wanes until she looks like she's on the verge of tears.

"We don't hide our methods of making sure the rules are followed. Everyone who has ever lived in Grove Hill knows. There's plenty of family's out there that would like to take out their revenge on you. You're Nigel's daughter, Finn's sister, and my woman. Each one of those is a target on your back. You're the little princess we all have to make sure doesn't step on a fucking landmine because you're too stupid to look where you're walking."

Her eyes glisten with tears as she wraps her fingers around my wrist. "I'm sorry," she cries, then the tears fall. I want to lean in and lick up her sadness, consume it. But, I refrain.

“That’s why you don’t get to go to parties by yourself. That’s why you have a tracker on your car. That’s why you are never alone, even when you think you are. I follow you wherever the hell you go and sit outside your house until the ass crack of dawn. You’re *everyone’s* weakness, but more importantly, you’re *mine*. You’re defenseless, Sorcha. Anyone could easily hurt you, maim you, rape you, *kill* you.” The words come out as an accusation as I’m unable to say them with a level head. The thought of anyone touching her fills me with a murderous rage.

“I said I’m sorry,” she sobs as she leans into my aggressive touch. She knows I would never hurt her, and this isn’t a method of manipulation. She needed to understand how fucking careless she has been and fucking finally, she does.

“Sorry isn’t good enough, babe. Your words mean nothing at this point.”

With my fingers on her pulse, I can feel the panic vibrate through her. There’s no fear. Just anxiety.

“Prove to me that you’re done being this fucking stupid, babe.” I loosen my grip on her throat and trail my fingers along her jaw, feeling the moisture from her tears on my fingertips. I trace the trail up her cheek and place my finger in my mouth. Her fear is delicious.

“What?” She releases a raspy breath. “How would I do that?”

In a flash, I have her hair in my hand, pulling her to the tips of her toes. “Open your fucking mouth,” I demand, my tone leaving no room for discussion.

She gazes up at me with flickers of light and confusion in her eyes, but she does as I instruct. She doesn’t expect for me

to spit straight into her mouth, so her lips slam shut and I pinch them closed. “Don’t you dare swallow or spit it out,” I warn. She knows if she disobeys me, she will regret it for a long time. My woman is smart so she doesn’t do either. “On your knees.”

I release her face and her hair as she drops hard onto her knee caps, the sound vibrating through the room. She can say she hates this all she wants, but we both know the truth. She loves every second that I degrade and humiliate her. She gets off on feeling like my dirty whore and that turns me on like crazy.

She gives me that look as if to say *now what* and that earns her a hard slap across her cheek.

First off, I know I’m an asshole. Second thing, she likes impact play, whether it’s her face, her tits, or her ass. I’d never raise a hand to hurt her, unless she begged.

A few days ago, when she was drunk, she confessed that she’s been curious about being slapped. Not spanked, but slapped. It’s a sexual curiosity, and I just fulfilled it for her.

Her cheek pinks under the red lights right before she presses her hand to the heated flesh.

She looks up at me like I’ve offended her.

I’m going to offend her even worse than that.

“Kiss my boot,” I command, and her eyes widen in disbelief.

“Wh—what?” She tries to say without disturbing the contents on her tongue.

“Do it or I’ll make your ass bleed,” I warn her against tempting me and continue to watch her throat, making sure she

doesn't swallow the spit I gave her.

She glares at me, her blush leading into her bra and down her stomach, as she leans down, pressing her lips to the tip of my boot.

“Now, you can swallow.”

Her eyes snap shut with embarrassment as her throat works to swallow my spit and she pulls her mouth back, looking absolutely disgusted with herself.

“What now?” she whimpers in defeat, her dark curls shielding her face from view as she bows her head in submission.

*That's my girl.*

“Now, you get up off your ass and do what you came here to do. You dance while I watch.”



CHAPTER  
**TWENTY-EIGHT**

I swear, I'm going to strangle Rian. That was so mortifying and disgusting. He spit in my mouth and made me kiss his freaking boot. His boot!

And, of course, it turned me on. Fuck him for knowing that it would.

It's hard to keep the glare off my face as he ambles to my phone resting by the speakers. He grabs it, and, of course, he knows my passcode, searches and selects a song from some music app, puts the phone down then sits in a nearby chair. Nation Haven's *Dirtier Thoughts* purrs from the speakers. Nation Haven is one of my newly found artists I love listening to, but I never thought I'd be listening to his music while doing this.

Rian wants me to dance for him. This wasn't the point of this class. I didn't agree to take a pole dancing class with Kia to show off my moves to Rian. I did it to boost my confidence and as an alternative to running, and it's worked wonders. *This* was not a reason for it.

The idea of doing this in front of anyone else doesn't faze me, but doing it in front of Rian—for him—I'm beyond mortified and scared out of my mind.

What if he doesn't like the way I dance?

Pole dancing, or at least the way Marion teaches it, is both sexual and sensual. It's a dance of attraction and a conversation of confirmed desire.

Marion said I'm a natural at this, but I don't feel like a natural right now.

*Cut it out, Sorcha. He just wants to see you dance. If he doesn't like it, that's his problem.*

Is it bad that I crave his approval? Dancing is my thing and pole dancing is one of the few things in my life that is just... mine. The only reason why Kia knows about it is because she's involved.

I close my eyes and tell myself to get lost in the music.

*Him*

THE WAY her body moves is like she's casting a spell, each sway of her hips is another curse I'm condemned to. Her hips writhe to the mellow beginning, bringing my cock to life. Her eyes are closed and I can't tell if she remembers I'm here. Though I don't like it, I can see that this is something that takes concentration. One wrong move, and Sorcha could seriously injure herself.

She spins around the pole then loops her leg around the metal bar, and her momentum pulls her into the air. Her full and strong thighs hold her in place as her body moves, and I nearly jump to my feet to catch her when her hands let go of the pole.

She's okay, though. Upside down, her hands trail along the wood floor as the music picks up the tempo.

I've been to plenty of strip clubs and witnessed hundreds of strippers do their thing on stage, but all of those exotic dancers could learn a thing or two from my woman. The dance she does is alluring and erotic. Her voluptuous body tells a tantalizing story, and I'm all about listening. My cock strains against the cage of my pants and I want so desperately to take it in hand and jack off to watching her. I'm sure that would embarrass her even more, but that would be the easy way out for her. I'll let her get me all riled up, but once I reach the breaking point, she'll wish she never pulled this stupid, late night stunt.

Sorcha pulls herself upright and I fist my hands, not trusting myself to touch neither her nor me when she grinds herself against the pole, all the way until her toes reach the ground. Then she opens her eyes and locks them with mine, that sexy as hell seductress look on her face. Hair disheveled, cheeks flushed, and her lips parted. She looks identical to how she does after I sink into her heat.

I relax back into the chair as she stands and turns, arching her back against the pole. Slowly sliding down, her thighs gradually spread until she's wide open for me to see.

Fuck. My brat is doing this on purpose. She wants to drive me insane with her moves—make me lose control.

“Stop,” I growl, and all of her movements freeze, her eyes blinking as she breaks out of her seductress haze. I grab her phone and cut the music as I glare at her, masking my enjoyment of her show. Unless she sees how hard my dick is right now, there's no way she'll know how much I want to fuck her.

“Come here,” I order and her shoulders relax. Sorcha takes a single step forward before I yell at her. “No!” She flinches at my tone and her eyes stay glued to the floor. “That’s not how this works, my little slut.” I shift and lean forward. “Come here, on your knees.”

She tries hard to hide it behind her mass of dark curls, but I catch her smile as she slowly drops to her knees. She stretches her arms in front of her like a goddamn jungle cat as she slinks my way. Her ass sashays side to side, her timid eyes meeting mine halfway.

I wish the pole had been further away because she’s at my feet way too soon. Sorcha kneels, waiting for my next command like she should be. Her defiance may never get completely erased. I believe she does it on purpose to get a... rise out of me. And it works.

I stand, looking down at her. Taking my time, I slowly walk around her with purposeful steps, examining how she sits her perfect ass on the heels of her bare feet.

This woman is all fucking mine.

“Bend over the chair.”

I hear her sharp intake of breath before she moves to her feet and lays herself over the arms of the chair, her ass presented for me. Her legs tremble in anticipation. She probably thinks I’m about to fuck her, but she’s wrong. She hasn’t gotten the full extent of her punishment yet.

I’m on edge in the best way, and I know she is, too.

Positioning myself behind her, I yank her underwear over her ass. Goosebumps prickle her spine when she hears the undeniable jingle of my belt being unbuckled. Pulling it out of the loops, I fold it in half and hold onto both ends, push them

together then violently pull them apart. That oh so satisfying *snap* pierces the air and she jumps, her fear palpable.

I bring my arm back and crack the belt down hard on her ass. She cries out in pain, but doesn't move or even flinch. The mark turns bright red and quickly morphs into a welt. I slap my hand right on top of the mark, making my girl sob so beautifully.

I do it two more times, but space the marks perfectly so they aren't touching, creating three bars across her ass like a sideways barcode labeling this spitfire as mine.

Her cries increase as her nails dig into the chair's arm. I gather her hair in my grip, pulling her to her full height. Her face is awash with tears, and the look she is giving is deadly.

It doesn't faze me, though. I drag her to the pole she danced on and press her against it. I take her hands and guide them above her head and wrap her fingers around the pole.

"Don't move," I warn and she drops her head in submission, giving me all the answers I need. She's not going to stop me or fight me, but she will want to in a minute. I know she will. She's freaked out every time I've brought up anything having to do with her ass, but she doesn't do a good enough job hiding her erotic curiosity of the possibilities.

She's very protective of her back door, but I'm going to take it, and she's going to love every second of it when I do. First, she needs to be prepared thoroughly.

I kneel behind her and yank her panties off the rest of the way, being careful when slipping her feet through the holes. Normally, I'd tear them off, but these hold a memory now. I'll make sure I don't ever destroy them. Maybe they'll join her pink ones in my box of trophies.

I push her feet apart and wait a minute, watching how her breathing increases, how her knees shake, how the sweat coats her spine. I love leaving her in anticipation of what I'm going to do next. It's hot as hell.

"Present your ass," I demand and she takes no time at all doing as I instruct. Sorcha arches her spine, which gives me a perfect view of the starfish I seek. "That's my good little whore. Are you going to start behaving?"

"Yes," she rasps.

"When you're good, you get rewarded. When you're not, you get punished. This part is not punishment, though." Gripping her ass in my hands, my fingers run along her welts, and her shriek of surprise converts into panic when I spread her cheeks.

"Rian, what are you—"

I cut her off as I trail my tongue along her starfish, gauging her reaction closely. The scent of her arousal overpowers my senses as it leaks down her thighs and she cries out. "Stop!" she begs, but doesn't remove her hands from their invisible tether. She likes it.

"You can't say no to this, whore," I growl, teasing her brown rim lined with beige skin.

"Please, don't do this," she pleads, but it earns her a slap on her thigh. "I don't want that, Rian!"

"Oh, I think you do. I think you're desperate for me to stick my cock in your ass."

"No, I'm—"

I slap her thigh before she can slander herself again. "Don't lie to me. Each time I lick your ass, you get even

wetter. I can smell your desire, I can smell your lies. Let go of your stupid reservations about this. Don't tempt me to shove a tab up your ass just to make you admit what you want."

She sobs as I tease her hole again, going slower and more intentionally.

"Admit it," I demand as I run a finger over her back hole. She sobs as I tease her hole again, going slower and more intentionally. I watch the way her wetness leaks down her thigh, down to her knee. She can feel ashamed of what she wants, but I'm still going to give it to her.

"I like it," she cries her admittance. This isn't depraved, and yet she thinks there's something wrong with her for wanting this.

I stand, still teasing her back doo and I whip out my cock then slide against her deprived clit. She's so fucking soaked.

She shrieks out in pleasure and her arms shake while her hips buck against my touch. "Yes, please."

"You want it?"

"Yes!"

I press just the tip of my pointer finger into her backside and she shudders. I push in farther and she convulses around me. Her asshole clenches and I groan.

"Fucking relax, baby."

"I can't! Your finger is in my ass."

"Figure it out or you'll take something much bigger than my finger." She sniffles from my threat, but her walls slowly release my digit.



Her breath quickens as she struggles to control her body's reaction. I drip spit on her crack and gather it on my pointer before pressing in again.

She mewls like a cat in heat as I tease with just that one digit, sinking it in past the knuckle.

"Oh, fuck." She trembles and I withhold the moan as I thrust my cock into her cunt, using my dick to distract her from how I use a second finger to stretch her opening.

Slowly pulling out, I add another finger and she cries out again. Her voice echoes through the room as I fuck her pussy with my cock and her ass with my fingers.

"That's my good little slut. You love having your ass played with," I growl as my balls tighten, but I hold out my release, slowing my strokes.

Not yet. Not even fucking close.

"Yes, I love it."

I angle my fingers to that special spot inside her and her body nearly falls, but I catch her with my hand around her throat.

"Hold yourself up," I instruct as I add in a third finger and she screams.

"It hurts!"

"You like the pain I give you."

Her silence is my answer.

"Only one more finger to go and then you can take my cock in there. You're such a good girl. I'm so proud of you. I've never heard of someone being able to take three fingers the first time." I ease her down to her hands and knees while

still inside her and her face drops to the floor, having zero strength.

“No, I can’t take more,” she whines while also rocking against my cock and my digits.

“I think you can and, if you do, I’ll let you come. You’ve been a naughty little slut tonight. It’s the only way I’ll let you get off.”

She weeps as I thrust into her again, letting her feel how full she is with my cock.

“Okay. One more,” she concedes, nodding as I rut against her cunt, letting her seize around me. I add the fourth finger into her ass. My woman screams like she’s dying, but I know better. She’s right on the edge of an orgasm and she’s desperate for it. “Rian! God, yes!” She claws at the ground as she meets me thrust for thrust. She is so sexy when her only focus is on getting off. “Fuck me harder,” she commands in a raspy voice.

“Your ass or your pussy?”

“Both!”

I finger her ass with the same pace as I ram into her. Her cunt shudders and quakes. She’s so close.

“Let yourself come, baby. Don’t hold back.”

Then, she screams and her orgasm sprays my thighs, the squirt of her release brings on my climax.

“Oh, my god. What was that?” she whimpers as I pound into her, making sure she takes every last drop I give her.

“You squirted, Sorcha. There’s nothing wrong with that. I’ve been trying to make you do that for weeks. Now, I know the trick with you. Your ass is the key.” I smirk down at her

back. I pull my fingers out of her ass and she hisses with discomfort, but other than that, Sorcha is at peace.

# EPILOGUE

I can't sleep again. It's the third night in a row and I'm getting sick of it. It's a mixture of my visions and the lack of Rian in my bed keeping me up at night. I got used to him being here all the time, and now, that my dad is trying to be more present, it changes everything.

I'm scrolling through Netflix on my phone to find something to watch when there's a tap on my window.

I flinch and hug my phone to my chest, immediately thinking about calling Rian. I scold myself. I need to stand on my own. I can't be this needy girl who can't check a suspicious noise without alerting her boyfriend.

*Is he really even your boyfriend, though?* The self-conscious side of me loves to eat at me at the worst opportune times. *You're a booty call at best. You're easy, Sorcha. He knows you'll roll over for him. It's less stressful than finding a random girl at a party.*

Shut up. These words are only trying to intrude now because we haven't had any alone time in awhile. Rian loves me. He said so that morning when he had to leave my bed.

*He hasn't said it since.*

That's... true. He hasn't said the L word since then. He only said it when he thought I was asleep.

I creep to the window and peak around my curtain. I don't see anything. I squint, trying to peer into the darkness, but there's nothing. I turn to go back to bed then the tap sounds again.

Without thinking, I unlock my window and slam it open. Someone is out there fucking with me. "What the—"

Out of nowhere, a small stuffed polar bear peeks over the window sill. "Hello, Sorcha. You look so pretty."

I'm about to scream from someone's idea of a sick joke until Rian pokes his face in the window, a lopsided grin misplaced on his cheeks.

"Rian, goddamn it. You almost gave me a heart attack."

"Well, that wouldn't have been good. I much prefer you alive," he jokes and swings a leg over the sill like it's the simplest task in the world.

"Are you drunk?" I ask as he stands tall, pulling me into his arms.

"Not at all." Then he kisses me with so much passion my knees nearly give out. There's the slightest hint of beer on his lips, but it's very mild.

He's right. He's not drunk, just goofy as hell.

"Who are you and what have you done with the real Rian Walsh?" I tease as he presses a kiss to my cheek, leading his lips up to my temple. He's being so sweet. It's so unlike him. Don't get me wrong. I'm enjoying this affection, but this isn't how he usually is.

“Would you rather I be an arrogant son of a bitch? I can go back to that if you want.” His tone is lighthearted, and it catches me off guard.

Three days. It will be the anniversary of Judy’s death in three days, and this is the time where he usually becomes a hermit, but there’s no sign of it.

He releases his hold on me and holds up the little polar bear.

Rian knows I have a thing for polar bears. I always have, and he’s using that against me.

“For me?” I ask sheepishly.

“Uh huh.” He kisses my forehead as I take the bear and hug it to my chest.

“Thank you.” This is just so sweet. How did he even know I’d be awake? I bet he has cameras in my room to make sure I’m not doing something I’m not supposed to. *Damn control freak.*

“He’s just the messenger,” Rian mutters as he runs a hand through his hair and takes a seat on the edge of my bed.

What the hell is that even supposed to mean?  
“Messenger?”

“Check his hand, babe.”

The polar bear’s hand? That’s a weird place to hide something. I turn the bear in my arms and pry open his little paw to find a folded-up piece of paper. It takes a minute to unfold and I study Rian skeptically while doing it. I gaze down at the paper, revealing a question handwritten in black ink.

*Will you go to prom with me?*

*xoxo*

*Rian*

My heart sputters as I stare at the words. Rian wants to go to prom—wants us to go together—and he came here to ask me?

“Really?” I ask as I look back at him, his normally grumpy exterior back in place.

“Well?” he presses, losing any semblance of patience. He’s waiting for an answer from me and I’m just staring at him in shock.

Tears prick my eyes as I try to control my emotions, failing miserably. “Yes. A million times, yes.”

I’ve heard thousands of stories of over-the-top proposals, and this isn’t over-the-top, but it’s cute and sweet, and by far my favorite. I might be biased, though.

I jump into his arms, throwing my arms around his neck and my legs around his waist.

“That’s my girl,” he smiles, breaks the kiss and pulls me into his arms.

“You really want to go to prom, though? What about my brother?”

“Do you really think Finn is going to step foot into prom willingly?” he asks with a chuckle of disbelief.

“Well, Francine will want to go.”

That sours his mood. “We need to tell him the truth,” Rian veers off the subject.



“I know. Sooner rather than later. If it comes from us, maybe he won’t freak out.”

Rian chuckles, his features contorting with amusement. “Babe, I’m pretty sure he already knows. Plus, I don’t think he’s going to give a shit. Think about it rationally. He knows I’m protective of you, and that I would never let anything happen to you. There’s no one else who will look after you like I will.”

I smile at him. “You’ve proven that ten times over. I doubt I could ever find a guy that would willingly kill half the town just to protect me.”

A laugh falls from his lips as he pulls me closer. “Don’t exaggerate. There’s only been twenty-six people.”

“Only twenty-six?” I gasp in mock offense at his obvious joke. “Well, perhaps you should make it an even thirty before you approach my brother,” I tease, playing along.

He looks me in the eyes, all evidence of this being a joke is gone. “Sorcha, I’ll make it an even thousand if it means keeping you safe.” We have a silent staring contest for a few moments before I feel a pinch on my ass and Rian gives me a wink.

I smack him playfully across the chest. “Aren’t you just a regular Prince Charming? Such chivalry,” I taunt, the witty banter back on his face.

He buries his face in my neck and his warm breath heats my flesh. “There’s nothing I do concerning you that could be considered chivalrous.”

*TO BE CONTINUED*

*IN HOPELESS...*

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