
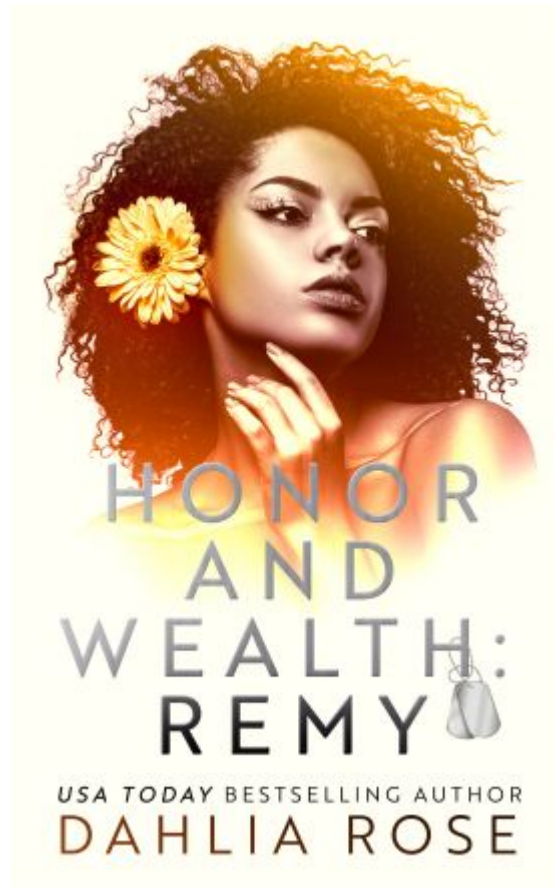




HONOR
AND
WEALTH:
REMY 

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR
DAHLIA ROSE



Honor and Wealth: Remy

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Chapter One

“Where are you going?” Sinead put her hands on her hips.

“I’m going to go find a part time job, so I can help out,” Brian said firmly.

She took him by the shoulders and turned him towards the stairs. “No, you are going to go study for your SATs because those are coming up.”

Brian blew out a sigh and pushed his sandy blond hair away from his eyes. “You really think I’m going to get into college, Mom?”

It always warmed her heart when they used that endearment. Sinead kissed his forehead. “I surely do, and we will get you scholarships and grants when you do. You can work when you’re there but not before, I need you focused. Go study.”

“Yes ma’am,” Brian grumbled but took the stairs two at a time with lanky legs.

“Momma, Devin, and Jeremy won’t let me play on the video game.” Rebecca came running up with the cloth doll that never left her side and her cornrows had beads at the end making a clacking sound as she ran.

Sinead could teach a class about how to get an eight-year-old to sit still and have her hair cornrowed. It took loads of patience and lots of My Little Pony DVDs.

“We’re playing basketball,” Devin said sourly. “She’s going to mess up the game.”

Just then, Mandy came out of the kitchen. “Mom, how much salt is a teaspoon?”

Sinead breathed out. “One fire at a time. Dev, Jeremy... finish out the game, save where you are at and then play Mario with her for a little bit.”

“It would be much easier with more than one console,” Jeremy muttered.

“I’ll get on that,” Sinead said dryly. “Rebecca, go wait... patiently until they play with you, bedtime is at eight. By seven, boys, she needs to be playing.”

“Yes ma’am,” they all said in unison.

Sinead smiled when they took Rebecca’s little hand to take her to the family room. “Now Mandy, let’s go find the measuring spoons.” She walked into the kitchen behind the sixteen-year-old Mandy with her short pixie cut and wide brown eyes.

This was a usual day at Enchanted Arms. It was supposed to be a group home for children, but Sinead ended up moving out of her apartment and becoming a foster mother to the five children in her care. Brian was the oldest and he could see she worried about money. Government financial help didn’t go far at all, and part time virtual assistant work paid by the hour and it was always a hit and miss. She kept the bills paid and food bought, mostly with donations.

She wished she could take in more children to fill some of the empty rooms, but until she was more financially stable, this was her brood and she intended to do right by them. The neighborhood right outside Capital Hill in Seattle wasn’t the greatest. Right now, she needed funding fast because the rent for the three-story building was due and Mr. Benton wasn’t keen on giving her any extensions. Of course, he was open to working it out in trade, and Sinead had wanted to kick him in the junk for the inference.

Then there was Morris, the local self-appointed kingpin who liked to have his fingers dipped in every illegal pie he could. He’d showed up on her doorstep with a duffle bag full of cash, offering it as a donation. The money came with some strings attached, using her kids, and the home she was trying to build for one. And oh yeah, he wanted to taste her goods too. What is it with men and trying to get into my panties?

“I have the spoon,” Mandy said.

Sinead smiled at her. “So, what culinary delights are you making us today?”

Mandy ducked her head. “The strawberry tart from the book. I want to get the dough right.”

“Well, this is a teaspoon.” Sinead showed her the one she would need from the ring. “But here is a little trick, if you make a tight scoop with the palm of your hand. You see that little deep part right in the middle?”

Mandy nodded. “Yeah.”

“That is the amount of a teaspoon,” Sinead explained. “An old family trick my mom taught me.”

“Oh, wow that’s so cool.” Mandy measured the salt carefully. “I’m making two of them because you know the boys will devour one on their own.”

“Thank you for thinking ahead,” Sinead said with dry amusement. “They eat everything that isn’t pinned down.”

“We are really hurting for money this time, aren’t we?” Mandy said suddenly.

“Don’t you worry about that,” Sinead stated firmly. “I will work it out and I promise none of you are going back to group homes, you are mine.”

“I know...” Mandy hesitated. “Morris’s guy, Hakeem asked me out on a date. I told him no. I know from other girls in the neighborhood that’s how he starts to trick them out.”

“When did this happen?” Sinead asked and felt her anger begin to simmer.

“Yesterday, when we got off the school bus,” Mandy said. “Don’t go making a fuss, Mom... it makes it worse. They already give me enough shit, walking home—sorry for cussing—enough trouble.”

“They pick on you guys?” Sinead tried to keep her voice level as she measured out the flour, but she was very protective of her kids.

“They told Brian and Jeremy they were pussies for hiding behind your skirt,” Mandy explained. “One shoved Dev and scared Rebecca by trying to give her candy and take her to the store.”

“It’s okay for telling me.” Sinead’s voice was gentle as she replied, “I’ll make sure you guys are safe coming home, I promise.”

Mandy smiled. “I know you will try and it’s okay, as a group we can take care of each other.”

“I love that fact. Just look how far you all have come since I brought you home.” Sinead laughed. “The first two weeks after you arrived you and Jeremy almost killed each other with the arguing and fighting.”

“He’s still a little turd, but he’s my brother,” Mandy said. “Now, please get out of my kitchen, so I can create.”

Sinead raised an eyebrow. “Your kitchen, is it?”

“I’m getting ready for when I open my first restaurant after I finish culinary school,” Mandy replied.

Sinead laughed. “Well ok, Chef. I will leave you to your artistic yummy treats.”

From the kitchen, she went into her small office, where a stack of bills were waiting for her. She grabbed them and on the top was the invitation to the Seattle Art Gala which was for charity. It wasn’t anything exclusive; the social services probably sent out the invite to every charity in the area who needed help. She didn’t want to do the trained seal routine for the blow hards to turn up their noses at her kids. She had been to a few of these and the promises of help never came.

When she called the business card numbers, she was met with voice mails and no answers. Right now, it was her only option to make sure a roof stayed over their head and food was in their bellies. Sinead tapped the envelope against her chin and sighed. Time to hit the thrift stores to see if she could find a decent dress to wear for the event. It was a few months away, so she had time and they could make do financially, but she couldn’t pass up any opportunity to get help for her kids.

But there was another matter at hand she had to deal with. Pulling her jean jacket off the back of the chair, Sinead left her office and headed towards the front door. She leaned her head into the kitchen door. “Be back in thirty I’m walking to the store on the corner for extra milk and cereal.”

Mandy looked up from her task. “Should I put Rebecca to bed?”

Sinead shook her head. “No, I’ll be back in a few, tell the others if they come looking for me.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

She watched Mandy for a moment as she crinkled the edges of the pie crust to pre-bake them in the oven. Sinead left out the front door and headed down the sidewalk towards the store. The evening was cool with low humidity which was the norm for Seattle. While places like the south where the humidity could start as early as April, summer in Seattle didn’t see as many hot days where the heat was unbearable. The kids would be out of school soon and Sinead hoped she could get them into a summer sleep away camp. If she received some donations maybe it would happen.

In the small market, she grabbed the items she needed and ice cream bars for the kids.

On the way home, the bane of her existence stood on the steps outside the building he frequented. God knows if he lived there or not. When the cops showed, he always happened to ‘not’ be there. Morris was a tall, burly man with no neck; everyone said he used to be a boxer and was on the way up before he got one good hit that finished his career. The cauliflower ear was proof of that. He was stuck in the past though, down to the gold chains around his neck, trying to be LL Cool J from the 80s and it was so not working.

As Sinead walked with the intent of not saying one word to any of them, Morris stepped out in front of her.

He was what Sinead’s mother would have called red bone or high yellow in skin tone. Her mother also said, “Them boys with that red bone in ‘em, they ain’t a lick of good.” Mama

Christie would be glad to know her assessment was right on point when it came to Morris. She did not intend to say a thing until he stepped out in front of her.

“Why good evening, Sinead.”

The way he drawled her name made her skin crawl. “It would be better if you weren’t standing in my path.” Sinead tried to step around him.

Morris took a step to block her. “When are you going to let me take you on a proper date?”

“To where, Burger King or Wendy’s?” Sinead asked sweetly. “Step in front of me again, just know my taser is right in my purse and I don’t mind using it.”

His eyes narrowed. “One of these days, I’m going to cure that smart mouth, Sinead.”

“Morris, you were one grade ahead of me in high school, I wasn’t afraid of you then and I’m not now,” Sinead said. “What I will do, is tell you if you stop my kids again on the street, like Hakeem or any of the other fools you think you have swayed. Y’all will see a side of me, you won’t forget too soon.”

Hakeem covered his mouth and laughed. “Look at her thinking she has threats.”

“What are you now Hakeem,” Sinead fired back. “Twenty, with a sixth-grade education? Stay in your lane, before I recall how they beat your ass in middle school, and you came into my mom’s class to hide. She had to give you a change of clothes because you’d pissed your pants.” When the friends in Morris’s crew started to laugh, Sinead covered her mouth with a wide innocent look. “Oops I let the secret just spill all over.”

“You bitch!” Hakeem snarled and moved to come off the steps toward her.

“Do it and I will start screaming god awful murder until one of these old people who don’t see anything but still knows everything, calls the police,” Sinead snapped and halted his steps. “Stay away from my kids and my house.”

“Don’t you owe some rent on that place?” Morris smiled. “I could own that place outright if I wanted to; better be careful who you insult before you and your... kids, are out on the street.”

“Trust me, I would sell my soul to the devil before I let anything happen to those kids,” Sinead promised and added quickly, “But not to you, you like to play at being the devil when in actuality, you are just a peon lesser demon. Now, step out of my way before the next sound is a scream so loud, it shatters glass windows.”

Morris held up his hands and stepped aside.

Sinead walked by with her head held high. “Don’t mess with my kids anymore, Hakeem!”

The parting words was more than a threat, from now on she would be standing outside with her cell phone as the kids came home. There had to be some sort of accountability for Morris and his people. If Sinead had to call for help or make cell phone recordings for them to stop the harassment, she surely would. The children had been through enough, broken homes, abuse and things that would scar a child.

Enchanted Arms was their home and she was the one person in this world who wanted to protect them, with her life if necessary. Standing up to Morris was a given. Going to the charity event to beg for money to sustain them, Sinead would do without question. For her kids, she would risk anything to ensure they were happy. Sinead walked into the door and heard five voices in the kitchen, with a smile she walked through the doorway to see Brian, Devin, Jeremy and Rebecca sitting at the table, while Mandy stood with oven mitts and watched the timer.

“A watch pot never boils,” Sinead said and put the bag on the table.

Automatically, Jeremy got up to put the items in the fridge and on the shelves. “Ice cream bars, yeah!”

Brian held out his hand. “Pass them over here.”

Mandy held up an oven mitt. “Hey, I thought you were waiting for the tart?”

He shrugged and grinned. “I can have both, I’m a growing boy.”

“If he’s having both, so am I,” Dev announced.

“Me too,” Rebecca popped her thumb out long enough to answer.

“Okay, okay, silence tribe!” Sinead called out. “It’s Friday, why not splurge? Ice cream and strawberry tarts it is.”

“Can I stay up and watch TV until nine?” Rebecca looked up with wide brown eyes at her and held up nine fingers. The scar on her lips from the cleft pallet surgery was barely visible anymore.

“How about a movie night?” Sinead suggested. “I think we still have that new Pets DVD to watch.”

“Aw man, that is such a kiddie movie, can we watch Aliens or something?” Brian grumbled.

“You want Rebecca screaming down the house from nightmares?” Mandy asked dryly. “I share a room with her, so no to that.”

“Brian, you will be fine for two hours,” Sinead said. “Get the living room set up and we’ll bring in your dish.”

In the end, with the extra blankets from the linen closet, pillows on carpets, the girls on the couch and the boys strewn across the floor...They all watched the movie and for all his grumbling, Brian laughed his butt off at the antics on the TV screen.

Sinead looked at them all, eating Mandy’s tarts that turned out amazing and the ice cream all over Rebecca’s face.

This was what it was all about...family. Something she didn’t really have in her life. Sinead wanted so badly to give to them.

Saturdays meant cooking class for Mandy, who wanted to take part in one of the teen cooking shows on the Food

Network channel. Jeremy and Devin had their gaming competitions at the school since they both wanted to work in graphic design and create video games for a living. Luckily, the local community college offered free weekend programs for under privileged kids that the duo took to like fishes to water.

Rebecca ran errands with her, happy to be in the car with her doll and tasting all the samples when they went shopping. In the afternoon around three, she piled everyone in the family automobile or car and went to Brian's basketball game, since the season started about two weeks ago. Saturdays were busy but she wouldn't have it any other way.

The bleachers were packed. This one of the first games of the season and with their school's biggest rivals, Bainbridge Prep. Of course, they were all uppity... walking in with pristine white jerseys with the black and gold school colors and letterman jackets. Sinead looked at them skeptically, she could swear some of them were ringers from the NBA they were so tall. Behind the team was an entourage that could rival any music awards. Must be nice, Sinead thought.

She doubted anyone in that group with the fantastic blazers and the supporters wearing Rolexes ever missed a day of food in their lives. Putting the thoughts out of her head, she focused on her Brian and his team. They had heart and even the underdog could win the day, so Sinead and the rest of her horde cheered loudly with the fans rooting for Collingsworth High School Supporters. Unfortunately, they lost seventy-three to seventy and that was because of a bad call by the referee in her opinion. Her team gave their opposition a run for their money and Brian scored the highest in the game.

He had a sense of pride about that, one that made his chest puff up when the other kids congratulated him after he came out of the locker room. She saw him stare longingly at his friends and their families who were going for pizza after the game. She knew he wouldn't ask, thinking about their very tight budget. They deserve a treat, Sinead thought firmly, she would make it up by taking on extra work online if she had to.

“Hey guys, let’s go for pizza this week with everyone,” she suggested and they stopped in their tracks.

“For real, real?” Brian asked his face instantly lighting up.

“Yeah why not, we had a killer Saturday,” Sinead answered.

“Then can I ride with Izzie and Gabe?” Brian asked. “Their mom said I could, she offered to take me, but I didn’t want the rest of this gang to feel bad.”

“Go catch up to them before they leave,” Sinead ruffled his hair lovingly even though she had to stand on tip-toe to do so.

Everyone else in her merry band of chaos was chattering away as they got into the car and buckled their seatbelts.

The car wouldn’t start.... Sinead grimaced. “Please not now.”

The engine whined and sputtered but didn’t turn over into a smooth sound.

“Mom?” Jeremy said.

“Don’t worry yet,” Sinead tried to keep her voice bright. “Maybe it’s just a loose wire, I hit one of those speedbumps pretty good getting here. I’ll check under the hood.”

Sinead flashed them a bright smile to belie the absolute dread she was feeling. Using the lever in the car she popped the hood, Sinead got out from behind the driver’s seat. Lifting the hood of the old car, she looked at every piece of wire and things that she completely did not understand. She wiggled a wire and tightened some knob things and prayed the car would start.

“Looks like you’re having some problems.”

A deep voice made her look around and up into the eyes of a man with a grin on his face. He was wearing the other school’s colors of course and she noted everything he wore looked like it just came off the rack.

“Yeah it won’t start,” Sinead said.

“Is it completely dead or does it make a noise when you turn the key?” he asked.

“Makes a noise like it wants to start and then it goes nowhere and whines,” Sinead answered.

He took off his coat. “Let me take a look.”

“Are you sure, I don’t want you to get your clothes dirty,” she said doubtfully. “Do you know anything about engines?”

He leaned over the car as he spoke. “I’ve been around an engine or two.”

The letterman jacket he wore had the scent of his cologne and Sinead could appreciate the subtleness while she held it. Sandalwood and an earthy spice that reminded her of clove. He looked familiar while Devin and Jeremy looked downright excited in the back of the car. They kept signaling to her every time she glanced their way. Sinead had no clue what they were trying to say.

“What?” She mouthed to them only to have two teen boys roll their eyes in exasperation.

“Ah there’s problem, you have a crack in the hose,” he said, and Sinead focused on him again. “I’ll be right back.”

“But...” the words fell away because he was already across the parking lot.

Their car savior was back in a minute carrying some kind of tape and in a jiffy he had her try the engine. On the second try it revved to life and the children inside cheered.

“Oh thank you. You saved our butts here,” Sinead said getting out of the car. “Oh! Your hands are dirty, let me get you some wet wipes.”

“It wasn’t a problem to help, but that tape is only a bandage. You’re going to need a new hose,” he said.

“Just one more thing on my never-ending list,” she muttered while reaching into her everything bag and pulling out a packet so he could take a few from the pullout lid. She watched as he wiped his hands and then tossed the wipes in

the trash close by. “Well thank you again, Mr...? I don’t even know your name.”

“Durant,” he said holding out his hand. “Remy Durant, your team did great today.”

“The one scoring all the points is my son, Brian,” Sinead said proudly.

Remy Durant frowned. “But he’s white.”

Sinead laughed. “Isn’t he though? He’s my foster, soon to be adopted, son and we are running late to meet everyone at the pizza parlor.”

“Don’t let me keep you,” he smiled. “But you never told me your name.”

“Sinead Christie,” she shook his hand. “Thanks again.”

Remy stepped back from the car so she could get in before speaking. “Maybe I’ll see you around sometime.”

She smiled up at him from the rolled down window. “Somehow I don’t think we run in the same circles Mr. Durant. Have a great day and we appreciate the help.”

She saw him watching her in the rearview mirror as she pulled slowly out of the community center parking lot.

“Mom that was Remy Durant,” Jeremy said reverently. “He hangs out with ballers and footballs players. He was at the music awards last week when we watched it. How did you not recognize him?”

“I’m not good with faces,” Sinead said with a laugh. “It was nice of him to stop and check the engine for us even though he’s so famous.”

“You are so weird mom... so weird,” Devin said. “At least you didn’t hyperventilate like Mandy was.”

“I did not!” Mandy said hotly.

“Okay let’s not start teasing each other,” Sinead cut off the trouble that was brewing. “How about we go celebrate your brother’s great day and enjoy pizza?”

That led to a chorus of cheers and at the parlor they all regaled Brian with what happened. They teased Sinead about not knowing who Remy Durant was. Sinead didn't have time to worry about the rich guy who fixed their car. The trip to the pizza parlor with ice cream and arcade money would be over a hundred dollars less than she had before and had to make up. The hose was a new element that needed to be fixed because any mechanic would charge for his time and when they saw a woman, that usually meant double the price.

Rebecca laughed and Sinead was in the moment once more. Brian and his friends were joking and teasing, of course Jeremy and Devin were at the arcade games. Mandy saw some girls she knew, and Rebecca was just happy to be out in the midst of all the people, sounds and lights. She couldn't let them want for anything. One way or another she would get what she needed to keep their household going and the kids safe.



THIS WOULD BE HIS LAST deployment, Remy thought one more time as he wiped the sweat off his forehead and left more grime than was there before. In the last eight months, he'd had sand in places good Christian folks didn't want to hear about. Bouncing along in the Humvee, as the second in a convoy headed back to the FOB, was just another day in Afghanistan. More than once, he wondered, how the day could be so long and hot and the nights could be so cold in a desert with hot sand as far as the eyes could see. He couldn't wait to be home, an actual bed for once and a beer so cold there was ice on the outside of the bottle. He wanted to grill a burger, big fat and juicy, medium well, and the truffle fries Fabiola had taught him to make...

"Sarge, you daydreaming again?" The amused voice next to him asked just as a huge rock in the road jarred the Humvee. It was the voice of Ramirez, his driver and a good friend.

This was their third deployment together and Remy loved the Puerto Rican man like they'd come from the same womb.

Remy was God father to this two daughters, and Linda was expecting the first boy.

“He’s got that wistful look on his face,” Jones said from behind them. “What food was it this time, Sarge?”

“Juicy ass steak,” Remy called out over the sound of the engines. “With parmesan cheese truffle fries.”

“What’s truffle fries?” Jones asked.

“It’s like an oil they get from these mushrooms that they train dogs to sniff out,” Remy explained. “These big steak fries with a few drops of that oil and the cheese. Your taste buds die and go to heaven when you eat them”

“In other words, rich people food; ain’t nothing like that in the hood,” Jones said with a laugh.

Remy looked around in shock. “Jones, you’re white and from Malibu. What hood are you talking about?”

“Hey, I live in the bad part of Malibu,” Jones defended with a smile. “We only got one Starbucks and I have to drive four blocks for hot yoga.”

“What exactly is hot yoga; hot girls sweating?” Ramirez asked.

Remy laughed. “I’m the rich guy and he’s talking about hot yoga, just remember that.”

The explosion rocked them, cutting off any more of their banter. It flipped the Humvee with the power of it, Through the ringing in his ears and blurred vision, Remy could see that the truck in front of them had exploded from an RPG. Soldiers were trying to scramble from the cab before another hit could happen.

The ping of bullets hitting the underside of his own disabled vehicle brought him back to reality. Remy called out. “Ramirez, Jones, are y’all good?”

Ramirez coughed. “Alive, Sarge, but my leg is pinned and—chest tight—can’t take a good breath.”

This told Remy that his driver had either a collapsed lung or puncture. “Jones, sound off... Jones!” Remy yelled.

If it weren't for the metal plate under the Humvee, they would be riddled with bullets. But if they used an RPG like the truck, he and his brothers in arms would be dead. They had to get out of here.

Jones was in the gunner chair, manning the 50 Cal mounted on the upper armored vehicle.

Remy twisted and turned until he could see the man behind them and understood why he couldn't answer. When the truck flipped, his neck had taken the brunt of the hit. The twisted angle of his neck and the blank staring eyes told Remy what he didn't want to know....Jones was dead.

“Sarge, my leg, I can feel the blood pumping out of it,” Ramirez gasped. “Applying pressure ain't doing much good!”

With his ears ringing and pain in the back of his neck and head, Remy fished out the tourniquet from the front of the vehicle's side pockets and moved as best he could to Ramirez's leg, wedged under the bent dash. He hoped to God, one of the other trucks in the convoy called for help. At least, the gunfire had stopped.

“This is going to hurt like a son of a bitch,” Remy warned his friend. “You can punch me after.”

“Just promise you won't let me die in here,” Ramirez begged. “Help me get home to my girls and my new baby.”

Remy gripped his hand tight. “You are going home. I'm buying you a damn mansion, if you don't give up.”

Ramirez gave a short laugh. “Stop throwing your money at me. I'm not easy.” His laugh was broken off with a cry when Remy pulled the tourniquet tight, cutting off the blood flow.

Looking at the leg, he could see bone and it was obvious, Ramirez would be losing that leg. Remy kicked the front windshield out and just as he got it free, another explosion rocked the ground around him...

...This was when he woke up. He always did with that second boom. His body drenched in sweat with the sheets soaked as he looked around at the shadows in the corners of his bedroom. He tried to orient himself to being in the present and not the dreams that plagued him. He swung his feet off the bed with a heavy sigh and moved to the bathroom. Remy didn't even bother to turn on the lights, and washed his face with the light from the dim rays of moonlight streaming through the blinds.

There was no way he would be getting back to sleep tonight and while he would be going to work, Remy decided to go down to the gym and work out. Maybe he could push his body into exhaustion. At three am, he could probably sleep till nine and push back the first meeting with the Hong Kong associate till eleven.

Yeah, a quick work out on the treadmill, then throw some punches at the heavy bag then a hot shower. From there, Remy would start working in the home office before heading into Durant Technologies. While he changed into a pair of sweats and a thin cotton back t-shirt, he thought about Ramirez, Jones and so many other names.

On the treadmill, he heard the repetitious beat of his footfalls over the sound of the instruction on the video guided work out. He should check in on some of his guys, see if they need anything or if their families... Some didn't make it home alive. Haunted, that was what it was, the dreams changed, new scenery, and different people but it always ended the same. A firefight...losing a life, watching families mourn.

Half the time, he wished someone were next to him, to chase away the nightmares. Half the time, he wondered if he deserved that kind of happiness when others had lost so much. Other times, Remy vowed that no one would ever see him gasping for air when the night-terrors plagued him. A Durant was made of steel and showed no fear, at least that was what his father said. That man was another total mindfuck.

Being one of the only black billionaire families had gone to his father's head. He and Remy were always at war about his perceptions, up til the day he died. After his workout,

Remy took a shower and dried off his smooth ebony skin. By seven thirty in the morning, he was striding through the lobby of Durant Technologies heading to the CEO office. This was once his father's helm, now after the old man's death, Remy had restructured the entire company.

Bought out the shares of his cronies and put them into retirement pasture. He added more young talent, broached into computer and microchip areas, taking some good business away from Silicon Valley. Business was good, but why did it feel like he was just existing from day to day?

Nothing to live for and nothing to lose.

“Good morning, Remington.” His personal assistant stood when he came off the elevator and came around the corner of the top floor.

Dorothy or as he called her Dot was his right hand, in her fifties, he'd pulled her from being the temp when he saw she had more of a head for business than just making coffee and typing up papers. She was precise and efficient, and she never used his nickname. His office and conference rooms were all that was up here.

There was no vying for VP or corner offices with the good lighting and views. He was the Alpha, so the whole bow, bend, and scrape to climb the ladder had become an old concept. Managers worked alongside whatever department they were in charge of. And if there was an issue, no chain of command for disputes happened. He was the chain and it came to him first.

“Morning Dot, cappuccino machine working yet?” Remy asked with a grin.

“They fixed it this morning.” Dot with her tight bun and pinstripe pants suit followed him. “The video conference is set up with Hong Kong to discuss the manufacturing of the new Blaze microchip and robotics production. You have a stack of mail on your desk and on the very top is the Seattle art Gala invitation. I went ahead and sent in the RSVP for you. It's tomorrow night, I asked for your grey tux to be sent to the house tomorrow morning at ten. Please don't forget.”

“Do I have to go?” Remy asked. “Being around those over-indulgent blowhards, gives me hives.”

“Take Duncan with you; he will keep you company.” Dot smiled and fixed her glasses. “Speaking of which, he will be up here in about an hour looking for coffee and muffins, also to discuss the acquisition of that new security tech you both are so happy about.”

“Dot, if you understood the military application for this and helping soldiers to be able to survive deployments, you would be just as excited as I am,” Remy explained. “If we had something like that when.... Well, it’s important. Until we can bring home all our soldiers in one piece to their families, I won’t stop finding ways to protect them.”

Dot patted his shoulder. “I know Remington. I always wondered how you turned out so well, with a father like you had.”

He kissed her temple. “Kindness needs a soul to take root in. That man had none.”

“Get to work,” Dot said fondly. “One cannot run a fortune five hundred company from the hallway, talking to me.”

“Right away, ma’am.” Remy gave her a smart salute.

His office was cool, just how he liked it when he stepped past the polished black doors. Being deployed in areas where it was over one hundred and twelve degrees in the shade, taught a man how to appreciate the air conditioning to be set on sixty-six and cool. His desk was mahogany with a marble top. Remy took off his jacket throwing it over the back before sitting down and pressed the on button to his computer system.

Remy didn’t just push papers. He liked to put that college degree to good use. He designed as well as tested his own technology. He wanted to create a new kind of prosthetic for amputees, one that revolutionized their way of living. Right now, it was more of a full range of motion with less pain and complication at the removal site. But one day, he hoped to have a computer chip and robotics to give them sensation once

more. Forgetting the stack of mail or the mailbox icon on his computer, Remy opened his program and began working.

The time went by until Duncan walked through the double doors of his office. “You are on Dot’s shit list.” Duncan walked casually inside and flopped into the chair across from him. “You aren’t answering emails and thus, they are calling her desk.”

“Who’s calling her desk?” Remy asked, barely glancing his way.

“Rob from R and D is freaking out, because the new girl blew up some piece of equipment,” Duncan used his fingers to count off. “Richard is calling about some hotel opening, you seemed to have forgotten. And a few other ankle biters that annoy her more than anything else.”

Remy grinned as he looked from his computer to the tablet where he used the sleek stylus to sketch. “Did she handle it with the finesse that is only known to our Dot?”

“She told Rob we’re not firing her. It’s a piece of equipment to be used, not wiped down by janitors. Conversation seemed pretty handled.” Duncan chuckled. “But she did the neck strangle thing for me to pass on to you.”

Remy laughed and finally focused on his best friend and head of security. You wanted to see a Scotsman in real life... it would be Duncan Thomson. His hair looked redder than sandy blond, but he kept it in a low military cut, with just enough, so he could run his hand over after a shampoo. He matched Remy in height but was broader across the shoulders. Remy always teased him that it was from tossing trees for fun, only to be reminded that they were called cabers and it was an actual sport.

“I hear that you’re my date for some fancy shindig tomorrow night,” Remy said.

Duncan pulled out his phone and looked at the screen while replying, “Someone has to keep you out of trouble, and I do look dashing in a tux.”

“More like that boxer in the bad painting of the dogs playing poker,” Remy answered. “How much of a flaying do you think we would get from Dot if we skipped it and went to Vegas for the weekend?”

Duncan held his hands up. “No sir, you try that on your own. I don’t wanna be on Dot’s bad side.”

“Come on, live dangerously,” Remy begged. “You know what’s going to happen. They’re all handing out checks for stupid shit like a new clubhouse for the Hampton’s girl scouts or four wheeling support for the housewives of Seattle bridge club. They don’t deal with real matters, inner city kids that deserve an education or a damn trip outside to see an actual body of water and grass, or veteran causes, because none of them made the cut. Then I’m supposed to write a big check for something I don’t believe in?”

Duncan raised a finger. “First thing, those aren’t real organizations. At least, I hope not and think they’re not. Second, since your last strongly worded letter to the chairman of the Seattle gala, I think he probably sent out the invite to some actual deserving charities.”

“I hope so.” Remy sighed and rubbed his temples. “Thinking about it, already gives me a headache.”

“Well, if he knows what’s good for him, he did,” Duncan said jovially. “I would be entertained by seeing you swing him like a piñata if he invites you to another sham charity to pick your pockets.”

Remy looked at Duncan curiously. “Did I actually say that?”

Duncan nodded. “Yeah, you did.”

“Man, I need to be more subtle,” he murmured.

“You can be as subtle as a tank.” Duncan rolled his chair around, so he could see the large computer screen on the far left of the desk. “Bring up the file I sent you from the Moore facility. They’re asking a pretty penny for the sale, but it looks promising. The radar capabilities to detect weapons and hidden insurgent base camps are phenomenal.”

This focused Remy's attention, and soon they were engrossed in schematics and sleeker radar system designs. Until tomorrow, he would focus on work and maybe he could exhaust himself to the point that his mind was just a blank slate, so he could rest. There was never enough he could do and no amount of money he could throw at the problem to assuage his guilt. They always said that combat was the worst part of being in the military. They were wrong, it was the survivor's guilt that ate at your soul when you made it home while others did not.



Chapter Two

He spotted her across a roomful of people, looking as out of place and uncomfortable as he felt. Remy stared at the woman he put at being around twenty-eight, with curves in all the right places. Her dress was a zig-zag black and white cocktail dress. He recognized the style as vintage mod; she was definitely giving off an Audrey Hepburn feel. All that hair was pinned up to expose her neck and her bare arms since the dress had no sleeves. Then her legs, that ebony skin the color of teak, seemed to go on forever. She stood out in the middle of all the diamonds and fancy dresses the other women wore.

The Four Seasons, in downtown Seattle, hosted the event outside Pike's Place market was closed if not, Remy would be tempted to escape. Remy looked around at the sheer, gossamer drapes that hung from the floor to ceiling. The gala coordinators of course, brought in their own lighting, and decorations. Champagne flowed, as loud laughter and light music filled the air while guests sparkled and shined with new diamonds and old money.

But she did not fit in, she was an outsider to everyone here and they knew it. This one... she sipped lightly from a glass and looked around. Why did she look so familiar? One too many men approached her and her smile would brighten as she talked. Until a hand went to her shoulder or rested a little too low on her hips when they asked her to dance. The lecherous bastards saw one thing and she guessed it too. Her kilowatt smile would fade quickly, and a fire of anger would spark in those wide, soft brown eyes.

Remy kept hoping she would slap the taste of out of one of their mouths. Let's see how that fine single malt scotch tasted afterward. A chuckle escaped Remy as he took a sip from his glass. Here's to hoping.

"You seem very interested in something or someone, all of a sudden." Duncan came up beside him and followed his line of sight. "She's a new face."

“Those old perverts are like vultures around her,” Remy said. “I’m watching her deflect them like a ninja blocking hands left and right. I think I know her from somewhere.”

“If she’s here to pitch for charity, they’re looking like they want more than to give her a check,” Duncan agreed.

Remy watched one man run his hand from her shoulder to wrist and that was enough for him. He handed his glass to Duncan and walked away.

“Go get ‘em,” Duncan called out with a laugh.

Remy shook his head. Duncan didn’t give a hoot who looked at him or thought what. That had been how they’d become fast friends. While everyone else was trying to kiss his ass, Duncan was trying to plant him on it. Their first meeting was at a fight in Vegas, and they almost ended up fighting themselves. But afterward, they found out that they were both military; it gave them common ground and their friendship began.

He could hear her speaking as they approached.

“The kids at my home have been through so much but they...” She deftly stepped away from his hand, but the man was persistent. “They are intelligent, make amazing grades... Please stop touching me.”

“But you’re telling me about the children,” the older man said to the woman who was definitely not interested in the attention. “My god, your skin is like silk, how do you get it like that?”

“Kenneth Pierce, you do know inappropriate touching is wrong; should I get Taylor to smack your hand?” Remy asked smoothly. “Being sixty years old, with a wife half your age, I would think you were occupied enough.”

Kenneth’s face turned red. “Now see here, Remy.”

“Mr. Durant to you. I am not my father and we are not friends.” Remy glanced at her as she sipped her drink and watched them curiously. “I’m sure she isn’t here to be manhandled by you, so be on your way.”

“One of these days...” Kenneth muttered.

“What?” Remy’s voice chilled. “Finish the sentence.”

Kenneth’s face turned red. “Nothing at all Mr. Durant, have a good evening.”

Remy turned and held out his hand to the woman. “Remy Durant.”

“I know who you are Mr. Gentleman’s magazine cover,” she took his hand and shook it. “Sinead Christie, you fixed my car once.”

His memory sparked to life. “About four months ago, the basketball thing.”

“Yes, and we did eventually get a new hose,” She answered.

“And what charity do you represent, Ms. Christie?” Remy asked.

“You assume I’m not married.” She raised an eyebrow at him.

“No ring,” he countered.

“I could be one of these progressive women who don’t need to show off her relationship,” she replied.

Remy grinned. “Touché, so are you a Mrs.?”

“I am not, are you like these assholes that think I’m here for a romp in the hay for some money?” Sinead asked bluntly.

“Not at all. Scout’s honor,” Remy said smoothly.

“I doubt very much that you ever were a scout,” she answered.

Remy held up his fingers. “Went all the way up to eagle and I’m a military man, so you can definitely trust me.”

“So that’s where you know the tricks to fix engines huh?” A laugh escaped her. “I dated a marine, so I definitely know that’s not true about all military men making good boy scouts.”

He wove her hand into the crook of his arm and led her to the bar. “See there’s where you went wrong. You went with a jarhead who thinks crayons are snacks.”

“And the Marine, Army rivalry is still strong I see,” she said amused.

“It’s like the Army versus Navy football game, the contention will go on forever.” Remy handed her glass of champagne. “So, tell me about your charity.”

“I run Enchanted Arms. It’s supposed to be a group home, but it just became home to my foster kids and me. You saw my kids in the car and Brian the one playing basketball,” Sinead said. “I work and still try to run it, but we have most bills due, and rent with not much governmental assistance. I know people may think it’s easy to send them back to another group home, but they are my kids. I can’t let the system fail them like everyone else has. They come from broken homes, abuse and the only stability they have is me. I won’t let them down.”

“If someone, or me gives you this money, what will you do with it?” Remy queried. Yes, he was intrigued by such a young woman taking on the role of mother to needy children.

“Pay the back rent for one and for at least a year ahead, so the landlord can’t bother us,” she answered easily. “Renovate the basement and the lot at the back, so they have more room to spread out. It’s a paved lot and I don’t like them playing in the front of the building, because it’s not a great neighborhood, especially for my teens.” Sinead paused and took a breath, as she seemed to try to slow her words. “We live right off Capitol Hill, where it goes from suburbia to poverty in a few steps. But it’s all we can afford. Books and maybe a van, so we can drive to the lake. I want to give them a taste of the world and show them, they can live, dream and become whatever they want.

“What are your kids names?” Remy had no doubt she could name them all.

“Brian is seventeen, super smart and wants to be an engineer. I am hoping that his SAT scores can get him a scholarship into CalTech where he wants to go. I don’t want

him to depend on a sports scholarship. Mandy is fifteen, and she is our resident cook that will try any recipe, you wouldn't believe how she's skilled at it. Jeremy is sixteen. He is protective and loving, so kind and loves animals." She smiled as she talked about each of them, "Devin is fifteen as well and loves video games. Then, the last is Rebecca and she is eight. The baby who loves to color rainbows, and thinks her doll Lulu, is actually a fairy. She is never without it and it's the first thing she grabs after school."

Remy could easily see the sparkle of love in her eyes for these kids. "Why did you take in these children?"

Sinead took a sip of her drink. "Not everyone is born with all the luxuries of the world handed to them. Like me, those kids needed someone and I'm it. I saved to buy them the oldest version of a gaming system because that was all I afford. They treasure it, clean it, use that compressed air to keep it in perfect condition. They protect and look out for each other; they are more than just foster kids, we are family."

Remy saw in her the same passion he'd felt for his own projects that could help veterans. But he could also sense her judgement about the money she had to ask for. He was nothing like the people in this room and the urge to show her that was great. "My father was like Kenneth over there and he wasn't the nicest man to me," Remy told her. "See... all these people around us, to them I am the outsider because I won't fall for the bullshit they spew. I do what I want. I blur the lines, and they hate me for it. I'm not like them. I live my life despite them. While I may have been born with more money than some, I know how parents can fuck up a child with or without coins in their pocket. Sometimes that makes it worse."

"I'm sorry if I offended you," she said gently. "That was not my intent."

"You didn't," he assured her. "Have you eaten from the buffet as yet?"

She shook her head. "In all honesty, I was scared to move, in case someone happened to grab my ass or touch me again. They are all so touchy... the men and the women."

He leaned his head down to her ear. “Any of them would take you to bed. They are that freaky in these scenes. Come on, let’s get food, we can’t have you surviving on champagne all night.”

“Not when they look at me like I’m on the menu.” She smiled. “Even if you don’t want to support my cause, I at least thank you for saving me back there.”

“The night is young. You may need to save me.” Remy smiled.

“Do you have many reasons to be saved?” Sinead asked.

“I’m old money and a bachelor, that’s like chum in the water at events like this,” he replied.

“So, tell me about the Riviera; pictures with that actress with the micro bikini,” Sinead teased as she picked up a plate and added the shrimp from the buffet. “It was all over the entertainment news slots.”

“That was an inopportune picture taken at the wrong time.” Remy chuckled and followed her with a second plate. She didn’t have much on her plate at all. “She was about to fall out the door and I was helping her.”

Sinead laughed. “Isn’t that how it always happens? Those darn pictures that are taken just as you save a poor helpless female.”

Remy let his own laughter escape. He liked talking to her. “For me it is. This is why I stay home and hide in my house.”

“A house is one of those things with three bedrooms and one bath. What you live in, sir is a mansion,” she pointed out.

“It’s a house,” he replied as they found a seat.

As she sat, he tried not to notice how she bent her elegant legs and crossed her. Mercy, those legs. .

“How many bedrooms?” Sinead bit into a small puff of flaky dough. “Try this one, it has lobster in it.”

“Eight bedrooms, seven bathrooms, indoor and outdoor pool, guest house where my security guy lives, and a gourmet

kitchen,” Remy answered before plucking the other half from her fingers and popping into his mouth.

“Mansion,” she stated simply. “And stop stealing my food. You have your own plate. You don’t know, this might be my first meal of the day.”

“Hey, I maybe hungry too,” Remy countered.

“Not with a gourmet kitchen you’re not.” She smiled around the mini quiche she was biting into. “Does your chef live in house?”

“I don’t have an actual staff. A service comes into clean, and Sue my housekeeper comes in twice a week,” Remy admitted. “The kitchen is for me. I like to cook.”

Sinead’s eyes widened. “You are a man of many surprises.”

“Is that good or bad?” Remy posed the question.

She smiled. “I’ll let you know.”

Remy enjoyed their chatting, listening to her talk about the kids in her care and watching her eyes light up with pride at all their accomplishments. Sinead hinted at some of the various abuses or lack of care they had all dealt with and left him wanting to do more than just give her a check. Oh yes, he would be doing that as well but not through this farce of a charity.

“Hey, I need to use the little girl’s room.” She stood to excuse herself.

“I’ll watch your things,” Remy offered. “Don’t worry, I won’t snoop or steal a thing.”

“There’s nothing much in there except for two peppermints and my license to drive a very beat up Honda.” Sinead laughed. “The valet looked like he was going to die while getting into it.”

Remy laughed. “Well, I have no problem watching your purse and wrap, go ahead I’ll be right here.”

“Thank you,” she said and walked away smiling at Duncan as he walked towards Remy.

“What’s her charity?” Duncan sat the table on the other side of Remy.

“She has a foster home for five kids and she needed help,” Remy answered easily. “I’m going to help her. Out of all these fools here, she’s genuine.”

“I like her,” Duncan said.

“You haven’t said one word to her,” Remy pointed out.

“She talks with passion and she caught your attention.” Duncan took a sip of his drink. “The Scotsman senses no bad vibes.”

“I’m glad to hear it.” Remy took out his check book and wrote quickly before slipping the paper into her purse. “Think two hundred thousand is enough to start?”

“To start?” Duncan asked. “What else are you planning there, good buddy?”

“We are going to be fairy godfathers to a bunch of kids.” Remy grinned.

“I think children, they give me hives.” Duncan sat back.

Remy clapped him on the back. “We’ll soon be finding out.”

“Check the door out; we have trouble,” Duncan murmured.

Remy looked towards the door where two men in suits were blocking Sinead from entering the ballroom again. She pointed to the table where he was and made a hand motion that he could only assume meant her purse.

The security detail still wouldn’t let her pass.

Remy stood then took her purse and wrap, striding quickly towards her with Duncan on his heels. “What’s the problem?” Remy snapped.

“Nothing to worry about Mr. Durant. We just have someone trying to con her way into the event,” one of the

security men informed him.

“Amazing enough since I have her purse, I wonder how that happened?” Remy said dryly. “She’s an invited guest.”

“I don’t see how.” Rhonda Hopkins, the event coordinator walked up to the little gathering. “I told Charlene, only to the charities on the list. I have never seen her at the meetings or on the board.”

“My invitation came through social services, I think,” Sinead said. “I thought this was for all deserving charities in Seattle. That’s what the website says and let me be clear. I did not scam an invite from anyone, it came in the mail.”

“I told Charlene specifically…” Rhonda in her glittering dark blue dress stopped speaking when Remy pinned her with a dark gaze.

“So, back to the same old playbook, the charities you feel deserve to shove their hands in our pockets,” Remy snapped.

Rhonda Hopkins, who had to be on the bad end of fifty, tilted her head haughtily. “Durant money doesn’t mean you get to dictate my events.”

“You are absolutely right.” Remy’s tone was mild. “Take my name off any of your charity or donation lists. I will no longer be a contributor or sponsor for anything that has to do with the Hopkin’s organization. Make a note Duncan.”

“Noted,” Duncan said smoothly.

“Now, don’t be hasty.” Rhonda gave a strained laugh when he called her bluff. “This was obviously a mistake and we should talk with cooler heads.”

“My head is frosty clear at this point,” Remy answered. “This brings to an end any relationship the Durant name has to do with yours.”

“But you sponsor multiple… that is millions that would be lost…” Rhonda couldn’t seem to finish the overwhelming thought.

“Isn’t it though?” Remy murmured. “Rhonda, this elitist bullshit puts money in the pockets of your friends. Nothing

more. Then you block actual deserving people who really need help. I won't be funneling money into your, and I use this word loosely... charity. Ms. Christie, may we escort you to your car?"

"Thank you." Sinead slipped her hand through the crook of his arm that he'd extended her way. "Good evening to you all."

They left Rhonda opening and closing her mouth like a fish out of water and stepped into the lobby of the hotel.

"That was truly fun," Sinead said with a laugh. "I can at least say, I got to be a part of putting a truly awful, rich person in their place."

"I'm glad I could help with that." Remy smiled down at her. "Let's get your car and get you home."

"I'll head out to valet," Duncan offered and moved ahead of them.

"I can't tell you what to do with your money, but there might be some decent people that need help in that room, even if she tries to funnel them away. Maybe you should rethink cutting ties," Sinead suggested.

"I can figure that out without Rhonda trying to tack on her luxury tax," he told her.

They waited for her car and when it arrived, Remy could see she was right, the car had to be about twenty years old and in need of a paint job or well... retirement. Still, he opened the door for her like it was a sleek limo and helped her inside.

"I'll be seeing you again." Remy leaned on his elbow at the opened driver's side window.

"That sounds ominous." Sinead laughed.

"Trust me, not to you," he promised. "I hope your night ends with a smile."

"It already has."

His heart picked up pace when she graced him with a wide beaming smile before she pulled away from the hotel.

Back on the sidewalk next to Duncan, they both watched the car go around the corner and out of sight.

“Oh, you’re not interested at all,” Duncan said dryly.

“I see something in her,” Remy said still staring down the street at where her cart turned. “What are your plans on Monday?”

“Somehow, I think they just changed,” Duncan answered.

Remy laughed; he couldn’t help it. Meeting Sinead was a breath of fresh air in a life where he was searching for something more. Seeing her again, wouldn’t be a bad thing at all. He had a plan to change her life and that of the children she loved. Hell, it had been a good idea to come out here after all. I’ll need to thank Dot.



SINEAD STARED AT THE check in her hand while sitting cross-legged in her bed. She still couldn’t believe it. Two hundred thousand dollars! It was more zeros than she had ever seen in her life. Imagine coming home and just dropping your bag on the chair in your room, until the next night when you knew you would need your license, the debit card, and the few dollars. Then, you open your purse and see a check scrawled out in elegant penmanship. Sinead was in shock, then she screamed and danced around a little bit.

The commotion caused the kids from Brian to Rebecca to pile into her room.

“Mom you okay?” Brian asked looking around. He came with his prized baseball bat in case there was trouble.

“Look what was in my bag, look!” She wagged the check madly and the kids couldn’t tell what it was.

“A bill?” Mandy asked slowly. “A parking ticket?”

“No.” Tears settled in her eyes. “A check. Look at the amount. Babies we don’t have to worry anymore.”

“Holy shit!” Brian exclaimed and quickly added. “Sorry, Mom.”

“Is that like this much?” Rebecca held up all ten fingers.

“No baby; its all of our fingers and so much more.” Sinead lifted the young girl in her arms. “I can take you to the American girl store and get you any friend you want.”

“A new Xbox One?” Jeremy and Dev asked hopefully.

“With games,” Sinead promised.

“A new car and then I can drive the old girl?” Brian asked.

“Yep,” she said happily.

“A kitchen aid because the hand mixer is on its last legs,” Mandy cried out.

“And that cookbook you kept eying in the bookstore, maybe two,” Sinead promised. “And some new shoes, because all of yours are getting worse for wear. But first we pay off the bills and get some of these stressors off our plate. I think there’s enough to put into bonds for college funds and Brian, I can help out more—”

“Mom, I don’t want you to pay for anything. I’m going to work and I’m going to get those scholarships,” Brian said firmly and with certainty.

“I know you will, but at least we have an option B now,” she said to her very independent oldest. “I can’t believe he slipped this into my bag and I just saw it today. What if I hadn’t gone in there and just tossed it in the closet?”

“It doesn’t matter now. We got the donation!” Mandy cried out and they all began to dance in excitement again.

There was so much she could do for her kids, update the house, renovate, and get a van so they weren’t all cramped like sardines in the Honda. Then the worry set in, what did he want for this amount of money and why her over anyone else? She was trained to doubt anything that seemed too good to be true. If you ever met her mother, you would understand why. Still, her instincts told her, that Remy was really a good guy and while she had doubts, she couldn’t say no, to what they were in dire need of.

Monday morning, she sat on her bed waiting to get the kids up for school. After that, she would be at the bank when the doors open too deposit the check. Sinead knew they weren't in a position to pick to choose because a cashier's check could be drafted that same day to pay for the rent.

She heard the first alarm go off and a groan from the boys. With a smile, she moved from the bed and put the check in her wallet. It was time to start the day.

In a matter of ten minutes, the house was chaos, multiple trips upstairs for things that were forgotten, packing lunches, eating breakfast and trying to get everyone out the door.

While Brian and Jeremy went to the local high school and didn't want to change, Mandy, Dev, and Rebecca went to the charter school with actual uniforms. So, the boys went off on the school bus, while she took the other three to school. At least in the mornings, they didn't have to worry about Morris and his crew bothering them. At seven thirty, the sun was actually up and it wasn't the hours men like that kept.

With half a bagel in her mouth and coffee in her to-go cup, she pulled into the drop off-line for car riders.

"Look out, its Mrs. Thorne coming towards the car." Mandy grabbed her bag and helped Rebecca into her own backpack.

"Wonderful." Sinead pasted a smile on her face while rolling down the window. "Linda hi!"

Mrs. Thorne was the PTA administrator who was overly perky.

Sinead swore she didn't drink the coffee but chewed the beans. No one could be or should be that perky so early in the morning.

"Sinead, I was hoping we could add your family to the food drive list this year." Linda smiled and leaned down. "I know you guys don't have much and I can do it anonymously if you want, so the kids don't get teased."

Sinead felt her smile fade. "Why would anyone tease my children about anything? They got into this school like anyone

else, good grades and yep, the education lottery for charter schools.”

“I-I mean because of the fostering situation,” Linda stammered.

“They are my kids and that has nothing to do with the fact that you think they have less or need pity,” Sinead said. “Now, don’t get me wrong, help is always essential, and it takes a village and all that. But to single out three because of what you consider a negative, or to say they will be bullied because of said facts, doesn’t sit right with me. Bullying should be a no go here at Queen’s Charter like the rules of conduct says, and are we the only family that may need help? I truly hope that you didn’t approach them in this manner.”

Linda Thorne stepped back. “It wasn’t my intent to make the kids or you feel bad.”

“No, it was to make you feel good,” Sinead pointed out. “You chose to assume our pantry was empty because of where we live and the fostering of my children. I am all for help but not this way, at all.” She turned to the kids. “We’re holding up line my loves, have a super day. Make good choices and shine on... my babies.”

“Bye mom, love you,” the children chorused as they slipped from the car.

“Love you too,” Sinead said and turned to the woman who still stood by her window. “Have a great day and week, Linda.”

“Bye.” Linda stepped away and wagged her fingers in a wave.

Sinead pulled away from the curb of the school and in the rearview mirror stood Linda, in her white capris and mint colored sweater. She looked more bemused than anything else. Honestly, Sinead understood women like Linda Thorne didn’t get it. They were raised in a two-family home, married their high school sweetheart in or after college, and went on to the two-point five kids mold.

Not that there was anything wrong with that, but in the bliss was the ignorance of not knowing how others lived and assuming that you were helping while being condescending at the same time. Linda, and women like her, were the epitome of soccer moms and anything outside that box, about culture and even living in a different kind of family was hard for them to understand.

After drop off, it was off to the bank. Sinead felt a sense of apprehension and relief when she slid the signed check over to the teller and watched her do her thing to get the check in Sinead's account. She was able to draft the amount she needed for three month's rent, one overdue, and her next stop was over to the office of Mr. Jack Benton. He worked out of one of those small strip malls, and while he had a few properties in the area. Jack was not known for upkeep, but he was known to pester everyone for the rent money. She parked the car and made sure to secure her purse before walking the few steps to Benton Realty.

In the little ten by ten office, with the chairs way too old, the chrome legs had rust in more places that metallic shine, sat Jack Benton. His desk, everything about him was just sleazy, down to the slick back hair that everyone could tell was a dye job and way too much cologne.

Mr. Benton looked up when she came inside. "Ms. Christie, this is a nice surprise." He smiled as his eyes slid down along her body. "What can I do for you today? And if it's about another extension, I'm sorry but I can't do that."

Anytime he looked at Sinead, her stomach rolled, but she tried to ignore it like always. "I'm here to pay this month and the next two," She never sat down, anytime she was here, she was never comfortable enough to take a seat.

He stared at her with interest. "Where did you get that amount of money?"

"My finances are not your concern." Sinead handed over the check. "This should square us until August."

"I can't take that. I was just going to file the eviction paperwork," he answered.

“You made a verbal agreement with me and now, you’re tying this.” Sinead felt her anger simmer. “I knew you were low Jack, but not this low to try to force us out. The damn building needs more work than you can afford. Getting rent is the least of your worries right now.”

“You can’t be a beggar and then act like Ms. Prim and proper,” Jack pointed out.

“I am not begging and definitely not from you.” Sinead stared him down until he looked away. “You were the one who offered the extension and now you are refusing our money which breaks the terms of the lease you set up. But by all means, let me slip this check back in my purse and we can settle this in the court system. You can explain to a judge why I had the money and you refused it. But that will be in about three to six months after they finally get us on the docket. And of course, its rent free, since I don’t need to pay you until such time a judge says so.”

He seemed to mentally tally up all he would be losing and with a grunt, he held out his hand for the check.

“I’d like my receipt first please.” Sinead folded her arms. “I need written proof from you and the amount you received, signed, and dated.”

He cast s glare at her, but she would not be deterred. Sinead had been dealing with shady landlords since she was sixteen years old. She’d had to. If not, half the time, she and her mother wouldn’t have had a place to lay their head. So, she watched calmly as Jack Benton printed a receipt from his computer and signed it with a furious hand before handing it to her.

“One of these days, Sinead, that luck you seem to have is going to run out,” Jack grumbled.

She handed him the check. “When that happens, I’ll act accordingly.”

“Even you can’t stop the progress that is coming to that neighborhood,” he pointed out.

“I wish it would hurry up, so my kids can live without the local candy man on the corner,” Sinead replied.

Jack laughed. “I swear, you may have a sharp tongue, but you are naive. But you’ll see... you’ll see. Remember Sinead, rent is rent. And the property is mine to do with as I please. I can sell out right from under you and money doesn’t mean a damn thing.”

“We still need notice and time, Jack. The law doesn’t let you put us on the street.”

Sinead gave him a disgusted look and shook her head before leaving. There was no need for farewells. He got what he wanted, and her receipt would be safely tucked into the important files in small fireproof file cabinet in her room. What was Jack talking about? She certainly had no clue, but she hoped that the city officials would allow some kind of restructuring to happen in the neighborhood.

They needed it, new jobs, coffee shops, and little boutiques where her kids and others in the community could have jobs safely. It was all necessary, but people like Morris would have to go. He caused the fear and the ugliness that surrounded Enchanted Arms.

It was short trip back to the three-story brick house. The emptiness without the kids echoed around her, so Sinead put on the small TV in her office that she used while she worked. Impulsively, she took the card from her purse that was tucked neatly into the folded check. Sinead called the number and waited as it rang for someone to answer.

“Remy Durant here.”

She halted when hearing his deep voice. “Good Morning,” Sinead said with a surprised laugh. “I thought this number would go to your secretary or something.”

“They’re called Executive Assistants now.” Remy’s voice held humor in it.

She could call up his face to memory just hearing him now. “I always liked the term secretary; it always seemed so

romantic in novels,” she replied. “I wanted to thank you for your generosity, Mr. Durant it was such a blessing for us.”

“I’m glad it was, and please call me Remy,” he answered.

“Well, Remy... you are going to have to come see Enchanted Arms and we can thank you properly with dinner,” Sinead said warmly. “It’s not what you may be accustomed to but between me and Mandy, we can cook a decent meal. You can see where your donation will be going and meet the kids.”

“Sinead, I have no doubt you’ll use the money in any way you see fit to make the lives of your kids better,” Remy answered. “I saw the love and determination in your eyes, the want to do better for them. You care and that’s a hard thing to find lately. That’s why I gave you that check and there will be more to come.”

“More?” Sinead asked alarmed. “Mr. Durant—I mean Remy. I won’t be hitting you up for money any time we need something. What you gave us can last a long while.”

Remy chuckled. “Sinead, how about you let me worry about what I want to do?”

“I guess. I just didn’t want you to think I was still holding out my hand for more,” she said dubiously.

“I would never think such a thing,” he promised.

“Okay then. Well thank you, and again, you are welcome to our home anytime for dinner,” Sinead reiterated.

“I appreciate that, see you soon, Sinead,” Remy replied. “Bye for now.”

“Bye,” she replied. Sinead looked down at her cell phone and saved the number. See you soon. What exactly does he mean by that? She focused on her work, getting the laptop open to see what jobs she had for the day. She was accustomed to the bumps in the road life threw at people.

Sinead put Jack Benton and everyone in the back of her mind while work beckoned and took all her attention.



Chapter Three

Another week came and went before the sun rose with the same zeal of any Monday. The morning filled with the usual ankle biters that always seemed to start out the week. By three, like she promised, she was outside waiting for her brood to get off the school bus, so there would be no problem from Morris's crew.

The men watched them all walk home with Mandy holding Rebecca's hand.

The noise in the house rose a few octaves with kids looking for snacks, asking for homework help or discussing the day. She let them have at it, the routine was so set and streamlined they could help each other with homework at the kitchen table while she finished up her tasks online.

Sinead was just about to shut down her computer when Brian came through the door like a hurricane. "Dude..." Brian said.

She raised her eyebrow at the term.

He gave her a sheepish look and went on, "Mom, there is like a slick ass...I mean a slick SUV outside and a truck behind it."

"Outside our house or down the street where Morris lives?" she asked.

"Our house," Brian answered.

Mandy rushed in next. "Mom, two guys in suits are coming up the walkway."

This was not the norm, so Sinead got up from her office chair quickly to go see what else Monday had in store for them. And of course, she was ready to do battle. She opened the front door to see Remy and his friend standing there, behind them a man stood with a baseball cap and a clipboard.

The kids all tried to get a look from behind her, with Brian tall enough now to look over her head and Rebeca using her

small body to push through until her small arms wrapped around Sinead's waist.

"Remy, what are you doing here?" Sinead asked in surprise. "What's all this?"

"You invited us over for dinner," he teased with a slow smile that spread across his handsome ebony face. "I'm teasing. I want to do more for you and the kids. If you let us come in, I can explain."

Why did she want to stroke that neat beard he had? Sinead put that thought out of her head instantly. They were from two different worlds and while he was generous, she wouldn't fool herself into thinking she was his type. "Of course, come in." She stepped back, shooing the kids with her hands, so they could make room at the door.

"You're Remington Durant. I saw you on TV at the All-Star Game," Brian breathed out the words in awe. "You were in the front row with that action hero guy."

"You were in Hollywood Entertainment magazine with Holly Crane!" Mandy added. "Is she as down to earth as she seems?"

"Holly is a sweetheart and she is like my niece. So, she asked me to take her to the premiere. I'll introduce you next time she's in town," Remy answered with a smile. "If you like basketball, you can go with me and Duncan to the next game."

"We all like basketball," Jeremy offered the pertinent boy information.

Sinead cut them off. "Let me introduce you to the chaos you see before you. The oldest Brian is the one with the blond hair, and by the way, he's looking at you, you're now his idol. He's our almost high schooler and then on to college. Mandy is the one ready to faint against the wall because of Holly Crane. Thanks for that. Jeremy is the superhero t-shirt, Dev is NASA t-shirt, and this little one..." Sinead lifted Rebecca in her arms. "Is Rebecca and she is the baby of the horde."

"Hi," Rebecca said shyly.

Remy's smile gentled. "Hi tiny tot."

“So why are you guys here again?” Sinead looked curiously from Remy to Duncan to the other guy looking around the house.

“You talked about converting the basement into a family room and we are here to get that started,” Remy replied. “Mike here is going to go look at what we need and we just tagged along.”

The kids talked in excitement, but Sinead burst everyone’s bubble with the next words, “We don’t own the building Remy. And from our talk with the landlord, I don’t know what will happen in the future or if we will be able to stay here. I don’t want you to put time, effort, and money into a place we may not be able to keep.”

“Is he selling the property?” Remy asked.

“Mom, do we have to move, I like my school,” Dev said and looked like he was ready to cry.

Sinead knew change was hard for him especially and she was instantly ready to comfort him. “Dev, don’t worry, I would drive you to and from school each day if I have to,” Sinead looked around at them and Remy. “I honestly don’t know; Mr. Benton may have been in a mood. Let’s not worry until we have to.”

“You won’t be moving,” Remy said firmly. “How about you guys show Duncan and Mike the basement and we have some things in the SUV for you.”

“Alright!” Brian did a fist pump. “This way Mr. Mike, Mr. Duncan.”

“No misters on the names please,” Duncan said dryly. “I don’t think I’m much older than the lot of you.”

“You’re fooling yourself, Duncan,” Remy called out with a laugh.

Sinead waited until the children and the two men went down the stairs before she directed her attention to Remy. She was acutely aware of his size and height as they stood in the small hall from the front door.

“Remy, I appreciate all this but don’t give those kids false hope,” Sinead said firmly. “They are so accustomed to being lied to and hurt. I tell them everything and if we lose the house, they have to be prepared for it.”

“I wasn’t trying to give them false hope,” Remy answered. “I legitimately will buy this place and give you the title. They seem like good kids, and you guys deserve some security.”

“Why are you doing all of this?” she asked bluntly. “What do you expect to get out of it?”

“Great tax right off,” he teased.

She folded her arms, giving him the look she would give her kids.

“Man, you are a tough one.” Remy chuckled. “Go out with me.”

She became instantly angry. “Listen, your money isn’t buying your way into my panties. And if that’s what you think, you can take your friends and go to—”

“Whoa,” Remy cut her off. “I didn’t mean that at all. I want to take you on a date, possibly several dates.”

“Why?” Sinead asked warily. “You can date actresses and models. I’m just a girl from the wrong side of town. I don’t own much, and I have five foster kids. Why would someone like you want to date a woman like me?”

“For everything you just said and more,” Remy answered gently. “You’re genuine. You are putting your all into this house and the kids. You’re funny and intelligent, smart as a whip and you intrigue me. I want to see if we connect.”

“And if we don’t?” Sinead asked.

“Then no harm, no foul,” Remy answered. “I still want to help the kids and you. I’m not like those guys at the gala. Far from it.”

“I don’t know if this is a good idea,” she admitted dubiously.

Remy grinned. "I think it's a fabulous idea. Come on, at least we can have a good dinner together and I expect nothing in return."

"Okay, Friday and you pick me up, and that is only if I can find a babysitter," Sinead replied. "I know Brian or Mandy could do it but I don't like leaving them alone at night. Not with the people around here."

"That's easy enough, Duncan can babysit," Remy said. "Problem solved."

"What can Duncan do?" Remy's friend asked as they came back up the stairs.

"Babysit. Friday night. You'll bring food and stuff for the kids," Remy's gaze looked suspiciously happy when he looked at his friend.

"Am I now?" Duncan said.

"We'll discuss it," Remy promised. "How does it look down there, Mike?"

"It needs to be sealed. There's some water damage and some cracks in the foundation," Mike answered looking at his clipboard. "I can do all of it, add a second wall and seal it. It's cold as hell down there that can be solved with putting in heating system and in about three weeks it would be all done."

"Works for you?" Remy asked Sinead.

She looked over at the hopeful faces of the kids and threw up her hands. "I guess so, they're giving me the cute doe eyes."

"Man, I need to learn that trick," Remy murmured. "Sinead, want to help me get some things from the back of the car?"

"Sure," she answered.

"Can I finish the walk through on the house? To see what else I can do?" Mike asked.

"Brian, can you show him the upstairs please?" Sinead noted they didn't even leave the front door area. "Duncan,

there's coffee in the kitchen and we can make sandwiches..."

"I'll order some pizzas, wings and drinks," Duncan suggested. "Somehow, how I think we're not leaving for a few hours. So, might as well get some food."

"Good idea," Remy said as he opened the front door to usher her out.

They were like a tornado disrupting her routine and the kids were loving it. What could it hurt, just once? Sinead asked herself. This was the most excitement they'd ever had in their lives. The SUV had also drawn the attention of the locals in the area. Morris and his crew walked around the sleek, pure black machine that seemed to have geometric shapes built into the body.

As Sinead got closer, she could see this wasn't some Escalade, it looked like a luxury war machine.

"Brother, how much does this thing cost?" Hakeem asked and gave a low whistle.

"More than you can afford." Remy's voice was curt. "I'm not your brother."

"It's a Karlman. This cost about two million," Morris spoke, the envy clear in his eyes. "This thing was listed as one of the most expensive cars of the year."

"You can read reviews, good on you," Remy said. "How about you go somewhere that's nowhere near here?"

Morris ignored him and trailed a finger along the car as he moved closer. "My question is how is Sinead hanging around with someone who can afford a vehicle like this?"

Remy flicked a cold gaze at Morris. "I think this is one question you won't get answered. Oh, and touch my car again, I'll rip your hand off."

Morris held up his hand. "No worries bro, I mean we are all friends here. You taking a slice out of the sweet Sinead can only mean good things for my community."

"You wouldn't know if I was sweet or salty, Morris and you know it," Sinead snapped and felt utterly embarrassed.

“You know you tried and failed miserably. I don’t date drug dealers.”

“Anyone can see this crew isn’t the highest caliber of any male specimen,” Remy drawled. He was baiting Morris and it worked because anger flashed to life in the self-proclaimed king’s eyes, but it didn’t seem to faze Remy in the least.

“Better watch out rich boy. These streets can claim you, regardless of how much money you in that wallet,” Morris snapped.

Remy rocked back on his heels. “Oh, I think I’ll be fine, you should be worried about yourself. But you gave me your warning and tried to pee on the sidewalk like the mutt you are. So go back to your doghouse like a good boy.”

“The hell you say to me?” Morris roared out and rushed at him.

Remy didn’t move or was not impressed.

Morris’s crew like Hakeem, made the pretense of holding their leader back as he struggled to get at Remy.

“Let him go. Roll the dice and see where they land; I bet it won’t end well.” Remy’s voice sounded deadly and he stepped close enough that Morris could reach him. Yet the grab didn’t happen. “I’ve met people like you Morris. Those guys aren’t trying too hard to hold you back, and your big ole’ frame can definitely break free if you wanted to. I’m so close I can feel your breath. But you don’t want to, because you can see I would put you in the ground and I can smell your fear. When you get froggy... brother... you can go right ahead and jump.”

“This is my neighborhood! You don’t live here and when you leave, she and those kids still do,” Morris spat out.

“They are under my protection. Touch anyone or anything in that house, hell step off the sidewalk onto the property, and I will show you what a solider with a hell of a lot of money can do to you.” Remy smiled wide and deadly. “You can count on that. I try very hard to put the soldier and the fighter behind me. But for you, I just might bring them out of retirement.”

“Morris, this chump ain’t worth it,” Hakeem said. “Let’s go back down the block.”

Remy flicked a cold glance at him. “Yes, go home... boys.”

They walked away.

Sinead stared at Remy in shock as he calmly went to the back of the SUV and opened the door. He started handing her bags and packages casually and whistling to boot.

“You do know we have to live here, after you leave right?” Sinead said taking some of the packages. “While you are in your palace sleeping, he’ll be on our case.”

“He messes with you, you call me,” Remy said.

Sinead sighed in frustration. “Remy, you can’t just come to the wrong side of Seattle and make us your pet project until you get bored. That goes with the date thing too. I won’t be used as some kind of foray into dating outside your social stature.”

“Sinead this is not a game to me in any possible way,” Remy answered. “If you haven’t seen I’m not that kind of guy by now—”

“I’ve known you less than a week, so I have no clue what kind of man you are.” Sinead met his gaze. “I just know, I won’t have my kids hurt if or when you get bored.”

“What about you?” Remy asked. “What if we had this date, and maybe a few more, and I suddenly stopped coming around?”

“That’s nothing new in my life. People come, and people go.” She shrugged. “I don’t have the luxury of crying in bed while holding your picture and imagining what could be. I had to learn to be my own woman from the time I could figure out how to tap 911 on the phone and make eggs. You come or you go Remy, my back won’t bend, and I surely won’t break.”

“You are so strong, Sinead. I guess you had to be and now, you use it to protect these kids,” he said huskily. “It makes you more appealing, and you’re not chasing me away.”

“Uh huh,” she said in a non-committal reply. “Let’s get this stuff inside before we draw any more attention and our place gets robbed.”

Back inside, Mike was finished with his inspection and gave Remy his assessment, while the pizza and food was delivered. It took her attention away, because Duncan seemed to think an army lived at Enchanted Arms with the amount of food he’d ordered.

“Where’s Mike? I made him a plate,” Sinead asked coming out of the kitchen and into the family room where all the packages sat.

“He went back out to his truck and is heading to his office. You’ll see him back with a crew this weekend,” Remy answered.

“No trouble from the peanut gallery down the street?” She moved the blinds to peek out of the window.

“None at all.” He took the plate from her. “They don’t want the smoke that three retired military men would bring. And I’m eating his plate because you didn’t make me one.”

“He was working. What were you doing exactly? Your hands aren’t broken; make your own plate.” Sinead snagged it back, sans the one piece of pizza Remy had in his hand.

He laughed and she could help but grin in his direction.

Chaos then came through the door in the form of a whirlwind of kids and a very bemused looking Duncan.

“Did you know they were different lines of Barbies and they’re not all the same?” Duncan announced.

The other two adults in the room stared at him in shock.

“Uh okay, yeah they are hundreds of different kinds,” Sinead said slowly.

He shrugged. “Who knew? Rebecca explained it all anyway.”

Remy shook his head. “Ok and after that dose of weirdness, dig in guys and see what’s in there. I still have the

bikes out there, but I figured it was a no go in the neighborhood for you, Sinead.”

“We could go to the park,” Jeremy suggested.

“We’ll figure it out, maybe get a bike rack on the new used car,” Sinead promised.

Remy was more than generous, and it all made her more uncomfortable by the minute. New game systems, tons of games, American Girl Dolls for Rebecca, notebooks and art paper that Mandy snagged along with tons of girl themed journals. Gift cards for clothes at the mall, and movie gift cards, so they could go to a theater and watch movies. She watched the pile grow and the excitement in all those faces she loved. It hurt a bit knowing she was unable to provide those things. All she had was her love and they were happy with that.

The material things Remy provided gave them things they had never had in their lives. Sinead cast a sidelong glance in his direction.

His coat was off as he sat in the middle of the foray on the family room floor. The half piece of pizza hung out of his mouth and he talked around it to the boys. Mandy handed him scissors to help Rebecca with opening her doll as he spoke. Remy fit in the midst of them like a puzzle piece, and in spite of all his wealth, he was down to earth.

“He’s a really good guy, you can trust that,” Duncan said as he passed by her to go out to the kitchen.

Sinead smiled and nodded.

Rebecca called her over. “Mama come see! The dolls have so much clothes and even their own hairbrushes and some even have hair like mine!”

“Coming sweetie.” She moved from her position close to the door, where she’d perched on the arm of the sofa to watch them all, and went into the room. Sinead had no doubt he was a good guy, but she’d met a few of those in her time. Nothing in her life ever worked out except for taking these children into her home. When it came to men, she was sure she still had

the Christie curse of having heartbreak before happiness. Looking at Remy and watching his quick grin on that more than handsome face, Sinead could feel her heart skip a beat and her breath catch. Shit! Trouble was a brewing and her heart might be on the line.



IT WAS AFTER NINE WHEN they finally left. Remy stood outside the house looking at the three-story structure, with lights in the windows, filled with so much love. How it must feel to know someone loved them like that, so completely and unconditionally. The thought made him rub the ache over his left pec because Remy envied and wanted to feel that at some point in his life. Maybe that had been what drew him to Sinead. Her body and her beauty that radiated from within and the fact, she could love so easily. Remy could of course find out everything he needed about her, but some how doing a search felt wrong, it wouldn't feel right unless it came to her. He would rather hear about her past, hopes and dreams from her own mouth.

“Are we staying here all night?” Duncan asked conversationally. “I mean I’m good with it, but I don’t want to wake up in the car with you cuddling me.”

Remy let out a laugh. “How are you such a sarcastic asshole?”

Laughter and a bottle breaking from down the street drew his attention. Under the streetlights, Remy saw the group and he vaguely recognized Morris in the group. “I need to know everything about her landlord and this guy Morris,” Remy’s tone became serious.

“I saw his intimidation tactic that failed miserably,” Duncan said. “Throw me the keys, I’ll drive.”

Remy tossed them and got into the passenger seat. “I’ve met insurgents that were more terrifying. He has delusions of grandeur. I will enjoy breaking him of that habit, if necessary.”

“I’m hoping he doesn’t start trouble.” Duncan got behind the wheel and with a quick turn of his wrist, the engine roared

to life.

“This neighborhood needs a change that’s for sure,” Remy said looking around as they drove away slowly. “Lots of historic houses falling to disrepair, people scared to be outside, kids can’t even ride a bike on the sidewalk. I need to know if there are any plans by the city council for this area as well. And if there is a community center, open or defunct.”

“If its gentrification, they’ll push everyone out and then Morris becomes another neighborhood’s problem,” Duncan pointed out.

“Yeah, I’m not for people losing housing,” Remy murmured.

“I can see the wheels in your head turning, Remington,” his friend drawled. “If another pet project is going on our list, I guess we need to start making preparations now.”

“You’re like my mini brain,” Remy teased.

“Huh? I’m not a mini anything,” he replied. “And by the way Remy, you never rode a bike on any sidewalk growing up.”

“Shit, with my father, that would have been too low class,” Remy said. “I don’t get how a man could hate his own people so much.”

“Hate himself is a better description.” Duncan scanned the intersection before making a turn. “You made every effort not to be that man and successfully, mind you.”

“His friends would like to think I’m an extension of him from the grave, they are sadly mistaken,” Remy answered. He thought about his life and how he grew up. Ronald Durant tried to destroy his every mindset growing up. When Remy joined the army, no son of his was going to work as a dusty boots soldier. Unbeknownst to him, his father tried to bribe the recruiter to lose his paperwork, but luckily, Major Adams was not a man to be fucked with. He saw Remy’s need to escape, he saw Ronald’s Durant’s malice, and was having none of it. That man was one of the few people who stood up to Remy’s

father without batting an eyelash. It was also Major Adams who showed Remy he didn't have to toe the Durant line.

"Hey, are you even listening to me?" Duncan's voice broke through.

Remy apologized. "Sorry, old ghosts were in my head. What did you say?"

"I asked about this date you have with Sinead. Why her man?" Duncan asked. "I mean she has a bunch of kids and the responsibilities that come with fostering them."

"I don't know. She is beautiful, intelligent, saucy as hell, and as blunt as a hammer." Remy grinned. "She isn't the usual type... Then tonight, sitting watching Brian play the basketball games with Jeremy and Dev. Mandy looking at clothes and showing Sinead, Rebecca brushing the doll's hair and promising her beat up Lulu that she still loves her the best." Remy replayed the images from tonight. "It was so family even though they are like a rich tapestry of personalities. Brian is smart as a whip I tell you. Hell I'll fund his college to CalTech easily, because his engineering savvy is ridiculous. He could be running R and D now."

"So, is it the family or the woman you want?" Duncan asked.

"Is it wrong that I want both?" Remy questioned the question.

"I guess not," Duncan said hesitantly. "It's new and something you never had in your life. But what if it turns out to be something you don't want? It's not just her but those kids who will end up hurt."

"Jesus Christ, what is it about everyone thinking I'm this fickle son of bitch who is just playing with a new toy?" Remy asked in irritation. "Sinead said the same thing basically, and I would think you knew me better than that, Duncan."

"I know you and I've met the demons you face every damn day too. You think I don't know you sleep less hours than most? That you take these runs through the woods out back, like the devil is chasing you? The night terrors, the waking up

in the middle of a battle... ready to fight some unseen enemy,” Duncan countered bluntly. “All of that has to be taken into consideration, because if you expect her to accept you as is, Sinead needs to know what she’s getting into here. You are still healing man, and that information is important.”

“I get all of that.” Remy sighed and ran his hand over his smooth, bald head. “It’s just one date so far, we might not even click.”

Duncan laughed. “You’ve already clicked, so there’s that.”

“Ok, one step at a time. How’s that?” Remy replied.

Duncan chuckled. “I guess that’s all you can do. Beers before we head back to Casa del Durant?”

“Sure, why not,” Remy replied.

Duncan gave him a lot to mull over and what better place than with a Guinness at Moe’s pub. There, no one cared how much money he had in his pocket, only if he could play a decent game of darts. Moe’s was filled with an eclectic hodge-podge of British memorabilia and the owner was a British man who immigrated, and brought a replica of his old family pub with him.

After about twenty minutes, their cold ales were on a small table and Remy was pulling the darts from one of the wooden boxes Moe kept behind the bar. “Did you see the little one’s face, Rebecca when she got those dolls?” Remy asked and gave a soft laugh. “Things other children take for granted, these kids thought it was Christmas all over again.”

“And we are back.” Duncan threw the first dart and it sank about three squares off the red bullseye.

“So first date, help me out here. Where do people go on dates?” Remy took a sip while waiting for his friend’s turn to be over.

Duncan gave him a quick glance before training his eyes on the dart board. “I’d say the movies, but you have a theatre downstairs in the mansion. That’s akin to hey, come by my place to see my etchings.”

Remy laughed. "People did not do that."

"Hey, I did and it was hit and miss but sometimes, it worked," Duncan retorted. "Your turn."

"As a Scotsman, shouldn't your eye be better for darts?" Remy teased and threw his own red tipped projectiles.

"Shut up and think of a place to go to dinner," Duncan grumbled. "Take her to Le Bon or something."

"That new place with the great skyline view?" Remy warmed to the idea. "I like that."

"And the convenience of a hotel right below," Duncan suggested with a twinkle in his eye.

"If you'd like to see me flayed for the world to see." Remy moved to the small table. "You saw all the lechers after her at the gala, and she is already skittish about the donation thinking I want a bed bounce as a payback. This one needs to go slow."

"Not a snail's pace I hope. You have been in a self-imposed dry spell for a while." Duncan looked at the board. "Well, look who won the first round... the blind Scotsman."

"I never said you were blind. I just said you had a bad eye for the game," Remy pointed out.

Duncan got the dart off the board. "In any case, I've never seen you this worked up over a woman, planning dates, liking kids and the eye thing you do when she smiles at you."

"I don't do any type of face, so shut it," Remy practically growled.

Duncan made a slack jawed face that looked more insane than anything else. "That's you."

Remy rolled his eyes. "Oh please, now you're just exaggerating."

Duncan clapped him on the back. "I am. I'm enjoying the fact that a woman has thrown you for a loop."

"This entire last week, I couldn't stop thinking about her," Remy admitted. "But something you said... how will she feel about a soldier who wakes up in the middle of the night,

sweating down to his drawers and hearing the gunshots still echoing in his head.”

“You tell her the truth from the very beginning, give her the choice,” Duncan answered. “We know too many men and women who came home to find their spouses couldn’t take the changes in them.”

Remy sighed. “The VA is sadly lacking in the mental health care they need as well. How can you learn to cope without the people and tools to help?”

“It’s an entire cluster fuck,” his close friend replied. “Putting Sinead and those kids under your umbrella of protection may have brought a new set of troubles. They could be targeted just for knowing you, not just from Morris. You’ve made a few enemies since you took over Durant Technologies.”

Remy met his friend’s gaze with a deadly one of his own. “And that would be the one sure way to end anyone who thinks using them as a pawn, would be a good idea.”

The conversation became light again, as they had a second beer and continued the game.

Remy didn’t fit in to the world his father built and he was okay with that. He knew for certain they called him a savage and uncivilized, too rough around the edges to run an empire. There was more than one company take over that he’d squashed into the ground. Remy would do the same to anyone who thought it was a good idea to mess with Sinead and her family. It would ensure he destroyed anyone and anything in his path.

The two-beer minimum was enough for them, and after paying the tab with a healthy tip, Remy was back in the SUV and it was on to the mansion. While Duncan went on to the guest house, Remy stood in the massive house and listened to the silence that seemed to overwhelm him. He finally felt tired and went upstairs to take a hot shower before climbing into bed.

The bottle of sleeping pills sat on the bedside table. Trazadone, he read the bottle and the description that basically said it was to help him relax and sleep.

It didn't say that it trapped him in his nightmares that he couldn't fight his way out until the effects wore off. Then he would swim to the surface of his consciousness, after the barrage of images for hours on end. The bottle didn't say he woke up tired, raw, and with an exhaustion that went past the body right into the soul.

Remy set it back down with a sigh and threw an arm over his eyes while he tried to sleep. Maybe the images of Sinead in that sexy cocktail dress would give him a reprieve.

He thought about how her generous curves looked in those jeans she had on tonight, and how her smile traveled to her eyes. How would her lips taste? He could see her body fitting against him perfectly as he kissed her and lifted her in his arms. Remy fantasized about her legs high around his waist as he took her. Shit. He pressed his hand against his groin as the ache of arousal made him hard.

Sleep finally overtook Remy, as his mind wandered to all the things they could experience together. He wanted to show her the world.



Chapter Four

Being nervous was an understatement. Sinead studied herself in the mirror and hoped her dress was okay. The soft rose wrap dress cinched her waist while accentuating her curves and showed a hint of cleavage. No one could accuse her of being a skinny little thing. She'd been a size twelve for as long as she could remember. But her curves drew attention from the opposite sex before she was even thirteen years old, and it was unwanted attention.

Well that was a completely different story and one she hated with a passion. There would come a time she would need to deal with that trauma but right now, she wanted to focus on tonight. Remington Durant, just thinking about him made a delightful clench happen in her lower stomach and she pressed her hand there to ease the ache. Even with the delightful feeling of attraction, Sinead felt hesitant. Her past was complicated to say the least, and she didn't want to place Remy in the same mold.

Trusting her instincts, she had said yes to the date, but multiple times, she almost picked up the phone to cancel. What if he was like every other wealthy man; what if he was like Keith? In the end, Sinead knew she couldn't paint Remy with anyone else's brush but his own; so, the date would happen.

"You look so pretty Mama, like one of my dolls," Rebecca said from the door.

Mandy was behind the young girl smiling. "Gorgeous Mom. That dress is perfect."

Sinead smiled. "I hope so, it's like one of the few dresses I own, and I didn't have to go to the thrift store."

The girls stepped into the room and Mandy spoke again, "Mom, we have the donation money now. So, you could've bought a really pretty dress."

Sinead shook her head. "Not with that sweetie. That is to take care of you guys and I plan to account for every penny."

“Do you have to go?” Rebecca asked with a small voice. “Have grown up dinner here. I can help Mandy make macaroni and cheese.”

“How about we do that next time?” Sinead laughed and sat on the bed while patting the mattress, so Rebecca would come sit. She hugged the little girl and kissed the top of her head. “Are you scared of something?”

“That you won’t come back.” Rebecca ducked her head low. “People always don’t come back and then I get sent somewhere else.”

Sinead lifted her small head with gentle hands and stared into the tear-filled brown eyes of an eight-year-old girl who needed more love and assurance because of everything she’d lived through. “Rebecca, I promise you, I will always come back to you. You won’t ever have to worry. How about I come in and kiss you goodnight when I come home? Even if you’re sleeping, I’ll hug you tight.”

Rebecca nodded. “Okay.”

“I’ll take care of her,” Mandy promised. “She can even sleep in my bed for a little bit.”

“And Mr. Duncan is coming to stay with you guys, so you don’t have to worry about being alone,” Sinead promised.

The doorbell rang, so she kissed Rebecca’s cheek before standing and checking herself in the mirror one more time.

“Mom. Mr. Durant is here,” Brian called from downstairs.

“Coming.” She blew out a breath, took up her small purse, and headed out through her bedroom door, her two girls trailing behind her.

Sinead almost missed the first step when she saw Remy from the top of the stairs. He wore casual dark blue jeans and black suede boots. Her eyes traveled upwards to his broad chest covered in a teal cashmere pullover with the sleeves pushed up over his forearms.

He smiled up at her, dark chestnut head shaved clean with his beard and mustache neatly trimmed. The man was

delicious through and through. When a slow smile spread across his face, she felt a warm tingle in all the right places. Lord, this one is going to be trouble.

“You look amazing,” he said as he bent to kiss her cheek.

She could smell the subtle spicy tones of his cologne and damn, if she didn't want to move her lips just a bit to nip his neck. Down girl.

“You're not so bad yourself,” Sinead replied.

“Ready to go?” was his next question.

Sinead turned to Duncan. “You think you can manage the horde?”

Duncan grinned. “I'm good as long as we're not pillaging. I gave that up years ago.”

“Good to know.” Sinead laughed. “I guess I'm ready then, you guys be good for Duncan and I'll be home in a few hours.”

“Have fun,” Brian said. “Mr. Durant, don't try anything with our mom.”

“I'll be the perfect gentleman,” Remy promised as they headed out the door; then he leaned in to whisper in her ear, “Unless you don't want me to be.”

She shivered just a bit and it wasn't from the cold. Sinead focused on the sports car parked in front of her house, probably getting just as much attention as the SUV did. This black and cherry red thing just gleamed in the darkness. The rims alone had to be worth over ten thousand dollars. God knows how much the car cost overall.

“So, no Prius tonight?” Sinead teased. “You should really consider regular cars in this neighborhood. One of these days, you'll come back and the frame will be up on bricks.”

“I doubt very much anyone would be crazy enough to try and steal my car,” he said as he opened the passenger door for her to slide into the custom leather seats.

“One of those rims could feed a family for six weeks, buy drugs, or a woman,” Sinead replied when he got in. “Trust me, your car was assessed and stripped down in many minds before you could even get halfway up the walkway. Morris and his people probably have camera phone pictures of it.”

“Is it the fact that it draws attention that bothers you or the cost?” Remy pulled away and the engine purred like a large predatory feline.

“A little of both,” she admitted. “Unwanted attention to where I try to keep my kids safe. Then, it’s the flaunt of money I’m not accustomed to. The last time I saw a guy pull up in a car like this outside where I lived, he beat on me for a year before I could end the relationship.”

“What?” Remy pulled the car to the side of the road viciously and turned to her. “Who was it?”

“I-I doubt you travel in the same circles,” Sinead stammered surprised by his reaction. “It’s fine, it’s the past.”

Remy cupped her cheek. “Who was it that hurt you?”

She sighed. “Keith Vargos started out good. He bought me things, made me feel special, then told me how much of a dog I was. That since he bought me everything, I was his pet, and he could treat me however, he wanted. He finally hit me hard enough the cops and his father had to take notice and for him not to go to jail, they sent him away. I have no clue where he is or what he’s doing now.”

“I’m not that man,” Remy said huskily. “I’d take my own damn hands off before I hit a woman.”

Sinead smiled. “I know, but the money. I’ve seen how it goes to people’s head. He thought it made him invincible. I have no doubt, if he’d killed me, no one would have known or found my body. Luckily, I escaped before he could.”

Remy turned and his hands were tight on the steering wheel.

Sinead covered one with her own. “It’s okay, Remy. It’s the past. Let’s go enjoy dinner... together.”

He took a deep breath and she felt his hand relax beneath hers.

“I can promise you, Sinead, you never have a thing to fear from me.”

“I’m sorry about my reaction,” she apologized as he put the car in gear and pulled onto the street again. “I have tried to raise the kids without having to even think about charity events or anything like that, so I wouldn’t have to be around anyone that would know the Vargos family. But government assistance for foster parents like myself is at its lowest. I have to put them first, so I bit the bullet and went to the gala.”

“I’m glad you did.” He smiled as he drove. “Because, I get to have a date with the most beautiful woman I have ever seen.”

Sinead laughed. “That’s laying it on a bit thick.”

“Or maybe it’s true,” he suggested. “And to you, I’m the most handsome man you ever saw.”

“Need me to get out, so you and your ego can be alone?” she teased.

“Nah, it’s more fun when you’re in here with us,” he answered.

Sinead laughed and his rich baritone joined hers, breaking the tension from a few moments earlier. Sinead enjoyed watching the scenic part of Seattle as he drove. This was her first date out in a very long time, let alone away from the kids. It was always work, then focusing on them. So for her, it was light sightseeing for enjoyment, not just to get from point A to point B because of errands.

Remy finally parked in front of a hotel.

She could tell it was just newly built.

After the valet took the car, he held her hand as they walked through the lobby to the private elevator of the restaurant called Le Bon. Stepping inside was like leaving Seattle and standing in the midst of fine dining in Paris. From the art on the wall to the music, it all screamed elegance.

Sinead looked down at her simple dress while instantly feeling out of place.

“Ah Mr. Durant, we have the best table waiting,” the host spoke without Remy even having to ask about the reservation.

I guess when you have Durant money, everyone knows your name. Sinead kept the thought to herself while being led to the table. God, she had to get over being so skittish when it came to the wealthy, but it felt like every set of eyes in this place were on them.

The view outside the window was breathtaking, below the twenty-nine stories beneath them, was Seattle’s cityscape spread out before her. The Space Needle was lit up for the night, standing like a specter in the midst of the all the lights in the darkness. You would think that one sight would be something she would be accustomed to but this was only her second time seeing the structure in her twenty-eight years of life. Living in the commons off Capitol Hill meant it was a hell of a drive to get to Pikes Place and the other areas close to the space needle. You needed money for that and growing up... well, hell right before Remy made that donation to her kids, this had been a scarcity in her household.

“What do you think of the view?” he asked.

His question brought her back to the present and Sinead smiled at him. “It’s breathtaking. They found the perfect spot to see the needle.”

“Have you ever been to the top floor?” Remy questioned just as the waiter hurried over.

“Good evening, Mr. Durant, would you like to start with drinks?” the waiter asked politely.

“Jameson over ice for me,” Remy answered. “Sinead?”

“A glass of Duplin Red Moscato please, if you have it?” she replied.

“Of course, Ma’am.”

With a nod, the man left, and it was back to just them at the table, so she answered his question, “I can honestly say I

have never been up to the top of the Space needle, it sounds terrifying.”

“I’ll take you,” Remy offered. “You’ll love it.”

“Or, I’ll be screaming all the way up and then all the way back down.” Sinead laughed.

He took her hand on the table. “I’ll be there to protect you.”

“I guess at some point I should return the favor and protect you,” Sinead said gently while liking the feel of his hand on hers.

“From what?” Remy’s voice took on a husky tone.

Sinead met his gaze and said one simple word, “Everything.”

Remy broke the connection by looking down at the menu; he cleared his throat. “We should look at the menu.”

Sinead smiled, knowing she made him feel as disconcerted as she did.

“Why does a man with so much money join the military and deploy how many times?” Sinead took a sip of her wine after the waiter put it on the table.

“Three,” Remy answered. “The last one wasn’t the greatest, in fact we lost some good people. But I joined because I know there was more to me than just being a Durant rich boy, more than my father’s perception and world’s views. He was not a good man. I chose to be better.”

“I can understand that,” Sinead sighed. “If I was anything like my mother, I’d be coked out of my mind in some dead-beat house. That’s why I hate men like Morris. I saw what they turned my mom into, but she played a hand, she took the drugs.”

“Sometimes it’s the only thing that eases the pain,” Remy covered her hand with his own. “Life can be hard when you don’t see any hope, people want to forget it and sink into drugs.”

She was amazed he could have that kind of perception being a man who never have to even face poverty. They started with broiled oysters with a parmesan cheese pesto that they shared. Remy convinced her to try the clam chowder, so they both had a cup before the entrees were served. He chose the steak and she chose the seafood pasta because the waiter said the noodles were made fresh daily.

Between the meal's courses, they talked and Sinead learned more about the man who was listed as one of the most eligible bachelors. Remy was down to earth. He could talk about books, to movies, and she found out he liked hot dogs so much he could eat them for dinner daily.

She also saw how he spoke about work or how his eyes turned to pools of turmoil when she asked about his military life. She let that drop, knowing that as a veteran he might need time. He did the same by not asking any more about her past with Keith Vargos, or about her family. Like him, she wasn't ready yet and this was all so very new, trust had to be earned on both sides. Tonight, had been a good start.

When the meal ended, and he paid the check while she sipped the last of her coffee, she wondered if or what he expected next.

Remy took her hand again and they made the trip back to the lobby only to find that it was raining lightly. "We can wait for the valet or walk to the car. I can see it right there." Remy pointed.

"I don't mind a walk in the rain," Sinead replied with a laugh. "Let's be spontaneous."

Remy got his key from the valet and Sinead took his hand as they stepped out from under the canopy into the light drizzle. A small squeak escaped her when Remy pulled her against him and began to sway. He hummed softly and then it turned into a song. His rich voice crooned the melody of an oldies song from the sixties, where dancing with a lover in the rain caused them to fall in love. She stared up at him as he sang, drawn in and charmed by the sweet interaction. At the

end, he dipped her with a flourish and when he pulled her upright, she was pressed against his chest.

Sinead felt her lids grow heavy as he stared at her and she parted her lips in invitation.

It was all he needed, Remy lips were warm as he pressed them against hers, teasing her with a light graze. Then he took more, demanded entry with a light but firm flick of his tongue. Sinead felt a warm tingle all the way down to her toes and without hesitation...she opened her mouth. A small whimper escaped her when he penetrated between her lips with his tongue, tasting her deeply until a low groan reverberated from deep in his chest.

He lifted his head after one nip then two and murmured, "Now that was a first kiss."

"Yes..." She licked her lips savoring his taste while slowly opening her eyes.

"Don't look at me like that," he warned huskily. "I'm trying to be a gentleman here."

A smile spread across her just kissed lips. "That's good... for now."

"Oh, so you plan to see me again, huh?"

"Well, you can't kiss a girl like that and not ask for a second date," she pointed out. "That's just plain rude."

Remy laughed as he took her hand and led her to the car quickly, as the rain picked up. He got her inside before moving to the driver's side and slipping behind the wheel. After starting the ignition, he pressed a few buttons and she felt the seats warm beneath her.

Driving home, Sinead stared out the window with a smile. She didn't feel pressured in any way but wouldn't mind a few more kisses from the attractive Remy Durant. As first dates went, this one was excellent and pushed away some of her reservations. Maybe this could be the start of something good, and all they could do was take it day by day. Back at the Enchanted Arms, he parked out front and she turned to him in the seat.

“If you want a good night kiss you better take it now,” she smiled. “When we step in those doors, we will be tackled like a linebacker before he could throw a pass.”

“The fact that you use use football as an analogy, we might as well get married now and be done with it,” Remy grinned.

“That’s all it takes huh?” Sinead laughed.

“What can I say, you know where go get me. Very intuitive of you.”

“You’re a nut,” she leaned forward and sighed when he pressed his lips against hers.

Was it wrong to hope and think this might work out? Remy had proven more than once that he was nothing like some of the elites out there. When the kiss ended, she opened her eyes to find him staring at her and he slowly ran a finger down her cheek.

“You make me feel things, I don’t think I ever felt before,” Remy said huskily.

“Is that a good thing?”

Remy nodded slowly. “I think it is.”

He got out the car and came around the front to lift her door. He took her hand so that she could get out into the cool night. They walked up the the three-story brick house and when she opened the door, the house was quiet. Duncan came out of the family room with the sleeves of his beige long sleeve t-shirt rolled up.

“Where are the kids?” Sinead asked curiously.

“Mandy took Rebecca to bed around ten and she stayed up there to write in her note book and compose recipes she said,” Duncan explained. “Can one compose a recipe?”

“Very much so,” Sinead said amused. “The boys?”

“They got tired of me kicking their ass in Halo and went to bed,” Duncan grinned.

“No that’s unfair, you are a soldier hence you are trained to be better than any ops game like that,” Remy folded his arms.

Duncan leaned on the wall. “You would think, but they gave me a run for my money before I won. You are right though. Brian could be running our research and development floor easy. He showed me some code written out by hand mind you, that could fit on a small chip and revolutionize gaming and space bandwidth without an external hard drive.”

“What does that stuff mean in English?” Sinead asked in confusion.

“Brian is super smart kid,” Remy said. “Would you mind if we get him into R and D a few times a week on a paid internship? It will look good on a college application and give him a leg up as a freshman.”

“Are you kidding? He would love that!” Sinead answered. “I didn’t want him to work but it was the only option.”

“Hell yeah I would, I’m quitting the other job tomorrow!”

“Brian, go to bed!” She called.

“On it!”

“On that note, I’ll let you all get some sleep,” Remy pulled her close to kiss her. “Call me tomorrow?”

“I will. We’ll talk for hours and I’ll doodle your name on my notebook,” Sinead teased.

“Pics or it didn’t happen,” Remy grinned.

“Goodnight, gentlemen,” Sinead led them to the door.

“See you soon, doll face,” Remy said with a smile.

She closed the door behind them and watched them drive away through the blinds at the long windows which bordered each side of the door. She was just about to close the blinds when Morris, Hakeem and a few others came to stand on the sidewalk and look at the house. His eyes met hers and she could see the malice in his eyes, making her heart thrum in fear. Sinead closed the blinds, then made sure all windows and doors were locked. She had a hard night that night trying to sleep even after seeing Morris outside her house. It was a silent threat and she decided not to tell Remy hoping it would go away and not get worse.

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THE EXPLOSIONS RANG out around him, shuddering the earth, kicking up the sand. He watched the Humvee in front of him lift and then theirs was in their air. It always felt like slow motion even though it happened in seconds. Then, all hell broke loose. The screams, gunfire and blood, he could taste it in his mouth, coppery and he spat it out while looking for his men, his brothers. Another rocket hit and this time Remy woke up drenched in sweat in his bed, his harsh breathing the only sound in the room.

“Fuck!” He shouted the one word and flopped back in bed.

He didn't lay still for long; the adrenaline pumped through his veins and he had to move. The walls felt like they were closing in and he got up and pulled on a pair of running sweats, a t-shirt and his beat-up running shoes. He went through the back door. Needing no warm up, Remy took off like the devil himself was chasing him and he cut through path he had worn through the trees. He ran with the images of Ramirez with his leg bound up so tight because the blood was pumping out of his leg.

He could still see the lifeless eyes of Jones looking back at him and what had he got? A plate in his leg with some screws? Jones never had a chance to really live while Ramirez went home to his family with a leg lost. Jesus, his chest hurt. It wasn't just from the exertion but he felt like someone was trying to rip it out of his chest. When his legs could go no more, he sat in that woods, his back against a tree and tried to catch his breath. He heard footsteps coming through the underbrush. Remy didn't move, he knew who it was.

“Here,” Duncan said and held out his hand.

Remy looked up to see the telephone. “Who is it?”

“Someone to talk to,” Duncan said, “I'll go get the coffee on.”

Remy took the phone expecting to hear some veterans counselor and he was ready to hang up as soon as they voice asked if he was taking his medication.

“Hello?”

“Remy are you okay?” Sinead voice made him lean his head back and close his eyes. “Remy?”

He swallowed thickly. “I’m trying to be.”

“Oh, Remy,” her voice was sorrowful. “I’m so sorry this is your burden. I wish I could take it from you.”

“No one can take this,” he sighed. “Its my penance.”

“Penance for what? Surviving?” Sinead asked. “You can’t think like that.”

“Why not?” his voice grated out, the agony in his chest almost unbearable. “You know what they said this is called? Survivor’s guilt, and they say it dulls over time. That’s bullshit, I feel this every day.... Every... Goddamn... day, and it feels like the day it happened. It chokes me like I can’t breathe, because it was my job to bring them all home. And I failed.”

“Remy, you cannot control life or death,” Sinead said firmly. “I don’t care how good of a soldier you were... Are. and from what the news portrayed, Military personnel was under constant attack and those road side bombs were progressively harder to spot. They evolved in the ways to kill while you and your friends were caught by a moment in time that changed everything.”

“That’s the logical way to look at it, but for men like me it goes past logic,” he said.

“Because you are a protector,” Sinead gave a small laugh. “Everyone and everything under your umbrella become yours and you will do anything for them. You did that for us, a foster mom and a group of kids that never should’ve even be in your realm, yet here we are.”

“You guys have something...” Remy shook his head. “That’s a whole story.”

Sinead’s laugh was soft. “You’ll have to tell me about it sometime.”

“Trying to slay my dragons, Sinead?” he teased.

His eyes were still closed and his head leaned back against the trunk of the old tree. How did talking to her seem to soothe that savage agony within him? It felt as if it was leaching into the ground beneath him.

“Someone has to,” was her reply. “Do you want to go back to the house?”

“Not yet, talk to me some more.”

“About what?”

“Anything, it doesn’t matter. I just like listening to your voice.”

For another half an hour, she talked to him about everything and yet Remy would say he couldn’t remember one topic alone. By the time he disconnected the call, he felt more at peace and took his time walking back through the darkened woods to his house and into the kitchen. Duncan sat on one side of the huge black and gray granite kitchen island. He pushed a cup towards Remy as he sat down.

Remy sniffed the brew suspiciously. “This doesn’t smell like coffee.”

“Sinead called my cell after she hung up with you,” Duncan replied. “She said you get chamomile, lavender tea so you can at least get a little more rest before tomorrow.”

“I thought you gave me your cell phone,” Remy commented.

“That was my secondary cell, I had my regular phone in my pocket.”

“How many phones do you own?”

“Enough to work for you,” Duncan grinned. “Drink your tea.”

Remy sniffed it again and grimaced. “Smells like the lawn.”

“I added honey just like she said I should,” Duncan teased.

“How do I even have this in the mansion?” Remy wondered and took a sip. “Not bad, but not great either. This

isn't something I would do everyday."

"I'm going to tell Dot you drank tea, and then she can slowly integrate it...."

"You do and I will strangle you, Scotsman," Remy warned. "We never speak of this in mixed company or ever."

Duncan looked at hm over the top of his own mug. "You seem less haggard than you usually do when you tear out of here like a bat out of hell."

"Sinead just talked to me," Remy answered. "Her voice is soothing and she's also very logical."

"So, a sympathetic Vulcan."

Remy laughed out loud. "I'm telling her you said that."

"I'm telling Dot about the tea."

"Well played."

Duncan drained his cup. "In any case, I'm going back to bed and you should too. Try and get some sleep, brother."

"Will do, and thanks Duncan."

He lifted his hand in a wave as he walked out the back sliding door. Remy slowly climbed the stairs and went directly to take a hot shower. The pulsing rain jets soothed his tired muscles as she stood with his hand splayed on the terrazzo tile. By the time he got out and toweled off, his bed was looking more pleasing by the minute.

"What was in that tea?" he yawned climbing between the sheets and the thick comforter. "Leave it to Duncan to slip me a mickey."

He closed his eyes, knowing he would be up in two to three hours again anyway, but this time there was just blessed darkness and no dreams to torment him. Remy was surprised the next morning when he opened his eyes; it was eight-thirty and the sun was up. Holy shit! He sat up and smiled knowing this was the first time in years he slept more than three-hour intervals. Thanks to Sinead and her Godawful tea.



Chapter Five

Sitting behind a desk everyday was not something that Remy enjoyed doing. In fact, he absolutely hated this part of his daily grind. The suit stifled him, the tie seemed to strangle him, there was a certain air people expected of him and he played the role. Being a black man, in this world came with a bunch of bullshit. Either they expected him to be hood wearing gold chains and to attend every rap stars lavish shindigs where champagne was flowing and scantily clad women walked around or danced trying to gain some type of favor.

Or they thought he would be this stingy, uppity bastard, who looked down on the less fortunate of his skin color with disdain... like his father. Remy knew he was neither of these things. Yet the stigma was still there, so he did exactly what he wanted to do and didn't give a damn about what anyone thought. Today was one of those days that he loved, outside on a clear day with no rain, for once, watching the kids from his charity group, play on the green grass. Laughter was in the air while some played flag football and other kids just hung around the picnic tables, eating the food provided by caterers.

It wasn't fancy shit like finger foods and canapes. Instead, it was the good stuff like hot dogs, hamburgers, potato salad, coleslaw and things he wasn't allowed to have growing up. Remy bit into fully loaded hotdog exuberantly and chewed. Today was a jeans and t-shirt type of day and he was looking forward to getting out there and playing with the kids, until he was sweaty and exhausted. Okay, he had to admit, times like this he could embrace being a kid again, there was no big office and piles of paperwork, there was sunshine and a sense of freedom.

“You're going to need stomach medicine if you keep shoving those things in your mouth.”

Duncan came running up. With a sigh he sat down on the bench of the picnic table and took bottle of ice tea from the cooler filled with ice. He was wearing a pair of red shorts and t-shirt that matched, making Remy's cargo shorts and jersey

blue t-shirt look neat and pristine. Duncan chugged almost half the bottle before sighing in relief as his thirst was quenched.

“Listen man. This has horseradish, potato chips, pickles, bacon bits and queso cheese,” Remy took another bite and spoke around his food. “This is what I consider, gourmet.”

Duncan looked green. “That’s absolutely disgusting.”

“Don’t knock it until you try it,” He said and finished his meal.

“You heading out there?” Duncan inclined his head. “I think they’ve been practicing since last year. They are brutal.”

“They’re growing,” Remy grinned. “Did you think they would stay small forever and in awe of your skill?”

“You’ll feel it when you get out there; complete decimation,” Duncan said. “And your back is gonna hurt.”

“I’m not that old,” Remy reminded him with a laugh.

“Your back is done for,” his friend repeated. “I hope to God I haven’t thrown out the Bengay at my place.”

“I’m so sorry old man,” he said in fake sorrow.

“Bite me,” Duncan grabbed some ice from the cooler and threw it at him.

“I’m going to go take on a game with these kids,” Remy said levering himself up from the bench. “You stay here and relax, I’m in my zone right now.”

“Uh-huh,” Duncan waved him away and went back to his drink.

Remy soon learned that he was in fact not in his zone, and the kids he played with last year, had become teens, and they were ready for battle. Did they sync up to beat my ass?’ Remy wondered as he took another tackle to the grass. Maybe he should have gone with soccer. He turned his head to look at Duncan take a hit to the shin. No, soccer doesn’t seem any better. He watched the other team huddle together, and one boy looked up and gave him a wicked grin. Oh shit.

“Mr. Durant, eyes on me while I’m calling a play,” the girl captain of his team said in a no-nonsense voice. “They ain’t taking another flag off us.”

“Dang okay, Natasha. Weren’t you like eight last year?” Remy answered.

“I’m fourteen,” she said in a dry amused voice. “I’m on the football team at school. I know Brett. He likes the hammer formation and we’re going to hit a basic counter formation and get take out their QB Luke, that balls going to fumble. I want you to take it to a touchdown. Mr. Durant and Lucy, you guys are going to cover him like a blanket, make sure he gets that ball across the end zone.”

Remy stared at her with mouth agape. “Who are you?”

Natasha nodded her head in his direction. “The girl that’s gonna going to Alabama State on a full football scholarship and be the first woman drafted to the NFL.”

Remy held out his hand impressed. “I will sure as hell make sure you get there.”

“Thanks, Mr. D,” Natasha piled her hair up on her head, her brown skinned face sheened with sweat. “Let’s show them how we do it.”

If he was impressed at her words and intelligence, that was nothing compared to watching this young woman call plays and move down the field. If there was going to be a first female in the NFL draft it would definitely be Natasha. They did get down the touchdown and three more after that. By the time, Remy called the game quits, because Duncan was right, his back hurt like hell. He went back over to where he sat earlier, grabbed a cold water to pour over his head, then downed a Snapple in one fell swoop.

Duncan looked at him amused. “How are ya fairing there, Mr. I’m-not-old?”

“They kicked my ass,” Remy admitted. “Did you see that girl, Natasha call plays?”

“Try being on the opposite side of those plays,” Duncan answered. “She freaking had them kicking the entirety of my

ass.”

“She wants to go to Alabama State full ride scholarship,” Remy said.

“I don’t want to ruin her dreams, but that old boys club is going to fight hard for her not to play as a career.” Duncan commented. “She’s good, I mean like pro good by the time she grows up.”

“Then we’ll help her,” Remy answered firmly. “Pay for school, shake up some of those college assholes and the NFL, buy a damn team who knows? But she’s going get her dream.”

“That’s the good in you, Remy, you want to save everyone,” Duncan said in a gentle tone. “One of these days, you are going to have to learn you can’t save everyone.”

“Then what is this life for, Duncan, all this money and crap that I have?” Remy demanded to know. “I may not be able to save everyone but I’m sure as hell going to try.”

“I know man, just pointing out the obvious here.” Duncan slapped him on the shoulder.

His cellphone rang in his pocket, reminding Remy it was there and he wondered how the damn thing wasn’t snapped the way he hit the ground repeatedly. The number came up as unknown on his private line and Remy answered it curiously.

“Hello?”

“Is this a Mr. Remington Durant?” the female voice said.

“Yes it is,” he answered.

“The billionaire Remy Durant, that is always on TV,” the voice said unbelievably.

“Yes it is,” he frowned. “Who is this?”

A bunch of excited whispering went on in the back ground.

“Well?”

“Mr. Durant, this is the principal of the high school, Miss. Atkins,” the voice finally answered.

“We have Brian Hurst in the office for fighting, and he said to call you.”

“May I speak to him please?” he asked politely.

“I’d have to put you on speaker...”

“That’s fine.”

“Hey Remy,” Brian voice sounded smug which made Remy frown even more. “It was bullshit, some kid was picking on me and I’m ragged for fighting and he’s back in class.”

“I’m on my way,” Remy’s tone was clipped and he hung up the phone.

“Uh-oh your face bodes nothing good,” Duncan noted.

“Hold down the fort, I’ll be back as soon as I can.” Remy said in a crisp tone. “Brian got in trouble at school.”

“And he called you?” Duncan said. “Bro handle this carefully. Call his ma to meet you there.”

“It will be fine. I’ll take him home and she will be there,” he answered. “No need to make her leave home.”

“If you say so.”

Remy didn’t stay to ask what Duncan meant. Instead, he walked to the Mercedes SUV that was parked close by; he got in, put on his sunglasses and made his way to the high school close to Capitol Hill. It amazed Remy that one side of this area could be safe enough for a high school and the other not so much. He parked easily and after being buzzed into the school, the new protocols to keep kids safe, he went into the office door. The receptionist seemed to be waiting; she was standing with a wide smile.

“Mr. Durant, Brian is in the office of our principle, if you would step right this way,” she extended a hand politely in the direction she needed him to follow.

Remy stepped inside a decent sized office decorated with small plants and little accents to make it more homelike. The principle sat beside the desk while Brian sat sullenly in a chair

that was beside the wall. Principal Atkins was a sharply dressed black woman with mahogany skin, wearing a powder blue business suit.

She held out her hand to him with a warm smile. “Mr. Durant, I can’t tell you what an honor it is to meet you.”

“Yeah but you didn’t believe I knew him,” Brian muttered.

Remy pointed a finger at him. “No.”

“Thank you, Mr. Durant for seeing how insolent...”

“Where’s the other boy that was in the fight?” Remy cut off her words.

She seemed taken aback. “He is from an affluent family and its quite evident that Brian started...”

Remy turned to Brian. “What happened?”

“We were in the lunch room and the rich kids always pick on the kids that either get in through the charter program or live close enough to go to this school. We don’t have the money you see, so they bully us all, they call us names, smack our lunches out of our hands. Any time we fight back, the teachers and Miss. Atkins take their side,” Brian explained. “Today, Lucas Wright and his crew, as he calls them, was going in extra hard. Usually I can take it, but they said something dirty about Mandy and when she finally got past freshman. So, I beat their asses after he tried to punch me in the face.”

“It’s a completely different story than what Lucas and his friends said,” Mrs. Atkins protested.

“I had friends too waiting to speak up for me,” Brian countered. “But our side didn’t matter. There is big divide here among the rich and the poor and many of the teachers cause it because they get rich gifts and shit..”

“Brian...” Remy’s tone warned.

“Sorry. I mean they do it, and only a few teacher here are okay. But, they get stifled by the others,” Brian said. “Especially when the so-called PTA brings in thousands of dollars and threaten to take it away.”

“That is not true, Brian and you know it!” Miss. Atkins gaped outraged.

“Yeah, then why did Lucas tell me he won’t be punished for this because his mom runs the PTA?” Brian asked and Mrs. Atkins looked away in embarrassment.

“We’ll wait for the parents and Lucas be brought in so we can discuss it,” Remy sat down next to Brian and pinned her with a stare as he pulled out his cell. “I suggest, you call them because I am calling the superintendent to come down here as well. You all will explain to me the divide between education and wealth as opposed to children who you deem poverty ridden.”

“Mhmm,” Brian grinned.

“Boy if you don’t stop,” Remy warned him and silence Brian.

In the end, there were the Wright parents, who consisted of two Pediatricians, and their son Lucas looked at Remy in shock as he spoke up for Brian. The superintendent sat uncomfortably with Mrs. Atkins trying to keep both sides happy.

“Well, I run the PTA and this bring in the dollars this school needs for funding,” Mrs. Wright said lifting her nose in the air as if that gave her son permission to be a teen asshat.

“How much was that last year?” Remy asked.

“Twenty thousand dollars,” she said with a smug smile.

Remy pulled out his phone again and called his assistant. “Dot, draft a cashier’s check for fifty thousand dollars.”

“To whom?” Dot voice questioned across the line.

Remy rattled off the name of the high school and hung up while everyone stared in shock.

“If money is needed for the playing ground to be even for these kids to be treated fairly. It’s now served and match,” Remy spoke calmly.

“What do you want exactly?” The superintendent asked in a stuttered voice.

Remy pinned him with a gaze. “Do I have to spell it out? If Lucas started the fight and Brian answered, they both should be punished the same. Money should not be the directive of how children are treated in this damn school. And if it is, I’ll start a public campaign to make sure everyone knows how the divide works. You certainly don’t want a bunch of parents protesting outside this school with me in the lead and the news outlets running it by the night’s end. Fix the mandates. Educate and treat these kids fairly, not by the donation amount or how rich their parents are. And for God sakes, bring in some diversity and ethics instructors to educate everyone.”

“But,” Mrs. Atkins said and stopped.

“Can he do that?” Lucas’s mother asked. “If he can we certainly can match the fifty thousand.”

“Don’t claim money because your coffers are full,” Remy snapped. “I just made sure of it.”

Her husband stopped her from speaking. “No, we cannot and I’m not playing who can donate more with Remington Durant. Lucas is spoiled and entitled and at this point he wrote a check his ass can’t cash.”

“But Dad,” Lucas started and his father quelled his words with a dark stare. “There will be changes Lucas. Big changes on how you act at home and at school.”

In the end, both Brian and Lucas got a suspension for fighting, which was fair in his opinion. He led Brian outside into the sun and opened the door so he could hop into the SUV.

Brian turned to him. “That’s was epic Remy. Lucas almost shit...”

“No,” Remy snapped. “Brian, who I am or what I have should not be used in this manner. Why didn’t you call your mom?”

“Because she would’ve come down here, took my punishment, and nothing would get fixed,” Brian mumbled.

“Then when I heard about it, I could’ve helped her handle it,” Remy pointed out. “I like your mom, more than like okay, but you can’t play one against the other. You were showing off and you know it. Our relationship cannot and should not be based on that.”

Brian hung his head. “I’m sorry, I guess I just thought...”

“That since I like your mom that I was going to be easier on you,” Remy said. “No. I will not, and now you get the pleasure of telling her what happened today.”

“She will not be pleased,” Brian answered. “Can’t we just join witness protection and be done with it?”

Remy grinned as he started the vehicle. “No, we cannot.”

After getting to Enchanted Arms, Remy soon realized that he probably should have listened to Brian about witness protection. Sinead was livid. Not only at Brian, but at him for going down to the school. Apparently, word had reached her about the events in the office.

“Brian, go to your room. you’re grounded for three weeks,” Sinead said stiffly.

“But Mom, I didn’t start it!” Brian exclaimed.

“You let him taunt you into a fight and you fell for it,” Sinead replied and turned to Remy. “And you went down there.”

“He called me!” Remy defended himself. “What was I supposed to do?”

“Call me,” She retorted. “Not go down there and fling your money around. I sent them to that school for an education not to flaunt money that’s not theirs.”

Remy shoved his hands in his pockets. “Okay I get it. But after it was all solved, I told Brian that he shouldn’t think he can use me that way, because I care about all of you.”

Brian mouthed sorry for the top of the stairs.

“Brian, if you don’t get your butt in that room,” Sinead’s voice held a warning note that the young boy heeded and took

off down the hall.

“Sinead, I’m sorry that I handled it that way,” Remy apologized. “I should’ve called you.”

“You should’ve and that’s not the real issue,” She snapped. “You usurped my authority by using money. How are those kids and the teachers supposed to respect me when they know you will throw money at the problem?”

“I wasn’t trying to do that,” Remy took a deep breath and looked at her helplessly. “I saw a snot nosed privilege kid who was straight cocky knowing that he wouldn’t get in trouble. It rubbed me the wrong way.”

“It’s not for you to be rubbed the wrong way,” Sinead cried out. “I’m the parent, you’re like some rich dude poking his nose in. We are your flavor of the next few months until you get bored and move on; then I have to pick up the pieces.”

“Do you really think that?” Remy turned her by her shoulders and saw the uncertainty and mistrust in her eyes. “My God, you do.”

“I have had zero positives in dealing wealthy men who think they can buy anything they want, even love and abuse,” Sinead said bitterly. “You don’t know how many times Keith paid off someone to say I attacked him and he had to defend himself. You know crazy black women can’t control their anger.”

“First, I’m as black as you, money doesn’t make my skin change color,” Remy said darkly. “And you can see for yourself what kind of man I am. I won’t be placed in the same category as a fucking abuser. I more than like you and these kids, Sinead, I know I was wrong as fuck for going to Brian without you. But I can’t be a poor man to court you and feel like you’ll give me a chance then. I was hoping you would look past my bank account and see that I’m a good guy who wants to help the community, trying to give everyone a chance.”

“Remy...”

He glanced at her, feeling more hurt than angry at their interaction. She still couldn't see past the money and no matter how close they got, Sinead still thought he would up and leave one day. How could he keep trying to prove himself to someone with that type of bias?

"I'm going to head out," Remy said quietly, suddenly even too deflated to fight. "Call me if you want to, and if you don't, please know all the promises made to you and the children will be kept. G'night Sinead."

Remy felt her eyes on him as he left. He walked down the cement path from the front door to the house. It was the first time in a very long time where Remy felt beaten, but had to put a brave face on as he went back to the community activity that was playing out in the park. Sinead was on his mind, and each thought of her made his heart ache. He wished he knew how to make her affection for him to grow, but all the money he had couldn't make that happen.



"YOU'RE AN IDIOT."

"I know," Sinead bemoaned.

"No. You are truly an idiot. I feel like I have to beat you about the head with that statement."

The voice came from her friend, Callie, and even though it was just a phone call, Sinead could picture her friend smacking her upside the head. Callie was in New York for work. Callie worked in acquisitions for a high-class auction house. For the last year, she had been working on a collection for a client based out of England. She also was blunt like a hammer, and Sinead knew her friend would not soft soak anything.

"Sinead, everyone in the world knows that Remington Durant is one of the most eligible bachelors out there. They also know this man is not a show off, he doesn't go to the events that would be filled with glitz, glamor." Callie announced. "He frequents charity galas, sets up communities to work better and bring in new jobs. Why would you accuse

him of being like Keith? That asshole tried to strip away your identity, until you literally thought about suicide to escape the abuse. Remington Durant is not like that. I haven't even met the guy and I could tell you that."

"Yes, I'm the biggest fool on the planet," Sinead sighed. "His face looked so hurt when he left, and the kids are all upset even though they're not saying it. Well except Rebecca, she's my informant about what they say. They are all mad at me for chasing him away."

"Hell, I'm mad at you," Callie said. "But this can be fixed, go apologize to the man, and take him some flowers and chocolate."

A laugh escaped Sinead. "Isn't that for women?"

"Who says?" Callie demanded to know. "Men need to feel wanted too. I say go romance that man and tell him sorry and take cookies too."

"So, flowers, chocolate, and cookies," Sinead said dryly. "Anything else?"

"Do it wearing a trench coat and lingerie."

"We have not got that far," she said to her friend firmly. "Taking things slow. The last time I didn't go carefully or see the triggers until it was too late."

Callie sighed. "You need to put that behind you and stop using that as a criteria for men. Trust me, after that, your instinct would scream if Remy was like that."

"When are you coming home?" Sinead asked. "I miss my friend. I may need to start taking applications for a new bestie."

"Wow, do that and I'm coming home to take you out at the knees," Callie said. "I should be home in the next few weeks. My client has his last piece on the way. The sale, to all parties involved, should be done soon and my lucrative advance check cut. Then, I'm homeward bound."

"I can't wait," Sinead admitted. "I miss you and the kids miss you."

“I miss that ragtag bunch myself,” her friend laughed and then sobered up. “We need to find you a place to rent that’s not on that block. We grew up, and it seems like Morris chose to be a Kangol hat and matching track suit wearing loser for all his life. Someone should tell him dressing like 1980s Run DMC is dead.”

“I like our house, but I may need to find a new place if this landlord keeps being a jerk,” Sinead sighed in frustration. “I don’t know what the hell is wrong with him, I paid the back rent and three months ahead.”

“We’ll get it sorted, but you know I’m with you. You and the horde will not be homeless,” Callie said firmly.

“Oh, of course we won’t; I’d never let that happen,” Sinead played with a string hanging from her blankets. “Anyway, go do your thing. I need to go apologize to Remy.”

“Good luck!” Callie said in excitement. “Talk soon bestest of friends.”

“Bye.”

There was a smile on her face when Sinead disconnected the call. Looking at the time and knowing this was Friday and the kids would be home ready to start a long weekend with two teachers work days the next week. She had time to go see Remy and then grab groceries, before heading to pick up Rebecca and Devin. The other kids would be driven home by Brian before he left to his internship. Brian had mentioned that nothing had changed when it came to working for Remy and they were all great.

This was day three since they argued, and she hadn’t reached out. Sinead had to accept this because like he said the ball was in her court. I know I was wrong but he could at least call, she thought, but quickly chastised herself. She was the one who caused the rift and had to fix it. Picking up her purse she headed down the stairs and out the front door. She locked it and walked to the new, but used, six-seater van.

“Hey look at you like a soccer mom who lives in the hood.” Morris stood at the end of the driveway.

Sinead rolled her eyes. “What brings you out of your hovel before the sunset?”

“I’m always outside early,” Morris smiled. It was creepy.

“Uh-huh.”

Morris shoved his hands in the pocket of the tracksuit. “So, I wanted to see if you wanted to grab some lunch. I mean the new Chinese place is open and we could go there, hit the lunch special.”

Sinead stared at him with her mouth open. “What?”

“Me and you, Sin and we can talk bury the hatchet,” Morris kept his tone friendly. “We were friends once, I’d like that again, maybe more... But first we gotta be friends and work towards a goal ya know?”

“Am I in bizarro world?” Sinead asked looking around. “Morris we were friends when you weren’t a jerk and a drug dealer. So til around the time when we were juniors. Now you’re asking me to be friends and a date?”

“I mean why not?” Morris asked.

“You’re a drug dealer for one. My social worker would grab my kids in a hot minute,” Sinead began to list the ways this wasn’t right, and why it would it ever happen. “I don’t like you like that, never did. I’m not built to be an around the way girl, holding down my drug dealer boyfriend. I have to reiterate the drug dealer part, and the fact that I don’t like you.”

Morris gaze became dark. “It’s because of that rich boy.”

“Remy is a man and even if he wasn’t in the picture. It would not be you,” Sinead answered firmly. “I’m late; so get out of my driveway.”

“One of these days, Sinead. I’m not going to be the one protecting you,” he threatened.

A sarcastic laugh escaped her. “You’re protecting me now? If delusion comes with that junk you push, stop sampling your own product. I’m getting in my car, don’t be there when I start to back up.”

She got in her car, started the engine, and started to reverse back. Morris stood defiant for moment before stepping away after a threatening stare. Sinead shook her head, wondering when Morris lost his mind. She had never given the man anything but utter disdain and disgust. Yet, he decided they should date? There was some kind of endgame to his actions but Sinead didn't know what.

She put Morris and his foolishness firmly from her mind and went about her task. Pike's Place was minutes away and it was the time of year where the flowers in market were so vibrant and a vast array of colors. Sinead wanted more masculine types of blooms. From the flower design class she took in college, she knew they needed to be bold color with strong petals and angular shapes. Sinead chose, Red Chrysanthemums, Birds of Paradise, with the orange pointed blooms, nestled in bright green leaves and she added white peace lilies to break up the color scheme.

With the bouquet in hand, she stopped at her favorite macaroon shop and bought one of the assortment boxes as an additional peace offering. Then it was on to Durant Enterprises, the massive shiny steel and glass building off Union Street. Sinead went to the front reception desk one had to go through before making your way to the elevators. The keeper of the gates, Sinead thought with an amused smile.

“Good afternoon, I'm here to see..”

“You can go right up ma'am,” The security man said with it smile. “Mr. Durant has left direct instructions you never have to wait. Press the buttons for the private offices in blue.”

“Yes, thank you so much,” Sinead said with a smile.

She made her way to the elevators and was on her way up to Remy's private offices with a soft swish as the lift moved upwards. Sinead had to admit the nervousness made her stomach clench because she didn't usually apologize or well, had anyone to say sorry to.

Dot looked at her through her cat eye glasses and gave a broad grin. “That's either a special surprise or a 'I might have fucked up' bouquet.”

“The latter,” Sinead admitted. “Is he in?”

Dot nodded. “He is. Kick Duncan out please, he has a two o’ clock downstairs in his own office. Also, tell him I’m not his assistant he needs to hire one, damn it.”

“Yes ma’am,” Sinead said respectfully, knowing that this entire place would crumble unless Dot’s firm hand was at the till.

“They think I don’t know they are in there trying out a new video game from R and D but I know,” Dot’s lips pursed. “Remind them I see all and know all.”

“I will do so forthwith,” she said while moving to the door.

Sinead opened the heavy barrier and noted both men had their chairs turned towards a large screen on the wall. Dot was right. Both of them had consoles in their hands and seemed so intent on the game, they didn’t even notice she came in.

“Look how I take that shot,” Remy said with pride.

“An arrow to an orc’s neck and where are you, cowering behind a rock?”

“No, you buffoon, and I’m on the hill, covering your ass,” Duncan snapped. “Why do you think they are falling down around you moron? Typical soldier thinking he did it all himself.”

“Ok Marine, go eat your crayons and shut it,” Remy answered.

Sinead didn’t know what either of them meant, but she cleared her throat to let them know they weren’t alone. They turned, both looking embarrassed when they saw her standing in the door way.

“Hi um... Sinead,” Remy moved his chair behind his desk and threw the wireless remote at Duncan.

“We ere just, trying out a new prototype...” Duncan let his words fall way as his smile became a grin.

“Dot knows exactly what you guys are doing in here,” Sinead told them. “Duncan, she says to tell you there’s an

appointment at two you are going to miss and also she's not your assistant hire someone, cuz she's tired of your shit."

Duncan grinned. "She didn't say that did she?"

Sinead raised an eyebrow. "Didn't she?"

"Apparently I'm leaving and no one brought me any flowers." Duncan bemoaned as he stood up and walked to the door.

"Here you go," Sinead pulled out one of the Bird of Paradise bloom and kissed his cheek. "Now go to work.

Duncan beamed. "See you both later."

"That sent a fire under him, and now he's going to expect me to give him flowers and kiss his cheek," Remy teased amused.

"You wish," Duncan called, taking long strides to the door.

Remy's smile left when they were alone. "I didn't expect to hear from you. It's been three days."

"I know," Sinead came forward hesitantly. "I'm very stubborn even when I'm wrong."

Remy stood and came around the desk to stand before her. "So, this is an apology?"

She held out the flowers and macaroon box to him. "I'm an idiot. I didn't mean what I said."

"Yes, you did," Remy answered bluntly.

Sinead looked up at him and sighed. "Yes I did, but I was also wrong about my perception of you and for that I was completely apologize. I'm sorry."

"Okay," Remy put the chocolates and flowers on the table to pull her into his arms.

"That easy, no groveling?"

"Why would I need you to do that? You apologized, and we move forward," Remy answered simply. "Then I work towards making you feel safe in knowing that you can trust me with your heart and your kids."

“I do,” Sinead said. “It’s been me for so long. It has been pointed out to me that I might not know how to share the space.”

Remy gave her a questioning look. “And who told you that precise, and correct, assessment mind you?”

“My friend Callie. She’s in New York,” Sinead twined her arms round his neck. “I hope she comes back soon, for you to meet her. We went to school together and Morris... I had a strange run in with him this afternoon.”

Remy frowned. “How so?”

“He asked me out,” Sinead looked up at him. “Like I would’ve said yes to him in any way shape or form. Then he kinda threatened me saying he was protecting me, and crazy stuff. I told him to get off the property before I ran him over. I was coming to see you.”

“A good enough reason to me,” Remy kissed her and it turned greedy instantly between them. When he lifted his head, his breath was ragged. “I think we can say that I was wrong, and I take part of the blame as well.”

“So, bringing you flowers and macaroons was not needed?” Sinead asked in amusement.

Remy looked downright affronted. “Hey just because I’m a man doesn’t mean don’t need to be romanced and have nice things.”

This time she couldn’t help but laugh. “I will keep that in mind.”

“Please do,” Remy kissed her hard on the lips. “Are we back on track?”

Sinead nodded. “I think so.”

“There’s this charity event next weekend. Say you’ll go with me,” Remy asked.

Doubts swirled in her mind. “I don’t know. The last time I went to one of those swanky functions...”

“Yeah I was there and trust me, no one will dare try that with me on your arm,” he promised.

“Don’t you mean the other way around?”

He shook his head. “No, because it’s my honor to be escorting you.”

“You say the nicest things,” she whispered. “I can almost believe you.”

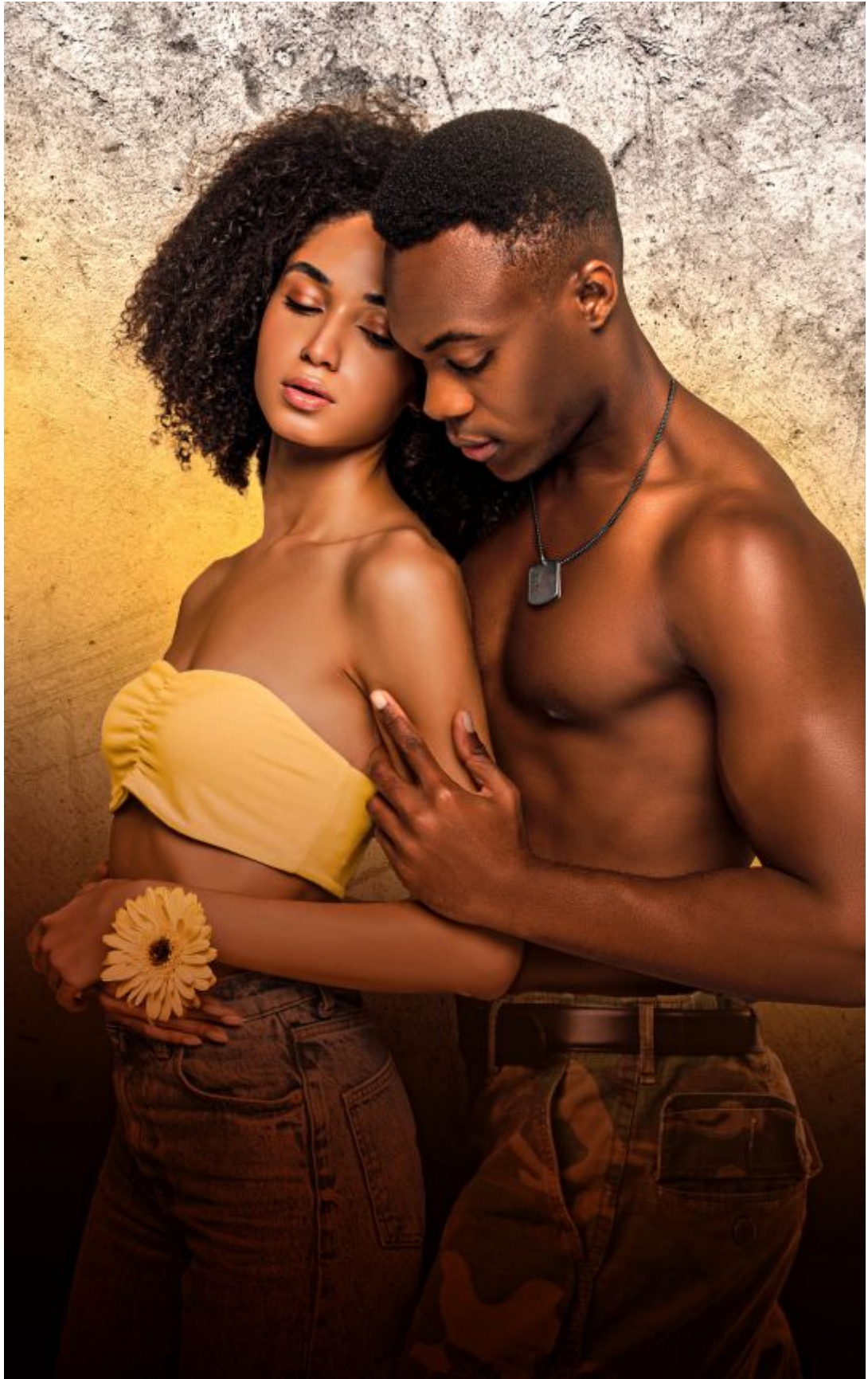
“You should, so that’s a yes?”

“It’s a yes.”

“Good. Then, kiss me until I forget I’m at work,” Remy demanded in a deep husky timber.

“I can do that.”

Sinead pressed her lips against his and her eyes closed as she teased his mouth with feather like kiss. With a deep groan Remy deepened the kiss, taking not only himself but Sinead from reality. She knew within her heart he was nothing like men in her past, who saw her as nothing. A girl from the wrong side of the tracks with no one to look out for her and one that could be used. Remy saw her past as her strength and not something that should be used against her. Now, it was her turn to stop putting a stigma on him because he was wealthy, and see Remy for the man he truly was.





Chapter Six

Duncan sat across from Remy and there was a file open in front of him. Two days after his PTSD nightmare, things were back to normal. And actually, Remy felt better than he had in a long time. Sinead was a part of that; there wasn't a day where they didn't talk multiple times and he saw her as frequently as he could.

This afternoon while she was on his mind it was for another reason, Enchanted Arms, that was her home, a dream to keep at risk children safe. But getting a handle on the situation of why the owner wanted to pull the house right from under her was his main concern. Duncan, in his usual fashion, comprised a file on the man all the way up to where he went to school.

"Jack Benton should be the poster boy for slum lords," Duncan said. "He has seven properties on that street alone and none of them are up to code. Enchanted Arms is in the best state."

"How much is she paying in rent each month?" Remy asked.

"More than she should for the place," he answered. "Three thousand dollars and each person I spoke to in some of the duplex units are doing the same. He knows they don't have any other choice and can't find anywhere else to live on their income."

"Make offers on all the properties; then get Mike to start renovations as soon as possible," Remy said firmly. "We'll give the credit on the time and start new smaller leasing amounts next year. Then, that money is going to start going into building a community center for that area."

"Knowing how you work and what you would plan to do. I tried to buy him out, a very lucrative deal, mind you," Duncan showed him the offer. "He said no, and that he already has another deal in the works."

“Oh does he?” Remy mused. “I guess we’ll be paying Benton Realty a visit tomorrow.”

“Fun, fun,” Duncan murmured. “I also have the file on Morris. Had a friend of mine pull his record from Seattle’s finest, and his rap sheet starts from the age of thirteen. Worked his way up to drug lord and stolen guns.”

Remy took the file. “He’s an over achiever I see. I’ll look this over.”

“What are you studying so hard on that computer?” Duncan said dryly. “And were did you get off to three days this week in the afternoon?”

“Nowhere, I had business meetings,” Remy said not willing to reveal what he was doing quite yet.

Duncan sniffed dramatically. “That’s what they all say. Are you cheating on me?”

Remy chuckled. “Yes with a bigger, more bearded, red head Scotsman.”

“Uh huh.” Duncan grinned. “Well if it involves the law team, I can at least know its legal.”

“How did you know the lawyers were involved?” Remy didn’t even try to deny it.

“I know all and see all,” Duncan said sagely. “Fear my power.”

“I think I’ll risk it and not feed your ego.”

“We have some new acquisitions from research and development to discuss. Milo was very impressed with meeting Brian... I saw them...”

A knock on the door broke off Duncan’s word and Dot stuck her head around the barrier.

“You have a visitor, Remington,” she said with a smile.

“Uh-oh, must be the IRS, she’s using your government name,” Duncan teased.

“Can’t be. They get their very large piece of the pie, yearly without fail,” Remy said amused.

He was pleasantly surprised to see Sinead standing in the doorway when Dot stepped away. She held a picnic basket in her hand.

“Lunch?” Sinead said hesitantly. “It’s not much, but I made us a few things...”

“I’m in,” he braced his hands on the desk and pushed his chair away.

“I’ll just table everything I was planning on saying,” Duncan said dryly.

Remy had already taken his coat off the back of the leather chair and pulled it on. “Yeah, lets do that.”

As he left the office he took the basket from her hands before lacing his fingers with hers. “This was a great surprise.”

“You’re always making plans for us; I thought it should be my turn,” Sinead smiled up at him.

To Remy she was a breath of fresh air in a world filled with wealth, greediness and fake smiles as masks, to hide true intent. Sinead wore a hunter green light sweater dress with a pair of black flats. Silver hoops in her ears matched the thin silver necklace with a single pink pearl pendant in the center. The mass of wild hair that she could barely restrain with a wide green and yellow band, always drew his attention. It was his fantasies to fist his hand into her thick hair and ravage her senses with a kiss. That was one of the tamer thoughts he had about Sinead. The rest were getting more explicit as their relationship progressed.

“There’s a small park close by your building,” she suggested. “Or at least I think so, I barely got a glance at it, so I’m not sure. Someone was sitting on their horn behind me when I slowed down.”

“I’ve got something better,” Remy flashed her a grin. “On top of this building there’s a green space I had created. It’s a good place for employees to get out and get some fresh air and

exercise without having to deal with traffic to grab a bite to eat.”

“I can say honestly I have never seen a garden on top of a building,” Sinead chuckled.

“There’s a full cafeteria on sight, free of cost. We have a hot bar, sandwiches salads and the likes,” Remy explained, the elevator dinged lightly and the doors opened so they can step aside. “Plus, ice cream and an assortment of candy they can nibble on.”

“My little basket sounds paltry compared to all that,” she commented.

Remy pulled her close and kissed her temple. “I’d rather have anything you make me any day.”

“Look at you being all sweet and stuff,” Sinead hesitantly slipped her arm around his waist, and that small action pleased Remy immensely.

He knew Sinead needed time to get accustomed to things. It still burned him completely that she had to deal with an abusive relationship and he wondered about her family, and why she had to be so independent as a young woman. Those were her stories to tell, just like his relationship with his father was as well. Yet, Remy found he wanted to share it with her, to tell her everything about his life, dreams and he thought about his future for the first time in a long time. The elevator opened up to the roof, and after walking down a short hallway to a set of sliding door, they were at the entrance to the rooftop solarium.

Walking through, Remy led her into the enclosed green space that he had specially created for the building. It cut down heating cost and offered his employees a place to go and relax. There were even swing hammocks set up for a nap in the sun, under the lush green plants and flowers. Sinead ran her fingers along the wide leaves of the elephant ear plants and laughed when she saw the palm trees in white clay pots. There was a trellis growing Moscato grapes, no less. And close by, the mandarin trees had ripe fruit growing between the leaves.

“You created an oasis on the roof!” Sinead exclaimed. “These pots are massive and there’s fruit!”

“This is not me; it’s Kimball who takes care of all this and keeps it going,” Remy told her. “Kim are you up here?”

“I am.”

If you saw Kimball with his six four frame and wide shoulder you automatically thought football player. He was the kindest most gentle man you could ever meet and his love of nature showed in every blade of grass that was on the roof of the Durant Building.

“Come meet my friend,” Remy encouraged. “Sinead, this is the one person who keeps this green space beautiful for all of us. Kimball meet Sinead.”

“Nice to meet you,” Sinead smiled up at him.

Kimball’s large hand swallowed hers. “You’re pretty, Sinead.”

“Thank you,” she said. “And you are very tall and handsome, Kimball”

“Hey Kim, I think Lori down in the day care brought in the bunnies today,” Remy said. “How about you go down and spend some time helping her and holding them?”

Kimball smiled wide. “Sure!”

He ambled off and Remy moved to their time system he had set up near the door and pressed buttons quickly.

“What are you doing?” she asked coming to stand beside him.

“Over the door there is a timer set up with a do not disturb sign,” Remy explained. “If anyone needs a little alone time to decompress or, you know breathing room, they can come up here and when the time is entered into the system, the doors won’t open until the duration is up. It can be overridden in case of emergencies.”

“How much time do I have?” she teased.

“An hour.”

“Then I’ll have to make the most of our time.”

There was a punch of desire straight to his groin at her words that implied so much more. The kisses they shared drove him mad and Remy longed to feel Sinead’s body writhe under his touch. Not wanting to make her think her apprehension was correct and that he was attentive to her and the kids because he wanted to fuck her, Remy bided his time. When he finally had her, it would be so much sweeter and the time would be right.

Between the palm trees and the cover of plants reaching towards the sun through the tempered glass, he helped Sinead to spread out the blanket she had placed in the basket. Remy took off his coat folding in neatly and placing it on the grass before sitting down.

“So what do we have?” Remy asked peeking into the basket.

She smiled and took out each container with a flourish. “Today for the distinguished and handsome gentleman, we have tomato soup with grilled chicken and cheese sandwiches. Fresh made lemonade, cold pasta salad and for dessert, apple slices and homemade caramel sauce.”

“How does one make homemade caramel?” Remy asked curiously.

“This recipe is just four ingredients, butter, salt, sugar and heavy cream,” Sinead explained and it stays super creamy for dipping. I usually make a batch once month and store it in the fridge for the kidlets when they come home looking for a snack.”

“Wanna adopt me?” Remy asked.

“I thought you wanted another type of affection from me,” Sinead poured him soup from the thermos into a cup, and added a cut sandwich on the plate.

“Oh, I do, but I can be patient,” Remy took the meal offered to him and met Sinead’s gaze.

He took a sip of the tomato soup and tasted the fresh basil and other spices that rolled across his tongue. She kept the

sandwiches warm and while he was accustomed to a chef making his meals, this was delicious and the simple fare made him feel warm in more ways than one. How many times had he spent alone in a massive dining room sitting at an empty table, just wishing? For something tangible, wanting some kind of interaction love or simple affection and finding none of it. Food like this was nonexistent in his father's house, even when he was sick, not even fucking chicken soup.

Remy felt her hand on his face with as soft caress before she spoke in a soft caring voice. "You went off somewhere, a dark place."

"And you brought me back," he answered huskily.

"From where?"

Remy chewed thoughtfully for a moment. "Not a great childhood, lots of money, alone most of the time, asshole abusive father that that paid his way out of killing my mom."

"Oh Remy..."

"Not like that, I watched her die slowly until it was just me and him," he explained. "Then I made sure I was nothing like him. Joined the Army to spite him, and loved the comradery even though the loss in unbearable sometimes."

"Money doesn't make everyone happy does it?" Sinead took a sip of her own lunch before speaking again. "We were poor as hell and my family was just as crappy."

"Want to talk about it?" Remy asked.

Sinead shook her head. "No, because I am here to make you smile, not for you to listen to my sob story."

"I would still smile, for you," Remy tone was husky. "I find that, lately, my thoughts are that I would do anything for you."

"Don't say that," Sinead said bluntly. "I can't believe in Prince Charming anymore. The time for all that has gone. I have my kids to take care of and I can't be heartbroken or them for that matter."

Remy took her hand. “I thought we established, I’m not that type of guy?”

“Remy, every guy is not that type of guy until they are,” Sinead said. “You have to let me find that trust my way, not by your say so.”

“I know,” Remy couldn’t fault her for needing that type of foundation. “Just don’t paint me with such a broad brush of every guy... please?”

“I won’t,” she promised.

They finished lunch and Remy helped her clean up before they lay back on the cloth blanket and started up at the sun, while eating dipped apple slices.

“How is it the perfect temperature in here and not too warm not too cold?” She murmured.

“Because I’m here. Remy laughed and rolled on his side and leaned on his hand to face her. “Or maybe it’s because you’re here. I think it’s the latter.”

“I like you a lot,” Sinead turned her face.

“I’m glad.” A slow smile spread across his face. “Does that mean I get a kiss?”

“My lips are sticky,” she said simply.

Remy moved closer. “All the better for me. Let me kiss you, Sinead.”

“Please,” her eyes got soft and sultry like warm caramel.

Remy took the invitation and pressed his lips to hers, loving the feel. When he flicked his tongue out he taste the sweet treat, a groan escaped him and Remy moved to cover her body with his own. Just a little taste, he thought in a mind drunk with desire. Sinead didn’t stop him. Instead, she felt ran her fingers against his scalp and the soft scrape made him shiver as if she had scraped her nails down his back in passion. He pressed his hand against the curve of her thigh and stroked his way down then back up again under the knit dress while his tongue speared into her mouth to taste her deeper.

Sinead wrenched her mouth away from his. “Remy, someone may come in.”

“I’ve got fifteen minutes left,” Remy muttered, kissing her hard between his words. “I need you. God, I just need you so damn much.”

She took his cues as Remy demanded more from the kiss as they both were swept away by desire. Remy kissed with an urgency he barely could control. A whimper of delight escaped her and she gasped his name. His touch went further under her dress, and when Remy moved to his side so he could slip his hand between the barrier and her soft skin, Sinead’s hips lifted seeking more. Her fingers grasped the outline of his hard cock through the fabric of his trousers and his control slipped further away.

Remy pinned her hand over her head. “Don’t.”

“Why not?” her voice was breathless.

“Because then I will be fucking you right here and I don’t care who comes through that door,” he answered. “Let me feel; that’s all I ask for now.”

With nimble fingers, he slipped between the soft folds of her sex and touched her intimately. He swallowed her soft cry of pleasure when he found her clit and arousal had her already slick and ready to accept him. He wanted to bury his cock inside her. While he devoured her lips, he thought about how she would feel clenched around his cock. As he touched her, she writhed against his seeking hand, and he ached to have her naked beneath him. He lifted his head to watch Sinead as he touched with her eyes closed she arched her neck, panting breaths escaped her.

“You’re so wet, Babygirl,” Remy could hear the need in making his own voice raspy. “Do you want to come for me?”

“Yes.” Sinead said in a pleading voice. “Don’t stop, Remy.”

He penetrated her with one digit and started a slow sexy pace that made her moan against his mouth. Remy slid his finger deeper and gritted his teeth when he felt her sex clench

around his digit. Christ, he had to be fucking Job to withstand this kind of arousal. His thumb grazed over the sensitive bud of her clit and she bucked against his hand. Watching her need build was akin to watching an orchestra build the music to a crescendo, and Remy eyes were riveted on her face. Her lips were parted and soft pants escaped. Sinead's hand was clenched in the blanket while he fingered her.

"You are driving fucking wild. Do you know that?" Remy pressed a kiss on her lips. "I want you to come for me."

"Remy, here?" she moaned.

He increased the pace and pressure of his rhythm and a soft cry left her lips.

Remy leaned down to whisper in her ear, his voice raspy. "Yes, right now, so every time I come up here I can look at this very spot and know my hand was covered in your come. Give yourself over to it, Babygirl."

Another cry escaped her, and unable to resist, Remy wallowed the sound by taking her lips in a fierce kiss. Sinead devastated his senses until every thought was about her. When she found her release a guttural sound escaped him.

"Damn, God I wish I could fuck you right now," Remy noted she didn't look away when he licked her essence from his finger. "Your taste is better than any dessert."

"Does it bother you? Waiting that is?" Sinead sat up and fixed her skirt. "I know women must just rip off their clothes when you step into a room."

"I wouldn't know," Remy kissed her nose. "I seem to only have eyes for one woman, since we met, and she was wearing a black and white sexy dress that blew my goddamn mind."

"She sounds hot. I might want to date her," Sinead laughed.

"I got her first," Remy held out his hand to her and helped her to her feet before wrapping his arms around her. "I don't think I'm ever going to let her go."

"I may believe you," her tone was soft.

He kissed her then, long and deep. That felt very much like a promise, and one he didn't mind keeping. She affected him in ways he couldn't describe; not just her, but the kids as well. Going back downstairs holding her hand felt, perfect and right. Rodriguez always said that there would be a time when someone would creep past his defenses. Sinead was that person, and God it scared him to death. His baggage wasn't a break up or loss; it went deeper and she only had a taste of it over the phone. Would she run away when she saw the true extent of his damage?



REMY SAT ACROSS FROM the man sweating bullets in the dingy little office in a rundown strip mall. It was part of Capitol Hill and also in the center of his redevelopment plan. Duncan stood by the door looking ominously large with the low-cut red hair, the Oakley sunglasses, and zero in the way of a smile. Jack Benton had refused both of their offers to buy the property of Enchanted Arms. He either thought that he could get more money out Remy or had some stupid plan since he was in league with Morris. Remy knew it all and now he sat in person across from the greasy little bastard who kept glancing at him then Duncan before wiping the sweat off his brown with a dingy handkerchief.

“I don't know what you expect from me Mr. Durant. I said no to both your offers.” Jack Benton tried to sound firm, but his voice wavered and it told Remy all he needed to know.

Remy laced his fingers and gave the man a direct stare before speaking mildly. “I understand that Jack. What I don't understand, is why. They were two very lucrative offers, that would have set you up very nicely in retirement or whatever the hell you wanted to do.”

“Maybe the property has sentimental value to me,” Jack tried to be snide.

“Don't bullshit me,” Remy snapped. “I know that you've been working with the local drug dealer Morris. He told you to give Sinead grief about the rent, and told you not to sell to me.”

Jack's deep-set eyes widened, in a head going ball with only a few strands of brown combed over the top in some semblance of a style. It failed miserably, and there was the stink of deceit and fear in the man's sweat.

"H-how would you know that?" he stammered.

Remy narrowed his gaze. "I have eyes everywhere, including the last few meetings you had with Morris, each time when he turned up here with some kind of shady lawyer. Why is that Jack or should I tell you what I found out?"

"I have zero clues to what you are talking about," Jack folded his arms and sat back in his seat.

"Then why are you buying properties the behest of Morris and putting your name on them?" Remy asked.

"A man can buy properties; it's a completely legal venture," Jack countered.

"If it was legal his name would be on it," Duncan said from the door. "But I guess you know that already."

"It's not secret that Durant Enterprises has been buying property left and right in the neighborhood," Jack snapped. "This is our way of countering wealthy businessmen like yourself."

"Or Morris thinks he can bilk me for more cash or use them as stash houses to increase his hold on this community," Remy answered. "But I have come with a proposition, one that will keep you out of jail."

"Why would I be in jail?" Jack asked dubiously.

Remy laughed. "The apartment fire in Chicago. The very same one you owned and left the city before they could charge you with, what? Seven deaths? All the charges of being a slum lord. There are still active warrants for you."

"So, what? You will let me go if I sell the properties to you?" Jack swallowed thickly. "That fire wasn't my fault."

"It was your fault, completely, you built walls where there should be none, and I think two firemen got hurt. So, there's a

shit load of charges against you,” Remy said and laughed. “You really think I’d let you skate on hurting people?”

“Then what are you offering?” Jack asked.

“To pay you enough so your family doesn’t suffer, like the ones you left behind in that fire. I will also pay the restitution that will be expected when you are found guilty. So, it doesn’t take from your family.” Remy snapped. “I have no quarrel with your wife and your boys. I think the older one Jonathan is in college. When you go to jail, he shouldn’t have to lose a chance at a decent life. Nor should your wife and teen son have to leave their home because you are a complete asshole with no morals.”

“I’ve been a good man since that,” Jack seemed to beg.

“And families have lost their livelihood’s, their loved ones and you have sat living off the fat of others people’s income for years after.” Remy’s tone was stiff with anger. “That’s not a good man; so you have my offer. Take it or leave it. But when I leave here, two FBI agents will come in to arrest you. You went across multiple state lines to escape the law.”

Jack sighed and loosened his tie. “I’ll take it, how much time do I have?”

“Enough time to get the titles out of that safe under the desk and my friend to pull out his laptop to create a separate account for your family where the money from this transaction will be placed. We have a lawyer on stand by to expedite this; then, you can go home say goodbye to your family to explain to them why. The agents will be outside waiting; they will be also at the back door so don’t try to run.”

By the time the evening came around, Remy purchased five homes and the strip mall that they were in from Jack Benton. Money the man couldn’t afford to dish out himself. It was yet another piece of the puzzle of how much of a hold Morris had in the community, and how much drugs he probably sold to have such an amount. He was sly of course, making sure that he lived like a simple street thug to keep under the radar. But, there was money and lots of it. It was just the first string that could be pulled to unravel his entire

organization. Both Remy and Duncan watched Jack leave in his car to go to his family for goodbyes. There was a noticeable black SUV that was behind him as he pulled away.

“Did you make note of the accounts that gave him the money to pay for the properties initially?”

Duncan nodded. “They were several, different names, all female, and no doubt some of Morris’s little harem he has going on.”

“Pull each damn thread and chase it back to the source,” Remy said firmly. “Tie it all to him, and put surveillance on each of the properties. Morris is smarter than he looks. He has to be running his crap from each of those houses. There could be money stored in there as well.”

“He knew better than to start living large and getting on the drug task force’s radar,” Duncan said as they walked to the car. “I bet you every street informant tells them he is small time.”

“That’s why we do the work for them and its discreetly handed over.”

Remy got behind the wheel. “So where to now?”

“Drop me off to my car and then go do whatever Duncan does.” Remy said. “Mandy is cooking tonight, and I have been invited over to dinner. They eat around the table and talk about their day and stuff. I thought that was only sitcoms.”

“And I wasn’t invited,” Duncan gasped as if hurt.

“No, because they know your big burly ass would eat everything down the plate,” Remy teased.

“Bro you don’t eat like any delicate social gentleman,” Duncan retorted. “Remember I watched you inhale hot dogs like a vacuum.”

The banter continued until he was dropped off at his own vehicle and he drove away with a wave to his friend who went in the opposite direction. The way to Enchanted Arms was now one of his familiar routes. While he could come into the neighborhood the opposite block, Remy always made sure to

take the direction that took him past Morris' little hang out so they could see his face and know there was no fear.

The rain had begun which was one of those things one could expect in Seattle at any moment; so his now enemy and his friends went looking for shelter and the steps were empty. He parked his car in the usual spot in front of her house and made a mad dash up the driveway to the front door and the small awning that would keep him dry. A quick knock at the door and it was opened by Sinead; she was dressed in an oversized brown and gold sweater, that slid seductively off one shoulder, paired with black slinky tights and black low cut boots.

With only part of her hair down in the back, the top was pulled up in a messy bun and she was simply gorgeous. Remy couldn't help but pull her into his arms with a soft kiss and rub his nose against hers gently.

"Hi," he said huskily.

"Hi, did you get wet?"

A slow grin spread across his face. "Really?"

Sinead slapped at his arm. "Stop it; the children are here."

Hand in hand, she led him to the kitchen and Remy saw each of the children had a chore, down to Rebecca who was walking around the table putting napkins at each spot. Jeremy followed her with utensils while Brian seemed to be watching something in the oven. Devin had glasses of lemonade and he placed them gently on the table. Remy had to admit, he saw nothing like in his own life, so the scene of family unity and teasing warmed him in a way he never thought possible.

"Say hi to the horde," Sinead said amused.

"Hello horde," Remy said and chaos ensued.

Rebecca threw her arms around his legs, and Devin and the boys came over with high fives.

Mandy threw up a wave. "Hi Remy! Can't talk. Hand in salad, and Brian should be watching my garlic knots so they don't burn but have a nice golden top with the butter."

Brian rolled his eyes. "I'm watching them. Jeez, such a perfectionist."

Mandy shot him a dark look. "You wanna eat, you do as I say."

"With that said, where do you want me Coach?" Remy took off his coat and put it on the back of a chair.

Mandy gave him a wide smile. "Can you mix my salad dressing? All of the ingredients are measured out for the bottle. Mom can you get the parmesan cheese from the fridge?"

Sinead gave a mock salute and then nudged Remy. "She is very precise."

Mandy blushed and went back to her salad, and soon bowls were being placed at the small table where an extra chair, that didn't match, was pulled up for him. They all sat down and after a quick prayer by Jeremy, the food was passed around. Mandy made a family style spaghetti dinner and while he thought the dough for the bread might have been the frozen kind, Sinead told him that she made it all herself down to her sauce. The flavors were wonderful, and Remy could see that at fifteen Mandy had a talent. One that should be encouraged. She looked at him hopefully as he chewed, well they all did, no one else took a bite.

"What do you think?" Mandy asked with hopeful eyes.

He would've lied even if it was awful, because no one should destroy the hope in the young teen's face.

"Mandy this is truly delicious," Remy's voice was genuine. "You are such an amazing chef, are you planning on going to culinary school?"

She nodded shyly. "I want to, when I get a job I'm going to save up to go, like Brian is."

"We'll make it happen," Remy said with a smile. "Plus, you should talk to my chef. He can teach you a few things."

"That sounds great!"

Sinead clapped her hands lightly. “Ok, let’s eat before it gets to cold.”

With that, conversations started up and laughter combined with sharing food and stories. Remy not only talked, but he listened noting that Sinead too made sure every child was heard down to Rebecca who was convinced she could have a panda for a pet. He finally convinced her to settle for a large stuffed panda, because the real ones wouldn’t like leaving their mommies and daddies. After dinner, the apple pie with vanilla ice cream was all Sinead’s doing. The atmosphere was filled with love and warmth.

So much so, that the thought of going back to his own house didn’t appeal to him in the least, because it felt so foreign and empty compared to the home Sinead built for her and the children. With the dinner over, he and Sinead decided to handle clean up so they kids could have a few hours of free time before bed.

“This was nice,” Remy said.

Sinead laughed. “Washing dishes, after a loud dinner, with kids trying to talk over each other, is what you consider nice.”

“My night consists of me eating something that is warmed up and watching TV alone,” Remy replied. “So, yep this was great.”

“You know you can’t leave until after bedtime, because Rebecca wants you to read her bedtime story tonight,” Sinead said dryly. “Would you have thought that a few weeks ago you’d be here doing this instead of living some amazing flashy life?”

Remy snorted. “I very rarely flash in my life.”

She laughed. “You are so crazy.”

“I’m a barrel of monkeys,” he chuckled. “I’ll dry and you stack mainly because I have zero clue where things are.”

“Watch and learn,” she did a twirl in the the kitchen carrying a plate.

It took them another half an hour to get the kitchen back to normal and left overs to be put away. Mandy insisted he take some dinner home, so there was a Tupperware container filled with spaghetti and a Ziploc bag with garlic knots on the counter for when he left. He played a video game with the boys and helped Mandy with math homework, while Sinead gave Rebecca a bath, before both she and Remy read her a story. By eleven thirty or so, the house was finally silent and Sinead led him back down to the family room turning out lights as she went.

“I did less than a quarter of what you usually do in a day and I’m exhausted,” Remy commented.

“You get used to it,” Sinead said. “A glass of wine or a beer before you leave?”

“I shouldn’t,” Remy pulled her against him and rocked slowly. “I already don’t want to go home. And being in the dim light, alone with you, all I can think of is taking you on that overstuffed sofa in the family room.”

“Yeah we can’t do that with the kids, upstairs,” Sinead ran her hand along the nape of his neck and he shuddered. “There’ll be time for us, I promise.”

“I hope so, because I replay how you came for me, in the roof top atrium, and I get so hard that I ache,” Remy kissed her and backed her up against the wall. He ground his hips against hers. “See how hard you make me?”

Sinead whimpered before trying to speak as he nuzzled her neck. “Then stay, come upstairs into my bedroom. We’ll lock the door, and you can show me and stay the night. The kids get up at seven you can leave at six.”

He wanted to say yes, it was on the tip of his tongue like the taste of her lips. But he hadn’t controlled his night terrors. He didn’t want to scare her or the kids and there was no way he could be naked next to her and get up to leave. Sinead wasn’t a tryst, not an itch to be scratched, or just a fling. He wouldn’t disrespect her by lying in her bed, then leaving like some low-class fool.

“I want to,” he admitted huskily cupping her cheek. “But not yet, okay, not until its right?”

“When will that be?” Sinead frowned. “The kids are always going to be around if that’s the problem.”

“Trust me its not that, its me,” he tried to explain.

“Uh-oh it’s the its me not you conversation,” Sinead muttered and moved from between him and the wall.

He sighed in frustration, “You know its nothing like that... I’m a veteran who went through some situations and I still have night terrors. I don’t want to wake you up or scare the kids with my bullshit. Talking to me on the cell phone after my demons have chased me is one thing, witnessing it yourself is another. I don’t want to scare you away.”

“Remy you’re going to have to trust me with this at some point,” Sinead pointed out gently.

He nodded. “I know, but let me trust myself first.”

“Okay,” Sinead went into the kitchen and brought his left overs to him. “Don’t forget this, it would break Mandy’s heart to wake up and it’s still on the counter.

“Thanks,” Remy kissed her once then twice. “Lock up when I leave.”

“I always do.”

He stepped out the door and waited to hear her throw the locks before he went back down the driveway path. The rain was the fine mist that could be seen from the glare of the street light, and for a moment, Remy stared down the street at the old houses. He could see a peaceful neighborhood; how it used to be, before it was deemed the hood.

It would be that way again, he vowed it as he slipped into his car. But right now, he would go home and warm up his leftovers and eat them while watching television because it was easier than sleeping on some nights. He could still think and daydream about Sinead, instead of sleep chasing her face away with the tormented scenes from his nightmares.



Chapter Seven

Remy offered to buy her a dress, but Sinead wasn't having it. There was no reason to buy some expensive couture thing for one night. While she thought about thrift shopping, her friend Callie came into town for the weekend. After hearing about her plans, Callie insisted she borrow one of her dresses and brought three choices to her house.

"I can cancel and stay home with you," Sinead offered. "You came in to surprise me and I'm heading out to this thing. I will stick out like a sore thumb."

"The hell you are. You are going to this thing, and Mandy and I are going to watch you at the live show on the Who's Who Weekly," Callie said. "I am here till Tuesday, we have time to catch up and you can dish about everything."

At home Callie was usually dressed down. Like tonight, she wore a paint splattered designed sweat suit, and her long hair was in two cute long braids. Sinead was sitting on the bed while Callie brushed her hair into sexy up do that emphasized her natural hair, with two elegant braid on each side of the bun.

"Maybe I should..."

Callie smacked her upside the head.

"Ow! What's that for?" Sinead demanded to know.

"For trying to bail on a good thing with a guy who thinks that you hung the moon," Callie said firmly. "Stop acting like you're this nobody and Remy deserves better. It's not him putting you down it's you. If he was ashamed of you, he wouldn't have asked you out in the first place."

"Fine," Sinead sighed. "I guess I keep expecting him to wake up and bail."

"If that was the case, he would've fucked you and left," Callie said. "He's still here."

"We haven't technically... ya know," Sinead admitted.

Callie met her gaze in the full-length mirror on the wall.
“Why the hell not?”

“We both want to, but Remy is worried, he has PTSD nightmares that he’s scared will chase me away,” she explained. “I can’t tell him its not the case, because I don’t truly now how to act if it does happen.”

Callie blew out a breath. “That’s a tough one; anyone you can ask?”

“Duncan, he called me last time Remy went running to work off the nightmare,” Sinead patted her hair and barely missed Callie whacking her with the comb,

“Hey!”

Her friend gave her a look. “Don’t make me.”

Sinead couldn’t help but grin. “I had flashbacks of your mom fixing our hair.”

“Right!”

They smiled at each other in the reflection of the mirror. It was good times.

“So I’m going to stay with the kids tonight. Put on your sexy panties and go combust with your man,” Callie said firmly.

“I don’t have that type of underwear.”

“The lies you tell. There is a magazine sitting on the floor with pages folded so you can remember the page.”

“Aren’t you scared of staying here alone with the kids?” She asked.

Callie raised the comb. “I swear I’m gonna hit you for asking stupid questions. I grew up around here just like you. Morris or none of them scare me, I grew up with that fool around, just like you,”

“I hate you sometimes,” Sinead muttered.

Callie climbed off the bed and smacked a kiss on her cheek. “You love me now put on some trashy undies and get

dressed.”

“You ruined my makeup with your sloppy kiss!”

Callie’s answer was a laugh as she went down the hall calling Devin and Jeremy’s name. God knows what she wanted those two to get into. Callie had childlike spirit that the kids loved as well, and she knew that tonight if she decided to stay out with Remy, no one in her household was going to bed on time. *Well maybe they deserve a night of fun, just like I deserved a night off*, Sinead mused. She held the red dress up to her body and admired the asymmetrical dress that left one of her shoulders bare. It was cut about two inches about her knees with small slit going up the left leg.

It would show a peek of the mandala tattoo she had on the thigh and she smiled knowing Remy would be shocked to see it. Sinead stepped into the dress and pulled the hidden zip up on the side that would sill gave the red a seamless look. If she was staying the night with Remy, she needed more information. Just in case, so Sinead pulled out her phone and pressed Duncan’s number.

“Well hello, if you are looking for Remy he is just getting into the limo,” Duncan said when he picked up the phone.

“I was hoping to talk to you,” Sinead said. “My friend is in for the weekend.”

“Who? Is she cute?” Duncan asked.

“Very,” Sinead said dryly. “Anyhoo, she’s staying with the kids tonight..”

“Is she single?”

Sinead sighed. “Callie is single. You can introduce yourself tomorrow. Now can I ask my question?”

“Fine.”

“If I happened to be with Remy and he has a nightmare what should I do?” Sinead asked.

“You mean like if you spent the night,” Duncan confirmed.

“Yes.”

“First you don’t wake him, because combat veterans in the throes of their night terrors can react like if they are in a fight.” Duncan explained in a serious tone. “Instead, you get up and go to the doorway of the bathroom and try to talk him onto wakefulness.”

“Why the bathroom door?”

Duncan hesitated before he replied. “Because if he doesn’t wake up, and he acts out what he’s dreaming, you can go in there and lock the door, until he comes to himself. There is also a landline in there that you can call the guest house where I live or 9-1-1.”

Sinead knew she had to ask before she made a firm decisions about the night. “And does Remy get violent?”

“No, Sinead I can tell you this with all honesty, he does not,” Duncan assured her. “Remy is stuck in the trauma of watching his friends die. He replays that over and over again. He feels this type of guilt towards losing his friends. They become his brothers in arms, and on a shared forward operation base, that day my C/O tapped me to be his driver. I wasn’t on the convoy. I hate myself for not being there to help him, but that’s my own burden to bear.”

“So, I should feel safe with him?” Sinead confirmed.

“I have never seen him react violently,” Duncan said. “What I told you is the best recourse and I’m always a phone call away. But the best thing is to have patience; if you are afraid, don’t. If he says he’s not ready, don’t push him.”

“I understand,” Sinead said softly and blew out a breath. “When did dating get to tough?”

“When you started dating Remington Durant,” Duncan said amused. “Enjoy tonight, just let things flow like the gentle waters of a crystal lake.”

“What now?”

“Don’t mind me, I’m getting sentimental in my old age,” Duncan sniffed dramatically, “my babies are growing up.”

“Dramatic much?”

“Us Scots are romantic, and lovers of the romance of it all; mention that to your friend Callie... Mmm Callie, beautiful name.”

“Goodnight Duncan I need to finish getting ready,” Sinead rolled her eyes and disconnected the call.

It was up to her. Sinead looked at herself in the mirror weighing if she should be scared, hesitant, or trust what they were building together. This wasn't something that could be a simple yes or no, she decided to let instinct be her guide and let the night lead to where it may.

“Hey Bestie, your chariot has arrived and the prince looks quite dashing,” Callie called up the stairs. “Bring your fine ass down here.”

“You wouldn't think that she worked for such a swanky place with the mouth on her,” Sinead murmured with a smile.

She picked up the sliver clutch that went with the shoes, and after once final look, she went out of the bedroom and closed the door. When she stood at the top of the steps, a low whistle came from her date downstairs. If oozing sex appeal had a place in the dictionary, it would be his picture as an example. The black tux was tapered to his body and broad shoulders. Instead of a white shirt, his was a satin like black and at the cufflinks at the wrist of his shirt were gold, while the tie was a print of black and gold.

“You look beyond fantastic,” Remy took her hand at the bottom of the stairs and kissed it. “You are going to wow the red carpet.”

Sinead gulped. “Red carpet.”

Remy laughed. “It's on the floor, not rearing up to smother us. Kiss the kids goodnight and we can head out. I've all ready had my hugs, fists bump and a smack on the cheek from the littlest princess.”

“On it,” Sinead said. “But first, Callie this is Remy Durant, and Remy this is my best friend in all the words and all the lands, Calypso Hart.”

“Interesting name,” Remy shook her hand.

Callie shook his hand. “Because I’m a damn interesting person.”

“I told Duncan the very same thing, and now he’s trying to come over here for no reason,” Sinead told Remy.

“And who is Duncan?” Callie asked curiously. “My hot guy sense is tingling.”

Remy groaned good naturedly. “Don’t let him even hear that; his ego is big enough.”

“What he said,” Sinead said dryly. “Are you sure you’re good here?”

Callie turned them towards the door. “I’m fine. This is my old stomping grounds too, and Morris or his people aren’t stupid enough to mess with me.”

“You’re brave enough to say the least.” Remy commented.

“I’m also a third-degree black belt and trained in self defense tactics, military and police levels,” Callie gave a wicked smile as Sinead closed the door.

“Her uncle is a cop and an ex-marine. We spent summers in Oregon; he trained us,” Sinead explained, as they walked to the limo. “She took it further and decided that she needed to be Jason Statham.”

“Well, I’m glad you both can defend yourselves.” Remy opened the door of the black stretch car so she could get in.

The Corinthian leather seats were supple under her fingers. When Remy settled beside her, the driver pulled away from the curb. She had been in limos before, and usually it was shrinking into a corner. But with Remy, he pulled her closer and laced his long fingers with hers. The city lights always seemed to calm her but as they pulled up the two-story art gallery, with all the glitz, glamor, and flashing lights from cameras, her stomach clenched with nervousness. The driver came around and opened the door before Remy unfolded his lean body from the back of the limo and held his hand out to her. Sinead stepped out of the car, and immediately was almost blinded by the cameras going off; then, the questions started being fired off in rapid succession.

“Remy who this new lady on your arm?”

“Has the most eligible bachelor been taken?”

“How long have you been seeing each other?”

“Miss you who are you wearing?”

Remy moved past them gracefully with a hand on her lower back, and she could feel the warmth of his hand through the material.

“I have to do this one quick interview,” Remy said, and steered her gently to the floor length banner was set up. “Then we can go inside.”

They posed for a few more pictures and the reporter who was dressed in a gorgeous rose-colored gown came up to them.

“Ready?” She asked.

“Yep, let’s hit it, Vicki.” Remy said with a smile.

“I’m Vicki Lopez and tonight and the Millennium Art Gala event, I have Remy Durant to give us the down low on the event.”

Down low, really? Sinead tried not to laugh, wondering if she tried to be hip to the lingo with guests who weren’t black.

Remy seemed to ignore her wording and spoke. “The Millennium Art Gala helps kids who have amazing talent, not many opportunities to go to art school. Millennium and I have formed a partnership to not only educate, but offer these amazing young men and women a chance to showcase their work.”

“So, tonight’s gallery showing is for…” Vicki asked.

“For their work and for guest like me to pay a hell of a lot of money to keep this program going,” Remy smiled. “I hope they leave at least one or two pieces for me to purchase.”

“Let’s move on to you Remy and the woman who is on your arm,” Vicki’s smile was almost devilish as if she was just waiting to spring those questions. “The rumors are that you’re

done with the models, starlets and daughters of the rich, and went down the ladder to a regular old woman.”

“I am neither regular or old,” Sinead said in irritation.

“Well, your social status..”

“Is none of your business,” Remy curtly cut her off. “Nor is anything you just said, factual. I don’t work my way through women, rich or poor. That’s not who I am, and I know you know that, Vicki.”

The reporters face turned red. “But you have to admit, she is a foster mother..”

“Who raises five children who call her mom and works for everything she owns,” Sinead answered. “I hope you don’t insinuate anything else by that, because I am damn proud of my kids.”

“We’ll be going inside now, enjoy the night Vicki,” Remy moved away with her hand in his and smiled down at Sinead. “Ready?”

She nodded, “As much as I’ll ever be.”

He pressed a kiss at her temple. “I’ll be with you all night long.”

Remy never left her side, and Sinead found herself enjoying the night, talking to the talented artists where the oldest was a nineteen and the youngest a mere five years old. Many people, who she thought would look down on her, instead she found were friendly and actually carried on conversation beyond their check book.

“I have to head to the bathroom,” Sinead said to him gently, and stood on tiptoe to kiss his cheek. “Be back soon.”

“I’ll be right here,” Remy’s voice was a warm deep timber that made her think about his warm arms around her.

Sinead made her way cross the gallery. Her steps matched the beat of the music that pooled around them. Finally, she stepped into the elegant bathroom and found a stall where she closed the door. While she was fixing her dress, she heard two voices as they came inside the room. Sinead was about to

leave the stall when she found out the topic of conversation was her.

“Seriously, that dress has to be at least two years old,” One said in a snide venomous voice. “Its like thirst store dumping, or whatever its called.”

“She’s one of those types, that are so goody two shoes, of course Remy was infatuated, but that will soon be over when he gets bored. A man like that doesn’t want a mansion full of homeless screaming brats with no pedigree.”

These bitches!

“Let him sow his wild oats and when he’s done, he will come back to the women he thinks he doesn’t want.” The friend said amused. “I’d even push out one or two little monsters to keep him happy.”

Sinead picked that moment to step out of the bathroom and moved to the sink. Their eyes widened while she washed her hands and they glanced at each other. Finally, Sinead turned to them while wiping her hands on the soft napkin and tossing it in the trash.

Sinead spoke in a cool voice. “I know, you think you’re being cool and catty, dropping insults about something that you can’t even fathom. I’m sure neither of you have soul enough to understand anything past money. Let me tell you this, Remy won’t get tired of me because I’m genuine and I don’t care about his checkbook, platinum card or his bank total. It’s such a pity that you think birthing babies you don’t want would keep him. It shows your slut mentality and makes Remy look like he can be mesmerized by pussy or kids. This is why he wants nothing to do with women like you. The fakeness is inside as well as out. Don’t stand close to an open flame.”

Sinead turned on her heels and opened the door leaving them there staring in shock. Remy was working his way to her when she stepped out of the bathroom.

“Hey, I was wondering if you got lost or went upstairs,” Remy’s voice was curious, and just then the women stepped

out thinking it was safe.

“No, I had an issue that needed to be sorted.” Sinead glanced at them and the women visibly gulped. “These two think you’re slumming with me and my two-year-old dress. Oh, and also you’ll be leaving me to come back to their shallow asses, and that one in the silver said she would push out two little monsters, aka babies, to hold on to you. I had to set them straight.”

A slow smile spread across Remy’s face. “By the look of their faces, I think you handled it nicely. Shall we continue with our night?”

Sinead slipped her hand though the crook of his arm. “Let’s. I mean really Remy, is this is why money springs up, they need to be replanted.”

“I completely agree.”

The rest of the night, they danced, laughed, and had the time of Sinead’s life all the while she could feel the jealous eyes on them but she didn’t care. If she was going to be in Remy’s life, she needed to grow a backbone. If she had the balls to deal with Morris and his crew, Sinead knew she could handle cattiness of some delusion women. By the time they left, the familiar Seattle mist had begun and the driver met them at the door with an umbrella to hustle them to the car. Thank God, all the reporters and cameras were gone and they could slip into the limo quickly.

“It was a great night,” Remy kissed her hand.

“I enjoyed it, sans the bathroom incident,” Sinead answered. “After that, it was peachy and I loved dancing with you.”

“I did funky with my foot work,” Remy grinned.

Sinead laughed. “Is that what you were doing?”

“Are you teasing me woman?”

“Yes I am.”

Remy pulled her close and kissed her with a restrained hunger that instantly unleashed the need within her. It would be

so easy to get lost in his kissed and the passion he caused to bubble to the surface within her. When he speared his tongue deep into her mouth and tasted her, a soft whimper escaped her. Remy groaned before he just nibbled at her full bottom lip before pulling away. He pulled away and rubbed his nose against hers in a moment of silent affection, before speaking.

“I want you in the worst way,” he told her in a raspy voice. “You are engrained on my heart, Sinead. I don’t think a moment goes by where I don’t think about you.”

“I feel the same way,” she whispered.

A long sigh escaped him.

It was Sinead who initiated the kiss, and this time it was she whole languidly teased his lips.

“You’re killing me, Sinead,” he muttered against her lips.

“Then how about we forgo taking me home and go to yours?” Sinead said between soft kisses. “Callie has the kids taken care of tonight, and I have a night to really delve into this fascinating attraction I have for you.”

“What if I had one of my episodes and...”

Sinead cupped his cheeks in his hand. “Remington Durant, we have to face this, we can’t keep dancing around the issue or each other. If we’re going to make this work, steps need to be made by both of us and this is a good start as any.”

Remy’s eyes looked tortured as he looked at her. “I don’t want to hurt you; it would kill me if I woke up and I caused you any harm”

“You won’t hurt me,” she assured him and took the initiative by tapping lightly on the privacy screen. It rolled down slowly to reveal the driver of the limo. “Take us to Remy’s home please.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

She could feel how tense he was all the way back to his home, one that she hadn’t seen until now. Durant mansion was breathtaking, and with the solar lights against the limestone rocks that graced the outers edges of the driveway, and against

the house, it was like looking at a fairytale home. Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous had nothing on this place, Sinead thought as the driver slowly parked in front of the door. While he took care of tipping the driver, she sent a quick text to Callie, telling her to lockup and she wouldn't be home first thing in the morning.

She felt the heat of his body come up behind her and the smell of his cologne was intoxicating. Remy nuzzled her neck and she leaned her head back against his chest. She trembled when his large hand splayed across her torso. Sinead turned in his arms and they met in a kiss that seared her down to her core. She pulled away to look at him and to caress the face of the man who looked beyond circumstance to see the true her, as she did for him.

“You won't hurt me,” Sinead said trying to ease the worry that crossed his brow. “Just you and me. Nothing else matters. I'll fight those dreams for you if I have to, I won't let them take you away.”

“I almost believe you could,” Remy's voice was husky.

He took her hand and led her upstairs, Sinead didn't even look at the luxury around her. Her focus was on the man in front of her and the anticipation coursing along her veins. In the bedroom he turned, flicked a switch to flood the room with a soft amber light, before he turned to her and pulled her into his arms once more.

“You, Sinead are the one thing that could shatter me into a million pieces, and I could never be whole again,” he said huskily. “I couldn't fathom losing you before and now it seems like the worst torture imaginable.”

“I don't plan on going anywhere, Remy, nor without you,” Sinead promised, she lowered the zip on the side of her dress before loosening and untying the bow of his tie. “Now let me show you what it means to be loved like no one else.”

Remy searched her face as if looking for some unknown answers that could be only found in her eyes. Suddenly he kissed her, a savage kiss that wiped all thought from her mind except for him.

The hunger consumed then both and it felt like all the patience they held onto was burned to ash and blown away. Urgent hands removed clothes at a frantic pace, until Remy lifted her like she weighed nothing and walked to the bed while their lips were still connected.

Sinead whimpered as he used his tongue to tease and tempt her while her hands clung to the wide expanse of his shoulders under the onslaught. He took her from sizzle to burn in a hot second. Sinead bit her lip as she offered her breast to him, and he cupped the smooth globes, teasing the cocoa bean tip with the pads of his thumbs.

“I want your mouth on me,” she shivered at his touch and pleaded for more.

“Your wish, Love...is my command,” Remy punctuated his reply with a trail of kisses that moved down her collar bone down to the the valley of her breasts.

His tongue flicked across her nipple and laved it gently before pulling the dark bead into his mouth. Sinead arched with a cry, holding his head to her body and his large hands gripped her hips. She was bare to him not, only in body, but by this moment her soul as well. She reveled as he moved greedily from one breast to the next while his hands roamed greedily over her naked flesh and ran up her inner thigh to her aroused sex.

“Damn, Sinead, you are so wet. Spread your legs for me.” Remy demanded.

Her breath stilled in her chest, as she followed his command, sliding her legs wider so he could touch her freely. Sinead’s body trembled in anticipation of what Remy would do and she was not disappointed. His finger gently teased the sensitive bud of her clit as he watched her, and he kissed her hungrily when a whimper slipped from between her lips. He meant to tease her; she could see this clearly when he teased the entrance of her sex before dipping inside quickly then back to his teasing until a shudder rolled through her.

“Do you want more, Babygirl?” His voice was rough with desire, deeper and a sexy caress that heightened her pleasure.

“Yes,” she whispered, licking her lips.

“Good, I’m going to take you so high baby.” Those words were muttered against her mouth before he buried a finger to the hilt inside her moist sex.

“Oh God!”

The soft cry escaped her lips and without hesitation, Remy began a driving pace as his finger moved against the sensitive spot hidden within her sex. Her hips moved of their own volition against his hand, a silent plea that sought more of the pleasure he offered. Without a deep grunt of approval Remy gave her what she asked for, adding another finger, joining it’s partner inside her velvet sex. Her moans were sultry and decadent on every breath she took, and she could feel her body reaching for the sweet aching pleasure of an orgasm.

“Hold on to me, baby. Let it take you.” His breath was hot against her skin as he spoke.

Through her haze of ecstasy, she could see the tight restraint he had on his control and she clung to his broad shoulders. His fingers were moving faster in her depths and the wet sounds of her body’s essence was part of the symphony combined with their breathing. Drops of her juices ran down her thighs. Sinead arched her head and cried out as she came, her body trembling so much she almost went to her knees. “Remy!” Her body shuddered, and her pussy clenched around the source of her pleasure. Remy held her to him with one strong arm while the other drew every last ounce of her release from her body. He kissed her with a savage hunger as he walked her back to the bed and he lifted her as if she weighed nothing to place her on the wide mattress.

“It was my intention this be slow and sexy and last all night,” Remy said urgently against her mouth.

“We’ve been waiting awhile, things tend to get heated fast,” Sinead gasped out. “We’ll go slower when we work off this pent-up energy.”

“I agree, next time.”

Remy kissed her as he positioned his cock between her legs and she wrapped them high around his lean waist. Their cries mingled as he filled her, buried to the hilt in her wet sex.

“God, Sinead, you feel so fucking good wrapped around my cock,” his tone took on the sound of harsh desire as he moved.

Sinead was lithe beneath him, and with a deft move she was on top and she slid down on his rigid length. Remy gritted his teeth and his hands cupped at the smooth cheeks of her ass. He pulled her down firmly, making Sinead cry out. From there, they couldn't control the burn of their desire for each other. Remy cupped and massaged her breasts as she rode his shaft with a wild abandon. Sinead as like clay beneath his hands being formed and molded into a creation that combined them both together as one unit. Remy sat up easily while she moved and his mouth sought her hard nipple taking the tip into his mouth. Sinead rode him hard, and with every cry or soft noise she made, he echoed it with a moan.

“Oh yes, Babygirl, take it all!” Remy's voice was harsh and his face was buried between the valley of her breasts, while he drove them both to the edge. It wasn't just her moving, but him pulling her down onto his cock hard and fast. “You fit me oh so good”

His words sent Sinead over the edge, and she spiraled into a release that took her breath away. The urgency and the waves of heat, made her cry out as it rolled across the sensitive nerve endings of her skin. Remy followed suit with his hands fisted in the thick tresses of her hair. His guttural moans filled the room as he pumped inside her over and over a quick succession prolonging his pleasure.

Finally, he fell back against the bed and took her with him while they both tried to catch their breath. Remy chuckled and Sinead turned her head to look at him curiously.

“What?”

Remy turned to her and pushed some of her hair away from her face. “Is it absolutely weird that I feel like going out

side and fist pumping the air, then possibly howling like a wolf?’

“Okay looney tunes,” Sinead laughed. “Yes it would be weird, and Duncan is out there.”

“Nothing would wake him up, I’ve seen him use a rock as a pillow, with our FOB being bombed.” Remy rolled to her and pulled her into his arms. “Thank you for being the voice of reason.”

“You’re welcome,” she snuggled closer and he yawned. “Remy you don’t have to stay awake. Sleep. I’ll watch over you babe, and keep those monsters away.”

“I will,” he promised.

But she could see the worry in his eyes, so Sinead talked and their conversation went back and forth until it slowly lagged and Remy finally fell asleep.

She kissed him gently. “Sleep, it’s okay. I’ll hold on to you tight.”

And she did, her instincts woke Sinead if he moved to make sure he was okay before falling asleep again. It was then Sinead knew that she was more than falling, she was completely in love with Remington Durant.



IT WAS AFTER SEVEN, Brian was never late and his shift ended at precisely seven. The old car finally crapped out and that weekend. They were going to go look at a small car for him to drive so he didn’t have to walk past Morris and his crew. She called the pizza place and they said he left on time and that was enough for her. Sinead was ready to do battle for her kids and somewhere between work and home, he had been stopped. Her heart ached with worry, because Brian was a tall gangly kid and no match for Morris or his goons if they chose to hurt him.

There was no point in pacing upstairs and wringing her hands. Sinead tried to keep her worry from her face as she went downstairs. Construction had begun on the downstairs

and fixes to all parts of the house Mike had seen fit to list. The boys were playing video games in the family room while Mandy and Rebecca were in the kitchen.

“Hey Mandy, I’m stepping out for like five minutes,” Sinead said casually.

Mandy looked up from her task of teaching little Rebecca how to make cookies. “Okay, Mom. Is everything okay?”

“Oh yeah, just fine; keep an eye on everyone.” She replied and stepped out the backdoor.

On her way through the gate, she took one of Brian’s baseball bats that was leaned up against the house. Sinead walked out to the sidewalk and made her way down to the dilapidated house where Morris was known to hang out. She heard the laughter and swallowed any fear she may have, especially when she saw Brian sitting on the step flanked by two of Morris’s men and definitely terrified.

Relief was on his face when he saw her. “I didn’t want to stay, Mom. They made me. I didn’t even take anything they gave me.”

“Shut up,” Morris snapped. “She ain’t your momma white boy. You been left in the gutter like the rest of us.”

She stood on the sidewalk and held out her hand. “Come on Brian, let’s go home.”

“He ain’t going anywhere, Sinead,” Morris sneered. His red track suit stood out in the night. “Your rich boy ain’t here with his fancy shit and I ain’t your protector, remember?”

“You are a fucking joke,” Sinead felt her anger rise, red like the very same color. “I don’t need Remy here for the likes of you. He is nothing like you and you hate it, want to know why Morris? Because I can love him and you have never had anyone who gave a shit about your pathetic ass. So, you see him blooming under my care and it burns you down to your core.”

“You know nothing about me,” Morris moved from his position.

“I do, I grew up with your insecure ass. When Trevor ran this neighborhood and made you piss your pants, you were that scared. But you know everything about me,” Sinead looked up at him without blinking. “I will swing this bat at you like I was Jackie Robinson and everyone here for that white boy, and he is mine as easily as if I gave birth to him. Oh, you might take me down, but I will break a few knees caps to prove exactly who gave me a beat down. And all the while I will be screaming bloody murder. Your name, your address, description. I will even scream, your mama’s name, your grandma, god rest her soul, and everyone I can remember back to your ancestors. I will scream Titi’s name especially because she’s the current baby mama you like to hole up with.”

“Shut your fucking mouth before I shut it for you,” Morris threatened.

“Trust me you want no part of me, Morris. You never did. Even when I was at school, because you knew that you could never ass up or class up to deserve me,” Sinead said. “Now give me my son before I have every cop in front of this house. I will tell them you tried to sell Brian drugs and you have your stash in that house, instant warrant.”

“You’ve gone too far,” Morris told her in a soft deadly voice. “I will not forget this, Sinead.”

“Too bad, because as soon as I turn my back, I forget about you,” Sinead replied. “Come on Brian, time to go home.”

Morris nodded and the men let Brian move with a shove. He stumbled towards Sinead.

“I’m sorry, Mom, I tried to avoid them and they followed me around the block,” Brian whispered as they walked away.

“We are getting you that car sooner rather later,” Sinead took his hand and squeezed it. “Let’s not make the others scared. You got off late and I saw you on my way home from checking on Mrs. Adler down the street.”

Brian nodded. “My lips are sealed. They tried to get me to smoke their crap. That would ruin my chances at a scholarship

and I refused. Even if they had beaten me senseless, I wasn't doing it."

"Let's not even think like that," Sinead felt the pain in her heart thinking of Brain lying somewhere hurt or injured once more.

"You are so bad ass, Mom, coming out with a bat," Brian squeezed her shoulders tight.

Sinead smiled. "I do my best."

Back at home, she tried to put the encounter from her mind as dinner was made and the usual chaos that came from five high spirited children. After cleaning up, she got Rebecca into her bath and the kids went off to enjoying the last few hours before bedtime. Her cell rang and she looked at the number with a smile while she got a very wiggly Rebecca into a nightgown.

"Hi, Remy," she said with a laugh. "Come on Pinky, time to put your arm in the sleeve."

"What are you doing?" Remy asked his voice was amused.

"Trying to get Rebecca into her nightgown and into bed," Sinead answered. "And if she doesn't, no story shall be heard tonight."

"I want my story!" Rebecca whined.

"Then let's get you dressed," Sinead said firmly. "What are you doing tonight, Remy?"

"Working late," Remy sighed. "I would rather be spending time with you."

"Then, we should make plans for maybe say tomorrow?" Sinead hinted. "There is a jazz festival going on in the Chihuly Gardens. We could listen and walk through the glass sculptures."

"That's sounds perfect. I'll have Duncan bring the kids here for movie night. My Chef can make them wings and and potato skins, anything they want."

“They would love that, but are you sure you want them running around your place?” she asked doubtfully. “I don’t want them to break stuff...”

“Duncan breaks stuff all the time, its fine,” Remy said amused.

“I don’t.” She grinned hearing Duncan’s offended voice.

“Stop picking on Duncan.”

“I’m not picking on him, he’s just a general nuisance,” Remy chuckled.

“I am sitting right here, you know.”

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” Remy said. “Be safe, call me if you need me.”

“I will, don’t work to hard,” Sinead couldn’t help but be amused at the interaction between two close friends. “Night, Remy.”

“Miss you,” he said huskily.

When she hung up, Rebecca was dressed and it was time to tuck her into bed.

“Is Mr. Remy your boyfriend?” Rebecca asked.

“I don’t know yet,” Sinead tucked the blankets around the tiny body and a multitude of dolls. “We like each other.”

“He’s like a prince,” Rebecca said. “Like in my books.”

“Yes just like that,” Sinead said gently. “Let’s get your book read so you can go to sleep and dream about fairies and magical gardens.

Rebecca would have time to learn the truth, that sometimes there was no prince charming and if there was, very few would come into her life riding on a white horse ready to defend her honor. Sinead would have to teach her all of that, gently, just like she would with Mandy when she was old enough to start dating. There was no one to tell her those things, and it almost cost her life. The house was quieting down, she had made her rounds downstairs to make sure everything was locked. Brian

always did the same. She worked on the front while he made sure all doors and windows in the back were locked.

“All good?” She asked from the bottom of the stairs.

“Ten P.M. and all’s well,” Brian said with a boyish grin.

“Okay town crier,” Sinead said dryly.

It was then she heard someone jiggling the front door and trying to open the lock. “Brian, go upstairs and get the others. Go to Jeremy and Devin’s room, lock that door, push the big armoire to block it.”

“Mom...”

They started to put their shoulders against the door. It was a solid lock, but still she worried.

“Do as I say, get my phone, call the police and get them here now!”

“You can’t stand up to them alone!” Brian whispered urgently.

“Go now!”

Sinead pushed him upstairs just as she heard heavy boots against the door and the wood began to splinter. Sinead wished she had brought that baseball bat in with her. Instead, looking around, she put her hand on a book bag lying on the bottom of the stairs. The door splintered and two men with masks barged into the house. They obviously weren’t expecting her to be right there and probably assumed they would be able to terrorize her upstairs. She threw the bookbag at the with as much force as she could, hoping it would deter them.

One man knocked it away and the other tried to grab at her before she could move around the stairs to the kitchen. Sinead struggled and tried to remember some of the self defense classes she took after Kevin Vargas’ abuse and what Callie’s uncle taught her. Arms wrapped around her lifting her off her feet. She used her elbow to jab her attacker in the kidneys, making him grunt with pain and when he lowered her, she stomped on his foot and kicked out blindly kicking the other guy in the shin or someplace more sensitive.

When he let go, Sinead whirled around and stomped on his foot once more before using the palm strike defense move got him in the nose. She was satisfied to see blood pour out and he grabbed his face, howling in pain. She used her sharp nails to scratch his face, knowing the marks would make it easier for him to be recognized. She was going to lose. She knew it, but she wanted them easy to find for the cops. The second attacker put his forearm across her throat and Sinead reached back and grabbed his face using her thumbs to find his eyes and pressed until he screamed, and again and was satisfied at his howl of pain. He tightened his arm around her neck and she started to struggle in earnest.

With a bloody face, she saw anger in the man's eyes before he punched her in the belly and pain bloomed through her. She was shoved so hard into the stairs. Her rib took the brunt of the hit and she kicked out unseeing at anyone who was coming at her. Her feet connected more than once but somehow they managed to capture her ankles and drag her down. She felt each punch connect to her face, and upper body. As long as their attention was on her, the kids were safe.

One attacker grabbed her by the collar of the shirt. "You don't ever disrespect, Morris, bitch!"

"Get off of her!" Brian screamed. "I called the police they are on the phone now! They are hearing everything!"

"Brian, go back upstairs!" Sinead cried out.

"The cops are on the phone," Brian said again. "You can hear the sirens, they're gonna arrest you!"

The men looked at each other and the sound of sirens could be heard in the distance. They went running out the door, leaving Sinead laying in a ball of her own pain, trying to catch a breath.

"We called the police, Mom," Brian came running down the stairs and cradled her head, trying caress her face past the swelling she could feel forming.

"Is Mom okay?" Mandy cried out. She could hear Rebecca crying loudly.

“Stay up stairs!” Brian called out firmly. “I’m going call Remy, Mom.”

“Brian...” she could feel the edges of her consciousness blur.

“Remy, Remy its Brian, you have to come... they broke in and Mom’s hurt.”

Darkness enfolded her as the sirens pulled seemed right outside.

“Mom, stay awake!”

Those words sounded far away...so very far away.



Chapter Eight

“Remy, you have to come. Mom’s been hurt.”

There were no words to explain the fear that washed over him while sitting at his desk. Then knowing exactly who did it... the rage that seemed to swamp and fury overtook him until he couldn’t see or hear anything but his blood rushing through his veins.

“Remy are you there?” Brian was openly crying and he could hear sirens in the background. A seventeen-year-old boy crying was a bad sign and he was so damn afraid...Sinead.

He took a deep breath and didn’t even bother with his coat as he rushed out of the office. “What happened, Brian?”

“We were locking up and they broken in...” Brian sniffled. “Mom sent us upstairs to lock ourselves inside, but I heard them fighting and hitting her so I called the police and then you... she’s all bloody and hurt... she won’t go to the hospital. They want us to go somewhere else and we don’t know what to do...Mom had a confrontation with them tonight. They wouldn’t let me go home and tried to make me smoke their drugs and she came down with a bat...”

Brian was spiraling into pure trauma and Remy needed him to calm down.

“Brain, take a breath, tell them I’m coming.” Remy kept his voice even as he pounded the buttons, hoping the elevator would go faster.

“Can I put you on speak so they know?” Brian asked.

“Yep, go right ahead buddy,” Remy tried to keep his voice calm.

“You can talk now.”

“This is Remington Durant. The kids will be taken care of by me, I am on my way,” Remy said politely. In his sports car, he pressed the button of the ignition and in minutes he was pulling out into traffic and speeding towards Capitol Hill.

“I’m not going to the hospital and leaving my kids,” Sinead said firmly. He had heard enough people talk through swollen lips to know hers were.

“Sinead... Babygirl... I’m on my way,” Remy said soothingly. “I’ll take care of the kids. I promise.”

“I’m not leaving,” Sinead said again and he heard her breath catch with tears. “Remy, it hurts to breathe.”

“Oh honey,” this time his own voice cracked with emotion. “I’m on my way.”

Remy tried to keep focus on the road as he drove. “Brian, I need to call Mike to secure the house after the police are done processing it and I’ll call Duncan. See you soon I promise.”

“Okay,” Brian said sounding relieved.

He already cared for those children, for Sinead, and if Morris wanted a war, he just started the one that would end him in the worst way possible. Remy wasn’t thinking jail for the man anymore. Death was on Remy’s mind and he wanted it to be by his hands. Using the telephone system in his car, Remy called Duncan who had gone home and was probably on the date he had tonight.

“Remy, you’re ruining my flow here,” Duncan said. “Stephanie just went to the the bathroom to freshen up.”

“Enchanted Arms was broken into. They beat up Sinead pretty bad,” Remy’s tone was clipped.

“Shit,” Duncan said in a low voice and he drew out the word. “Remy, I know you’re pissed as hell, but do not do anything until I get there. For the love of God stay with Sinead and those kids.”

“You better be hauling ass, Duncan, because I’m about to rain down hellfire on anyone I see. Call Mike to get him out there for the house.”

“Remy...don’t...”

He disconnected the call intent to get to Sinead’s side. When he saw the flashing lights of police cars and ambulance outside the house, his heart fell even further. Remy parked the

sports car haphazardly and jumped out not even bothering to lock the door.

He dared anyone to touch anything of his at that moment in time, cops be damned. Remy rushed inside to see her sitting on the steps holding her ribs, and the EMTs trying to coerce her into going to the hospital. The police were also firing questions in her direction.

“Did you recognize the men, Miss Christie?” One officer asked.

She shook her head. “No, I didn’t.”

“Of course you didn’t, no one ever sees anything around here, how do you expect us to catch anyone?” Cop number two said angrily.

“First off, you don’t yell at me. I’m the victim,” Sinead winced around her words.

“Second, never speak to a woman, a victim no less like that, in my presence,” Remy barked out angrily. “What is wrong with you? Did you forget basic victim advocacy taught while you were a Rookie?”

“Who are you?” The cop turned and his face went pale. “Mr. Durant, I didn’t know...”

“Yea you didn’t, and that should be the big warning sign that if it wasn’t me, how you might treat people in this community. You sure as hell don’t want me going over your head to report how you treat people in crisis,” Remy snapped.

“Honestly, if I knew who they were, I’d tell you,” Sinead said and he could hear the exhaustion and pain in her voice. “All they said was don’t disrespect Morris, and I’m sure you know who he is and it wasn’t his usual crowd. You’ll know who they are when you find them, their faces look like they went one round with a feral cat, one might be speaking at a higher octave. I’ll give as best of a description as I can.”

Remy smiled at her fiery spirit. She gave them hell.

“Ma’am we really think you should go to the hospital,” one of the EMT’s said in concern. “The laceration on your

head is clearly from someone kicking you while you were in a prone position. There could be swelling or a fracture, a brain bleed or a concussion at the very least. Plus, you can barely breathe, your ribs are damaged.”

“I’m not leaving my kids alone in a house with a broken door,” Sinead said firmly. “Give me some Tylenol and I’ll be fine.”

“Sinead,” Remy knelt beside her. “Go to the hospital. I’ll take the kids home with me, and when they give you the all clear then I can pick you up.”

“I don’t want...”

“No,” Remy’s voice was firm. “You’re not putting me out. I want you all there and you’ll stay there as long as you need.”

“Can you take them to your house first, and made sure they’re okay before coming to the hospital?” She asked with a sign of resignation.

“I can do that, and trust me no one can get onto my grounds unless I want them to and God knows they don’t want to try,” Remy touched her swollen bruised face lightly not wanting to hurt her. He was fuming but his concern came first. “Oh honey.”

“Reminds me of the last round I went with Keith,” she tried to smile but failed.

He saw the fear in her eyes and this had to take her back to a bad time of her life. It was another account he had to settle for her and Remy was done biding his time, it was time to call in all markers.

“Don’t make fun of that, Sinead,” Remy said all too softly. “I want you okay, babe, so go with the medics and I’ll make sure the kids are okay.”

Sinead nodded. “Okay. I know the others are watching from upstairs. Let me walk out on my own so they don’t worry.”

“Brian, I’m going to help your Mom into the ambulance and then come back,” Remy told the young worried boy. “Get

everyone to pack up what they'll need. Make sure Rebecca has a coat and all her dolls."

Brian nodded stiffly and wiped his cheeks with the bottom of his t-shirt before heading up the stairs. The police followed Remy outside.

"We'll go to the hospital, and take a more thorough statement," the officer said.

"Take her to Mercy South, and you two will wait until I get there," Remy said briskly. "And you won't be harassing her or acting like she or the people in the neighborhood are the bane of your existence. Lest I call the commissioner and the Mayor."

The officers nodded stiffly, obviously irate at his demand, and Remy didn't give a shit if they were or not. He donated enough money to the Policeman's Fund that he would throw his Goddamn weight around if he had to. It was obvious they both needed better sensitivity training. The two men in uniform went to their cruiser, speaking to other officers lingering on the sidewalk while they waited for the ambulance to pull away. Remy helped Sinead into the ambulance and the screech of tires and a louder engine let him know Mike and Duncan had arrived.

Duncan came up to the ambulance and when he saw Sinead's face one word was spat from his lips. "Fuck!"

"We should get her to the hospital," The medic said gently.

"I'll be there soon," Remy kissed her hand and got out of the ambulance, allowing the second medic to close the door.

He, Mike and Duncan watched the vehicle pull out with sirens on and the police cruisers followed. They stood in silence for a moment before Remy turned to his friends.

"Can you watch the kids for a minute? I have a quick errand," he said calmly.

"Uh sure, but what do you have to do so late..." Duncan's question was broken off when Remy turned to walk down the block. "'Shit!! Mike, stay with the kids... Remy don't go down there... Ah shit!"

Remy's long strides were brisk down the block, and he had no intent on stopping. Morris and his crew were in their usual spot when he came up on them.

"Something wrong rich boy?" Morris asked with a cocky grin. "Got some trouble down at Sinead's place?"

Remy acted without a word, pulling the one Sinead called Hakeem towards his folded fist and slamming it in his face. He did it three more times until he knew the man's nose was broke and blood was on his face. The next guy put his hand on Remy, and without hesitation he broke his wrist and then kicked the side of his foot surely knocking his kneecap out of place. The man was left screaming on the ground. They obviously had zero common sense, because he saw the glint of a knife from a third one of Morris's associates and Remy chopped him in the throat with such force he dropped the knife and held onto his neck trying to catch a breath.

Everyone else jumped up, but they didn't move off the steps. In a flash, Remy had his forearm around Morris's neck in a hold that was as easy to Remy as taking a breath. He could snap his neck so easily right now. So very easily. The thought was more and more appealing with each second that ticked by. His years in the Army weren't for shits and giggles. He could take them all out if he wanted to, and they would never see him coming. This time, he wanted them to see him and feel his rage, then they would fear him. One man placed his foot on a step to move forward.

"Stay the fuck where you are, before I snap his neck and then take the rest of you out," Remy snarled.

"Jesus, Remy let him go. His eyes are bulging out of his head," Duncan muttered. One of Morris's men tried to grab Duncan only to end up face down next to Hakeem on the ground with Duncan's foot on his neck. "You keep that up he's going to lose control of his bladder."

"You thought it was a good idea to send men to hurt Sinead?" Remy rasped in Morris's ear.

"I don't..." Morris strangled words were cut off by Remy tightening his hold.

“No talking, no lies... it means you can breathe and I don't want that at all,” Remy's voice was all to calm like he was having a conversation with a friend. “It would be so easy to snap the fragile vertebrae of your neck. You thought this would scare her, or make me back off, and it did the opposite. You wanted war, now you got it.”

Morris's struggling became weaker and Remy allowed his nemesis to have a sliver of air past through his throat and keep him alive.

“You will leave this neighborhood, walking or not I don't give a fuck,” Remy's tone turned deadly... Forceful. “But you and your people will take that shit you sell and you'll go far, far away or I will end you all. You are now my special project, Morris, and if you don't leave, I won't kill you in public. No. It will be in whatever hole you sleep in. I'll be deep in the shadows watching you swallow back your fear and when you finally close your eyes, then I will make sure they never open again.”

“Talk quicker, Rem, he's going out,” Duncan ordered briskly.

Remy pushed him away and Morris's boys caught him before he fell to the ground.

“You've been warned,” Remy said staring each of them down.

“These are my streets, I ain't going no where,” Morris rasped out between trying to drag air into his lungs. “Bring it rich boy, money can't save you from these streets or a bullet.”

Remy laughed. “I've seen more bullets rain down than you can imagine. You chose the hard way. I was hoping you would. I like that shit. I'll be seeing you soon, Morris.”

Remy turned and he and Duncan began to walk away.

“Fuck you man! Get off my streets and walk away you little bitch!” Morris said bravely.

Remy turned quickly and watched them all jump back in fear. A purely evil grin spread across his face. “Yeah I thought so.”

Duncan fell into step beside him. “Remy, brother, you cannot go around half killing people. No matter how much they deserve it.”

“He started it. I’m going to finish it,” he told his friend. “Tomorrow, cancel all our contracts with Vargos shipping. Then, let them come up to my offices complaining.”

“Wait why? They are the most competitive prices,” Duncan protested.

“Keith Vargos Junior. That bastard beat Sinead for over a year when they were in a relationship,” Remy answered. “Durant Enterprises, doesn’t work with people like that. It may have happened with my father but not with me.”

“Is it only that, or are you seeking revenge for Sinead?” Duncan asked.

“Both.”

Duncan sighed. “So, you plan on getting revenge on anyone who dared to hurt Sinead?”

“Yes.”

Duncan shook his head. “Just checking.”

Back at the house all the kids waited downstairs while Mike worked on the door.

“Will this be sound so no one can get in?” Remy asked.

“When have I made anything that isn’t sound?” Mike asked. “Get those kids to a warm bed and let me do my thing.”

Remy smiled. “Thanks, Mike.”

“I don’t want to go without Mama,” tears slipped down Rebecca’s cheeks and her tiny sobs were heartbreaking. “Mamas don’t come back, and I don’t care about my dolls or anything if she isn’t here. I want my mama and my bed!”

“Mama will be at my house by the time you wake up tomorrow,” Remy lifted her and tucked her small frame into the crook of his arm. “I promise, and there’s an ice cream fridge at my house and we can have some with all the toppings, before you go back to bed. Mama also said

tomorrow you guys can stay home from school and you can go swimming.”

“There’s a pool?” Mandy asked.

“There’s lots of things,” Remy answered. “Plus, we can get chef to make you guys some cocoa and something good to eat before bed, if you don’t want ice cream.”

Duncan pulled out his phone. “I’ll get Corbin to the house.”

“Okay guys, you can ride with Duncan and I think Brian can ride with me,” Remy said. “Mike will make sure the house is safe, and trust me no one will be breaking in to mess with your stuff.”

Together, he and Duncan got the kids and their things in the SUV and he and Brian got into the sleek sports car that he drove to Enchanted Arms. The engine revved to life when he pressed the ignition and he pulled away from the curb outside the house. Brian, who would usually be jazzed about being in the car, was silent and his shoulders slumped.

“You did the right thing, Brian. Goddamn, son, you were brave,” Remy said.

Brian shook his head. “Brave is kicking their asses and not letting the hurt Mom.”

“Bro, we pick our battles and sometimes we fight, or sometimes we fall back for a better opportunity,” Remy explained. “We fall back for now, and trust me they will get what they deserve. You’ll feel better at the house, I promise.”

“I’d feel better driving this car,” Brian teased sounding a little like his usual self.

“We’ll wait until your mom gives you permission,” Remy said amused.

He never saw his home as anything other than a place to eat and sleep. It never felt warm, not like how Sinead’s house felt when he was there. Pulling in the gates, he heard two words whispered by the boy next to him. “Holy shit!” By the

time they parked and the other kids piled out of the SUV that Duncan drove, they were in an equal awe and excitement.

“This where you live?” Devin asked.

“Can I sleep in my own room?” Jeremy asked. “He talks in his sleep.”

“It’s a castle, a real castle,” Rebecca sighed.

Mandy just looked around speechless as Brian and Duncan pulled the bags from the back of his SUV.

“It’s just a house guys,” Remy said feeling embarrassed.

“To you it’s a house. To kids like us that never saw anything like this in our lives, its like Rebecca said, a castle,” Brian explained dryly.

Inside there were more ooh and ahs and Remy promised he would show them everything the next day. Mandy shared a room with Rebecca, and they chose a girl’s room with two beds and a sitting room. Remy always made sure there was someplace comfortable for his friends with kids to stay, even though it was a long time since that happened.

He thought about Rodriguez and his family and pushed the thought away because that would mean also thinking about the men they lost. The mansion had plenty of rooms. Jeremy, Devin, and Brian each took one and dropped their bags inside. The children came downstairs and Corbin was already in the kitchen stirring hot cocoa which he called his special blend and there was cheese, soft breads and a rice crispy treats.

“How come I don’t get any of this stuff,” Remy teased.

“Because you are an asshole and when I cook, you barely eat.”

Corbin was in his late fifties and a veteran who Remy met when he came back from his deployment. Remy was brash and angry, not wanting to seek therapy and Corbin sat him down for a talking to and it lasted for hours. By the end, he was practically in angry tears. All they went through becoming too much to even bear. Corbin and his gray hair stark white against mahogany skin, walked with him to sign up for

therapy. They continued to talk and he ended up telling Remy his living situation and how finding a job was hard without certain certifications.

Remy sent him to school to live his dream and become a chef. Remy was there when he graduated top of his class. Knowing that large crowds and a restaurant atmosphere wouldn't be good for him, Corbin opted to accept Remy's job offer to work for him. They were friends and that meant unmerciful teasing from both sides, in a way only soldiers did. Corbin was the closest thing to a father figure he had and he loved the man immensely.

"If you'd cook like this instead of poached fish and fancy shit, then I'd eat more," Remy retorted.

"Go to Sinead, we got this," Duncan told him a low voice. "I'll stay downstairs until you get back with with her."

Remy clapped him on the back. "Thanks man."

He said a quick reassuring goodbye to the children and he took the SUV this time to the hospital. By the time he got there she was still in the ER but doctors had seen her, her wrist was bandaged and her ribs taped up. There were butterfly fly band-aids holding a cut closed on her cheek and the doctor was finishing stitching the cut near her hairline. The rage within him bubbled up to the surface once more and Remy had to bank it down and take a deep breath. The police waited, but they weren't too happy it was over two hours before they could ask her questions. Remy stood back while Sinead gave a detailed interview, and each word she spoke made him want to punch through a wall, the fear she had to feel and the pain as they hurt her. He stepped out when the doctor did and spoke to him as he pulled off the gloves.

"How is she?" Remy asked.

"Contusion on her face, a good bump or two on the head, bruised ribs from where they kicked her a hairline fracture of her wrist," The doctor said. "I would like her to stay overnight because of concussion protocols, but Miss Christie is adamant she will go home even if she signs out against medical advice."

“I can watch for signs of concussion at home,” Remy sighed knowing it would be a lost cause to try to get her to stay.

“Do you know the signs of a cerebral hematoma as well?” The Doctor asked.

“I was deployed more than once and dealt with multiple explosions. I know what to look for,” Remy replied.

“Thank you for your service. I’ll get her discharge papers and you can take her home.”

Remy watched the doctor walk away for a moment and then police finally left her room with a small nod. He went back inside and it broke his heart to see Sinead leaning her head back on a pillow with her face swollen, cut lip, and the bruises were already showing darker undertones. Remy sat beside her, lifted her bandage hand, and gently kissed it hoping it convey some of what he felt.

Sinead tried to smile. “It’s not as bad at it looks.”

“It is and I’m trying so hard not to go throw a grenade in any of the rat’s nests Morris lives in,” Remy told her honestly.

“I hope you don’t have any of those lying around your house,” she said with a panicked look on her face.

Remy smiled and shook his head. “I do not keep munitions in my home.. but I can get some if need be.”

“We don’t need one,” she answered. “The kids are okay right?”

“I left them having hot chocolate from my chef and other stuff,” Remy moved a whisp of her hair away from her face. “I took the liberty of invoking your name and telling them they can stay home tomorrow. After tonight they might need a day to take a breath.”

“I’m completely okay with that,” Sinead grasped his hand with her uninjured one. “Thank you. I don’t know what we would’ve done without you. The social worker would’ve taken the kids for sure. After this she might want to anyway, and I can’t even fathom not having them.”

“Why would they remove the children?” Remy asked, he honestly had zero clue about how social services worked.

“They need to be in a safe environment and my social worker was already hesitant about the house being so close to, well, an obviously not good area. After this, she can choose to take them, if she feels the home setting is not safe.”

“And a break in with violence and a broken door...” Remy let his words drop away.

“Exactly.”

“Then you’ll stay with me. That will be your legal address,” Remy said firmly. “We are a couple...”

“Are we?”

Remy cupped her cheek. “Aren’t we?”

“We never formally put a name or designation to our situation,” Sinead pointed out.

He leaned forward to kiss her. “Well, I am now. We are a couple and my home is your home.”

“I can’t ask you to do that,” Sinead protested. “Trust me, five kids in my house is a constant revolution of laundry, broken stuff, yelling, tears... shall I go on?”

“We’ll hire a housekeeper.”

“The boys will constantly bother you about video games and stuff.”

“Sounds perfect.”

“If you have a Picasso or some fine Ming dynasty bowl, they will break it,” she told him.

“Material things can be replaced, and I’m not pretentious. So, that crap isn’t in my house,” Remy leaned forward until they were nose to nose. “What else ya got? Throw it all at me.”

“You like your peace,” Sinead said helplessly.

“Do I? Since I seem to be at your house so much,” he kissed her gently again. “Ok how about this? We will repair

Enchanted Arms to a pristine condition, add security and a camera system, fence in that back lot, rip up all that pavement crap, and add actual grass. I will stand by your side when social services comes and tell them you have my complete support, we're a team."

"That would be much more reasonable instead of moving in together until..." Sinead looked away in embarrassment and he found that completely charming.

"I get what you mean, until you're ready and want to move in permanently, but you'll stay with me until Mike is done with everything," he insisted.

"I won't say no to that."

It was another hour before he was able to get her gingerly in the car and it was almost four in the morning before he led her inside.

"Holy crap, Remy. Maybe it's the drugs, but this seems bigger than last time." Sinead gasped. "Is it the same house?"

"It's the same house," he said amused. "Do you want to check on the kids before I put you to bed?"

"Please."

First he took her to see Brian who sat up as soon as she brushed a blond tendril away from his face.

"Mom," he sat up and embraced her.

Remy saw her wince and placed a hand on the boy's shoulder. "Easy son, she is more than a bit sore."

"Sorry," Brian pulled away. "Will you be okay?"

"Perfectly," Sinead smile and cupped his cheeks. "I have never been prouder of you for saving me, for having my back. I call you my son, because I love you with all my heart and thank you."

"Mom," Brian leaned forward and put his head on her shoulder. "I love you too."

"Now go to sleep, because tomorrow is Friday. There's no school. Then a whole weekend and no practice," she kissed his

forehead. "You should enjoy it."

"Okay."

He turned over and she tucked the blanket around him, then Remy watched her do the same for all the other children. Even though they were sleeping, she tucked the blankets around them and kissed them bending with difficulty because of her injuries. Remy couldn't remember once his mother kissing him let alone making sure he was asleep, tucked in or that he could turn to her when problems arose. She was so stuck in her own despair that Remy wasn't even a thought. No one was a thought, the pills kept her numb to the pain, the abuse, to her husband, to her son, life was more than likely all a blur.

Watching Sinead, he couldn't even ache for what he never knew. Rather he had a sense of awe to be in her world and be a part of something this good and pure. Those kids came to her alone, afraid, tossed about like they meant and were nothing, and she gave them a home, and all the love in the world. Remy helped her up after she kissed Rebecca and led her to his room.

She protested. "Remy, I-I can't take your room or whatever you have planned, it's a big house, just plant me somewhere."

"My plan is to hold you while you sleep and watch over you," Remy heard the husky emotion in his own voice. "I wasn't there to protect you when you needed me the most."

"No one could know that would happen," Sinead protested. "You are always there when I call, Brian did tonight and you came to rescue us all."

"I just need to hold you." Remy admitted.

"Only if you sleep too; let me chase those demons away." Sinead said softly.

Remy could only nod and he helped her undress, taking her blouse over her head slowly because her ribs were so sore. He kissed the dark bruises that were forming on her shoulders and then her face and cheeks. He helped her into one side of

the bed before Remy undressed down to his boxer briefs and gingerly climbed in on the other side so as not to jar her.

“Easy now,” Remy said huskily, as Sinead tried to move closer and with such care he made sure that Sinead was close to his chest and she pressed a kiss onto her skin.

Sinead lifted her head to look at him and cup his cheek. “Now you sleep. I’m here to protect you too.”

Her words did something to his is soul, a balm that soothed him and an ache that was such a sweet ache to his heart, it felt like he couldn’t take a deep breath. She was so unlike any other woman that had walked through his life, and that’s what made her perfect. Remy closed his eyes and drifted, focused on Sinead in his arms to intently. He didn’t even know when he fell asleep.



“I WOULD KILL HIM MYSELF, if Remy wasn’t willing to do it,” Callie said angrily.

“I very much want to do it, but Sinead or Duncan won’t let me,” Remy said.

Sinead found sitting up at one of the kitchen chairs felt tons better than lying down at that moment. Sinead had called Callie the Friday morning. Early. Like five in the morning, to tell her what happened.

“I’ll be there soon as I can” Callie promised. After she closed out some work or said fuck it, Callie left. Sinead was always unsure when it came to her best-friend.

While the kids were back at school that Monday, Callie arrived by noon that same day. The buzzer at the gate went off and Remy was helping her friend inside with three big rolling suitcases. She took the earliest flight back to Seattle, so Sinead was right, it was a fuck work type situation. Remy was making lunch from meals Corbin left in the fridge and this was Duncan’s first real introduction to her friend.

“Well hello, you must the the incomparable, Calypso, aka Callie,” Duncan’s voice was smooth as silk as he came

through the sliding doors that led to the pool.

“Incomparable?” Sinead said dryly.

“She said it when I called to check in that night you guys were out,” Duncan explained. “I’m going by what she said. I assumed she was the best thing since pasteurization and the creation of electricity.”

Callie grinned wickedly. “Yeah I am.”

“Nice to meet you,” Duncan shook her hand.

Callie looked him up and down. “Feeling’s mutual, ginger snap.”

“Don’t encourage her and you don’t encourage him,” Sinead said to them and she used a karate chop to break the handshake.

“Now, what won’t I let Remy do? I got the back end of the conversation.” Duncan sat down on one of the stools next to the counter to snag a piece of fruit.

“Let me kill Morris for getting Sinead assaulted,” Remy told him. “Stop fucking with my platter or I’m going to take a finger.”

“As you can see, he is very violent,” Duncan said mildly. “He’d more than likely hang Morris from the Space Needle and write Remy Killed him on his body in spray paint to announce the kill.”

“So?” Both Callie and Remy said the word.

“You two are bloodthirsty,” Sinead said.

“I’m an eye for an eye type of guy,” Remy said simply. He picked up one platter and looked at the other. “If you’re eating with us, grab that please.”

“I won’t refuse an invitation,” Duncan said with a smile.

Remy shook his head. “Of course you wouldn’t.”

Sinead loved the open feel of Remy’s kitchen and it had nothing to do that her living room and kitchen being able to fit in this one space. Remy had a breakfast nook with windows

looking over the side flower garden and the water feature that decorated the landscape. There was also the white dining room table that was to the right off the granite kitchen island leaving a wide path that would lead in or out from the sliding doors. They sat at the breakfast nook mostly because Sinead didn't feel like moving. Callie was on the inside from her, and Duncan scooted in before Remy sat down.

"Nice and cozy," Duncan said with a smile.

"It's a six-foot breakfast nook with a wide ass wrap around bench," Remy handed out plates.

Duncan rolled his eyes. "You have no taste for ambiance."

"They are both very one dimensional I think that's why they suit each other," Callie told Duncan.

"I appreciate that you see my vision," Duncan lifted his glass to Callie.

Callie clinked her drink to his. "I appreciate you have that vision. I see you Duncan... I see you."

Sinead and Remy were openly looking at them curiously.

"What?" Callie asked.

Sinead narrowed her gaze. "What's all this now?"

"What's all what?" Duncan asked. "I made a friend."

Callie shook her head and put some antipasto on her plate. "Jeez, suspicious much?"

"Uh-huh." Sinead glanced at Remy shrugged his shoulder.

The conversation was light over lunch. And when Callie decided to call a ride share to take her and her bags to her home, Duncan offered to drive her. More and more curious, but Sinead kept her mouth shut, until it was just Remy holding her. The medication for pain was making her sleepy and it was time to lie down. It felt safer with his arms around her.

"Your friend is trying to bang my best friend," Sinead murmured sleepily.

Remy's body shook as he chuckled. "More than likely."

“She’s going to take his soul,” Sinead yawned.

“Like you took mine?”

She smiled. “Just like that. Except, Callie doesn’t settle down and has commitment issues. Prepare for a rich, lovesick, fool.”

“He’s a big boy, he’ll be fine,” Remy’s voice was a deep rumble in his chest. “Sleep, I have my alarm set to leave at three.”

“You’re amazing.”

“You bet your sweet ass I am.”

It hurt to laugh, so a quick chuckle and a wince of pain, sleep claimed Sinead quickly. Chaos would be home soon and they would want her to know every minute of their day in detail. Yes one needed a nap for that.



Chapter Nine

A few things happened over the weeks that went by, Sinead saw the full extent of Remy's house and instantly felt out of place. Even though she'd been there a few times when date night or a long lunch, led to hot sex. Sinead never stayed over except for that one night of the art gala, nor had she explored the house. It was like walking back into her past, where her ex lived like a king and thought she was one of his possessions, and treated her like she meant nothing. Looking around at the kids, she knew that Remy wasn't like that.

The first afternoon, he was in playing some sort of water ball game with the boys while Mandy and Rebecca floated in huge swan blow ups. He even thought about Rebecca being the smallest and got her the arm blow ups to keep her above water. He taught her how to paddle in the shallow end of the pool while she sat in the sun and sipped the ice tea brought out by his chef.

The man had a chef, and again it felt like he was slowly replacing her home with his own. What would happen when they went back home? She wondered to herself, would they be happy back in their house that could fit into his four or five times... maybe six. Remy had a movie room downstairs, a gaming room with the cool gaming chairs that made you feel every movement that happened with in the simulation on the screen. The room the girls were staying in was three times the size of the ones at Enchanted arms, and Mandy was in love with the sitting room with a wall full of books teen girls would love.

Not to mention the kitchen. She watched how Mandy passed her hand over the Kitchen Aid and the two ovens set into the wall. There was even a brick oven to make pizza and the outdoor grilling area even had a TV, plus deck chairs. The landscape was pristine down to the manicured lawn. There was a wooden trellis with vines growing and twisting around the reddish brown wood.

“Mom these are grapes,” Devin said the first time he saw them and brought two over. “Can we eat these?”

“You can,” Remy said with a simple nod. “But these are grapes they make wine with so they have seeds and a tougher skin. You have to spit them out and you can’t eat the skin so you pop it with your teeth, suck the juice and the stuff out, toss the skin and spit out the seeds.”

“I wonder if they would grown in our backyard when its done?” Jeremy wondered.

“They would, but it would take about a year or two for the vines to have grapes on them,” he replied. “Keep the seeds, let them dry, and Corbin will put them in a small jar for you.”

“Cool!”

At least Jeremy still thought about home. That’s was a good thing, and she hoped the other kids felt that way as well. Stands to reason they couldn’t stay here long term and that wasn’t what she wanted anyway. Remy was so willing to bring her into his home, but what would she lose in the process? Would she slowly lose herself in to all he was and all he provided? That was one thing she could not do again. For the first time since their first date, Sinead wondered how she and Remy could ever make this work. They were from two different worlds, and even with how down to earth Remy was, the fact that he was part of the elite world of the rich was still a huge barrier between them.

She contacted the social worker. That was one of the requirements to have the children in her care. Sinead gave Remy’s address. Mrs. Soto came over immediately contemplating about possibly removing the children if the home wasn’t adequate. Sinead could see her mind was changed by the time she knocked on the door. When she actually stepped inside and looked around Remy’s home, Sinead watched the stern woman’s mouth drop open. Remy helped her stand and move towards their social worker.

“Mrs. Soto,” Sinead said was warmly as she could “I hope the day finds you well.”

“It seems to to have found you a change in fortune,” Mrs. Soto murmured and looked in Remy’s direction.

“It’s not a change in my fortune. None of this is mine,” Sinead said firmly.

Remy head out his hand. “Remington Durant, of Durant Enterprises.”

“Mr. Durant, I’m sure I’ve seen your name on more building,” Mrs. Soto said. “Are you two dating?”

“We are,” Sinead said.

“A background check for Mr. Durant will need to be added to the file,” Mrs. Soto made a note.

“You can have that today and any reverences you may require.” Remy answered.

“Remy loves the kids, even if we weren’t together I am sure he would still care for them. Brian now works in their research and development department and he can use that when he starts applying for colleges.”

“I will also be setting up a college fund for each child,” Remy said with a smile.

Mrs. Soto nodded. “Money is good and all, but it doesn’t change the fact that you are an unknown entity in their lives. The house, in all its glory, would make one consider them safe. But, are they safe here, mentally and physically?”

“They are,” Remy said firmly.

Mrs. Soto was direct. “We’ve had incidents where foster kids were groomed for certain...”

Remy stiffened. “I would take offense to that, but I know you have to ensure the children are safe. But let me be clear, I am not that man. I am a veteran and an honest man with no ill intent. Many of the children in our charity programs are in foster care and the team ensures they don’t age out, then be left on the streets. An occurrence that seems to be more common in the foster care program.”

Mrs. Soto turned red and looked down for a moment. “It’s a practice I abhor myself, but we have limited resources.”

“And that’s why we ensure they can have a college education, a home, and not have to join the military at eighteen unless they want to. Not for three square meals and somewhere to sleep,” Remy added.

“Remy isn’t like that,” Sinead felt her anger simmer. “I’m not some innocent, doe eyed woman when it comes to money, that I would put my kids in jeopardy. When our home is renovated from the damage, then all of us will be returning to Enchanted Arms.”

“That’s the other issue, Sinead,” Mrs. Soto said calmly. “How can I be certain that won’t happen again?”

“No one can assure you of that, Mrs. Soto,” Remy answered. “That entire area needs to have the bad elements removed and revitalized.”

Mrs. Soto looked at him over the trim of her glasses. “Let me guess, you plan to take care of that too? I’ve seen the Durant initiative go through more than one neighborhood. For the better, if I might add.”

“Well thank you,” Remy inclined his head. “I also want you to know that I took my foster care certification, passed with flying colors. Both my self and the home visit we completed vetted in the process.”

“You went down to the Social Services building and did the the two courses?” If Mrs. Soto was shocked, imagine how Sinead felt.

“Yes, ma’am,” Remy replied with respect in his voice. “I am no longer active military, but I am medic certified and did the course for that was well while I was there. I can bring the certificates for you, if you would like to seem them.”

Mrs. Soto shook her head. “That won’t be necessary, I will be able to see them on your foster profile, I guess the background check is a moot point. What I do need is to see the children, each one and where they are sleeping and the kitchen. Well, a tour of the whole house.”

“Remy can you take her please,” Sinead asked. “I’m starting to hurt.”

He took her back to the wide sofa and helped her lie down. “I’ll get the prescription the doctor had us fill.”

“Not right now. I just needed to sit down,” Sinead said.

It was more that, her ribs ached unmercifully beneath the tape and a headache was well on its way to being a migraine. But she didn’t want Mrs. Soto to think she was dependent on the medication, so Sinead bore the pain.

“I’ll be back soon,” Remy promised and led the social worker away.

Sinead’s thoughts went back to his foster certification. Why did he do it? While she was sure it was to make him acceptable by the powers that be in her life. It still bothered her that he was infiltrating their lives completely. What if this didn’t work out? Would he try to take her kids? He had the bigger, better home. The motivation of the wealthy still made her wary, yet she didn’t speak to Remy about it. Mrs. Soto approved of them staying with Remy and at least that was a relief and one less thing on her plate to worry about.

But, today they played in the pool and Remy barbequed while she lay under the shade watching the children she loved more than life. People usually wanted a child of their own and fostering was an after thought. Sinead grew up in the system on and off through out her life until she aged out as people say. When in actuality, she left and found a place to live with her friend Callie and her family. By that time, she was more street wise than anything else and she wondered how she let a man like Keith into her world.

“Hey, I’ve always heard that, when the wind blows, your face stays that way,” Remy said with a grin sitting down beside her.

Sinead looked at him in confusion. “What now?”

“Frowning or making faces, if the wind blows your face stays that way,” Remy explained. “You’ve never heard that old saying?”

“I have not, but then I didn’t have a mother who would pass down such sage wisdom to me. Is that a plate of food you’re carrying for me?”

Remy looked down. “That was my lunch... awe man I guess I’ll give it to you.”

“You are a paragon among men,” Sinead laughed and took the meal. The plate was filled with potato salad, barbequed ribs and cold pasta salad.

“I think Rebecca has turned into a mermaid,” Remy said. “Her toes and fingers were pruned when Mandy finally convinced her to get out.”

“I’ll have to get her some swim lessons, so I don’t have a heart attack every time she’s in a pool,” Sinead took a bite of her food and flavors burst across her tastebuds. “This is amazing.”

“I can only claim the meats. Corbin took care of everything else,”

Remy was shirtless. Sinead looked at his sculpted muscles under the brown skin, a few shades darker than hers, and the water droplets drying away to nothing in the sun. The man was built like a carved African deity with each muscle defined down the Vee of his hips that led down into his swim trunks. Lord he was magnificent, and Sinead felt that new type of hunger build within her.

“You’re staring,” Remy’s voice took on an edge of desire. “Don’t look at me like that; you know what it does to me.”

“Thinking about how hungry I am,” Sinead admitted meeting his gaze.

“You’re on the injured list,” he reminded her softly and put the tall glass of ice cold lemonade to his lips.

Sinead took a bite of the meal and chewed before speaking. “When I’m all healed up, maybe we should consider the option of me and you naked.”

Remy choked on this drink.

“Shit, are you okay?” Sinead asked, instantly concerned.

“I’m fine,” he rasped out. “Thanks for trying to fill my lungs with liquid.”

She laughed. “I’m so sorry, but hey think on it.”

“Oh honey, that’s not even an issue. It’s all I ever thought about since we first met,” Remy leaned forward. “Trust me, I will take you again and again, until you can’t think long enough to form words. I’m no angel, Babygirl.”

“That’s fine, I’ve always loved a darker experience,” she answered.

Remy leaned forward and kissed her, his lips lingering until the ‘eews’ and ‘gross’ started from the kids.

“Time to go start some chaos,” he kissed her again before hopping over a small brush that grew in the areas of raised beds that sat outside the pool area. “Come ‘ere, I’ll show you gross!”

Remy chased Devin and Jeremy around the pool, finally tackling them both into the water. Brian jumped in after them with a war cry and Mandy sat on the edge kicking her feet until a large arm came out of the water and pulled her in. The screech she let out was epic while Rebecca stood on the side jumping in excitement with her little arm floatie on.

“Do me, do me!” the litter girl begged.

“Ok but a small splash until you learn how to swim,” Remy explained. “Big deep breath.”

Sinead watched her take a deep breath until her cheeks were puffed out and Remy grabbed her around the waist before falling back in the water. His long arms kept her far enough out of the water that she wouldn’t be afraid, but Rebecca came up laughing like she had just experienced the best thing ever in her little life.

“I heard sounds of merriment, then water splashing, and finally I smelled food,” Duncan ambled up to where she was sitting. “I thought I should investigate.”

“You should definitely check out the food,” Sinead laughed. “I’d stay out of that fracas.”

Duncan sat on the lounge chair next to her. “They seem to be having fun. Remy is the biggest kid when he’s around children.”

“The rooms where they kids are sleeping, why are they all set up for kids? Did he used to have family that came around?” Sinead questioned.

“No nieces or nephews by blood, but the kids of some of our military buddies used to come around,” Duncan explained. “Not so much now.”

“Why not?”

Duncan sighed. “Its not my story to tell, but you’ve heard him at one of this worst points when he went running from his demons. Remy carries so much guilt that he didn’t bring all of his guys home. Some that came home, did it with injuries and he blames himself for that too. He was the best goddamn leader we had, because the COs were more about medals for themselves than thinking of us, who had boots on the ground.”

“So having them around would remind him of his perceived failure,” Sinead murmured. “He’s so torn up sometime; I can see it in his eyes.”

“Right now, he’s in his element with the kids,” Duncan said. “He loves children; the big goofball has taken you and yours under his wings.”

“I didn’t want the kids to get accustomed to something they might not have the rest of their lives,” she voiced her concerns. “I didn’t grow up with anything like this but I knew from when Keith and I were together that money doesn’t mean good or kind. Remy is amazing and I can see his affection for the kids. It also feels like we are a side project. You know like when a basketball team does a charity thing for under privilege kids. When will he get bored?”

Duncan sighed. “He is never going to be, because when you’re in his heart that’s where you stay. He is that kind of person. I have never seen him act like this, especially around you. He got it bad.”

Sinead put the plate Remy gave her on the small table between them.

“That scares me too, the logistics of how we could work out,” she admitted.

“I can only say, if you spend all your time thinking about it, you’re missing out on trying to create it,” Duncan added. “How is he sleeping?”

“Murmurs in his sleep a lot, but nothing major,” Sinead answered.

“That’s good,” Duncan sounded relieved. “He’s sleeping more.”

“More sleep suits him,” Sinead knew for them to work, she would have to get over own baggage, but still she worried.

“Sinead,” Duncan said her name gently as if sensing her thoughts. “Military spouses have woken up with arms across their throat, or slammed into a wall because their husbands are in the midst of a full-on fight in their dreams. A lot of them are so tortured, they end up taking their lives instead of working through the process. Remy has done the process and he is safe. The nightmares are because he needs get over his own guilt.”

“Are we safe here?” Sinead asked bluntly. “I have to think about me and the children, if he’s...”

“You are safe here,” Duncan cut her off and promised. “Remy himself would’ve put you all in a hotel suite if he thought he was a danger to any of you. He’s healing, so you take it slow and if you feel the same way he does, you walk the path with him.”

“Thank you sage wise friend,” Sinead’s lips twitched with a smile.

Duncan sat back. “I’m glad someone recognizes my abilities.”

Remy came running up soaking wet. “You guys seem all serious over here.”

“I was telling Sinead she should ditch you and come see my place,” Duncan teased. “Now you’ve found out about our

secret love.”

“But you live on my property, so it would be pretty much easy to find you,” Remy countered.

“Drat, foiled again,” Duncan murmured. “Sinead, the stars are not aligned for our love.”

“But, but our secret love child, Sweetums, will be without a father,” Sinead cried out.

“Ha, ha, you two are a riot,” Remy grinned wickedly. “You’re on the injured list. I’ll get you later, but Duncan here...”

Duncan stood and eyed his friend warily. “Remy don’t you fucking dare. This shirt cannot be ruined by chlorine so don’t touch me.”

“I wasn’t going to touch you,” Remy said casually before whistling. “Hey Boys, we need to corral this guy.”

“Damn it Remy.”

Duncan turned to head back to his house and that path was blocked by Brian, Jeremy and Devin while Remy advanced closer. The four of them started to close in and while it hurt like hell, Sinead laughed at Duncan’s panicked eyes as they moved him closer to the pool.

“Come on guys. A hundred for each of you to join my camp.” Duncan begged.

“Like we planned,” Remy told the boys with a nod.

“You planned this!!” Duncan yelled.

That was all he got out because with a yell, they all rushed Duncan and took him into the pool with them.

He came up sputtering and grabbed Remy ducking him under the water. It was an all-out war of splashes while two grown men acted like the teen boys that Sinead raised. Mandy held Rebecca’s hand. Together, they sat with Sinead while the chaos reigned in the pool.

“I wanna play,” Rebecca complained.

“Not this time sweetheart. This is called rough housing, and I don’t want you to get hurt,” Sinead said comfortingly.

“Boys are weird,” Mandy added shaking her head.

Sinead took a sip of her lemonade. “Yep and trust me the older they get the weirder they become.”

“Hmm.”

That was the sound that Mandy made while they all watched the male species in the pool continued to try drown each other. Sinead smiled; the laughter combined with yells from her boys made her happy. She hoped that they could make it work, because no matter how much she didn’t want her heart to be invested, it had already happened.

It wasn’t the fact that he was rich, or what he could give them. The best thing about Remy was his empathetic and caring soul. He was like her. Despite their circumstances, they overcame to be the people they were today. She would feel this way about him in any job in the world, and Remy proved the money did not make the man.



A WEEK HAD PASSED AND Sinead was practically back on her feet. They would be able to move back into Enchanted Arms that weekend and the kids were excited to go back home. The prestige of being in Remy’s house or being driven to school in a luxury SUV did not seem to faze them, and she knew that she’d raised them right. Not sleeping next to Remy would be a change she would have to get used to not having once more.

His warm body made her feel secure, and the passion that was always under the surface beckoned her to him like a moth to a flame. Her resolve was tested while everyone slept that last few nights of their stay. Somehow, he had drifted away from her in the night. And first, she heard his murmurs of distress, “Jones.” She heard the same more than once, and sleepily reached out to caress him until he settled. But Remy had moved, and when he yelled she knew he was in the throes of a nightmare that would let him go.

“Jones! Jones, oh man not like this,” There was agony in his voice. “Someone get that fifty-Cal off the base and waste these guys, we have a man pinned!”

“I’m going to get you home brother. Rodriguez, I’m buying you and the family a fucking house so you don’t give up! You have girls to raise, they need their daddy.”

Sinead did as Duncan told her and moved closer to the bathroom to be safe.

“Remy, baby, you have to wake up,” she said gently.

He combat rolled off the bed and scrambled to the corner of the room next to his bed. His eyes were open but wild and she knew it wasn’t the room she was seeing. “We’re pinned! Evac can’t get us until the gun fire stops,” Remy shouted. “Command we need some assistance from over head. Ambush coordinates...” Remy rattled off the numbers. “I say again, overwatch we need an assist! I’ve got a man down, gonna lose his leg if we don’t get him out of here and another four KIA. Confirm fire from the sky!”

Sinead didn’t know what it all meant, so she moved carefully around the room close to him but still had the ability to run if necessary. Her heart raced and ached for him simultaneously. Oh what he must have gone through and seen to make him relive it night after night.

“Remy you’re home safe. In your bedroom, and I’m here,” Sinead spoke and slid down the wall watching him. His eyes wide and unseeing while tears trickled from his eyes slowly.

“Jones, Farrhid, Masterson, Broomes... My guys.. I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry,” Remy’s breath hitched on a sob. “Forgive me, forgive me.”

“Oh honey they don’t blame you,” Sinead felt her own tears fall. “They know you would’ve done anything to bring them home. And Rodriguez is home with his babies right now because of you.”

At least she hoped he was, but she assumed since he wasn’t listed by Remy as one of the men lost, his friend made it safely home. He was quietly talking to himself now, as if

whispering a prayer for his friends and Sinead sensed that the worst was over. She kept talking to him until she saw clarity in his eyes and he stared at her for a moment confused.

“Sinead?”

She nodded. “I’m right here.”

“Did I have a nightmare?” he questioned her.

“You did, and now you’re with me again,” she held out her arms to him. “Come to me, Baby.”

Watching him move across the floor was akin to watching a predator move except when he lay his head in her lap and wrapped his arms around her waist. Sinead saw only the man, who loved so hard, that he blamed himself for deaths that he couldn’t control. He pressed his face against her torso and she rubbed his shoulders and back until Remy took a huge breath and she felt the warmth of each breath on her stomach as he released it.

“I’m sorry you had to see that,” Remy said suddenly. “Damn it. I hoped you’d never have to see it.”

“Is it always that bad?” She asked.

“Worse,” Remy admitted. “I can’t seem to swim clear of the memories and I can still smell the blood mixed with charred engines and gunpowder burning my nostrils. I should send you home and make you stay away from me. I don’t want to hurt you or the kids and sometimes when I get like this, I don’t know what might happen.”

“I trust you,” Sinead said gently. “I’ve been reading up on post traumatic stress disorder and Duncan has filled me in on the rest, we can manage.”

Remy sat up and looked at her with a tortured gaze. “But I don’t trust me, and if something happened to you because of me, I wouldn’t be able to survive it. I hate the medication they give me. It makes everything dull, but I go to alternative therapies, counselling and I’m trying to make it go away. I swear I am.”

“I believe you; we will make it work,” her voice was firm. “I’m not running away because you are still healing from all you saw. I will go to therapy with you if I need to, but you’re going to work through this and I’m going to be with you.”

He stood up and helped her to her feet. “I’m going to shower; it helps and I’m clammy.”

“Ok,” Sinead pressed a kiss on his lips.

She watching him walk away and soon the shower went on and she heard the water hitting the tile. The decision came naturally, and Sinead acted without any doubt. She took off her pajamas, walked naked into the bathroom and stepped into the shower with him.

“Sinead, what are you doing?” Remy asked, but she felt his gaze roam greedily over her body. “You’re hurt.”

“And you’ll be gentle.” She pressed her self closer to him underneath the spray. “I thought what I was doing was abundantly clear. Love me Remy and chase both our demons away.”

His kiss was gentle, then like a match being struck, it became hungry and he walked her back until her body was trapped between him and the cool tile. He speared his tongue into her mouth with a low groan and lifted her against him. Sinead wrapped her legs around his waist while their tongues dueled from his mouth to hers. His hands roamed over her greedily. A muffled groan escaped him as he kissed his way down her neck to the fullness of her breasts.

Her nipples were already beaded hard from the water and arousal, and Remy licked at the rivulets of water that ran down between the valley of her breasts. Remy kept going down her body until he was on his knees and she could feel his breath against her lower stomach. Sinead looked down and saw the primal desire in his eyes, just before he fused his mouth against her sex and he delved his tongue between the slit. She heard the guttural groan of satisfaction escape him, and he lifted one of her legs over his shoulder while she leaned against the tile.

Remy tasted the very core of her greedily, sucking at her clit until she could hardly stand it, then lapping at the sensitive flesh denying her release. He stood and turned her so the smooth curve of her ass was against his body, and with a large hand he lifted Sinead's to kiss her while the other splayed across her stomach. She inhaled as his fingers moved lower to the apex of her thighs. She undulated against his hand when Remy teased her core. Sinead was already slick and wet, eager for his touch. He grazed her clit. Lighting caused her to gasp out his name, lifting her hips seeking more pleasure.

"Damn, I'm trying so hard to be gentle," he asked softly into her ear and continuing the manipulation of her clit.

"I'm a little bruised not broken, feeling better each day," Sinead gasped out. "But if you stop now, that's definitely going to kill me."

Her words fell away when Remy slid his fingers lower between the delicate folds of her pussy. It seemed he planned to drive her crazy by circling the entrance of her moist cavern but not fulfilling the unspoken promise of pleasure. Sinead lifted her hips to bring his digit inside her, but he retreated, going back to circling the sensitive bud as he had before.

"Remy," she said in frustration.

"Tell me what you want," he demanded in a husky voice.

She made a sound of frustration in her throat when he dipped slightly inside and continued to tease her. "Remy, I want your fingers inside me, please!"

"Mmmm, thank you," he whispered.

With her body still spooned against his, Remy sank his digit into her, and from that angle when he withdrew, it grazed her clit. The friction was a sweet unbearable sensation that drove her higher and a wave of heat washed over her body. Sinead felt her pussy contract deliciously around his finger and Remy groaned in response. Sinead's hips pumped against his hand and he pushed deeper sending Sinead right over the edge. Her hands, that were flat on the smooth tile, curled into fists as she trembled in release.

“Yes. Damn I love watching you come for me,” His voice was like gravel as he spoke.

She was still trembling when he loosened his hold on her and she felt the head of his shaft probing the entrance of her sex. Hot opened mouth kisses were placed on her shoulders as he grabbed her hips. When he thrust deep, a guttural cry escaped him. Sinead writhed, her hips moving in an intimating dance, and Remy stilled her with his hands.

“Babe, give me a minute,” his breath came out in harsh pants. “I crave you like a drowning man, needs air.”

“Don’t stop, don’t stop,” Sinead begged.

He surged upwards and filled her once more, against and again until they were both gasping. He was so thick and her pussy sheathed him like a velvet glove. Feeling him glide against her walls was the ultimate pleasure. Remy cupped her breasts, each smooth globe fitting easily in his large palm as they moved. Remy picked up rhythm of his thrusts, and soon the driving beat became hers.

“Damn!” he said harshly.

Sinead could feel her slick core take him in greedily and release him, only to capture him once more. Remy sucked on the soft skin of her neck while their piston like movements were carnal as Remy tried to take them both into their release. Remy teased her nipples as he moved, wringing a low cry from her lips. Their harsh breathing combined with the water jets sending a soft spray across their bodies in the shower filled the room.

Remy’s hands gripped her hips tight from behind, pulling Sinead to him, impaling her onto his steel hard shaft until they both tumbled over the edge of reason into their release. Breathless and pliant, Sinead was sure she would slide down the tile to the floor and possibly down the drain if it wasn’t for Remy holding her up. Remy managed to clean them both, even washing between her legs which made her tremble once again.

No,” he said in a soft firm voice.

“Spoil sport,” Sinead pouted.

He kissed her, hard and deeply, showing Sinead the desire was still there. “Let me have honor here and be a gentleman so you can heal.”

“Fine,” she grumbled. “I’m really okay.”

He dried them both and helped her into one of his large t-shirts watching her wince when she lifted her arm too high.

“Uh-huh, you’re okay,” Remy swept her up into his arms and put her into his bed. “I’m going to get us some ice cream and we can watch the news before going back to sleep.”

“Is that what you usually do, after a nightmare?” she asked.

Remy kissed before stacking pillows behind her. “No, but it feels like a you and me thing, after a nightmare.”

Sinead smiled. “I like that idea.”

“I’ll be back.”

She watched him pull on a t-shirt and pair of shorts before jogging out of the room. In minutes he was back with two big bowls of Rocky Road with extra toppings, and together they ate and watched the late night shows. The bowls were piled on his bedside table when they were done and sleep seemed to claim Remy easily. Sinead watched him worriedly for a while, looking for any distress before she was comfortable to fall asleep. Sometimes, even the hero needed protecting from the monsters that only reared their heads in the dark.



Chapter Nine

Remy was in his office once again and missing Sinead. She and the kids had gone back to Enchanted Arms that Saturday, and now his house felt like a fucking mausoleum. Hollow and empty, the sounds only an echo from the time when she and kids were there. He taken to staying to her place a few nights a week, even though the property was fully secured. It was for their protection, but also he hated going home without them or sleeping without Sinead beside him.

Morris's people could do nothing more but to tag the sign outside on the front lawn with spray paint. It was repainted that very same day. Then, he watched the police toss Morris's house, and they found the two men that hurt Sinead hiding inside. They were promptly charged with two felonies, assault and burglary but neither would speak against Morris. Remy know that meant that it would be up to him to bring the self-proclaimed drug King down. The thread all went back to him, and Duncan was tying up loose ends before they presented the evidence to the police.

He wanted Morris to know his reach was growing smaller. So the Durant Enterprises, logo was going on each property he owned in Capitol Hill. The strip mall was being renovated starting with the outside. Inside as they as they fixed each business store front on a rolling scale, and the owners came back to a lower leasing rate because Jack Benton was over charging them all. Each house in the neighborhood had two options. Sell at more than the property value, an amount that went beyond market price for the area, and move into a new home or stay in their house and take a new lower mortgage from Durant enterprises and have their houses renovated.

The split was pretty much even between those who wanted to go or who would stay, but each building had his name on the property as new ownership or being renovated by his company. The people who owned the crumbling duplex, where Morris liked to hang out, chose to sell as quickly as he made the offer. He stood outside his SUV and watched as his name went on the property and Morris was served a notice to vacate

the property. They would be arrested for trespassing if they returned. Morris's angry glare didn't phase Remy when he walked out with old duffels filled with his crap. Remy gave him a mock salute as he went down the block with his crew.

Remy had no intention of letting Morris go and be another neighborhood's problem. He would see him and his crew in jail. A smaller crew, because Remy noticed the group had gotten smaller. The word on the street was many bailed because they didn't want jail time for the self-proclaimed King. He also knew that a cornered animal was at its most dangerous. So, while he pigeonholed Morris, he also was on the look out for retaliation. Right now, he had another target in mind. Vargos Imports and Shipping was no longer on his books and he was waiting patiently in his office for father and son to show up.

One might think he was being heavy handed. But regardless of if it was Sinead or not, if he had heard of the abuse, he would have cut ties, knowing what he and his mother faced at his father's hand. Since it was the woman he loved, knowing she never got justice for what Keith did, made this all the sweeter. Remy was not a petty man, but he refused to put money in people's hands if they mistreated others. They could go do whatever the hell they wanted after, but his money wouldn't be a part of it. The phone at his desk rang and Remy pressed the speaker button.

"What's up, Dot?"

"Remy, you have two people demanding to see you," Dot replied.

"You'd better see us, Durant," Vargos Sr. had a voice filled with rage.

"Send them in, thank you."

The door was used open by a tall man who was more than likely formidable in his day. Vargos senior's hair was all white, and shellacked back with too much gel, while Keith had his black hair pulled back in a ponytail and wore to large rings on each pinky finger. His dark eyes were cold and calculating as he looked at Remy.

“What the hell are you doing, Durant, cancelling our contracts with you?” Vargos Sr. barked at Remy.

“Don’t ever come in my office snarling at me Vargos,” Remy stood and snapped. “I don’t work for you. Remember that.”

The older man took a deep breath. “Can we sit and discuss this?”

“You can stand. This won’t take long,” Remy answered. “I cancelled your contracts and paid the early termination fees. You should be good.”

“We have worked with Durant Enterprises for years, long before you took over from your father,” Keith said.

“I am not my father and the new Durant Enterprises does not work with men who abuse women,” Remy replied.

“Who the hell is claiming we abused them? Some woman we fired?” Vargos Sr. asked.

Remy looked directly at Keith. “Sinead Christie ring a bell?”

Realization crossed Keith’s face and a laugh escaped him. “Are you fucking her and she told you this nonsense? She was the abuser. I was defending myself; the cops were called multiple times by me.”

“You gaslighted them and Sinead,” Remy’s voice was icy cold. “Scaring a woman into silence, and from my investigation she isn’t the only one.”

“So let me get this straight,” Vargos Sr. took a deep breath. “You cancelled our contracts because of some woman and her claims my son abused her? Come on son, don’t be stupid. That’s not how the game is played; your father understood that.”

Remy slammed his hand down on the desk. “I am not my father, and don’t you dare call me son! I don’t work that way and I no longer have business with you.”

“Come on, fuck her, marry her for all I care, but don’t lose millions over some whore,” Keith held his hands wide.

“I’m not losing millions, you are,” Remy’s anger was barely restrained. “Speak about Sinead like that again and I’ll throw you out my window without a second thought.”

“I really thought you had better sense than this. Your father toed the line, but it’s basically clear, black men can’t be placed in high business,” Vargos Sr. said bluntly. “I should’ve destroyed your father when I had the chance.”

Remy stared the older man down until it was he who looked away. “My father was the biggest asshole in the world. Well, number two to you. But one thing he wasn’t, was stupid. You think he didn’t know you, and well three quarters of you, were racist as fuck? He knew, he laughed it off and built his fortune until you all had to contract with him to survive.”

Keith spoke. “Remy come on don’t do this. We can work something out.”

“Yeah, I don’t have to suffer with pretense any more,” Remy replied. “Now look at you, Vargos men. At another Durant desk begging for scraps. Our business is done. Get out of this rich black man’s office.”

“You’re going to regret this. I’ll ruin you,” Vargos Sr. seethed.

“Go ahead try. Dad’s cronies are all gone and any business who doesn’t want my work can go, and I’ll find someone to replace them,” Remy sat down and picked up his pen.

“All for a woman,” Keith said amazed.

Remy looked up. “No, all for honor in wealth. I said get out.”

There was one last hesitation before both men left the room, and Remy tapped the pen on his desk. Dot came in soon after with a stack of files in her hand.

“That went well,” she commented.

Remy smiled up at her. “I didn’t wring their necks. I consider that a feather in my hat.”

“I’m glad you could restrain yourself,” Dot said dryly. “You need to go through these and approve acquisitions. Also,

Duncan, Brian, and Javier are coming up from R and D.”

“Thanks, Dot.”

She hesitated and then spoke. “I like this change in you Remy; you seem lighter. Hold on to Sinead. She’s good for you.”

Remy nodded. “I plan on it.”

It was another ten minutes before there was a knock and Duncan stepped in followed by Javier, who was one of the leads in research and development. Brian ended out the trip and they all looked excited with big grins were across their faces. Remy hired Javier right out of MIT, knowing the young Latino man would go great things in technology.

“What’s going on guys?” Remy said curiously.

“Remember the prototype of the new robotic laser we wanted to introduce at the Robotics conference in Sweden next year?” Javier said. Remy had never seen the young man so jazzed.

“Yeah, the one that could be used for more precision in delicate surgeries?” Remy asked.

“That or for NASA to be used on new rover expeditions to Mars, the applications of this could be used in monumental...”

“Javier, breathe,” Duncan patted the man on his back.

He took a deep breath and spoke again. “The problem was the laser and making it such a precision tool that the coding would need a massive program and the chips would have to be interlinked within the system so the program run seamlessly from the robotic aspect to the laser itself.”

“I’m still with you,” Remy hoped he was at least.

“Brian solved it,” Javier grabbed Brian by the shoulders and shook him in excitement. “Tell him.”

Brian looked embarrassed, but he brought the system plans to the desk and opened it up. “We don’t want a bulky unit that has to be rolled in and out of space application, the lighter the better right?”

“Right,’ Remy answered.

“Interlocking microchip, system for the unit,” Brian grinned and showed him a diamond shape pattern. Each chip would need to be built so that it can support at least one thousand terabytes of code and storage for preset programs or new perimeter that can be set by the user. This would fit into a smaller unit and the chips can be built in house.”

“No one else has a chip design like this,” Javier said almost reverently. “We can secure the patent now and it would be propriety use only, no one outside Durant would have it. Then Brian and I can start building.”

“Thoughts?’ Duncan asked and their hopeful faces looked at him.

“Guys, this could revolutionize microchips,” Remy looked over the plans with shrewd eyes and saw the possibilities. “This chip design could be used in multiple ways beyond our laser and be bought worldwide.” Remy stood and his grin was as big as theirs. “Get this patented immediately. Duncan you know what to do, security for this is imperative. All plans and prototypes will be stored within the lab secure room. Coded for the four of us. This is not going to be discussed in house or out of the house. And Brian, when we reveal, you get the credit as inventor.”

“Really?’” Brian’s eyes grew wide.

Remy came around the desk and lifted him off his feet in a hug. “Hell yeah! CalTech doesn’t know who they are getting. You are going to knock their socks off.”

“I still have to get in,” Brian said.

“Oh you’re getting in,” Remy smiled down at him. “I say we celebrate with dinner out. Go call your mom and let her know to get everyone dressed up. Javier and Duncan, you too.”

The rest of the day seemed to pass with a sense of excitement in the air. Remy drove Brian home. When he changed, they all went out to dinner meeting Duncan and Javier at the restaurant. It was a lively affair and while they

knew that Brain was being celebrated, it was best the kids didn't know what great thing Brain did at work. Later that night, he lay in Sinead's bed with her against his chest as she drew tiny patterns on his skin while he explained to her what Brian had done.

"I already got a set of geniuses," Sinead said proudly. "Devin got put into advance math. Jeremy's English teacher called to tell me she wants to move him into the honors programs. Mandy is dominating in her culinary classes and Rebecca can read at a fourth-grade level."

"They are all amazing," Remy murmured sleepily and gave a big yawn.

Sinead laughed. "How are you half asleep?"

"After what we just did, in the quietest way possible, how could I not be," Remy replied in a teasing voice.

"That's either a compliment or not."

"It's a definite compliment," He turned to his side and kissed her. "Plus, I slept at home last night and I can't seem to sleep without you."

"Okay you win, that's sweet, so go to sleep."

"Before I do, I have something for you," Remy rolled over and got out of bed to pull something from the pocket of his leather jacket. He got back between the warm covers and handed it to her and kissed her before placing the large envelope in her hand. "For my Babygirl."

Sinead lay back and opened the thick envelope pulling out a set of folded papers. He watched her face in anticipation of her reaction. Reading through, she almost dropped the stack because it was the title for the property in her name. Enchanted Arms was hers lock stock and barrel.

She turned her head and spoke slowly. "You bought me, Enchanted Arms... Remy, you got Jack Benton to sell you our home?"

"Well, I got Jack Benton to sell me lots of things to revitalize this area. But yes, Enchanted Arms in yours," he

said mildly.

“Oh my god,” Sinead looked at the papers. “I don’t know what to say.”

“I’m hoping, at some point, when you’re ready that this will be the place where you build your dream,” Remy said. “A place where kids are safe. They don’t have to age out of the foster care system, and they have more of a family like setting to be a foundation to a good life. I figure if we get two more houses close by and do the same thing...”

Sinead cut off his words with a kiss before whispering with a voice clogged with tears. “Thank you, Remy, thank you for this”

“To make you this happy, I’d freaking catch the stars for you.” He cupped her cheek and kissed her.

“This is quite enough,” Sinead gave a watery laugh while placing the paperwork on the bedside table.

“Well then, let me sleep woman. You’ve already worn me out,” he teased pulling her close

Remy was already drifting off, but soon he was trapped in his own dreams once more he sat up with a name on his lips.

“Rodriguez!”

It wasn’t loud but Remy sat up looking around expecting to see he was back in that sand with the mangled metal and dark smoke.

Sinead sat up and kissed his shoulder. “It’s okay, you’re not there. You are home with me.”

Remy lay back in despair. “Why won’t this stop haunting me?”

“Because it was a trauma and those aren’t easily healed,” Sinead said. “Is Rodriguez alive?”

Remy nodded swallowing thickly. “He lives in California with his wife and three girls. He has a son now.”

“Those were the kids that used to visit weren’t they?”

“Yes.”

Sinead laced her fingers with his, “When was the last time you saw him?”

“Three, almost four, years ago,” Remy admitted. “We came home a year before that, but I’m sure that losing his leg, I’m the last person he wants to see.”

“I’m sure that’s not the case,” she spoke softly. “I think you’re more guilty than him blaming you. We should go see him.”

Remy looked at her. “We?”

Sinead smiled before pressing kisses on his lips “I won’t let you face anything alone.”

“I may have won the girlfriend lottery,” Remy said rolling so he covered her body.

She twined her arms around his neck. “You bet your firm sweet buns you did.”

Remy chuckled. “Wanna try to be real quiet again?”

“I would like that immensely.”

Remy languidly kissed her, sinking into the taste of her lips and feeling the desire grow between them. There was this art in Asia called kintsugi, where shattered pottery was fixed by fragments of gold until it was whole again. His heart was the cured clay and Sinead was the gold that slowly put him back together. And with her, Remy knew he was whole.



SINEAD ENCOURAGED HIM to go see his friend. Yet while they sat on the flight to California, trepidation filled her and she hoped this wasn’t a mistake. How Rodriguez might react when he saw them and did he truly blame Remy? It had to be done, because until Remy got some type of closure, she felt his nightmares would continue to be frequent. No one should ever have to live like that and she didn’t want that for the man she loved.

The words had yet to be exchanged, but without a doubt she knew that loving Remy would always be a part of her. The two-hour flight went smoothly and they only had a carry-on because they only planned to stay one night. Callie was with the kids. After her assault, it seemed like fate dealt them a better hand because Callie's work was done in New York and back in Seattle in her apartment. Duncan would check in on them that night and a chuckle escaped her thinking about how the interaction would go, those two were like sparring partners.

"What so funny?" Remy asked from beside her.

"Just thinking about Duncan and Callie when he drops in tonight?" Sinead told him. "She can be quite a pill."

"We can say the same about Duncan," Remy was amused. "He is also a flirt."

"I can bet you that she makes him blush down to his red roots," Sinead looked out the window to the fluffy clouds. "Nervous about seeing your friend?"

"When we discussed this, I thought you meant in a few months not the weekend after our discussion." Remy commented. "I am anxious, yes. It's been a while."

"You need this," Sinead rubbed his arm comfortingly. "Why put off tomorrow what we can do today?"

"Use logic on me; that's good," he teased.

He was turned to her and Sinead took the opening to kiss him. "Anything to have my way."

The flight landed without issue and after picking up the rental, Remy drove them out of the airport. Feeling comfortable without the usual fanfare of private jets, and security around him. He could damn well take care of himself but Duncan insisted sometimes. This time he didn't because they both knew how Rodriguez would react to a convoy of SUV's pulling into his driveway. The dry heat took her breath away for a moment, and soon Remy rolled up the window and put the A/C on high.

"Not like Seattle huh?" he commented.

Sinead shook her head fishing out sunglasses from her bag. “I think my eyes dried out and became sand at the first breeze. Jesus its hot.”

“I’ve visited, Benicio a few times and I see why the house needed a pool, so they could hydrate their whole bodies.”

“It’s like that cartoon with the sponge guy who lives under the water when he came up to the surface and dried out.” Sinead laughed.

Remy shook his head while his attention was on the road. “That who thing is ridiculous.”

“You should see the disparities in one of Rebecca’s shows called Bubble Guppies, they are mermaids, who live under water. There is an ocean under water, boats, then mountains and kids fly helicopters. Under water mind you.”

“Oh I know. She made me watch one about puppies who are superheroes and drive like rescue vehicles. I had questions and Rebecca looked at me like I was so dumb. I think she rolled her eyes.”

“Oh I know that look!” Sinead laughed. “I feel so uneducated when she explains to me with such patience.”

Their conversation lightened the mood, but when Remy turned into what Sinead assumed was a familiar neighborhood because of his visits, she watched his fingers rightened on the wheel.

“It’s okay,” she covered his hand with hers. “No matter what, I’m with you.”

Remy parked and they both got out of the car. Sinead looked up at the two-story Spanish style villa home. The front landscape consisted of plants that was native to the dry weather and a lawn with the sprinklers on. Remy came around to her and took Sinead’s hand just as the front door opened and a man stood in the shade of the house.

He wore his hair short in a military cut, and he was at least two inches shorter than Remy. He wore shorts and she could see his prosthetic leg easily as he folded his arms across his chest. *Uh-oh*, Sinead sense the hesitation in Remy and she

took the first step forward. Luckily a female figure pushed Rodriguez aside and a soft cry of happiness escaped her.

“Remington! Finally, you come to visit us!” She came out with her arms extended and embraced Remy warmly. “Oh how we missed you, and who is this?”

“This is Sinead, my girlfriend,” Remy said. “Its nice to see you to Lana.”

Lana, with her long black hair, embraced Sinead warmly before pulling away. “Thank you for bringing him back to us.”

“Ben,” Remy said when his friend stepped out into the sun. “Looks like you’ve done some reno to the house.”

“Yeah, thanks for buying it for us.” Rodriguez said.

“That was never a problem. I made a promise...”

“You know what I needed more than a house?” his friend cut him off. “My damn friend. But hey, he hasn’t come around for years, so I don’t know who the hell this is now.”

Rodriguez turned and stalked back into the house, moving as easily as if he had two legs. Remy looked at Sinead and them Lana with uncertainty in his eyes.

Lana linked her arms through theirs. “Come inside, you and him need to have this out, and we will do it before the girls come home from school. Beni is on vacation, so he has the time.”

“Oh, what does he do now?” Sinead asked conversationally.

Lana smiled. “My Beni is with the California Police Department. He got a commendation last week for saving two children who were kidnapped.”

“Oh wow, no wonder you’re proud,” Sinead said.

“I am proud of them both,” Lana said. “I know you had your reasons, Remington for not coming around, but Beni has missed you terribly.”

“I’ve missed him too, I.... I guess I figured he wouldn’t want to see me,” Remy admitted.

“Why would you think that?” Lana asked in surprise. “No, wait, Beni should hear this, go through to the family room and I will get him.”

Sinead stumbled when Lana yelled up the stairs. “Benicio Rodriguez, *Bajate ahora A!*”

“I refuse. And in English, so he knows what I’m saying!”

“Dude, I know how to speak Spanish remember?” Remy called out.

“Do not make me come up there,” Lana warned and added in a loud sweet voice. “Or forget that thing you like... forever.”

“Oh Jeez,” Remy turned away.

Beni came to the top of the stair. “Why do you have to mention that?”

“Trust me no one wanted to hear it,” Remy muttered.

“Because it will get you down here. Now hurry up, I am going to get drinks for our family,” Lana said striding away. “Be in there when I get back.”

“That’s what I get for marrying a bossy woman,” Beni came downstairs and stalked past them. “Well come inside, before she says something else.”

Remy and Beni sat across from each other, glaring, and Sinead cleared her throat.

“Its vey nice to meet you. I’ve heard so much about you.”

Beni’s stare never left Remy’s. “I would say the same, but I haven’t heard from HIM, in many years, so I know nothing about you.”

“Stop being rude, you blockhead,” Remy replied. “She has nothing to do with this. She is the best thing that ever happened to me.”

“You’re right of course,” Beni said. “Its nice to meet you Sinead. Tell me about yourself, like how did you hook up with this... *herramienta*.”

“Tool, really bro? I’m a tool?”

It was fascinating to see how they conversated without blinking or breaking eye contact.

“I call it like I see it.”

“Well,” Sinead said. “I met him at a charity function where he slipped a check in my purse. I have a home with foster kids. Well not just foster kids, but they are my kids and family. Remy fell in love with them too as we started dating, and this drug dealer in my neighborhood had me beaten up so we stayed...”

“Whoa a drug dealer beat you up?” Beni looked at her and then Remy. “Did you kill these fuckers and why didn’t you call me so I could break off a piece?”

“Thought about it, but figured you wouldn’t want to see me,” Remy answered honestly.

“Why the fuck wouldn’t I?”

Remy tried to speak but couldn’t and Sinead took his hand in encouragement.

“Because I caused you to lose your leg, and for Jones and the others,” Remy admitted. “I was in charge. I was supposed to protect all of you.”

“Here are the drinks,” Lana said cheerily. “I hope you like fresh squeezed fruit juice! What’s going on? Is Beni being a *herramienta*?”

“No, they were both being tools but now talking, kinda,” Sinead said taking a glass.

“You speak Spanish,” Lana said warmly.

“Nope, these two were a quick education.”

“Remy Durant, there is such a thing as too much honor. You didn’t cause me to lose my leg,” Beni said. “You didn’t cause our friends death; a bunch of insurgents with a vendetta did. We were there to do our job.”

“But if I had gotten you out sooner, they would’ve been able to save your leg.” Remy pointed out.

Beni folded his arms. “How, Superman, were you going to block the bullets with your mighty Nubian chest?”

“Nubian?” Remy said dryly.

“The point being, none of us could do a damn thing when we rolled over those IED’s,” Beni said. “I was glad we came home, so we could honor our friends and be brothers while remembering them. Not you trying to be black Bruce Wayne in his ivory tower taking on all the guilt by himself.”

Remy grinned. “I remember why I hate you now. Sinead lets go.”

“You love me,” Beni stood and held out his hand. “I missed your crazy ass and love of food.”

Remy took his hand and they pulled each other into one of those slapping embraces that men do.

“Now you’re supposed to tell Beni what you missed about him,” Sinead teased.

“I like her,” Beni grinned. “Better than some of those other women with zero brain cells.”

“Oh really?” Sinead’s voice was saccharine sweet and curious.

Remy nudged him to shut up but Beni continued. “Who was that girl, Lana, who asked if we were from Spain because we spoke Spanish?”

“It was a legitimate question,” Remy said in exasperation.

“How?” The question was simultaneously from the other three people in the room.

She saw Remy’s face lighten in relief and it was indescribable. The burden he carried was lessened and that was everything she wanted for this trip. Lana and Beni wouldn’t hear of them staying at a hotel for the night; instead they would be in the guest room in the Rodriguez home. Remy reconnected with their spirited girls and met their son for the first time.

Later when the house was quiet, she heard Remy and his friend talking about the similar nightmares they and how they were working to put their lives back together after all they faced. This was truly what Remy needed. She couldn't heal him, but others who knew exactly what he faced could understand and help him along the path. Sinead smiled and went back to bed leaving Remy to talk to his brother-in-arms, a bond that she knew surpassed blood.



Chapter Ten

“**M**ove in with me, you and the kids.” Remy made the offer and her answer was that she needed to think about it. It had been months since they met and Sinead was sure that she loved him. But wasn't it still too soon? The last time she moved in with a man, impulsively, it almost cost her soul and she couldn't make this decision lightly.

“Do it,” Callie said firmly when they were at lunch.

The kids were at school, and today Mandy got to be teachers-aid at the school where Rebecca and Devin attended. It was one of the programs where high schoolers could take the extra credit from Freshman straight to graduation by being a teachers aid for elementary and middle schools. Luckily it was a combined school for the last two of her brood and Mandy was able to get in one of the last slots for her freshman grade.

She was excited she got to be in Rebecca's class, and so was Rebecca who was already boasting about it as soon as she got out of the car. That meant her afternoon was free with no parent helper duties today; so she and Callie could eat lunch at one of their favorite diners. Outside the glass window, Pike's Place market was bustling with art, flowers, food and everything a vendor could sell. To work off their meal, the market would be their second stop. Walking through a sunshine filled day in Seattle felt much more interesting than being stuck inside behind her computer.

“You're supposed to be helping me weigh the pros and cons,” Sinead pointed out dryly to her friend.

Callie popped a piece of fruit into her mouth. “I weighed them, move in with the man you love and the kids adore him.”

“Then what comes after?” Sinead asked.

Callie looked at her like she'd grown two heads. “Really?”

“Really, I mean who wants to live in a constant state of living together...forever?”

“You really think that this is the final step for Remy, to move you and the kids in and poof that’s it,” Callie smiled her thanks to the waitress that came to fill their coffee cups once more. “What’s next is marriage, the adoption of the brood and happily ever after.”

“You really think so?” Sinead her the hope in her own voice and grimaced. “I sound pitiful, don’t I?”

Callie nodded. “Like you haven’t been holding it down for all your life and walked through the fire coming out like a damn goddess. A person like that has no time to be pitiful. You have two options. Take a leap of faith or live in fear, and if you chose the latter you’re not the Sinead Christie I know and grew up with.”

“I am a bad ass,” Sinead grinned

“Don’t let it go to your head,” Callie muttered. “Plus, I know a little secret big and sexy Duncan let slip when he came to check in that night you went to California.”

“First let me erase that phrase out of my head,” she said holding to her stomach dramatically. “Brain please delete big and sexy Duncan from the data base.”

“Shut up. The man in fine,” Callie laughed.

“Yeah, but to me its like me telling you your brother, Eddie is fine,” Sinead pointed out.

Callie grimaced. “Ok I catch your drift. Anyway, Duncan said that Remy cut all contract ties with the Vargos family shipping empire. I mean every last one of them and it cost Keith and his father a shitload of money.”

“Why would he do that?” Sinead said in confusion. “That had to cost Durant Enterprises money as well.”

Callie looked at her with a mouth agape before asking. “Why would he do that, Sinead?”

Realization crossed Sinead’s face. “He did that for me? Holy shit, for me?”

“Yes you dolt, why else would he?” Callie said in exasperation.

“I’m not accustomed to people making such grand gestures for me, okay,” Sinead retorted.

“At this point, with Remy, you should,” her friend said. “The point of this little walk down the primrose path is this, why would he do any of it if he didn’t think you and him were going to be together for a very long while, like forever?”

“I guess so,” Sinead murmured. “That must have put Keith and Vargos Sr. on the war path.”

“Duncan said you could hear the dad raging in the front reception of Remy’s building, and he decided that he wasn’t done having words with Remy,” Callie informed her and leaned forward with the juicy gossip. “He tried to go back up to the private offices and security stopped them both. Duncan was called and he effectively threw them out on their asses with Keith’s bullshit threats.”

“He could try, but he certainly doesn’t want to mess with Remy,” Sinead firmly. “This would be a good time for him to take the loss, tuck tail and run.”

“So, we know he kicked Morris’s ass when you got assaulted, got the guys arrested mind you, has systematically started renovating Capitol Hill and forcing the bad elements out, bought you Enchanted Arms, has been nothing but enamored by you and you with him.” Callie ticked off each point on her fingers. “How is this not right?”

“I know,” Sinead sighed. “We have traversed a lot together. I mean he’s even sleeping better after we went and saw Beni and Lana.”

“You guys are practically married. Just move in already,” Callie cut into her bowl of braised beef and egg poutine. After taking a bite and chewing, she sighed dramatically. “God I missed this type of food. Man cannot live by bagel alone.”

“I take it, you didn’t get the luxury of your need for a full breakfast each morning,” Sinead was amused by the look on her friend’s face as she ate. It could be called orgasmic.

Callie scowled. “A continental breakfast is bagels and like twelve different flavors of cream cheese. I refuse to eat powdered eggs and brown and serve sausages. That’s just heathenistic.”

Sinead laughed. “God I forgot how much of a food snob you are.”

“It’s just not civilized, I tell you,” Callie said. “So, if you move what’s your plan for Enchanted Arms?”

“First of three group homes,” Sinead played with her fried potatoes. She would need a to-go box. She wasn’t worried about wasting food because the first boy who got to the fridge after school would devour it. “My plan is to get a grant for three homes and to start a charter school. After how Brian and some of the others are treated at the prep school, these kids need a safe space for a great education and a good home to live in. I would oversee everything and have a live in matron. Someone kind and loving..”

“Like me,” Callie cut in.

Sinead smiled. “Like you, thoroughly vetted of course.”

“Seriously, sign me up.”

She was dumbfounded for a moment. “But you have your job, a very lucrative one mind you.”

“But I’m not happy there. I thought I would be, but I’m not,” Callie said. “You know my dad always taught us to look out for the younger kids in our neighborhood and to help the community. I love how you were so sure taking in the kids and I am sure that my path is to become an advocate too, instead of running off all over God’s green earth buying more stuff for rich people to get richer. How does a collection of Egyptian Anubis artifacts change the world or help anyone, I ask you?”

“In no possible way.”

Callie pointed her fork at Sinead. “Exactly. So if you say yes, after this I will go, quit my job and say tally-ho to this level of elitism. You better say, yes.”

“Of course, I’m going to say yes,” Sinead exclaimed. “We always wanted to work with each other and this is the perfect way! You can help me write grant proposals.”

“You know Remy would fund your idea,” Callie pointed out.

Sinead nodded. “But I don’t want him to; some things have to be under my own steam and my own hard work. I don’t need it handed to me. He is welcome to donate, but I’m going to bust my tail for the funding, like if we didn’t know Remy or have his backing.”

“Deal,” Callie held out her hand and Sinead shook it, both grinning like crazy people.

The rest of brunch went by with great conversation and people watching outside the window of the diner. After they paid the bill and left a great tip for the waitress, since they took two hours at her table instead of a quick turnover, She and Callie left to haunt the market, going from vendor to vendor. They bought small things from old books to a radiant scarf with peacocks embroidered on light turquoise cotton. It was time for Callie to head into the office to meet with her bosses and Sinead to head to the school and wait in the line to pick up the kids. It was around two thirty in the afternoon and it was best to get into the carpool line as early as possible.

Sinead felt lighter; things were changing in the neighborhood where they grew up. Morris and his gang no long sat on steps at the corner harassing people, a community center was being built, you saw people outside in the evenings talking, the store at the corner began opening till ten instead of closing at nine. It reminded her of how they grew up, she and Callie riding bikes from her house to that store to buy the push pop ice cream or hot cocoa and a toasted buttered roll when it got cold. Remy had done that, not just for her, for all the people of Capitol Hill. He did what everyone else wouldn’t. He saw past the crime and saw the beauty. He wouldn’t give up on the area; instead, choosing to revitalize it for all of them.

Pulling into behind the car in front of her, Sinead saw that she was further back in line than she would like. She was

parked closet to the brick wall with an overhang of trees which belonged to the neighboring property. They should do something about these branches, Sinead thought irritably. In the warmer months, it was enough shade to block out anyone from being seen further down the small alley that separated the school from whatever that business was. Is it a mortuary? God I hope it's not a mortuary. Those words passed through her mind each and every time she was resigned to parking further back in the line.

She was going to move in with Remy, which would mean a combined effort of getting herself and five kids packed and relocated from Enchanted Arms. Excitement filled her because Remy would be ecstatic and so would she. Falling in love with a man that could love her and her kids regardless of their background was truly a blessing. There was no doubt she loved Remy, her heart ached sweetly, just thinking about him. And Callie was right, she over thought every damn thing. She pulled out a notebook, not only to make lists of what they would need to pack but what would be left at Enchanted Arms.

Then she started a list of points for grant proposals she and Callie could work on. It would be great having her best friend work on creating this dream with her, and in the process they would be helping to give children with no options a better chance at life. That was more than was given to Sinead by her parents. If it wasn't for Callie and her father, God knows how she would have ended up. Sinead was so deep in her thoughts and her notes that when her passenger door opened up and someone slipped in, she didn't react until it was too late.

Morris sat beside her and a gun was pressed against her side. "What's up, Sin."

A sliver of fear went through her but she kept her voice calm. "What the hell are you doing Morris?"

"Hanging out with my home girl," he said casually and dug the muzzle of the gun into her side. "Oh wait that's not you is it?"

"Whatever you got going on, this is surely going to make you see a jail cell," Sinead pointed out. "You should leave

before I start screaming.”

“You make one damn sound and I will put a bullet through your lungs and bounce, let your kids watch you cough up blood and die,” Morris snapped. “Your man, Remy I think it is, well not only did he run me outta my own home; but bro-man fed the cops all my deals and side deals. They were coming for me today. You believe that? Coming to arrest your boy Morris.” His voice was astonished by the developments as if he wasn’t a criminal. “Not just police, but the feds! One of my people was just getting bailed out and he heard a lil sum’thing and told me. So, I bounced.”

“What does any of this have to do with me?” Sinead asked. “You created your own problems being a criminal; the feds don’t come after good people.”

He grabbed her neck and Sinead had to hold back a scream as he whispered viciously in her ear. “You and these brats are gonna be my insurance policy to get to Mexico. Then, you can walk back across the border. Tomorrow I got a way out, so tonight we hole up until I can roll out.”

Now fear did slide into her heart, knowing he meant to take her and the younger kids out of the country. God knows what he could do especially to her, Mandy, and a fragile Rebecca. Sinead tried to think fast, to make a way for her kids to be safe.

“Why not just take me,” Sinead suggested lightly. “Kids need to be fed and they’ll need bathroom breaks, me by myself, much easier to travel with.”

“Nah I’m taking you and the brats,” Morris kissed her cheek. “You’ll behave to keep them safe. Do whatever I want.”

Her stomach rolled and while they waited, she thought frantically how to save the kids. The first bell rang, that was for elementary and her heart dropped. It was happening and there was nothing she could do, not even blink the lights because the kids wouldn’t understand. She saw Mandy holding Rebecca’s hand running for the car, bright smiles on their faces, and then the door opened.

“Hi Mom!” Mandy said from outside and Rebeca got in.

“Mandy run!” Sinead yelled.

But it was already too late. She was half way in when the teen saw Morris and her face went pale. Rebecca’s eyes were wide with fear and she popped a thumb into her mouth, it was one of her coping mechanisms.

“Hi girls, It’s your uncle Morris,” he said with a laugh. “We’re going on a trip.”

“Don’t be scared, babies. Don’t be scared,” Sinead reached back and patted Rebecca’s leg before squeezing Mandy’s knee.

“Let cars move around you. Open the window and wave them past,” Morris ordered. “Smile wide or pop.”

Sinead did as she was told and with each vehicle they were more alone. The middle school bell rang and she knew without a doubt she needed to save Devin. He came out and stood on the side walk. When he sat the car parked further down from the rest an instant frown crossed his face. He knew Sinead always moved up when elementary pick up was over. Still, he turned to walk and his steps slowed as if sensing something was wrong. Morris slumped down to hide his face and pulled his phone from his pocket. It was the moment she needed, she blinked furiously at Devin and mouthed the the world over and over. RUN!

“Grab the kid!’ Morris snapped.

Devin’s eyes widened and he cut between two cars and ran across the street. Sinead barely saw the man that ran behind the car from the alley but she knew Devin wouldn’t stop, and he would hide when until he thought it was safe.

“Drive!”

Morris shoved the gun harder in her side and Sinead pushed the car in gear, pulling out so fast the tires squealed. Mandy was crying quietly. Rebecca, not so much. Her loud wails filled the air.

“Shut her up. Don’t make me have to do it!” Morris snarled.

“If you fucking ever think about hitting any one of them I will let go of this wheel and beat the shit out of you!” Sinead said in a deadly voice. “This car can crash. You’re not wearing a seatbelt and neither am I. We can die. I don’t rightly care. But I sure will not let you hit my girls. Is that clear?”

Morris looked at her. “I think you really would.”

Her eyes never left the road. “You know I don’t lie.”

Her phone rang and Morris pulled it from the center console. “Well if it isn’t lover boy.”

“Let me answer, because if I don’t, he’s going to get worried and track my phone,” Sinead lied.

“Oh he got you on lock like that?” Morris said seeming impressed. “That’s what money does huh?”

“The right money.”

“By all means, answer your man.”

Sinead pressed the earpiece in her ear. “Hey babe, how is your day going?”

Remy’s voice almost made her cry. “Good Babygirl, got the kids?”

“Yeah, I forgot Devin had practice so Brian is going to get him after,” she lied. “So, if you go to the house and don’t see him that’s why. Me and the girls are stopping for gelato.”

“Uh okay?” Remy sounded confused. “Are you alright? Your voice is trembling.”

“Oh yeah I’m fine, but I have to hang up and focus on the road,” Sinead said and hesitated. “See you tonight, and Remy, beyond measure. I love you so damn much, it hurts. We will move in with you, and start our lives as a family. Forever babe, you, me and the kids.”

“I love you too.” Remy said. “That’s the first...”

She didn't let him finish, Sinead hung up, hoping he took the cues she sent, and it would help him find them before the night was through.

"You guys sound solid," Morris commented. "Don't worry Sin, I'll get you back to him no worse for wear, or maybe a little worn."

His cell rang and he put in on speaker. "What?"

"Lost the kid; he is fast as hell."

"Don't worry about it, we got the main ones, meet me at the spot," Morris replied and hung up.

Sinead said nothing, but she knew to protect her and the girls until Remy could find them or she saw an opportunity for them to escape. She was no victim, not anymore. And while Morris thought he had the upper hand, he never met a woman who was ready to fight for the survival of her herself and the children she loved.



EACH THREAD HAD BEEN pulled and it all led back to Morris Cook. Remy knew pretty much everything about the man that needed to be known. A bullied kid, who in turn decided to become bully. Then add drugs, murders for hire, selling guns and working with some not so nice cartels from across the border, Morris was smart, trying to be low key. After looking at what Duncan had compiled, there was a mountain of crimes behind his name. Remy and Duncan passed every little piece of evidence over to their friend in the police department, and while they thought it was small it was soon clear he was not and the federal authorities were called in. Now, it was a joint task force thing.

His location was found easily enough and they were going to hit it that day. Until Duncan walked into his office with a frown on his face. Remy was just hanging up with Sinead as well, and the conversation felt off. It should've made him happy she said she loved him and they would move in together. Then why did something feel weird inside him, that made his stomach tie up in knots? He felt this way when he

used to be on deployment and an attack was imminent. Maybe it was just his PTSD trying to rear its ugly head.

“Remy, that was the police. Morris wasn’t at any of the locations that Hakeem gave them,” Duncan told him.

“Someone in the police tipped him off?” Remy asked.

“They doubt it, they think maybe someone overheard and told him,” Duncan said. “Why do you look... off.”

“Sinead just told me she loved me and she would move in,” Remy said bemused.

“That’s a good thing, right?”

Remy shrugged. “She said something about Devin staying late for practice and Brian picking him up?”

“Call the house,” Duncan suggested. “I learned to trust your gut.”

Remy called the house and Jeremy picked up. “Hey Jeremy, where’s your mom?”

“Not here, I thought she was with you,” Jeremy said.

“Did Brian pick up Devin from practice?” he asked.

“What practice? Devin doesn’t like sports,” Jeremy said. “Everyone should be home by now.”

“She said she was taking the girls for gelato,” Remy heart began to race and he put his phone on speaker.

“Mom wouldn’t do that,” Jeremy said. “It’s me and Brian here, Remy... Where are mom and the rest?”

“Hey Remy, I am on the other line,” Brian’s voice came in and it was filled with worry. “Mom, doesn’t deviate. Homework time is right about now and she is starting dinner.”

“I’m going to call your Aunt Callie and tell her to come to the house,” Remy motioned to Duncan to make the call. “We’re going to find your mom and get your siblings home.”

“Please,” the teen’s voice cracked. “It’s Morris. I know its, Remy it has to be him.”

“I know, Brian. I sure as hell will. Lock up till Callie gets there.”

Duncan was explaining to Callie on the phone as they left the office.

“Dot, cancel everything. I don’t care what the fuck it is, cancel it,” Remy said striding past the desk.

“What’s going on?” Dot asked alarmed.

“Someone took Sinead and the girls. Now, they’re going to die,” Remy didn’t stop moving.

“I’ll try to keep him from committing murder!” Duncan called to Dot.

“Please do, but let him hurt them a little bit!” Dot said loudly.

Duncan was beside him as the elevator went down to the first floor, silence reigned for a moment and then he spoke.

“Hack the camera images for the school and any CCTV,” Remy said. “I know want to know if he has all three and what direction her car took.”

“I have our rig in the car, and I can check from there,” Duncan said as they stepped outside. “We can gear up after we know where they are.”

“Got that in the SUV too?” Remy asked.

“Always ready, brother.”

Duncan held up his fist and Remy bumped it with his own. It was automatic, but his mind was focused on Sinead and the fact that if anything happened to her, there was no coming back from that. Remy knew that his soul was barely holding on as is, and he was slowly healing. Another loss would cripple him, but right now he pushed that back and let the soldier take over. The one that would do anything necessary, the man that had no problem with killing with extreme prejudice. All he needed was a target, and as he drove Duncan was trying to give him exactly that.

“Its Morris alright, he got in to Sinead’s van at three fifteen,” Duncan put the screen up so Remy could see and zoomed in. “You can see, Sinead tried to warn Mandy but it was too late. Three forty-five, Devin steps out. You can see him hesitate. Then here, he runs and there is someone chasing him and Sinead pulls off.”

“Fuck!” Remy slammed his hand on the wheel.

“The guy walks away empty handed. I’m thinking Devin is hiding somewhere,” Duncan said.

Remy gunned the engine grimly and made a sharp turn towards the school. Within five minutes, he screeched to a stop at the now deserted school and he crossed the street in the direction Devin took. Another small alley, between an alteration shop and a Thai restaurant. It ran up a long hill and Remy wondered if Devin went all the way up or managed to find a hiding spot before Morris’s man could get to him.

“Devin!”

Remy looked around before yelling again and walking up the steep path. “Devin! Its Remy! If you can hear me come out son! You don’t have to be afraid!”

Still no answer, and he started to wonder if the boy was caught after all and he wasn’t answering because he was.... No don’t think like that!

“Devin! Come on buddy...please!”

He saw a grimy face peak out from inside a storm drain then two hands as the boy wriggled out. *Shit, how did he get in there!* Remy thought in relief. Not caring, he jogged to the boy and grabbed him up in a hug.

Remy wiped some of the grim off his face. “Are you okay? Are you hurt anywhere?”

He shook his head, fat tears started to trickle through the grime. “Morris got mom and the girls. A guy chased me so I hid.”

“You did the right thing,” Remy hugged him again. “Let’s get you home, then I can find them okay?”

Devin wiped his face with his sleeve and nodded and Remy wanted to lift the boy in his arms and take him to the SUV. But he was thirteen, gangly, and his back stiffened because he didn't want anyone to know he had cried. That didn't mean Duncan didn't hug the hell out of him before he got in the back seat and they drove him back to Enchanted Arms. Callie had to check him over when they got there and so did his brothers before they took him upstairs to get cleaned up.

"Find them," Callie looked at them with tears settling in her eyes. "Please."

"I plan on it," Remy said. "I gotta change this suit. I'll be back."

He ran upstairs and for a moment he looked at the bed he had shared with Sinead. This was like home to him as well, and if he inhaled deeply enough, Remy could smell the soft scent of her lotus perfume. It angered him that she was out there alone, that she and the girls were afraid. His hands clenched in the sheets for a moment before Remy changed into clothes that were appropriate for hunting. That was exactly what he was right now, a hunter. Remy came back downstairs to see Duncan fully dressed and holding Callie while rubbing her back. *Okay then, that would be discussed at another time.* Remy cleared his throat and Duncan stepped back like he was caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

"Ready?"

Duncan nodded. "Ready."

"Shouldn't you call the cops?" Callie asked suddenly.

"By the time the cops get around to it, we'll be done," Remy said hearing the crispness in his own voice. "Lock up, when we go, Callie."

Remy stepped out the door and Duncan was on his heels. They were back in the SUV and now they were pinging Sinead's cell. The evening was turning to dusk quickly and with every second that ticked by he worried more and more.

“The cell is pinging six blocks away from the school,” Duncan said.

Remy looked glanced at the screen, “There’s no way they’re that close. It’s a dump job of the cell, car, or both.”

“Yeah I figured, but we gotta check it anyway,” Duncan muttered. “I’m thinking he’s got to be in an industrial district in of those old warehouses.”

“He’s trying to get to Mexico. He’s going to need cash,” Remy murmured. “I’m hoping he calls and asks for a ransom. I know the Feds froze any bank accounts that had any laundered money.”

“Here’s to hoping,” Remy muttered. “Because I will burn every fucking thing down to to cinders to find her and the girls.

“Can we not do that?” Duncan muttered.

They were correct. The van was parked in a spot outside a few small boutiques. They searched inside and found Sinead’s cell phone, the kid’s school, bags and lunch boxes. In the backseat, Mandy’s pink phone with the stickers stood out, and Remy snagged it as well. Mandy’s phone was on, and the little bell on top of the screen was moving.

“Why is this little dingy thing moving?” Remy turned it and showed it to Duncan.

“Its an alert, press it,” Duncan said.

Remy did and a recording popped up. He turned up the volume so Duncan could hear it as well.

“If you need money. Remy would pay a ransom.” Sinead said.

“I don’t need his money. We just gotta say hidden till tomorrow then we roll out to Mexico,” Morris snapped.

“We need food for the girls and someplace where they can rest,” Sinead said. “They’re not sleeping in this van.”

“I have to pee,” Rebecca said.

“Christ almighty. I hope Lee’s place has an extra room I can lock their asses in,” Morris muttered. “Thank God in Mexico, I won’t have to see any of my kids.”

“Well then you shouldn’t have made them you idiot,” Sinead said.

Remy heard Sinead cry out when Morris hit her and he folded his hand in a fist as his side.

“You don’t hit my mom!” Mandy said angrily. “Remy is gonna break your arm!”

“Get out the car,” Morris snapped. “Oh, you thought I was stupid enough to take your car that your man probably got a tracker on? I don’t trust nothing, leave it all. Cedric is on his way with the rest of the boys.”

“I can’t believe you are going to Lee’s still, predictable?” Sinead said.

“What’s Lee’s Mom,” Mandy asked.

Good girl! Remy thought, Morris had no clue she was recording.

“It’s an old warehouse they named Lee’s, because it was where they had parties,” Sinead told Mandy.

“But who can you call to save you with no way to call?” Morris gloated. “Get your asses out of the van.”

The recording ended with the phone being dropped and Remy placed a call to Callie.

She answered on the first ring. “Hey did you find them?”

“Callie, where’s Lee’s? The place the neighborhood kids used to party?” Remy asked.

She gave him directions and they were back in his vehicle heading in the direction she gave. The police would be called soon enough. After he exacted his own vengeance.

“That’s one smart girl Sinead raised,” Duncan commented.

“She is,” Remy replied. “Side arms only. Hand to hand. Shoot only if necessary. We’ll call the police after.”

“They’ll be pissed they were an after thought,’ Duncan pointed out.

“Not my concern,” Remy answered. “I’m not standing outside while they spend seven plus hours trying to talk Morris out of a hostage situation. They’ll send him in pizza and chicken wings while he asks for a helicopter we all know he’s not getting. That’s all going on and the woman I love is in there alone with those scared girls.”

“Understood.”

Remy glanced at Duncan. “So, what was that between you and Callie?”

Duncan checked his side arm. “Now’s not the time, bro. We’re saving your people.”

“Uh-huh.”

The warehouse dubbed Lee’s was thirty minutes away taking them back past Capitol Hill into a long forgotten industrial district. Remy parked far enough away that no one would notice the sleek black SUV in a neighborhood where a rusted Cadillac sat up on bricks in a derelict row of warehouses. There were so many areas in Seattle that could profit from redevelopment and maybe more affordable housing.

Remy had to look past that for now as he and Duncan moved through the shadows towards a building with a faded sign held on with one rusted nail that barely read Lee’s. No police cars came by. Why would they? The only people that would be down this way would be the homeless trying to find somewhere to sleep. So, the dim light coming through the grimy window wouldn’t be noticed in the least.

“One outside smoking,” Duncan said in a low voice.

Remy nodded. “Put him to sleep then follow me in.”

“Hoo-ah”

Remy didn’t wait, Duncan could take care of it, and the soft muffled sound confirmed that as he slid between the door and the frame of the wall of the building. There was a small

walk way and another man faced away from him walking towards the main room. Remy caught him before he could. With his forearm around his neck and his hand around his mouth, Remy dragged assailant number two back and rendered him unconscious, just as Duncan joined him.

Together they moved forward, and he could almost laugh at the stupidity of Morris and the other man sitting in the room. Sinead sat on an old pallet covered in a dingy blanket, Mandy's head was against her shoulder and Rebecca head was in her lap asleep. The two buffoons sat at a small table eating food from Styrofoam containers facing away from the hallway, no doubt thinking the other two had their backs.

Remy caught Sinead's attention and her yes widened in happiness, but quickly she took her face back neutral. Mandy lifted her head sleepily. When she blinked and saw Remy her face beamed. Sinead patted her face, and made her lay her head back down.

"Ced said one fucking smoke and you know Shawn probably out there with him," Morris muttered.

"They don't get back soon, I'm eating their damn food."

Remy gave the signal and before Morris could put another forkful of food in his mouth, Remy caught his hand. "Hello Morris."

He made a choking sound just before Remy whirled him around. With one punch, he sent him over the table and toppled that and the food. Duncan had already rendered his partner unconscious, but Morris would pay dearly for what he did.

"Which hand did he slap you with Sinead," Remy asked in deadly tone. "Doesn't matter."

Morris' scream was satisfying to his ears and so was the sound of his bone snapping. Remy left the self-proclaimed kingpin rolling in agony.

"Duncan, now you can call the police."

His attention was no longer on anyone but Sinead and the girls. They rushed to him. While Sinead's arms were around

his his neck, Rebecca's arms were around his leg and Mandy's was around his waist.

He cupped Sinead's face. "Are you okay?"

She nodded and kissed him. "We're okay, no worse for wear."

He turned his face and there was a bruise on her cheek. He murmured. "I should break his other arm."

"You found us, Remy!" Rebecca jumped up and down.

He crouched down and kissed her forehead. "Always little princess, no matter what."

The chaos of the police arrival ensued and the explanation of the kidnapping and everything that happened that evening had to happen. Statements were taken there and back at Enchanted arms were Devin had to give his part of the story about being chased and hiding in the storm drain for hours. Dinner was fast food that was delivered and homework forgotten.

The physical and mental exhaustion had taken a toll on everyone's nerves. Duncan took the SUV and drove Callie home and Remy certainly wasn't worried about how he would get back to the house the next day. Finally, when everything was quiet and it was him and Sinead alone, Remy held on to her so tight, and for a moment was unwilling to let her go.

"He wanted to take us to Mexico and make us walk back across the border when he was safe," Sinead's voice was muffled against his chest.

"I wouldn't have let that happen," Remy said. "Mandy was recording his conversation on her phone. That's how we knew where you were. Trust me, if he had made a move for Mexico, there would have been choppers in the sky and I would be in the lead one."

Sinead smiled up at him. "How smart was she, that's my girl!"

"I love you, but I know you wouldn't have waited to be in the car lane to tell me that," Remy said. "There was no way in

hell I was losing you, Sinead. We've walked through the fire together and come out stronger.”

Sinead kissed him deeply. “There is no one in the world that could love me like you do or I could love so much in return.”

“I love you, Sinead. I never thought I would get to say that,” Remy said almost reverently. “You have brought me so much joy in my life; thank you for that. For allowing me in your world.”

“Thank you for showing me that there is honor in men with wealth, and that your love is worth more than any riches out there,” Sinead replied.

The kiss they shared sealed more than just their love but a promise, for a future and a thousand tomorrows. Remy held her close that night, and as sleep claimed him, a wide smile crossed his face. Destiny had more in store for him than being a war-torn veteran plagued by tormented dreams of loss and combat. There was joy to be had, love, passion, family and hope. He had found all of that in Sinead and in her enchanted arms.

One year later....

“Do we get to go to Disneyland after we take Brian to school?” Rebecca asked.

“I thought we said Lego Land first?” Devin asked.

“No, you said Lego Land first, but we don’t want to spend the entire day there,” Jeremy retorted.

“We have a few days here guys. We don’t have to fit everything into one day,” Sinead said in amusement.

“Exactly. Don’t be childish. Besides, I want to go to Malibu Beach. I heard Tom Holland goes there to swim,” Mandy gushed.

“Cool your jets; he dates Zendaya,” Jeremy said drolly.

“I know. I just want an autograph,” Mandy said.

“That’s not what your diary says,” he muttered.

“Mom!”

“Jeremy, please don’t be in your sister’s diary,” Remy said as he drove.

“I see why Brian chose to drive himself,” Sinead leaned over to say to Remy.

“That and he needed his car,” he answered in amusement.

Today was move-in day at CalTech for Brian who got in on a full scholarship like he wanted. In front of them, he drove a loaded, new but used, jeep with all his stuff. Sinead couldn’t be more proud of him, because he graduated with honors from high school, a 4.5 GPA and the microchip patent that was for the new tech with Remy’s company was in his name. All of that made him super appealing to not only CalTech, but many other colleges who wanted to headhunt him. But, this was his school of choice.

How things had changed in almost a year. They moved in with Remy and they were married three months later on Christmas Eve, no less. They were all now Durant’s, with adoptions being expedited and finalized, with a subsequent

barbeque style patty to celebrate. Color didn't matter, only love did in the Durant household. Remy's house soon became home with coloring books in the family room, lunch snacks in the kitchen. Corbin was in his zone making lunches and afternoon snacks. Homework books on kitchen tables and Legos being stepped on in the middle of the night, that elicited whispered cusswords, were all part of family living.

Mandy had her first date show up to the house with Duncan and Remy dressed like they were about to commit an incursion to a small foreign island and scared the boy senseless, even though Brian was the chaperone. She and Callie got Enchanted Arms Group Home running and by the next year number two would be on its way. Sinead was happy because they did get the grants they wanted and Remy did donate, but the foundation of the project was built by she and her best friend.

They still didn't know what was going on between Callie and Duncan, neither one said a darn thing, because one minute they were busting each others chops and then next they seemed awfully close. Today was Brian's day. After they helped Brian move his things in his room and helped him setup, he walked them back out from to where they were parked to see them off. Sinead felt her anxiety build at leaving him alone; she had been in his life since he was thirteen. Each and every day. Now, this was the first night he would be alone. It seemed to be harder on her than it was on him.

"Are you sure you don't want to come eat with us?" Sinead asked hopefully. "We can bring you back after."

"No Mom," Brian grinned. "There's a get to know you thing in the quad. I'm going to with a few guys."

"What guys? We just got here," Sinead demanded to know.

Brian sighed. "It was an online meet up group... Mom I'll be okay don't worry."

"Do you have enough money?" Sinead asked trying to pull around her purse from her shoulder.

“Mom,” Brian stopped her. “I have what I saved up from working at the pizza place and from working with Remy... I mean Dad.. still getting used to that.”

“Don’t worry, me too,” Remy grinned.

Brian looked behind him where two guys and a girl waved at him. “Okay I have to get going.”

“Who’s the girl?” Sinead asked.

He ignored her question and went around and hugged his siblings, then Remy, leaving Sinead for last.

Brian hugged her. “Love you, Mom.”

“I love you, Brian and you can call me for anything, no matter what time. I will drive down and kick someone’s ass if I need too...” Sinead clung to him. “And call and check in every few days, or at least text me every day to let me know you’re okay, so I don’t worry...”

“Remy, help..” Brian wheezed out.

“Let the eighteen-year-old go, Babygirl,” Remy helped extricate their son from her arms. “Run Brian before she suction clings onto you again.”

He stepped back and started to walk away before turning back and rushing to hug Sinead tight.

“I love you so much mom, thank you.”

Remy kissed her temple and his deep voice soothed her. “You did good, Sinead, he’ll be fine.”

“I know,” she whispered, trying to hide her tears.

The kids walked ahead as they went back to the car and Remy sipped on the coke that he got from the vending machine in the dorm.

“Is there anything I can do to make you feel better, babe?” Remy put the can to his head and gulped.

“Wanna make a baby?”

Remy choked, and bent over coughing as his drink went down the wrong way while Sinead smiled brightly and kept

walking. He tried to catch up and asked hoarsely while trying to breath.

“What!”

The End



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Honor and Wealth: Remy.



About the Author

Dahlia Rose is the USA Today best-selling multi genre author from Urban fantasy to Romance with a hint of Caribbean spice. She was born and raised on the island of Barbados and now currently lives in Charlotte, North Carolina. Her life revolves around her family and her grandson who she's fondly nicknamed 'the toddler overlord, long may he reign.' She has a love of dark fantasy, crazy sci-fi B-movies, and delving into the unknown. Dahlia writes from romance to suspense, giving her characters the voices they deserve, if she doesn't, they surely won't let her sleep. With over seen dozen books published, Dahlia has become a reader favorite. Not only because of her writing but her vivacious attitude in talking to her fans online and at various events. Being a BIPOC, author of color, her books feature strong heroines with a Caribbean or African American culture, that is showcased in the vibrancy of her words. Books and writing are her biggest passions, and she hopes to open your imagination to the beauty of possibilities between the pages of her books.

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