



*Lucky*

# CLOVER

ROYAL BASTARDS MC



USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

# DANI RENÉ

# **LUCKY CLOVER**

ROYAL BASTARDS MC (BELFAST,  
NORTHERN IRELAND)

BOOK 3

**DANI RENÉ**

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There's a gritty, emotional story that awaits you, but before you venture to Northern Ireland, [sign up for my newsletter](#) so you don't miss out on sales, new releases, recommendations, and much more!

# ROYAL BASTARDS CODE



**PROTECT:** The club and your brothers come before anything else, and must be protected at all costs. CLUB is FAMILY.

**RESPECT:** Earn it & Give it. Respect club law. Respect the patch. Respect your brothers. Disrespect a member and there will be hell to pay.

**HONOR:** Being patched in is an honor, not a right. Your colors are sacred, not to be left alone, and NEVER let them touch the ground.

**OL' LADIES:** Never disrespect a member's or brother's Ol'Lady. PERIOD.

**CHURCH** is MANDATORY.

**LOYALTY:** Takes precedence over all, including well-being.

**HONESTY:** Never LIE, CHEAT, or STEAL from another member or the club.

**TERRITORY:** You are to respect your brother's property and follow their Chapter's club rules.

**TRUST:** Years to earn it...seconds to lose it.

**NEVER RIDE OFF:** Brothers do not abandon their family.

## PREFACE

Hi my lovelies!

I wanted to add a note into this story, because as it stands, it's a prequel to Sully's full length book coming in June. It ends in what I would call a happy for now. But, more is coming!

Also, I need to state that Clover's story is at times difficult to read. There are scenes of abuse from her past, which I had to write as authentically as I could. If you have any triggers, please proceed with caution, or, perhaps skip this one.

This story is extremely close to my heart. The difficult scenes were harder to write than I imagined, and I hope that you take this journey with Clover as she overcomes, and grows stronger.

Thank you for reading,

Love, Dani xo



*Running away  
Escaping the pain  
Finding the city  
Evading his reign  
Life had been cruel  
One needed to flee  
Rediscover myself  
Change all that was me  
Even in darkness  
Light would arise  
He came into view  
Ignited my eyes  
Brief an encounter  
From time long ago  
Remembering him  
I had never let go  
We would connect  
Get lost in our stares  
My past still a shadow  
He was so unaware  
Hidden my secret  
Masking the truth  
A love reimagined  
Born from my youth  
The heart wants to tell him  
Share all that is real  
Will he remember  
And feel what I feel*

Avow

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## PROLOGUE

TIME STILLS.

Moments pass.

But there's no peace.

The tension that coils in my stomach is a serpent, readying its attack on my body. I watch his chest rise and fall from the corner where I've been huddled up. I don't move. I can't. The agony has riddled me motionless. It's easier to hide.

His expression is peaceful. A calm, serene air surrounds him.

His body nothing more than the glassy top of a still lake, not a ripple in sight.

But it's a lie.

There's no peace when the slightest movement can bring war. He breathes, in and out, until those black lashes flutter open and his dark eyes pin me to the spot. It's as if he's someone else. And I believe he's been overtaken by an alien force rather than admit he's the man I love.

His legs swing over the edge of the sofa. Rogan doesn't speak, because silence is more terrifying than the vile words he utters. He doesn't see me. I'm nothing, but something all at the same time. I'm his solace, I'm his frustration, and as I watch him move about the room, I know I'll soon be his punching bag.

Guilt weighs on me.

Sadness grips my heart.

And with each day that passes, I know no matter how many times the words 'I'm sorry' pass those lips, it will never be enough. Because in the same breath, he hisses, "You're a stupid whore."

**ONE**

## CLOVER

IT WASN'T THE MOMENT OF IMPACT THAT REMINDED ME WHERE I was.

Or why I'd chosen to go back to him, time and again.

It was the moment I lost all feeling in my face—my arms.

Each minute after felt like an eternity. I didn't move. And he didn't stop.

I didn't breathe, yet he continued.

Angry. Feral. Animalistic.

The promises would come without a doubt, without fail. They were constant reminders of what happened the night before, but I overlooked them because the apologies were heartfelt. Surely, they were.

*Isn't this what love is about?*

Standing by your man. Being there when he needs you the most. Unless those words my worthless mother uttered were wrong. You'd think I'd grown out of wanting someone to love me. Even after she was taken by cancer, stolen from me and my dad, I could tell my life wouldn't be the same. Dad was there for me—he watched over me for years, ensuring I had all the love he had for me, but he was different. Detached. And then, he was taken from me. I still found myself searching for that one person who'd offer me what I so stupidly craved.

That's how I landed in a dump of an apartment on the outskirts of New York where *he* was my only salvation.

But one day, something clicked in my mind. It's as if someone had come in and flicked a switch. Perhaps it was the time he slammed my head against the wall. It was the last time he ever touched me. Because the next morning when he left for work, I ran.

The money that had been sitting in my bank account, without his knowledge, bought me the plane ticket. I had nothing else but the clothes on my back. There was no doubt where I'd go. I knew I couldn't stay in the US, because he would track me down. So, I came to a country where I thought I could fly under the radar. I chose Ireland.

My father's brother lives here in Ireland, and that's how I find myself in a city called Belfast. It's been a couple of months, yet I feel more at home here since I left my childhood home. When I did find my uncle, it was his assistant who helped me get into this place for rehabilitation. My uncle wasn't even in the country, but she knew of me. He'd told her about me. And when I explained my plight, she made some calls.

Out of the shower, I stand in front of the mirror before I get dressed. I do this every morning and every evening. I have to bear witness to what I've been through. I haven't touched any drugs in six months, and being clean isn't easy, but I'm doing it. Granted, I'm forced to be good while in rehab. I'm able to focus on taking each day as it comes, rather than on the fear of being beaten every evening, or morning, or whenever he gets home.

There are other tokens of what I've been through. My body bears the scars of years of abuse. Some remain, but most of them are hidden. Deep within my tattered soul. It reminds me that hope is something fleeting, an emotion not worthy of my time.

And trust, that's something I let go of a long time ago.

Love discarded me.

Love violated me.

And hope. That motherfucking bitch left me to rot.

I'm lucky, though, like my mother used to say. I will make it. I didn't believe her back then, but now that I'm here, I think I truly am. Not many women get out of a situation like mine.

I'm not your average girl. I'm not even the prettiest girl, with my pierced tongue, eyebrow, and lip. The white-blond dreadlocks on my head are a harsh contrast to my dark hair I grew up with.

Stark.

Cold.

Just like me.

I run my finger along the scar that runs from my thigh up to my rib cage. A bumpy line that has healed since it was inflicted, but to the touch, it still burns. I recall the night it happened. When he finally had enough of my *stupidity*. I call it that because it's what I'd gotten used to hearing. It's what he made me believe about myself.

Somehow, I believed things would change, but they didn't. It was the night of my twentieth birthday when he came home from the bar stinking of cheap perfume and vodka soaked with lime. I recall the pain, the silence of the room, and then, the sounds of *him* hovering over me.

I waited.

I breathed.

They all told me it was abuse, but I didn't see it. I was blinded by love. That sickly sweet emotion every person hungers for. The promise we all seek out as if it's the answer to our prayers. Let me tell you something for nothing, it's not the solution. Love is far from the answer.

Staring at my reflection in the mirror, I note the other bumps and healed cuts and burns. They all make up a kaleidoscope of a story I will never tell. I recall the various blues and purples—the yellows and greens that once adorned my skin.

A rainbow of pain.



The color of agony and trust all melded into something vicious that stole everything from me. There's a niggle in my ribs, just below my breasts, that serves as a stark reminder of that night. If I close my eyes, it's like I'm transported right back there. When certain movements were so painful, I couldn't breathe.

That wasn't the first time, and it certainly wasn't the last. The abuse continued for weeks, months, then years. I struggled to clean the apartment we shared, to make his dinner while trying to be the good wifey he wanted. Only, I was never a wife, not even a girlfriend, I was a punching bag.

Inhaling deeply as I prod at the other scars, I blink back the tears. I'm broken. I doubt I will ever heal. But it's the exhale that hurts the most when I remember how I lay in bed the next morning thinking I was dead. I felt the movement of my chest, and it was as if my ribs wanted to expunge themselves from my body. Attempting to push themselves from my chest, through the porcelain flesh.

It wanted to escape. In the end, I finally did.

I allow my fingers to trace each one gently. They no longer protrude from my torso. I'm looking a lot healthier.

I don't know how long it will be until he figures out I'm not in America anymore. Or how long until his contacts track me down. He'll find me. He always does. But for now, I'll live a life of freedom, of safety. At least, I'll try to.

My body still aches, as if the ghost of the pain is still there. My heart hurts from knowing I'll never be normal. And deep down, my soul has given up on me.

I allowed it to happen.

It's my fault.

Sighing, I head back into the bedroom where I get dressed. I share the space with another young woman just like me. The roommate I've been assigned is one of the patients who stayed on even after she healed from her injuries. She chose to hide. They've put her in here with me so she can ensure I don't try something stupid.

They don't have to say it. I see it in their eyes.

She's quiet, a sweet girl who's had an eating disorder due to bullying. The sadness that tugs at me whenever I see her is unfounded. I don't know her. But when I glance at her in the clothes she wears, it scares me that someone would go to such lengths to feel beautiful or to be accepted by a man. But then again, didn't I do the exact same thing?

I've learned that nobody in this place is judge or jury. Least of all me because that would make me a hypocrite. Each time I woke up with bruises, cuts, and burns on my flesh, I lied. I hid what was really happening. And now I'm in here.

A home for people with problems.

A home for adults who can't control their addictions. The abuse of drugs, alcohol, and anything else society deems *wrong*. We're meant to heal, to be able to walk into the real world as responsible adults.

Only, I'm not ready to be an adult yet. At least, not in the sense most believe.

I'm twenty-five. But I feel far older than those years.

Even though I had a family for most of my youngest years, it was after I turned fifteen that everything changed. There's a soft hum from inside our quarters, so I pass by and head toward the courtyard. I pull out my cigarettes and tap one from the packet.

A long white stick that offers me solace.

Sad really.

Something so small but ultimately so powerful.

"Bout ye." The deep rumble in a thick Irish accent comes from behind me as I push by the queue in the cafeteria to grab an apple on my way to the backyard.

I glance up to see a man. No, this is no man. He's some form of beast. He's easily over six feet tall, his broad shoulders looming over me as his eyes rove from the tip of my head to my black-and-white Chucks. He does it a couple of times,

giving me a chance to take note of the amount of ink that adorns his slightly tanned flesh.

“What?” I ask, confused at his slang while I gulp past the lump in my throat as I take in the beast who could easily swallow me up. I’ve managed to pick up some of the Irish slang used since arriving here. It’s been helpful in getting to know the rest of the patients.

“I was askin’ how are ye, lass?” He chuckles as he regards me.

“Getting by. I haven’t seen you here before,” I tell him.

He smirks at my response and tips his head to the side. His long hair hangs just past his shoulders, and it glimmers in the wintery sunshine. There are dark clouds rolling in, and I know it’s going to rain soon. But the man before me doesn’t seem to notice anything other than me. I take him in from head to toe. His height and weight are probably three times mine. The possible damage he could inflict on my five-foot-four frame is clear. I hate doing that to every man I come across—wondering just how much they can hurt me physically.

“What’s yer name?” he rumbles, leaning in. I think he’s about to kiss me, but he doesn’t. Instead, he reaches for an apple, then straightens.

“Clover,” I tell him as I watch the glint in his eye.

“Lucky?” he throws back with a grin, and I can’t help but smile as I think about Mom. She was good to me until she was cruelly taken from me and my dad.

Men seem to enjoy breaking me and her. She was so torn up, she started drinking, taking drugs to numb herself, and that’s when the darkness overtook her.

I shrug at his query and say, “Maybe.”

His dark stare takes me in from head to toe before he nods slowly. “All that ink hidin’ somethin’?” he questions, his cocoa eyes piercing right through me. It’s alarming.

“I could ask you the same thing,” I counter, tipping my chin toward him.

He doesn't respond, merely shrugs and saunters off. I can't help taking in the blue jeans he's wearing and just how tight they fit his thick, muscled thighs and the way his taut ass seems to fill out the back pockets too perfectly.

Sighing, I light my smoke and inhale deeply. It's the only drug they allow in here, so I'll happily enjoy the guilty pleasure while I can. I still have some time before I can leave here, which means I have to get used to a mostly clean life.

I put the smoke between my lips and flick my cheap lighter a few times before it sparks to life. Inhaling the deep smoke of minty tobacco, I revel in the calm already shooting through my veins from the long draw.

How I wish this were something stronger.

Some Mary Jane, or even a line of the smooth, white powder that always sets me at ease. Being in *his* home, tensions ran high more times than I could count, but when we were high, we were perfect for each other. Perhaps that's why I stayed. My brain wasn't functioning, and I believed he was good for me.

Sadly, even now, as I attempt to move on with my life, there are still reminders of how angry I made him. And even so, I wonder if he could change if he had some form of rehab. *Does an abuser ever heal?* The question lingers in my mind as I finish my smoke. I think about the psychology of someone like that. After every incident, each time he told me it would be the last... but it never was.

"Lucky." The familiar deep tone comes from beside me.

"You know, this could constitute as stalking," I retort without looking at him. Mainly because I'm afraid to.

I'm worried he'd see just how deep my fear of men goes. Where the anxiety lies in my soul as those eyes attempt to spear me with their probing gaze. He's nothing like Rogan. They're complete opposites.

Perhaps that's why I don't feel afraid of him.

I don't feel as if he's out to hurt me.

The question is, *what does he want from me?*

**TWO**

## SULLY

“NOT STALKIN’, I WOULD SAY, JUST INTRIGUED. JUST WANTIN’ to know what the wee girl is hidin’ beneath all that ink,” I tell her, once again taking in the beautiful tattoos adorning her perfect body.

“Nothing that concerns you,” she bites back in her American accent, and I can’t help chuckling. *Cute*. The wee thing is feisty. But I think if I told her she’s cute, she’d have a shit fit. She’s so small I’m sure I could pick her up with one hand. Imaginin’ her straddlin’ my bike flits through my mind, and I have to cough to hide my groan.

Even though she’s smokin’, when the breeze whistles by us, it carries her scent toward me, and I inhale deeply. Jesus fucking Christ, her sweet perfume is enough to force a saint to sin. She turns her face away, but I’m hooked. No woman has ever refused me down or been so fucking feisty. I don’t know what it is about her, but I want to delve into the darkness that swims in her pretty eyes.

“If there’s one thing you need to learn about me, Lucky, it’s that I don’t give up.” Without waiting for her retort, I turn and head away from her towards the benches which are set up for us to relax on when there is some feekin’ sunshine. But today, there’s not goin’ ta be much. I sit down before I light my smoke and inhale a lungful of nicotine. Even though the scent overpowers the fresh air, I can’t help but smell *her*, and it makes me wonder how much it would take to get to know her. Lucky Clover. A pretty wee thing who’s captured my attention. She’s in this feekin’ shite place, and I wonder why.

Running my fingers through my long hair as the wind billows the locks, I cast a glance over my shoulder to see her half hidden in the shadows, as if they'll keep her safe from whatever is plaguing her. She's still standing there, looking like a deer caught in a set of headlights.

Her big eyes look right through me, and I wonder if she sees into the depths of my soul. *Can she see the shite I've seen?* When Monster told me my first job in the club was to go undercover, I didn't expect to be sent to feckin' rehab. But I get it—as the newest patched in member, I have to do my part.

I glance at her again, and my mind ticks over. There's somethin' about her that's made sure anxiety twists in my gut. I've been able to read people all my life. I had to learn from an early age. Da was a fecker when it came to drink, and I had to know how to read his demeanour when he stumbled into the house. Feckin' abusive arsehole.

The thought brings me back to her. Clover. It was the ink that caught my attention. People I know get tattoos to express themselves or hide something. With her, I have a feelin' it's the latter.

How I wish I could meet the arsehole who inflicted that on her. I'd ensure his balls were shoved right down his throat while his dick was shoved so far up his arse he'd need surgery to get it out.

I turn away, pullin' out another cigarette from the packet and sparkin' it to life. I can thank fuck they didn't take away my smokes when I walked in here. I had to make them believe I needed help. When this job is done, Monster will get me out. But for now, I need to be the addict everyone thinks I am. I spend my time outside inhalin' the thick smoke that calms the tension in my muscles.

The rain is coming. The rumbling of thunder echoes through the sky as I lean back and look up, finally tearin' my stare away from the wee Clover.

I didn't want to come in here and do this shite job, but I knew I had to. Monster has given me a family, and I owe him my life. When I think back, I realise I shoulda been locked up



a long time ago. But the Royal Bastards were there fer me, and I can't deny them. Even though I want nothin' more than to be out on the road, lookin' fer Bragan, I know gettin' this information is goin'ta help us.

Pushing off the bench, I turn to find she's no longer there, and a sense of disappointment washes over me, realisin' she's gone indoors. Nobody else likes being in the heat, so the yard is empty. I decide to sit back and wait to see if she comes outside again, and soon enough, moments later, she strolls out with a bottle of chilled water.

"Thanks, sweetheart." I cock an eyebrow at her as she sits on a bench opposite me.

"Do I look like a waitress?" she quips, but even though she's been rather serious since I first spoke to her, she offers me a small smile that makes me want to see so much more of it.

Leaning forward, I settle my elbows on my thighs and question, "Were you a waitress? Before you got locked in this loony bin?"

To this, she laughs a soft, magical sound that makes me grin.

"Are you meant to call it that? I mean, is that PC?"

"PC?" My brows furrow in question, giving her the advantage of thinking she'll educate me, but I know exactly what *politically correct* is.

"Politically correct," she informs me, slim shoulders shrugging, as if it's something I should know. And even though I should've just responded with an easy answer, this seems to keep her talking, and I can't help enjoying having her school me. Fuck, I want her to show me everything she's hiding.

I can't help noticing the big purple bruise on her shoulder. The angry-looking mark seems to be embedded under her porcelain skin. As if she's a broken doll.

"I'm not fragile," she tells me, causing me to snap my gaze to hers. There are intricate patterns of hidden pain shimmering

in her clear green eyes. They hide secrets, dark ones.

“I ain’t said you are, sweetheart,” I tell her. Pulling a pack of smokes from my pocket, I tap the bottom, making one jolt out, and lift it towards her. “Want one? They’re strong. Not for fragile girls,” I taunt.

“Fuck you,” she spits but takes a cigarette, and I can’t help chuckling.

I watch her light the smoke and pull hard on the stick until the cherry burns deep orange. It burns bright as she slowly inhales the thick plume. When she blows it out, making small rings, I’m awed. I’m fecking floored, to be honest, because this woman has done something some of the guys have never been able to do.

“Not bad for a little girl, huh?” She quirks the corner of her mouth into a small, satisfied grin.

Shrugging, I inhale a deep drag of my own smoke and meet her gaze. “Impressive, but I bet you’ve been practisin’, and you weren’t completely honest with me,” I tease and chuckle when she swats my knee. The contact of her small, delicate hand on my leg causes my blood to simmer.

“So, why are you here, Sully?” the little Clover asks, sounding genuinely curious.

**THREE**

## CLOVER

“THERE ARE TIMES WHEN AN ESCAPE IS NEEDED. I’VE FOUND myself at the bottom of a bottle far too many nights,” he informs me, suddenly serious, and the surrounding air shifts.

There’s a heaviness hanging over us, and I feel sad for asking him something so personal. But then again, he did ask me a few questions I didn’t want to answer.

“I’m sorry.”

He pulls deeply on the cigarette hanging between his lips. The redness of the sparks burns as he inhales, and the dark orange reminds me of a sunset lighting the sky. And before long, it’s dark when he exhales the smoke into a plume that surrounds him.

He shakes his head in response to me. “Don’t be. I’m no wee lad anymore. Time to grow up. But I hear lassies fancy bad boys, so it’s not all shite,” he boasts, puffing out his chest.

But even with the bravado he puts on, I can see his sadness in those dark eyes.

“And all that ink only adds to the persona?” I challenge while raking my eyes over him.

“Wanna see the rest?” he asks, his fingers curling around the hemline of his tee, lifting it only infinitesimally, and I can’t help glimpsing tiny bits of ink on his exposed stomach.

“No!” My voice comes out squeaky and raspy all at the same time, and I wonder if he noticed it. Surely he has.

I've only ever been with one man. One man who hurt me more than I'd ever thought possible.

“Calm down, sweetheart, I ain't givin' everyone a show.” He lifts his chin toward the door behind me, and I turn to see a couple of the other women from my ward coming out with their cigarettes. “But”—he leans in closer, and there are still a few inches between us—“if you'd like to have a private show later, let me know.” He winks before rising from the bench and sauntering away.

I'm left alone to mull over the flirty conversation. I have nothing to keep my hands busy. The nerves set in, and I bounce my leg as I watch the other two women on their smoke break. The storm clouds are now thick and heavy, and any moment, they'll open and shower the land with refreshing rain. I need to head inside and check my phone. My uncle's men who brought me here managed to sneak it in for me, and I'm thankful because I can keep in touch with Uncle while I'm locked up. The only person I do want to hide from is a million miles away.

Deep down, I want to call him, to talk to Rogan and tell him just how wrong he was for doing what he did. But I know I can't do that. I ran for a reason. Perhaps it was the clarity that hit me when he slammed me against the wall. Maybe it was just the exhaustion and my body had had enough. When I'm stronger—when I'm the woman I portrayed only moments ago to Sully, I'll face my demon and end the tie Rogan has on me for good.

Pushing the earphones into my ears, I turn on the music playlist I've had on repeat for the past few days. I've always turned to music to allow my mind to forget my life, my mistakes, and my failures. I'd been with Rogan since I was eighteen. He was the perfect boyfriend for almost three long years. We'd grown close as friends, and when we started dating, it came easily. There was a comfort in being with someone I'd known for so long, but soon after we'd moved in together, it started.

It wasn't long after I'd turned twenty-one that he noticed me changing. Not in a bad way, but I got an internship at a

local company that allowed me to learn more about art, curation, and perhaps even find a career path. But Rogan was jealous. I noticed how he would watch me when I spoke about the opportunities coming my way. He didn't like it.

Most of all, he hated that I would spend time around other men. Nothing ever happened. I was loyal to him. But he didn't believe me. And it turned ugly. Something inside him snapped and there was no longer the man I'd first fallen in love with. He turned into a stranger.

Most people wonder why I chose to stay. I know strangers would question me. Why didn't I pack a bag and leave, just walk out. The problem is, when you love somebody, there isn't just walking away. You believe their promises, and you trust their lies.

And that's why love is such a dangerous emotion.

It forces you to look through rose-colored lenses at the worst of times.

We accept those we love, for better or worse. Isn't that what the vows of marriage tell us? And I did accept Rogan with all his faults because I believed he loved me as much as I did him.

I close my eyes as "The Wrong One" by One Less Reason starts, and the lyrics filter through me as I recall the moment I realized I'd fallen in love with the devil.

*IT'S ALMOST FIVE, and dinner is late. I worked all afternoon on a project that would mean the promotion I want would be in touching distance. The moment I see the time, I know I'm in trouble. And nothing is going to keep me from the wrath of the man I love.*

*He'll be home soon, wanting dinner after a long day on the construction site, and I know he's tired. The problem is, the reasons I have for being late aren't going to sit well with Rogan, and I'm going to end up in knee-deep trouble. More than I can handle. He's been good for a while, but the*

*simmering annoyance he shows me is still there. I can see it when I talk to him.*

*Deep down, I know living in fear isn't the life I want, but whenever he apologizes, I give him the benefit of the doubt. The door whispers open, and my anxiety tightens my stomach. Knots form as his boots clunk through the hallway and into our kitchen.*

*"I'm home, Clover," he calls to me as he enters the space.*

*"Rogan." I smile, padding up to him with my bare feet. But as soon as I reach for him, his eyes flit to the stove behind me. "Dinner is almost ready," I tell him, hoping he'll go shower first, but he doesn't move.*

*"I'm tired, Clover," he informs me in a tone that sets my nerves on edge.*

*Lately, he's been angry a lot, cursing and calling me names, but he's never hurt me.*

*"I know, baby. Why don't you go shower, and I'll—"*

*My words are broken off when his fist meets my face in a harsh punch that causes my jaw to smart as I stumble backward into the kitchen table. The steel edge cuts into my hip, and I can't help crying out as agony shoots through my body and my face. My butt hits the cold tiles with a thud, and pain radiates through every inch of me.*

*"I fucking asked you to have dinner ready!" His voice is rigid with rage as he reaches for my long, dark hair that hangs down my back in soft waves. "And your fucking hair is curly again," he hisses, dragging me up from off the floor with one hand fisting my locks.*

*"P-please, Rogan," I beg him, tasting the blood dripping onto my tongue, but he doesn't stop.*

*I can't stand as he pulls me along behind him like a rag doll. When he reaches the bedroom, he shoves me onto the floor. Thankfully, the soft carpet is easy on my knees.*

*"Shut the fuck up!" he bites out, pulling the thick belt from the small hoops on his jeans. He folds the leather in half and*

*grips it tightly in his fist. “Why is dinner not ready?”*

*“I-I... I had... work... I—”*

*He lifts the belt and brings it down on my thighs, hard. The sound echoes around me like a warning bell. My throat burns as I screech in pain while he continues his assault. The leather biting into soft flesh causes thick, red welts on my thighs.*

*“What the fuck were you doing?” he hisses again. Ignoring me, he continues his tirade. “Were you fucking someone else while you were meant to be cooking me dinner?”*

*I try to shake my head, but he grips my neck. Then, lifting me like a weightless sack, he spins on his heel. Pressing me against the wall, he pins me between his body and the cold tiles.*

*“Are you cheating on me, you ungrateful little bitch?”*

*“N-n-no,” I cry out as he rips the shorts I’m wearing down my thighs and from my body. His fingers probe my dry core.*

*“Are you fucking lying to me?”*

*I cry out in agony when I feel the cold metal buckle of his horseshoe-shaped belt enter me.*

*“Like this? Did you fuck some other dick like you are my belt, little whore?”*

*I can feel the metal cutting inside me, but I can’t move.*

*Tears streak down my face. Words tumble from my lips as I plead with him to let me go, that I’m not cheating, but he doesn’t listen.*

*When he finally relents, he drops me on the floor in a small pool of blood I know came from me. He allows the belt to tumble to the ground beside me.*

*“Clean up your fucking mess,” he spits and heads into the kitchen, and I hear the pots and plates as he finishes up the dinner which I started making for him.*



SNAPPING MY EYES OPEN, I inhale a deep breath. My heart thuds against my chest that still aches from what I've been through. The pain of that night still replays in my mind on an endless loop. A tender touch on my shoulder causes me to leap from the bench.

“Leave me the fuck alone!”

When I find a young girl, who doesn't look older than nineteen, staring at me with an ashen face from my outburst, I realize memories are still my enemy. And I know for a fact they always will be.

Sully saunters up to us, grips the girl by her upper arms, and ushers her away from me, mumbling something in her ear. I watch as he lights her smoke, then he turns his dark eyes on me. I expect confusion, pity, or something similar, but I find none of those. Instead, he watches me with sadness that grips my lungs, leaving me breathless.

I don't wait for him to say something. I don't apologize. Rushing by him, I lower my eyes and make my way inside. Only once I'm in the safety of the cafeteria, then and only then, do I blink to allow the tears to trickle down my cheeks.

Instead of waiting around for Sully to find me, I make my way to my bedroom where I shut myself inside. Thankfully, I'm alone and I'm able to slide down the door until my ass hits the floor. Even thousands of miles away, Rogan still has a hold on me. He's never going to let go. I have a feeling I'll forever be stuck in this warped version of my life.

When I close my eyes, he's there, haunting me, reminding me of what I am. Nothing but a toy for him to use as he pleases. There's nothing pleasurable about being forced to believe lies about who you are. I know I'm strong. I know I can be something more, but the taunts he drilled into my head over the years seem to have stuck, and I'm left scrambling for a way out of the darkness.

Nothing is going to save me, not even some handsome tattooed Adonis who seems to think it's his mission in life to be a knight in shining armor. I've learned that there are no heroes in this world.

I want so much to be normal, to associate touch with affection rather than violence. But it's not possible, and I doubt I'm ever going to see myself in that light again. I came to Ireland for a fresh start. I needed it. And once I leave here, I'm going to make sure I don't go back to Rogan. Because he will find me, and when he does, I'm going to make him pay.

Even though my thoughts are confident, filled with malice for the man who hurt me for so long, I don't know how I'll ever be able to do it, make him experience what he made me feel.

Perhaps with the help of my uncle, I can. But only time will tell.

For now, I lean my head against the door and sigh. Sully is a good person. I can see it in his eyes. But he's not for me. He can't be.

I'm nowhere near ready for something like that. And I don't know if I'll ever be.

**FOUR**

## SULLY

I KNOW I SHOULDN'T, BUT I CAN'T STOP MY FEET FROM movin' inside behind the beautiful, broken woman. I've seen people who are fecked up because life dealt them a blow, but this is something vastly different. This is worse.

She's not broken.

She's tattered.

Tiny pieces of a woman lyin' at my feet.

I'm in here for one reason only, but Clover has distracted me. Monster wants me to get information, but I can't do that yet. Tonight, when the staff are gone, I'll get the files he needs, but for now, I have time to talk to this girl who's stumbled into my life and turned my feckin' head.

I've seen shite like this before. Those flickers of fear in her pretty eyes are emotions I've witnessed so many times while growin' up. I can't stand by and watch another woman get hurt. I'll never do that. Ever again.

Which brings me to the clinic and Clover, who's runnin' from somethin' or someone. It has to be a boyfriend or husband. It's usually the case. I hate it. I may be a feckin' arsehole at the best of times, but I'd never raise my hand to a woman. Any man who thinks he can do that is a feckin' cunt.

Something inside me ticks over, a possessiveness that makes me want to take her and put her back together. To mend her. But how can I do that when I'm not even whole myself. She's not mine, and I can never take that leap with anyone, but if I can help her in some small way, I'll do it.

As much as I know I have nothin' to offer her, I can't bring myself not to go to her. My pain, those scars I've lived with for so long, force me forward because I know what it's like to live with demons. This will be a short and sweet meetin'. Fer once, I've picked up a lucky Clover, even though I know I have ta let her go when the time comes. I'm not in here fer very long, so it means even if she wanted more, it'll never happen. Besides the fact she's American and will probably head home after her stint in here, I have too many feckin' secrets to keep.

I find one of the nurses strollin' down the hallway as I reach the fourth floor. "Nurse Gillian, do ye know where Clover's room is, please? Somethin' happened outside, and I want ta see if she's all right."

Her big brown eyes stare at me for a moment before she nods. "Three-one-four," she offers. "No funny business." Her thick accent reminds me of my school headmistress when I was a wee boy. She was strict as shite, but she was a good woman.

I offer a smile and a nod. "Ach, aye, I swear to ye, I just want to make sure she's doin' okay." I pass the nurse and head down towards the rooms. With each white door I pass, I look up at the numbers, countin' them down as I get nearer. When I finally reach hers, I stare at it for so long I'm certain I'm the stalker she called me out as earlier.

Raisin' my fist, I rap on the wood twice and wait. The silence that greets me is deafenin'. I'm about to knock again when the door swings open, and standin' there, on the threshold, is a beautiful woman with black streaks of eyeliner on her cheeks. Her white dreadlocks are tied at the back of her head, showing her beautiful face, and her big, green eyes which are blotchy and red from cryin'.

She doesn't say anythin' and neither do I. If I had to be honest with myself, it's the first time in years that I'm speechless. There are only a handful of moments where I've found myself lookin' for the right thing to say, and this is one of the more important times. I didn't expect it to happen, not with someone I don't know, but here we are.

Her body is tremblin' with sobs, and I want to pull her into my arms. My fingers itch to touch her, to reach out and tell her I'm here for her. But I don't. Not yet anyway. I can't offer up promises I can't keep. Not that I don't want to. Feck me, I'd promise this girl the world if I could.

From the bruises on her body, I've a feelin' I know what the problem is, and havin' a man touch her might not offer her the solace I'm aimin' for. I've never felt the need to protect someone outside the club like I do with her. Most women who come across my path are there for an escape. A moment in time I'll forget the moment they walk away. But with her, this wee Clover, I want ta be close to her. The demons who fight inside me for dominance seem to cower when I'm close to her. She emits a light I've never seen before.

The brothers will take the piss outta me if they knew what I was thinkin' right now. But then again, Monster has his own love, and Tye's convinced he's goin'ta get married soon. The rest of them will make sure I regret ever confessin' my feelin's for this wee thing.

“What are you doing here?” she rasps, her voice drippin' with pain and anguish. She lifts her eyes, and I'm met with those forest-coloured orbs, and I'm lost in the trees and leaves as they fall within her stare. She crosses her arms over her chest, as if she's tryin'ta hide behind them. But I see it, the agony she's keepin' inside.

“Ye feckin' ran off like ye'd seen a ghost.” I want to kick myself at the accusing tone in my voice because she winces, but then she nods at my words. She doesn't reply to me, though. “I needed to know ye're all right. I don't like ta see a wee thing like yerself hurt or upset. I'm not usually like this, but ye've got me worried, lass.”

“You shouldn't be here. As much as I appreciate you checking up on me, you don't need to. It's best if you don't,” she tells me quickly.

Steppin' back, she pushes the door shut, and I stand here starin' at the white, wooden barrier now separatin' us. There

are soft sobs comin' from the other side. I lean against the door, and slide down until I'm on my arse outside her room.

"Tell me what happened," I ask, talkin' to the wall opposite me, starin' at the old stains on the cream-coloured concrete. "I've heard talkin' about yer problems with someone is the best way ta get them to go away."

"Why do you want to know? It's not like we're friends or anything like that." Her voice finally comes after so long I thought she was goin'ta ignore me all afternoon. A loud crack of thunder from outside causes her to yelp in fright, but I can't stop myself from smilin', because I love this weather. "I hate storms." Her words are a bit louder now, and I wonder if she's feelin' less scared of me because the weather is shite. Either way, I'm glad.

"I know what it's like not ta have anyone to talk to." I don't know why I'm telling her this, but I feel as if she needs to know. I spent most of my youngest years alone. It was only when Monster asked me to join the club that things turned around. Patchin' in was a change for me, one that gave me a purpose.

More silence comes from inside her bedroom, then I hear the lock click, and the door slides open, causing me to fall backwards halfway into her room.

"Hi," I say from the floor, smilin' up at her tear-stained face.

She's beautiful. Even in all those gloriously tattered pieces, she's utterly breathtaking.

"You can't sit outside my door all day," she tells me, almost back to the snarky little woman from outside, but there's still so much emotion in her words, in her expression, that I sit up and spin on my arse. Leanin' my back against the wall I'd been staring at earlier, I now look at her standin' in the doorway of her bedroom.

The fiery wee thing is gorgeous. I'm a man, hot-feekin'-blooded, and she's causin' me to think 'bout things I should not be thinkin' 'bout. But she's healin' and there's no way I

can try anythin' with her in that state. She needs help, not some fecker pawin' her.

She's still dressed in torn stockin's with holes in the knees. Her frayed denim shorts sit mid-thigh, offerin' me a view of bruises on her legs. Her top hangs off one shoulder, and I've a feelin' there must be bruises on her body. And even the ones not visible are etched on her soul. She's too jumpy when I'm close to her. I know women who have been in violent relationships. My ma was one of those women.

Never understood why she didn't walk out. I wasn't old enough to talk to her about it. And I never once asked her afterwards. It's a topic we didn't ever broach. I don't judge Ma for stayin'. I'm just feckin' ragin' that she didn't take her things, and me, and walk out. We could have made it work somewhere.

Even though we didn't have anyone else, we coulda had each other. I woulda done anythin' fer that woman. I saw strength in her I haven't even seen in myself. Deep down, I always wondered if she only stayed because she knew we needed a roof over our heads. Or mine. She woulda given me the food off her plate if she knew I was hungry. And that's what the bastard saw in her, the softness. And that's what I see in Clover.

Instead of wantin' to take advantage of it, I want to hold it tight. Nurture it. I'm a brute on the best of days, but with the woman before me, I want to lie back and have her take control. I want to soften myself just to make her feel at ease.

“Sully, seriously, you cannot sit here outside my door.”

Her voice drags me back to the present and I realise she's still glarin' at me. Her mouth pursed into a pout, and for a moment, I wonder what she tastes like.

I wish I knew the asshole who'd done this to her. He can try his shite on me. I'd welcome it. Because if he did, I'd make sure he felt every feckin' bone in his body break. Then, I'd slowly cut him from forehead to chin and listen to his feckin' squeals. I'd feck him up. I'd revel in his blood on my hands.



I finally look at her directly. My dark eyes keep those gentle, green ones hostage. “I can and I will sit here until you talk ta me.”

“I can’t talk about what happened.” She sighs, leanin’ on the doorframe, then quickly moves away with a flinch when the hard surface presses against yet another wound I can’t see.

“Okay, tell me about you.” I change the subject. “What’s yer favourite colour?”

She snaps her gaze to me, then smiles. It’s a small gesture with her lips curlin’ upward, and I feel like I’m on top of the feckin’ world when I realise I’m the fecker who made her smile.

“Blue,” she tells me, settlin’ herself on the threshold of the room.

“What’s your favourite food?”

She looks away, usin’ her finger to scratch at the doorframe, rippin’ at the peelin’ paint. Her focus is on that while she ponders my question, then she smiles again.

“Burgers. Like with real cheese. Saucy ones that drip down your chin when you bite into them.” This time, there’s a laugh. A soft, sweet melody.

“Sounds like my kinda food,” I affirm proudly as I regard her. “How old are ye?”

Her head drops back slowly, leanin’ against the frame, her eyes on the ceilin’. I don’t expect her to respond, but she does. “Twenty-five,” she tells me with sadness drippin’ off the words.

“I’m thirty-six,” I offer a bit of myself.

She side-eyes me with the corner of her mouth tippin’ upward. “You’re old.”

“Easy, sweetheart,” I admonish her teasing, but I chuckle because my chest feels light, as if all the shit I’ve done, all the darkness in my life, is gone, just for a moment in time. “You know, my ma told me somethin’ once.”

I'm lost to the memories as I recall the moments I didn't have to watch Ma takin' shite from her feekin' boyfriend. It wasn't often, because he was there all the time. Always watchin' her. Makin' sure she wasn't running around as he liked to believe. I can't look at Clover as I speak, though. It's my turn to look away. Thinkin' about Ma still hurts. I inhale a deep breath to keep my emotions from showing.

“It doesn't matter what ye go through in life, sweetheart. As long as ye take time to breathe each day, that's more than anyone can ask of ye.”

**FIVE**

## CLOVER

I'M NOT SURE WHAT TO SAY TO HIM, BECAUSE IT FEELS AS IF he's just punched me in the gut. All these years, I've believed I deserved what happened to me. I was controlled by a man who told me I was worthless. I was beaten, bruised, and tormented, but here's a man who's sitting in ripped jeans, a torn wife-beater, and ink all over his body, even on the side of his neck, but he's uttering sweet words.

His long hair seems to shimmer in the light coming from the overhead lamps. Another thunderclap sounds, causing me to jump. I wish I enjoyed storms. I want to dance in the rain one day, but now all I can think about is the past. The stormy night that caused me to end up in the hospital.

I haven't thought about it until today. After it happened, I buried it deep because the memory was nothing short of horrific, so instead of facing it, I pushed it away. It was the only way I could survive through those long days after. The nightmares still lingered, but slowly, as I forced myself to move on from it, I was able to live *normally*. At least, that's what it looked like to the outside world.

Looking back, I realize it was nothing more than a Band-Aid when I needed so much more. I look at Sully, then try to smile. I'm not sure it even looks like one. I can't remember the last time I truly smiled.

"Sometimes it's breathing that hurts the most," I confess finally.

He nods slowly. As if he's remembering something long-forgotten. Or perhaps he's recalling the moment his mother offered him the sentiment. I wonder briefly if she's no longer in his life. *Did she die?* I don't ask. I can't bring myself to delve into his heartache, even though I want to. He doesn't say anything more, merely sits with me in silence. It's comfortable, and I bask in it for a moment.

"Sometimes, when ye breathe in for long enough, ye heal from the agony that steals the air from yer lungs," he tells me after moments of solitude. "Life is fecked-up."

I nod because I agree wholeheartedly. However, there's nothing for me to offer to continue this line of conversation. If I say anything, it will have to be the truth, and I can't tell him that.

Sully looks at me again. "But there are good people out in the world. I'm not claimin' to know what ye went through or understand why ye stayed, but obviously somethin' must've made ye believe that he could change."

His assumption has my eyes dragging over to where he's still sitting, watching me. His heavy leather boots flat on the linoleum that looks like puke. The contrast of his dark with the creamy color surrounding him is strange.

"I believed lies." My voice is a soft croak as the pain of the memories slowly sinks back in. It's as if reality and the past mingle together in a sordid dance.

"Perhaps, but ye had hope."

Those dark eyes that hold so much kindness pierce me. The armor I've built over the years hasn't been broken, and yet this stranger seems to know how to nudge at it.

"Hope is a fucking lie as well. It's a fruitless emotion that will not serve anyone well if they hold onto it. I've given up on hope, left it at the doorstep when I walked out of his apartment." My words are harsh, angry, but they're not aimed at Sully. They're spat at a man who isn't here. One I can never face again.

“Do ye have family over here?” he asks then, bringing me back to the present.

It’s as if he knows my mind wants to run away with me. It wants to disappear right back in the past where there’s blood dripping from between my legs, from my nose. Where my lungs don’t work, because I was shoved against a cold, concrete wall. To the moment I was burned with a lighter for smiling at someone. The night when I was on the floor curled in agony after he’d decided it was time to try new things sexually.

“My uncle travels a lot, so I don’t see him often. He was the one who got me this gig,” I say as I gesture around me.

The hospital isn’t bad. I’ve seen worse. When Rogan was taken into rehab, I went with him to see where he would be staying, then I went to visit him daily. That place was a shithole. But then, he did get in with the wrong crowd. Bikers. Outlaws. Sully looks like one, but he doesn’t have that air of menace following him around, not like the guys Rogan hung out with.

“Well, if ye’re needin’ a place to lay yer head when ye’re out of here, then I can offer ye that.” Sully shrugs as he looks at me. The idea of living with someone, another man, only sends warning bells ringing in my head. “I mean, not with me,” he says, as if he’s reading my mind. “But at the clubhouse of a friend of mine. You’ll have other women there. My friend Monster—well, that’s his road name—and his wife live in the house as well. She’s a good’un. Sweet girl. She’ll look after ye.”

“And who is Monster?” I ask, curious.

“He’s the President of the Royal Bastards Motorcycle Club in Belfast. He’s a good man. Took me in when I needed it. And I know he’ll want to help if I tell him ’bout ye,” he tells me with a proud smile. “He’s my best friend.”

“A motorcycle club? I don’t know.” I shake my head.

I’ve spent too long around a testosterone-filled home. My anxiety would be skyrocketing every time I’m near any one of

them. He did say there are women there, but... *Can I do it?*

“Ye don’t have to tell me now, Lucky.” Sully grins, showing me a smile that reaches inside my chest and grips my heart. “I’ll be out of here in three days, though, so don’t take too long to think about it. Once ye tell me yer decision, I can set it up easily. No bother.”

“So, if, and I mean *if*, I do stay with them...” I turn to him, crossing my legs Buddha style. “What do I do? I mean, I don’t have money or anything like that.”

“Monster is a good guy. He’ll give you a job in the bar, or he’ll find somethin’ fer ye ta do. He’ll make sure ye’re taken care of. I’ll explain yer situation, and ye’ll be kept safe. There are no arseholes. The men respect all the women who walk into the club.”

It sounds too good to be true. Nothing in my life has ever been easy, and this is on par with all the other shit I’ve been promised all my life.

“If ye can’t stay with yer uncle, then let me know,” he says. “So, what’s your favourite movie?” I watch him lean back against the wall again, all seriousness evaporating as if he knows I need the light and the dark.

“Well, that depends.”

“On?” He tilts his head to the side, and he watches me once more.

There are moments I wonder if he’s trying to decipher something from my answers. Perhaps trying to find the secrets I hold by just staring at me.

“I’m a fan of romance,” I tell him, watching him roll his dark eyes at my response, which in turn sets me off in giggles. “I’m serious.”

“Ye believe in all that Prince Charmin’ shite?” He cocks a dark brow in question as he regards me with curiosity.

I suddenly feel like a naughty girl when I think about it. A teenager who didn’t get to grow up. Who saw too many bad things to ever believe in a happy ever after. But then I shrug.

“Sort of. I’m not saying there’s a perfect man in the world, but as a girl who’s been through the ringer, I just think there has to be something good out there. If not for me, then for others who deserve it.”

“Be careful, Clover. Ye’re soundin’ a lot like someone who has hope.”

I want to laugh, but he’s right. “It’s not really what I would call hope. I mean, it’s more just believing that good things can happen.”

“Which is hope,” he throws back easily, then chuckles. His smile creases the corners of his eyes, but the darkness sparkles. Even as the rain pours outside, I realize I haven’t jumped or felt scared since he started talking to me. He’s been distracting me from my fear. “And someone who has even just a smidgen of that will go far. Ye’ll get stronger, wee lass, and when ye do, ye’ll find yer own fairy tale.”

I shrug, unsure what to say because he’s right, not about the fairy tale, but I actually do have hope I’ll be happy one day. Perhaps I won’t have a happily ever after, but I pray I’ll find someone I can talk to, even if it’s just as a friend.

Maybe not a husband and kids, but someone who’s there to keep me company when I need it. Someone like... I look at him and shake my head.

“What?”

“Nothing,” I whisper. It’s stupid. I’ve only just met him, and here I’m considering him a friend. He’s a stranger who’s been friendly to me. That’s all it is. As he said, he’s leaving in a few days. And then I’ll be left on my own. Which is probably something I need. I have to grow on my own before I can even consider anything more.

I don’t remember a time when I was truly alone—when I was single and did something for myself. Granted, I did work before things got really bad with Rogan. But once that stopped, I don’t even remember a day when I was independent.



This was meant to be a fresh start. And it's time I lived up to that decision. I made it in the heat of the moment, but it's a good one. Once I'm out of here, I can find myself again. The girl I once was. It would be healing to shed the skin of the past and step into a future that's bright with possibilities.

Those were taken away from me. The image of Rogan's angry glare shatters through my mind with another crack of thunder that makes me jump. And I have to fight back the tears that threaten to fall.

"Hey," Sully says, snapping me out of my reverie. "No sad thoughts," he admonishes me.

Once again, it feels as if he's reading my mind. As if he's already delved behind the armor, and he's burrowing himself deep into the recesses of my mind. If he has, he'll see the darkness that resides there. He'll note all those pained thoughts that eat away at me. I never wanted anyone to see them, to get that deep into my mind, and yet, it feels as if Sully's done it so easily.

"I'm okay," I lie.

They're the only two words that feel natural to say. I've uttered them time and time again, to anyone and everyone who asks. It's the only answer I can focus on. I want it to be the truth, but no matter how much I wish, it's always a lie.

"All I'm sayin' is, don't knock it. Shit happens, but there's never any need to lose hope," he says, ignoring my response.

He probably knows I'm lying, so there's no need to acknowledge it. I'm not angry at him for it. I respect that he can allow me my moment of torture. But I doubt it will last long.

I glance at him and smile.

"Careful, you're starting to sound like a big softy and not some big, scary biker," I taunt, earning myself a deep, rumbling chuckle.

"Touché, Lucky."

He's called me that twice now, and my curiosity wins out.  
"Lucky?"

"Aye," he says with a nod. "Ye're a Lucky Clover," he tells me and that makes me laugh.

It's an honest, full belly laugh that seems to be infectious because he rumbles with laughter. The sound is beautiful, and it makes his face light up. This man may look like one of those scary bikers from back home, but he's nothing like them.

He's different.

He's a good person.

And I have to fight with my mind, and my heart, to stop from wanting to learn more about the stranger who walked in and broke through my armor.

**SIX**

## SULLY

WHEN I WOKE UP THIS MORNIN', I DIDN'T EXPECT TO ACHE TO see her. It's like she's burrowed herself inside me, and with every breath I take, she's clawin' her way deeper. Last night, I sat with her for a few hours.

We talked about our shared love for metal, hard rock music. Then she told me how her obsession with classical was the one thing she held onto through all the real fecked-up shite she'd been through. But as much as we'd confessed, she never told me just what that *real fecked-up shite* was.

And I didn't push. I also didn't tell her about Ma and how I grew up. There are some things that just couldn't be said in the hallway of a feckin' clinic. And I suppose that's all right, because I want to know more, outside of this shithole.

What I did admit to was just how much I love art. Watchin' the ink get stained onto my skin has always been intriguin' ta me. She told me about her love of the piano. When she spoke of the times she'd sat at a baby grand and stroked the keys, I could tell there was real love for the instrument. Her smile was wistful, sad almost, and I knew that's when she lost it all. The arsehole who hurt her stole her light, but as I sat there last night, watchin' her, I made a silent promise to give it back to her.

It's been a whole day since I've seen her. Instead of spendin' time with Clover, I've had to work on gettin' these files. Last night was a bust. I tried to log into the computers but only managed one before the guard was doin' his rounds. But now I have all the files Monster wants.

Bragan was the focus here. He's had people admitted over the years, and we have a feelin' there's more to it than bein' a carin' man. The patients in question have records as long as the feckin' day is long. I thought he was hirin' them as soon as they walked out, but it's not the case.

In my room, I throw my shite into a rucksack before sendin' Monster a text, lettin' him know it's time to go. I've overstayed my welcome. Once it's done and I'm packed, my mind goes back to Clover. Knowin' she's in her room has me anxious to go and see her. But I also don't want to say goodbye just yet. I'm leavin' earlier than I anticipated, but I have to be wary of seein' Bragan's men, and I'm pretty sure they're in here, watchin' the patients.

They have a particular taste in who they take, and it seems to me, they wouldn't leave this place unguarded. I haven't come across any of them since bein' in here, but I don't want ta take any chances. And I don't need them knowin' about Clover.

In a few hours, I'll be walkin' out of here, and since she hasn't given me an answer, it makes me even more feckin' nervous. I want to walk out and never look back. But I know if I leave here without her answer, I'll be back. There's somethin' about this girl that doesn't just make me want to save her, it makes me want to keep her fer myself—but I know I'm no good fer her. There isn't a feckin' reason I should even be so aware of her. She needs a good man, and I'm no knight in shining armour. I'm no Prince Charmin'.

My phone buzzes on the bed, and I know immediately who it is. Pickin' up the device, I press my thumb on the *home* button to unlock it. A message from Monster sits waitin' for me. I know what he's goin'ta say, but I don't want ta look at it.

He's managed to get me released tomorrow. I tap out my response.

*AYE, sounds grand. I'll be ready, just... give me till the evenin'.*

THEN I DROP my phone on the bed when I leave the room and head up the stairs to where the women are housed. I have one more night with her. I know I do want ta learn more about her. Maybe I can get her to talk about what that arsehole did to her. It will make her feel better, gettin' it off her chest. I'm sure of it. But it's not goin'ta be easy on her.

Even as I walk up the feckin' stairs, I find I'm nervous. I don't get anxious for shite, ever. I spend my life cleanin' up the mess of the MC—blood, dead bodies. All that does nothin' ta me. But Clover, she's somethin' else entirely. And I don't know how to feel about it. I don't know what to think about it.

Her door is closed. There aren't any sounds comin' from the other side. I knock and wait. Moments pass in silence as I stare at the off-white barrier keepin' me from her room. It hides what she does, all those goddamn secrets I want to know.

She doesn't respond.

The door stays closed.

She must be hidin' away. Last night was somethin' else, though. She opened up and I saw parts of her I don't think she's offered up to anyone else. Perhaps she's regrettin' talkin' ta me. Shakin' my head, I force the idea out because I know she was happy. She smiled more than I'm pretty sure she has in a long while. Maybe she's thought things through and decided against comin' to stay at the club.

That causes my stomach to churn with anxiety. I'm never this unsure about someone. Never this nervous and feckin' tense. Even in the middle of dead bodies and drenched in blood, I'm calmer. This feckin' wee thing is doin' somethin' ta me.

I turn in frustration. I so badly wanted ta see her, but if she's outside, I can have a smoke while chattin' to her. That's probably where she is. Headin' back towards the staircase, I'm about ta make my way down when I hear it. A melody. So faint—so quiet. I'm sure I'm hearin' things. But I take the stairs to the third floor instead of goin' to the women's section.

The higher I get, the louder the sound is. A song. The tinklin' of ivories. It's a feekin' piano.

When I reach the floor where the music's comin' from, I turn left and follow the siren's song that's lurin' me to my death. I shove the door open and follow the music. I don't doubt it's her, because it's as if she's emittin' that very light that shone in her eyes last night, in the music she's makin'. And when I do find Clover, sittin' in a room I never knew existed in this godforsaken place, I'm not at all surprised.

Her small frame is perched on a black wooden bench. Her fingers fly over the keys as she plays "River Flows In You" by Yiruma. The only reason I even know the feekin' song is because some of the girls at the club were playin' it and it caught my attention. Even though I'm more of a classic rock lover, there are times a simple instrument can entrance.

The melody is gentle, just like the girl who's hypnotised me with it. She doesn't hear me or even notice me. Her eyes are closed, her fingers moving like dancers on a stage. She's confident in every note, and her chest rises and falls as she breathes through the song. It's as if she's lost in the music, in a memory I can't see, and I'm frustrated beyond recognition because I want to be there. I want to see what she does. Feekin' Christ. I want to be in her memories.

Leanin' against the doorframe, I fold my arms and keep my gaze glued to her. Her dreadlocks hang down her back as she plays. There are so many thoughts racin' through my head right now, things I probably shouldn't be thinkin' about, and others that make me want ta break all my feekin' rules about women.

As she comes to the end of the song, she slows down but never opens her eyes, and I wonder if she knows I'm here. *Can she sense me like I do her?* But she doesn't look my way. Instead, she starts a new song, and as much as I should be annoyed or frustrated, I'm not. I'm hooked. I'm caught by her net, and I don't want to be let loose.

The acoustics in this space are incredible. The piano echoes against the bare walls as if we're sitting in a concert

hall and I'm listenin' to an award-winnin' pianist. Her body moves while her fingers do, followin' the melody she plays. There's passion in her movements as she gets lost inside her mind, in her soul, and she once more comes to the end. She stills, and I take a deep breath.

"Are you going to watch me all day?" she finally quips as the last few notes dance over the space between us, as if they're attemptin' ta drag me closer, then filter into nothin'.

"Maybe," I tell her as she begins another classic melody, which I recognise as Beethoven.

I push off the frame and saunter towards her, but she doesn't offer me her green eyes. She doesn't look at me. Instead, she focuses on the ebony and ivory keys beneath her delicate fingers. Then I notice the tears wettin' her cheeks, and my fingers itch to wipe them from her pretty face.

So breathtakingly beautiful.

Such a broken disaster.

And there's no doubt, she's mine.

She's my beautiful disaster and I want nothin' more than to keep her.

I'm in awe when I stop behind her, watching as her hands fly over the keys, back and forth, again and again. They sweep me away, makin' sure I'm focused on her and the song. I'm feckin' losin' my mind. Monster is goin'ta tell me I'm fallin', but that's all shite. Ye don't find love in places like this. And ye certainly don't fall in love with someone ye don't truly know.

I've never been a believer of those emotions. I've watched Ma think she's in love, and she's only been hurt. Clover has as well. There's never a solid foundation to feelin's. They're only there ta feck ye up. And when you're lyin' on the ground, beggin' fer mercy, ye realise what a numpty ye were. Feckin' eejit.

I didn't think I'd ever be one of those, but if there ever was a wee lass who could make me fall, perhaps it's her. Even though she's so feckin' shattered, broken beyond what I've



ever seen, there's a strength ta her. One that's shinin' through right now as she plays one final note, and she stops.

Clover drops her hands to her lap and pushes away from the piano. I'm not musical. I can't play for shite, but listenin' to her makes me want to sit beside her. She turns to me, and I notice the tears that make the green shine brighter. This is feckin' ridiculous because I've never wanted a woman more than I do right now. Not only to fuck her, but just to hold her, to kiss her, to learn who she is deep inside her tormented pieces.

To maybe even put her back together.

# SEVEN

## CLOVER

MY MIND IS STILL ON LAST NIGHT. HOW HE SPOKE TO ME, wanting to know more about who I am, who I was. I didn't want to tell him. And if I'm completely honest, I know why. It's because I didn't want to scare him off. He's nothing like Rogan. Even though he's a biker, just like the men Rogan was friends with, he's nothing like them. He doesn't exude violence. He carries affection, wielding it like a weapon. And he's shielded me in more ways than I care to admit.

I didn't expect it, and I didn't think it would be possible for me to feel at ease when I'm alone with a man of his stature. But something about Sully is calming. It's a strange thing to consider if you see the bulk of him. Long hair and a beard, with ink on every available inch of skin. His hands are strong, but I know they've never been lifted toward a woman.

That's what makes him different.

The fact that he came up to my door to see if I was okay speaks volumes for the type of man he is. One that will keep me safe rather than put me in danger. But still, after hours of us talking, I can't stop the fear. I am afraid of my past.

Rogan wasn't a violent person, not that I could tell anyway. He was friends with bikers, but he never got too involved in that world. And to me, he was sweet, caring, and loving, but slowly as the years went by, he became callous, crueler, and angrier at everyone. And then at me. I was the punching bag for everything that went wrong in his life, and he enjoyed making sure I never forgot it.

Time has passed, but I know it will never leave me completely. I'm haunted, and I always will be. Even though I came here, to this place where I've found solace, I think there's still a long road ahead of me.

I have my uncle here, and now I've been offered a place to stay by a man who I've only just met, but I know the option is there if I need it. Perhaps it may be good to meet others in a place I'm about to call home. It can be a refuge from the pain of far too many months, days, and hours at the hands of a violent man.

I step into the shower, allowing the water to rain over me. The water covers the trickling tears racing down my cheeks. There's pain in my chest, but it's not because of Rogan. No, this is an acute awareness that I *like* someone. A man. Someone who looks like he should be violent, but he's not, and the fear of him turning into Rogan stings. It grips my heart, and I can't help crying out. The sound echoes off the walls, bouncing left to right.

Frustration ebbs and flows through me. Sully offered me a new life. One where I don't have to keep looking over my shoulder, waiting for the day Rogan finds me. Because I know he will.

As the water turns cold, waking me from my thoughts, I turn off the taps and step out into the bathroom. Even though it's scorching outside, I'm cold. A shiver wracks my body as I wrap myself in the soft, fluffy material of the towel.

The bruises may have faded, but there are a few that have stayed. The scars of my past will forever haunt me. Through the colorful ink, I can see them, taunting me. Reminding me of who I was.

A girl who trusted.

A girl who gave everything.

Back in the bedroom, I sit on the bed, staring out the window, taking in the view of nothing but red hills in the distance. The heat is already starting to seep from the room. It's stifling at the best of times, but today, Sully is leaving, and

it's as if he's taking the warmth with him. I know he'll want an answer to his offer. And I honestly don't know what I'm going to say.

I'm clean of the drugs.

I'm ready to go out into the real world, but to trust a man again is not something I want to do. In fact, it's the last thing I ever want to do.

A rumble of an engine stirs me into action, and I lean on the windowsill to see three bikes pull up into the parking lot. There are two men and one woman because I can see her curvy figure in a pair of blue denim jeans and leather jacket that cuts into her waist, fitting perfectly.

I can't tear my eyes away from them. From her. When she tugs the purple-and-black helmet from her head, I note how beautiful she is. With confidence, she shrugs her leather jacket from her shoulders, and I notice the ink covering one arm from wrist to shoulder.

She's absolutely stunning.

Sully saunters out, and I watch in awe as he shakes the hands of both men, then jealousy surges in my gut when he picks the girl up and spins her around. I don't know who she is to him, but I can't deny there's yearning in my chest.

*Do I really want this man?*

He sets her on her feet, and when he turns, he glances up at my window, and I leap away with my heart thudding wildly. He caught me watching. Confusion swirls in my mind because I want to go with them, to have a life, but I'm so fucking scared it grips me in its feral claws, threatening to tear my heart from my chest.

I pull on my underwear quickly, then my jeans. As I'm tugging a white tank top over my head, there's a knock at my door. I move quickly toward it and pull it open to find Sully standing on the other side.

"My Lucky Clover," he says, cocking a smirk from the corner of his mouth.

I feel the heat on my cheeks, the blush he causes. “Hey.”

“I’m headin’ out,” he informs me. Which is of course why his friends are here.

He told me last night he’s going. And even though we only sat and spoke, debated about music, I realize I didn’t want him to go then, and now I’m pained because he has to leave.

“Oh.” The syllable falls from my mouth. Even though I don’t want to sound sad, I hear it. There’s disappointment drenching the word. “I saw the bikes pull up.”

“Aye, Monster is here,” he murmurs, gesturing with his hand down toward the staircase where I know his friends are probably sitting in the quad, possibly smoking. “I told him ’bout ye.”

This causes my eyes to snap to his. “You did?”

He nods, his eyes boring into mine, questioning me without words. He wants to know what my answer is. Will I go with him, go with them, or will I choose to move on alone? I have another week of being in here, then I’m out.

I swallow back the panic that’s threatening to choke me and ask, “What did he say?”

“Told me ye’re welcome anytime. There’s a spare room at the clubhouse, and Miren is excited to have another lass there. She’ll take care of ye. Ye’ll be safe. No one will touch ye,” he informs me with confidence.

He takes a step closer to me, his height looming over me, cocooning me with warmth. The lump of fear in my throat threatens to choke me. I haven’t been this physically close to a man in a while. I’m not sure I’m happy with it, but he doesn’t hurt me. He won’t. It’s something I’m sure of without a doubt. He reaches out a large hand, which I flinch at. I want to cower, but I grit my teeth and stand still.

“I won’t hurt ye,” he offers in a whisper drenched in promise.

“Nobody can promise not to hurt another person,” I bite out as his knuckles find my cheek.

The gesture is slight. He caresses the skin, causing goose bumps to erupt all over me. I want so much for him to kiss me, to offer me solace. But fear strikes when his fingers brush over an invisible bruise. It was there once upon a time. I remember it like it was yesterday, and it causes me to jolt backward.

“I’m sorry.” Those two words fall from his lips with more sadness that I’ve ever heard. They’re not lies Rogan used to spew. No, these are words of pure remorse and regret.

Looking into Sully’s brown eyes, I see it. Everything he wants to offer me dances in those dark orbs. He’s not angry—he’s merely regretful I don’t trust him.

“I’m not him. I never could be, because I saw my ma at the hands of a man like that. I hated him with my very bein’, and I killed him when I turned fourteen.”

I’m so shocked at his confession that I’m left speechless.

“I know what ye feel—the fear, the anger, the distrust.” He shakes his head solemnly, then reaches into his pocket and pulls out a small piece of paper. “If ye ever change yer mind or feel like ye can finally move forward,” he offers, handing me the note, “ye’ll find the answer in there.”

My fingers tremble when I reach for it. The contact of his skin on mine sends a jolt of want coursing through my veins. Hot and needy. I want to say yes, but I don’t.

He stares at me with a smolder on his face, and I know if I went with him right now, I might never survive. Not because he’ll hurt my body, but because I could fall in love with him.

“Thank you.” My voice finally sounds, and it’s croaky, sadness lacing my words.

He doesn’t respond for a moment. The silence threatens to engulf me, then he meets my eyes with his. “I’ll be around. Remember, Clover, if ye ever decide to call, I’ll come runnin’. I’ll find ye again, because I want to.”

“I—”

“I’ve never missed someone by standin’ in front of them, Clover, but with ye, I do. Take care,” he tells me with blatant

honesty.

He turns and saunters down the hallway, leaving me blinking back tears. I stand there for a moment, unsure what to do or what to say. I open the note, and my heart catapults in my chest.

*CLOVER, I'M FECKIN' scared to want ye as much as I do. But that doesn't stop me. I want ye anyway. 07883 592 811  
- Sully*

I GRAB my small notebook and scribble my response. Then racing out of my room, pulling the door shut behind me, I make my way down the steps, taking two at a time. When I reach the ground floor, I find them just leaving through the two large doors at the main entrance.

He turns to look at me, his eyes filled with hope, and I pray my note offers him that. We don't speak as I reach for his hand, placing the small, torn piece of paper into the large palm that seems to be the only place besides his face that isn't filled with ink.

I meet his gaze, offering a small smile, then a nod.

And as I watch him walk toward the bike sitting in the parking lot, I want to tell him to come back for me, but I know I can't offer him what he so clearly wants. There's something between us, which I feel. It's something solid, as if I can reach out and touch it, touch him, but I'm still too afraid of what would happen if I let myself feel again.

As Sully swings his leg over the bike, I watch his head tip my way for a moment. Our eyes lock then. We're in a stand-off, and there's nothing more I can do. I can't promise him I'll go to him, and he can't promise to wait for me.

The engines growl to life, and Sully's friend, Monster, glances up. He's rugged. Like a biker should be. His eyes meet mine in a small show of solidarity as if he's thanking me for looking after his friend, but I did nothing of the sort. It was, in



fact, Sully who looked after me. And even though I don't know if it's even his real name, I know who he is.

As they pull away, a small salute comes my way, and then I watch the dust kick up behind the wheels of the bikes as they pull out onto the road. Once more, I'm left to my sadness. The depression I fought for so long threatens to choke me when the rumble of engines is no longer within hearing distance.

I head back inside and up to my room. When I get there, I race to the window, but the storm of red sand has long since settled, and it's all quiet again. As if he never existed, Sully is gone, and with him, my heart.

**EIGHT**

# CLOVER

## *Two Months Later*

THE LIGHTS DIM AS I TWIST THE SWITCH. EVEN THOUGH THE bar is known to be a shithole, out of the way stop for bikers and truckers, I know it's also a haven. I look after it. When my uncle offered me a job, I thought he was going to have me waitress in some café, or end up in an office in a high-rise, but this is perfect for me. It's a place I can be myself.

It's kept me busy, but I still think about Sully and wonder just where he is and what he's doing. I could go to him, but there are things I can't tell him. The truth is, I'm bad for him. He may call me *Lucky Clover*, but I'm far from it.

And then there's Rogan. He hasn't found me yet, and I'm thankful that my luck has held out. But I have a feeling this is the calm, right before my life comes crashing down. Sully will learn who I am. Not just a stranger in rehab, confessing her innermost demons to him.

I thought it would be easier than this to forget him, though. He's so close, within touching distance, but I can't bring myself to go to him.

As I flick the lights of the back bar off, I smile in the mirror that shows my tired expression. Nobody can take this from me. When I think back to how I ended up with Rogan, how I fell into his arms because I craved the safety, I admonish myself. My father left me a legacy when he died, and I threw it away for a man. One who hurt me.

The rumble of an engine startles me as a bike pulling up to the front breaks the silence. The headlight streams white through the windows. Surely, he can see we're shut. Everything has been turned off, and the closed sign is hanging in the door. It has been there for at least an hour. I take my time cleaning up after a long night. Saves me having to do it in the morning.

A knock on the door forces me to stop wiping down the counter. If I ignore it, he'll leave. I don't really want to have to open up for someone who can't read. Irritation skitters down my spine when another knock comes. This time it's louder and more urgent than the first. I'm almost certain he can't see me inside—the windows are darkened by the blinds.

But when a voice calls out, "Hello!" I know the bastard isn't giving up so easily. And I also realize, it's the moment I've been waiting for. It's a voice I recognize.

Sighing, I round the bar and head to the front door. Lifting the blind, I come face-to-face with a man in a hoodie and a leather cut over the dark material. Half of his face is obscured, but from what I can tell, he's ruggedly handsome. But I knew that already. I know the dangerous-looking man at my door.

His angular jaw is dark with the start of a beard, which if he left it for a few more days would be full. A shiver of desire trickles through me, but I shake it off quickly. His full lips glint with wetness under the weak yellow glow of the porch light.

"What do you want?" I call out, not wanting to open the door to him yet.

I've never been afraid since moving here, but the moment I'm face-to-face with him, trepidation courses through my veins. The Royal Bastards are good guys, I know this, because the previous owner of the pub told me they're always willing to help out in the community. But right now, I'm unsure of what *he* wants. I can't see a patch on his cut, but I do know he's one of them. It has to be him. I'm sure of it.

His gruff tone once again vibrates through me when he says, "Need a drink."

Another sigh escapes my lips. “We’re closed.”

I don’t know why I’m doing this song and dance with him. There’s no doubt I’ll open and let him in. I just want to see his face. To confirm my suspicions.

“Please,” he says finally before pushing the hoodie off his head.

When he lifts his eyes to lock on mine through the glass, my heart thuds against my ribs. Handsome doesn’t cover what he is. I try to hide the recognition in my expression when I look at Sully.

His dark eyes hold mine hostage for a long time. Even in the dim light, I can tell they’re like the night sky, with no stars, no moonlight, just darkness. The brown has turned black. It’s the same gaze that captured mine and never let go that first day we met. A flicker of recognition dances in them, but only for a moment, though. He doesn’t realize who I am. Not yet anyway.

“Just one drink. I’ve been ridin’ all night,” he tells me through the shut door. His deep, rumbling tone seems to vibrate the window. “Ye know Monster,” he tells me. “He’s one of my best friends, and he’s always sworn by this place as bein’ one of the best pubs to hide away in.” He moves his body, and the patch on the front of his cut becomes visible. He is part of the Royal Bastards.

Under the main patch logo is the word, *Cleaner*. All I can think about is going to bed after a long day, but I know this will be a good time to talk to him. It’s been months since I’ve seen him, and even though he’s not realized who I am, he still makes my heart do stupid shit in my chest. The thrum is almost deafening. I undo the latch and pull open the door.

“I haven’t seen you in here before.” A remark I know he’ll agree with.

“Been out on a job and got delayed.” He doesn’t elaborate, and I don’t ask. I know what a Cleaner does within an MC. I know all too well. I’m about to reply when he continues, “Was headin’ home, and I noticed the light flickerin’ on the outside.

I've passed by many a time, but usually drink alone in my flat a couple of blocks away," he tells me as he saunters by me.

In my rush to tidy up, I forgot to turn off the outside light. But the scent of his cologne invades my senses, and I inhale deeply. I can't stop my attention from drinking in every inch of him. From his broad shoulders, right down to his tight-fitting jeans that hug thick thighs and an ass that makes the denim look like it's been painted on. He's beautiful. He doesn't look at me. Instead, he looks around the pub.

"Just needed a drink before headin' to an empty home," he says as I join him at the bar. I am so close to him it's like a dream. There have been times where I wondered what it would be like to see him again. Nothing compares to this. "I know ye," he says as he stares at me. "Clover?"

I don't know how to answer him. I thought he'd be angry with me for not calling. I should have. But I couldn't bring myself to do it. I was afraid.

"Yeah," I say as I swipe the cloth from the countertop.

He shakes his head. "It's... I didn't think ye'd still be around," he says slowly. "Pour me a Jameson, double, no ice," he orders with a nudge of his head to the top shelf behind me.

Grabbing the bottle and a glass, I pour a double shot before setting it in front of him. "Here you go."

"Join me, Lucky?" His voice is a ragged vibration of need when his hand lands on mine. He holds it for a moment. And it's the first time in a long while since a man has touched me and I don't flinch. But then my hand moves of its own accord, and I pour myself a shot as well. I keep my gaze locked on his as I lift the glass to my mouth while he picks his drink up.

I allow my stare to roam over his fingers and the ink that adorns his knuckles. His right hand has the letters *HATE* on each finger, the left hand has *LOVE* inked on it. And there's another tattoo written in a smaller script between the curve of his thumb and forefinger—*your throat here*. It shouldn't turn me on, but it does. The idea of his strong hand wrapped

around the delicate column of my neck makes every nerve in my body spark.

His face is rugged, just as I noticed earlier, his lips full as they glisten with the alcohol, and I find myself wanting nothing more than to lick up every drop. I shouldn't want him like this. Though, I can't help my body from aching in all the right places.

"I'm sorry I didn't call. I wanted to, but there was so much going on in my head. Things I needed to work through," I finally say as I try to tear my attention away from his masculinity and focus on something other than how I'd love for him to bend me over the counter. He can never know the real reason I stayed. And he can't learn the truth about who I am.

"Things happen," he tells me in his thick Irish brogue. "As long as ye know ye're happy, then that's all that matters. Ye've been through more than anyone should. At least that's what I picked up from our time in there." There's a hint of sadness in his voice, and I wonder if he's upset I didn't call.

"I was afraid to use your number in case... I felt something I wanted to run from, Sully," I admit, causing him to lift his head, and those dark orbs pierce a hole right through me. And as much as I want to look away, as much as I know I should look away, I can't.

"Aye?"

The thick accent sends warmth washing over me as if he were covering me in his protection. But it's stupid to even consider myself wanting him. I came here to escape men. But the way Sully is looking at me has me pondering a whole different scenario. One I'm not at all ready for.

"Fear stops us from doing things that could be good for us." I nod as I pour us both another shot because he needs it, and frankly, so do I. Before I can second-guess myself, I settle in beside Sully and watch as he swallows his drink and pours another. Then, he lifts his glass toward me and smiles, and I wasn't ready for it. There's nothing on this God's green earth

that could have prepared me for just how breathtaking this man is.

“Fear is the devil’s work,” he spits with venom lacing those words. We clink our glasses and I swallow back mine in one long gulp. Sully’s gaze bores into me as he watches me. And when I look at him again, he’s chuckling. “Look at ye,” he says, pouring us both another shot each. “Ye tryin’ ta get me drunk?”

“Not at all,” I respond easily as we continue our shot-taking. This is asking for trouble, but I find I’m having fun. For the first time in a long while, I’m alone with a guy and I am at ease. Perhaps it’s the whiskey. Maybe it’s not, but I don’t dwell too much on it. “So, why haven’t I seen you in here before?”

“I’m... I don’t drink like I used to. It’s just not who I am anymore. I spend my time at the club, and that’s where I stay. My flat, a couple of blocks away, is my sanctuary. In this line of work, I need the solace more than you can imagine.”

Curiosity wins out, and I find myself wanting to know more about this man. He’s still a stranger to me, and I have to change that if I’m going to put my plan into action.

“Why is that?”

I remember how he told me about his past, about his mom, but he never spoke of his work. At the time, I was sure it was because he didn’t want to scare me off.

He glances sideways at me, the corner of his mouth tilting into a smirk.

“The mind plays tricks on ye when ye’ve seen what I have, Lucky,” he confesses easily. When Sully sets down his glass after what I think is our ninth or tenth shot of neat whiskey, his eyes burn through me, far stronger than the alcohol currently swirling in my stomach. “And the word around the city is that I’m trouble.”

“I don’t like trouble,” I whisper, finding I’ve lost my fight when he leans in closer, his lips feathering along mine. The



scent of Jameson on his breath, mixed with his masculine cologne, only seems to incite need inside me.

“What if I told ye I was the good kinda trouble?”

A laugh escapes me in that second because words fail me. And then his mouth captures mine. His tongue licks at my lips, and I allow him entrance. The sheer dominance of his hand tangling in my hair at the back of my neck as he draws me closer has me whimpering.

When my lashes flutter and my eyes close, I give myself ten long, beautiful seconds kissing this rough, rugged Adonis before I push at his chest.

“I can’t.”

He tips his head to the side, his hold still in my hair as his fingers tangle in the locks.

“Why?”

My mouth opens, and I want to say something that would scare him off. I should tell him who I really am and why I’m really here. Perhaps he already knows and doesn’t care. He knows my name, remembers the girl from rehab, but I’ve changed. And he’ll have no idea what he’s getting into bed with.

So, instead of saying anything, I shake my head once more. He releases me with a nod, and I can’t help the breath that whooshes from my lungs. I push off the stool. But Sully is fast. His hand shoots out, grips my arm, and tugs me back against him. My back flush against his chest.

His lips whisper along the shell of my ear, “Don’t go runnin’ from me now.”

I don’t know if it’s a threat or not, but there’s something dark in his voice. A warning.

Thankfully, I’m not looking at him. His chest heaves against my back.

“I only know how to run.” The confession stings my eyes and burns like poison on my tongue.

But then his grip on my arm tightens, and he pulls me even closer. There's no longer space between us.

"One night." The two words are a plea. "Let's get lost in each other for tonight, and tomorrow," he says, "I'll walk out and ye forget about me."

I don't know why I'm not shaking my head. I should be. He's not the person I need in my bed, because it will bring pain and heartache. But I can't fight the attraction to him. It's an addiction I've had for far too long.

And I know it may be the biggest mistake of my life when I nod.

**NINE**

## SULLY

I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS ABOUT THIS WEE WOMAN WHO'S pressed against me, but I can't release her from my hold. When she nods, I spin her around and pull her against me once again. She's breathtaking. Her sparklin' green eyes shine as if there's a light behind them. The soft green meeting my dark stare.

When she didn't call me from the rehab, I thought she'd chosen to forget about me. It was only a few days we'd known each other. I didn't recognise her at first, but now that I'm holdin' her, I can see it. It's the wee thing from the time I went in undercover to steal information. She's changed. Her long white dreadlocks hang to the middle of her back, and there's ink on her neck now, a wee clover, just like herself.

My memory is shot, not just from the alcohol I've consumed, but the past few months have been a nightmare tryin'ta find Bragan. He's goin'ta make his move, and we just can't figure out where it's goin'ta be.

I bring my focus back to the wee thing in front of me. I shouldn't taint her with my shadows. Instead of fuckin' her, I should walk out the door to her pub and never come back. I've never been in here before because anywhere outside the club or my flat in the city is bad news. I may have lived here all my life, but my past still haunts me.

So long ago, I had a choice to make, and I chose wrong. As I look into her eyes, they remind me of the past. They remind me of the day I saw the same colour eyes shimmerin' with tears.

“There’s somethin’ about ye,” I whisper, my voice so low, it’s barely audible, but she hears me. I know she does because she sighs. I wonder if she’s about ta tell me a secret she’s been hidin’.

And I’m about to ask her more when she replies, “I don’t know if I’m ready for this, Sully.”

I can’t help but smile.

“Then I’ll walk away. I’m not goin’ ta force ye to do anythin’ ye’re not ready fer,” I remark, remindin’ myself that only two months ago she was so broken.

She didn’t need me, and it’s all right. I don’t have to be wanted, but I thought she’d at least call to tell me she’s found somethin’ else. Need turns to frustration, and I step back. I can’t do this to her. She came to escape her past. I shouldn’t be makin’ her do something she doesn’t want to.

“I should go,” I finally say as I swallow back the last of my drink.

“You should stay,” Clover tells me as she reaches for my arm. “You should know why I didn’t contact you. I wanted to. I really did. But when I got out, well, my uncle helped me with this,” she tells me. There’s a softness to her that wasn’t there when we first met. “And I needed to find myself before I could ever call on someone else.”

Her safety comes first. I can’t argue with that. But seein’ her here, out of that place, has me shocked.

She smiles up at me, and I take a step towards her. Reachin’ for her face, I run my thumb over her cheek, down to her full lips which are plump and glistening. I can’t stop myself from leanin’ in and stealing her mouth with mine.

She tastes of whiskey and secrets.

Ignorin’ my gut instinct to stop this, I run my hands down her arms before grippin’ her hips and tuggin’ her against me. Her soft, slightly curved body presses against mine.

“Tell me, Lucky,” I whisper on her lips. “Tell me to stop.”

“I don’t want you to stop,” she murmurs when I lift her against me. Her legs wrap around my waist, and I look up to take in our surroundin’s. This isn’t a place I want to do this. I should take her to mine. “Through the kitchen,” she tells me. “Up the stairs. I live there.”

“Ye’ve been livin’ two blocks from me fer months, and I ain’t ever seen ye.”

I shake my head when I think about it. I’ve missed her. For weeks after the rehab I thought about her, but then when she didn’t get in touch, I focused on findin’ Bragan. I dove head first into work.

When we reach her bedroom, which is on the first floor, along with a bathroom, kitchen, and lounge, I can tell she’s made herself at home. It’s pretty. Just like the wee thing I’m holdin’ in my arms.

“I suppose now you’ve found me, you’ll have to tell me all those things you didn’t say back then,” Clover tells me as I set her down.

I don’t want ta be speakin’, not right now when all I can think about is worshippin’ her body.

“Do ye truly think I’m goin’ ta be chattin’?”

I drop to my knees in front of her, and my fingers move for the button on her jeans. Lookin’ up into those emerald eyes, I wait fer her to stop me, but she doesn’t.

Slowly, I unbutton the denim, and tug the zip down. Her knickers are black lace, and the scent of her is intoxicatin’. She smells like promises and regrets. Not that I’ll feel bad fer doin’ this, but I have an inklin’ that she’s still hidin’ things from me.

I pull her jeans down, along with her knickers.

“Ye tell me if this is okay,” I say to her. “One word and I’ll stop, all right?”

Clover nods.

“I need ta hear yer words, wee thing,” I command, but I keep my voice low, a gentle coaxin’ fer her to admit what she needs.

“I understand.”

“Take yer top off fer me,” I ask her gently, and she willingly obeys.

She’s beautiful in her nakedness. Even if she wasn’t a walkin’ canvas, she’d be breathtakin’. I press my lips to her knees, then move higher. Her thighs shake, and I wonder if there are scars I can’t see under my touches. I briefly ponder askin’ her about them, about her past, but I don’t. Not now.

I savour her taste when I lap at the softness between her legs. She’s wet already, drippin’ fer me. I didn’t think she’d want me, but she so clearly does. Her hands tangle in my hair, and she pulls me closer. Her legs part wider, offerin’ me access to her cunt that’s perfect. The small strip of hair that adorns her mound is gorgeous.

“Lie back,” I tell her and watch as she shyly nestles herself on the bed.

Her legs splay easily when my hands slip up her inner thighs. Her pussy is wet and drippin’, and I lean in to have my feast. I start slowly as I lap at her core. The sweetness of her arousal coats my tongue.

I’ve never tasted anythin’ more delicious. With two fingers, I slip them slowly into her body. Her warmth envelops me, and my cock aches against my jeans. I want so badly to be inside her. But I have to be slow.

Lookin’ up at her as I tease her body, I watch as she glances down, meetin’ my stare. Her moans are a feckin’ symphony to my ears, music more beautiful than her fingers could ever play on the piano. Or any feckin’ instrument. I move faster, and her hands grip my head once more. She pulls me closer, my tongue movin’ with my fingers as I bring her close. Her walls pulse around both digits. I don’t stop. I fuck her mercilessly with both fingers as I suck on her clit, biting down gently on the hardened bud, which sends her over, and she cries out my name.

My feckin’ name.

“Please,” Clover says as she lifts her head and looks down at me. “I... I want to forget.”

I move to stand, and she scoots up against the pillows. Her body is a masterpiece. I pull off my top before I undo my jeans. Once I’m in my boxers, I smile down at her.

“We can stop anytime ye want,” I tell her.

“I don’t want to stop,” she admits, a smile gracin’ her beautiful face.

I shove my underwear down and watch as her eyes widen. The silver glint of the piercin’ is clear even in the dim light of her bedroom. When I move, my cock bobs, and that’s when she sees the ladder on the underside of the shaft, a series of piercings from base to tip.

Clover whispers in shock, “Will... Will that hurt?”

“No, wee thing,” I tell her. “I’ll be gentle,” I promise. I move over her slowly before I grip my cock and tease it along her entrance. The wetness of her causes me to groan. “Close yer eyes and feel this,” I coax in a whisper as I tease her cunt.

Every time the piercing makes contact with her clit, she trembles and moans.

“Fuck me,” Clover suddenly cries out as she pulls me closer. Her eyes lock on mine. “Fuck me.”

I move to her entrance, my cock already slick with her juices, and I inch into her tight cunt. Her walls suck me in, and I have to shut my eyes and bite my tongue to keep from comin’ too soon. Jesus feckin’ Christ, she feels good.

“Is it okay?” I grit out as I thrust deeper and meet her stare.

Clover nods, biting her lip as she looks up at me. “It feels... good.”

Her breathless words are evidence of her enjoying our tryst. But when her pussy grips me tight, I almost lose it. She’s drenched, soakin’ my dick, and I thrust one final time until I’m balls deep inside her.



I didn't think I could feel this good again. Sex has become nothin' more than an instinct to me. Somethin' I do because it's needed. But right now, it's as if I've died and gone to heaven.

We move together, and my mouth captures hers. The softness of her body and the way she moves is enough to drive me insane. She could turn a saint into a sinner. But it's not me who's movin' after a while, it's her.

Clover arches her back, her eyes locked on mine as she moves her hips, rolling them in time with mine. I grip her gently before flippin' us over, and she's on top. I'm still deep inside her.

“Take what you need, my Lucky girl.”

I want her to feel like she has the power, like she's in control. I don't think she's ever had that. And as she obeys me, her tits bounce as she moves. Her body is incredible.

I recline on the bed and watch. It's better than any porn I've ever seen.

Her head falls back, and her body curves. She looks like a piece of art as she rides my cock faster and faster. I'm focused on her now. I want her to come. But I don't say anythin' because she's lost in her own pleasure. It's hypnotic watchin' her bounce on my dick.

I could watch her all feckin' day and night. When I feel her walls pulse, I reach for her breasts, and she looks down at me with a smile. I tease her nipples, tuggin' and tweakin' them, which sends her over the edge and her cunt squeezes my cock, milkin' me for all I'm worth.

I can't hold back any longer. I empty my seed inside her. She falls onto my chest, her body cocoonin' mine, and her arms hold on to me as if I were her saviour. And I hope that at some point, I can be. Because I'm so fucked, not just physically but mentally. I want this girl.

I've just claimed her, even if she doesn't realise it yet. Because there's no way I'm ever lettin' her get away from me again.

**TEN**

## SULLY

THE APARTMENT IS DARK AND COLD WHEN I STEP INSIDE. I didn't expect to still be thinking about the wee blonde after I left the bar this mornin', but I can't get her out of my head. I didn't think I'd see her again. And I definitely didn't think I'd bump into her only a couple of blocks from where I'm livin'. Fer one thing, I figured she'd gone back across the pond. Not sure what brought me to her door last night, but I can't say I'm disappointed.

She was perfectly beautiful. A vision. An angel. I've never been with a woman who's made me unsure of myself, but she took what she needed, and I gave her what I could. I hope she doesn't regret what we did.

I shoulda stayed, especially after the night we had, but I didn't want to see if she had any regrets. I asked her fer one night, and she gave me that. I don't want to overstay my welcome. She's still gettin' over what happened to her. I could tell from how tense she was last night. It took her a while to let go, to allow herself the pleasure. I doubt she's ever had that before. But I can't deny I'm thankful I was the one to give it to her.

Which brings my thoughts back to the here and now. Focus. Last night needs to settle in my mind for later because I have work to do.

It's comin' up to Paddy's Day weekend, and we're on edge waitin' on Bragan to make his move. He's comin' fer us, but we don't know how or when. Even though we're always ready for an attack of sorts—livin' this life doesn't bring you peace

at the best of times—there's an underlyin' threat that comes with the feckin' Irish mob.

Flickin' on the lights, I head into the bedroom and shrug off my cut before making a beeline fer the bathroom. I turn on the shower to scaldin' before strippin' down and steppin' under the cascade. A hiss leaves my mouth when the water hits my skin, and I plant a palm on the cold tiles as I lower my head under the waterfall of hot spray. When I close my eyes, I think about the blonde beauty. Long, white dreadlocks that hang to the middle of her back, those tight feckin' jeans, and the tight tank top that made her perky tits attract my gaze.

She's done me in. I can't describe it, but she's goin'ta be mine, one way or another. She has a permanent place in my head, and I don't ever want her to leave. I have ta find a way to tell her, to make her see. Maybe, just maybe, there is a chance I can get through to her.

I lather myself in shower gel and rinse off quickly before steppin' out and wrappin' a towel around my waist. I'm late, and Monster is goin'ta have my head fer it.

My phone buzzes on the bedside table. A message from Monster gives me instructions to get to the warehouse. Looks like I'll be cleanin' up a mess again today. I don't respond. Instead, I get dressed and make my way back to my bike.

The rain beats down on me as I speed up the road. I shouldn't be ridin' so fast, but I need to clear my mind. It's been weeks since the new year has come and gone. And now we have to figure out how the feck Bragan is goin'ta exact his revenge. We've had the mafia and law enforcement lookin' out fer the bastard. He's underground. When he wants to hide, he's good at it.

With Monster on the war path, focused solely on Bragan, I'm havin'ta clean up more of the mess than usual. I don't mind it, though. There are times I revel in the violence just because it forces me to forget where I've come from. The stench of death surrounds me, it permeates through my skin, and I exude it as if it were the feckin' cologne I wear.

It forces me to think about my own past. Havin' blood on my hands since I was a wee one has changed me in ways I don't want to think about. But I do because it's made me the man I am today. Takin' shite from arseholes isn't my thing. If I see a bastard startin' a fight, if I notice some cunt doin' somethin' he's not meant to, I step in. I'm not afraid to die.

The day I took matters into my own hands and made the cunt who'd hurt my ma pay fer his sins, I knew I wouldn't be the same again. Once you steal a life, it changes you in ways ye don't expect. But he was the devil, as if he'd risen from the feekin' depths of hell to live on this earth. I pray the moment I killed him that I sent him back there. He deserved an eternity of torture and pain. The fecker smiled as I squeezed the life out of his lungs. He knew he wasn't goin'ta make it, and I knew it too.

Though, I didn't want to admit it.

Ma stood on and watched her son become a madman. She hasn't spoken to me since that day. There wasn't hatred in her eyes. She merely shook her head and walked away. I wanted her to thank me fer freein' her, but she couldn't. I didn't understand it, because I thought she would be safer without the bastard. Even though she hates me now, I'm proud I killed him. He can't hurt her or any other woman again. He deserved all he got in the end.

After that, I walked out of the house I lived in with Ma, and I found my own way. I was the loner, and I was happy with what I'd become. She doesn't know I still check up on her. It's my wee secret. She's my responsibility even though she doesn't know it.

When I pull up to the warehouse, there are still a few bikes parked outside. Monster and Rebel are here, as well as Rev. The moment I step into the large room, I find them staring down at some poor bastard who's goin'ta die today. At least, he looks like he's about to take his final breaths. Fecker is worse fer wear, and I doubt anythin' is goin'ta fix his face after what Monster has done to him.

“If you can’t tell me anythin’, then ye’re no help to me. And you know what that means?” Monster leans forward so he’s right in front of the bloody pulp of the fecker’s face. “That ye’re goin’ ta meet yer maker today.”

I stop not far from the scene before me and lean against the wall. My arms cross over my chest as I watch Monster do what he does best. You’d never know the man has a beautiful wife at home and a baby on the way. He’s violent, unrelenting in his torture, and he enjoys it.

“I-I-I... Please, Monster,” the man begs, but I know it’s no use. He won’t survive this.

He’s one of Bragan’s men, and if Monster had his way, he’d take them all out, which I’m pretty sure he’ll do eventually.

“Who is Bragan workin’ with? I want to know what he’s plannin’.”

I stand back as I watch Monster get angrier. The fecker is a beast when it comes to gettin’ answers out of people. I’ve seen him at his worst, and Bragan has been in the wind fer too long. The secrets we learnt about what he did to Monster’s family makes it understandable that the Prez is so fecked-up over this.

“He has a mole,” the bastard finally admits. “There’s someone he’s workin’ with undercover. Please, I don’t know anything more than that.”

“My club is sacred,” Monster tells him. “There’s no feckin’ mole, ye hear me,” he bites out as anger takes a stronghold on him. His fist slams into the man’s face, and I know it won’t be long before he takes his final breath.

“I’m no lyin’,” the words are spurted with blood drippin’ from the captive’s mouth.

Monster stills, then glances at Rebel and Rev. “Did we bring in any new prospects?”

“No,” Rebel answers, steppin’ forward. “This bastard must be lyin’. We don’t have any new members.”

“Girls at the bar?” Monster throws in.

“A few, but—”

“Fire them. I want them gone. I don’t give a shite.” Venom is drenched over the command from our Prez. We can’t refuse him. The order is clear.

Rev steps forward, and I follow suit, makin’ my way closer to where they’re all standin’. But it’s Rev who speaks up. “Monster—”

“Did I stutter?”

“No,” Rebel says as he puts a hand on Rev’s shoulder. “We’ll sort it out.” The two of them walk out, but Rebel gives me a look that says to be careful. Usually I’m the one speakin’ out of turn when it comes to orders, but this time, I’m leavin’ Monster to run his club the way he wants. I don’t want to get involved in the shite that’s about to hit the fan.

Once we’re alone with the man who’s bleedin’ profusely, Monster turns his attention to me. “You want ta say somethin’?”

“Nah, ye carry on, boss,” I tell him and wait for the moment he finishes off the arsehole in the chair. There’s no doubt, he’ll take his final breath soon enough.

The man looks at me, his gaze zeroing in on me. “It’s you.”

My brows furrow in confusion. “What?”

“I’ve seen ye about,” he tells me. “I can’t say anythin’ more. You will all find out soon enough,” he continues with his cryptic bullshit.

“I’ve had enough.” Monster’s hand slams into the bastard’s face, over and over again, until he’s out. His chest is still moving, albeit slowly. “I want him sent back to Bragan. Leave him in the bar where we know Bragan’s men drink. It will be a message enough.”

“I wonder what he meant when he said he’d seen me about,” I say, still confused at the comment.

“Don’t let it bother ye,” Monster says when he straightens and turns to me. “He woulda said any shite to get outta here.

We need to prepare fer the party. And then we'll wait, ready for the bastard to come fer us."

Nodding, I head for the unconscious body. "Aye, I'll be at the house soon." Before Monster walks out, I call to him. "Can I invite someone over to the party?"

He glances at me from over his shoulder, a knowin' look in his eye. "Aye," he says with a nod. "Someone special?" The fecker has been on my case since I told him about the wee thing I met at the rehab.

I shrug it off, not wantin' to get into it right now. But he doesn't leave. I know he won't until he gets an answer from me.

"I don't know yet," I tell him honestly. There are things I want to sit down and talk to Clover about. She needs to open up, to tell me all those secrets she's hidin'. "We'll see."

"Aye, bring her around. Just remember what I said to ye," he says. "If she's someone ye trust, then she's welcome in our home." And with that, he walks out.

I trust her, aye, but I know she's still keepin' parts of herself from me. I'm sure it's got to do with that bastard she was datin'. If I ever get my hands on the wee cunt, I'll make him pay fer hurtin' her.

And I'll do it gladly.

But fer now, I have to get this fecker out of here and clean the mess on the floor. My thoughts about Clover and what we're goin'ta do will have ta wait until later.



**ELEVEN**

## CLOVER

IT'S BEEN A LONG DAY, AND I'M ABOUT TO CLOSE WHEN THE door swings open and Sully saunters in. His gaze tracks me easily, and I'm frozen in place. I haven't seen him since he snuck out of my apartment yesterday, and he hasn't called, which makes me wonder what he's doing here. I'm not about to sleep with him again until he gives me answers. And even then, I'm not sure I would.

I'm lying to myself, though. This man has a hold on me. One I didn't expect.

"What are you doing here?"

"Invitin' ye to a party," he tells me before slipping onto the bar stool. "It's Paddy's Day."

I can't help but smile. "I know it is, which is why it took me so long to get everyone out of here earlier."

Thankfully, I was able to empty the pub by eleven. Most have gone off to do their own thing. I wanted to be a part of the celebrations, but I couldn't bring myself to go out.

"Come to a party with me," he says. A glint of mischief dances in his eyes.

I look at Sully as he watches me. He must know I'm hiding things from him. But I'm afraid he'll hate me if I tell him. There's nothing more to do here but come clean.

"I don't know," I say finally, realizing I hadn't responded about the party.

Sully pushes off the chair and makes his way toward me. “Please, even if ye stay fer a short wee while.”

I can’t deny him the request. As much as I know I should. So much has changed since we met two months ago in that damn rehab. And last night, I want to say was a mistake, but I would be lying.

I nod slowly, and it causes him to smile. It’s that bright, happy fucking grin that makes my heart beat so much faster. He doesn’t realize he’s doing it, but it’s so clear he has an affect on me. It’s no longer a lie, or hidden away. It’s real. And I don’t know how he’s going to react when he learns the truth.

I respond with a smile and a roll of my eyes, “Fine.”



I SHOULD HAVE NEVER COME to the party. But as I look at each of these men and women, I realize just how beautiful their connection is. They’re loyal, honest, and there is a sense of belonging, even though none of them truly fit.

I watch the women chatter amongst themselves. The party has a life of its own, and as they move together, each person slotting into spaces where they clearly belong, I’ve never felt more out of place.

When I’m alone with Sully, it’s different. He makes me feel different. There are such clear emotions involved, and even though I’ve been through so much, I can’t stop myself, my heart especially, from wanting him. He’s been on my mind since I woke in the morning to find him gone. I didn’t want to admit to myself that he’s gotten under my skin.

But it’s what’s happened since I left rehab that’s been haunting me even more. When I agreed to take on the bar, I also made a decision that could fuck all of this up. Sully glances at me from where he’s standing with Monster, and he smiles.

“You seem to be lost in your thoughts,” Rev says as he sidles up beside me, capturing my attention.

He’s been friendly, welcoming me with a warm greeting and a gentle smile. I want to talk to someone about what’s going on in my head, the war that’s so clearly raging back and forth. Maybe I can ask him for advice without actually going into too much detail.

“There are times my mind drags me away from the present,” I tell him honestly.

It’s one of the few things I’ve come to terms with, and I haven’t fought it. I’ve allowed the memories to take hold when they need to, and I’ve worked through them. But it still makes my chest ache.

“I understand.” He sighs wistfully, as if he’s thinking about his own troubles.

I glance at him. “You do?”

“Many times over the years, I’ve had to consider what I wanted from life. I did go into the seminary for a few years, and while I loved helpin’ others, I knew the church would not fulfil me in the way I needed.” He doesn’t look at me as he’s talking, his focus on the people he calls family.

I’m not sure how to explain it, but there’s a calmness that seems to follow him. However, in saying that, he’s also got demons. For someone who’s a priest and offers sound advice, I can tell he is dangerous in his own right.

My gaze drops to his neck, which is mostly hidden by a small white block of material surrounded by the collar of his black shirt. “But you still wear your clerical collar, and you still help people.”

“Aye,” he says with a nod. “I want to help, but also, I took a vow.”

This piques my interest, not for the reasons he thinks it does, though. “So, does that mean you’ll never get married, or be with someone?”

“Never say never, darlin’,” he tells me, nudging me with this shoulder. “But whatever is botherin’ ye, it’s best to talk it out. Tell him what it is ye’re worried about, and he’ll understand.”

“But what if it’s so bad that he can’t find it in his heart to listen and take in what I’m saying? There are things I should have told him when he found me in the bar. I’ve lived in fear for years, and yet, this makes me more afraid than I’ve ever been.”

I haven’t fully admitted what I’m talking about, so Rev can’t know I’ve betrayed myself and Sully. But he also won’t be able to guess that Sully isn’t just a stranger to me. It’s been years, but I know him. A chance meeting far too long ago has ensured I’m here for a reason, and that bitch is called Fate.

At first, I thought I was going crazy when I saw him in rehab on the other side of the world, but then again, it’s not so far-fetched because I knew he was Irish.

“We all go through challenges, Clover,” Rev tells me. “There are choices we all have to make in our lives. Some are easier than others. If ye’re forced to do somethin’ ye don’t want ta do, then it’s not yer fault. Do ye get me?”

“So you’re saying because I have no choice in the matter, he’ll understand?”

This time, I look over at Rev. He’s just as nice as Sully. Friendly, open, and he’s willing to offer an ear to listen and advice.

I’m truly saddened I didn’t call them when I got out of rehab. If I had, perhaps the war that’s coming wouldn’t have been imminent.

“Who knows,” Rev says. “All ye can do is try. Most of us are in the same boat. Each day comes as a challenge, and it’s up to ye how ye deal with it. Do ye want ta tell me what’s botherin’ ye?”

I look out over the blazing fire and watch as Sully finishes his drink. He’s going to come to me now, and I’m going to have to tell him.

Casting a glance at Rev, I shake my head. “I think he should be the one to know first.”

“Fair enough, lass,” he says as he pushes to his feet. “I’ll catch ye soon.” I watch as Reve walks off. I’m not sure how much older than Sully he is, but I’d guess a couple of years at least.

“Are ye all right, all the way over here?”

“Yeah, I didn’t want to get in the way. I think I’m going to head back.”

I’ve once again chickened out. More because I don’t want this man to hate me. I don’t want to see what he looks like when he’s angry. And deep down, I don’t want him to be disappointed in me.

“I’ll take ye home,” he says. “No debate,” he adds quickly before I can argue with him.

I know I won’t get my way, so I let it be. And as we say our goodbyes, Monster looks at me, his eyes narrow for a moment.

He leans in to give me a hug and whispers, “Don’t hurt him.” Then he steps back and offers me a smile and a nod.

It’s a warning. I’m pretty sure the man can see through my mask. He can see the lies, or he can smell them because I’m wearing them like fucking perfume. Either way, I know that even if Sully forgives me for my lies, the rest of his family won’t. And I know I can’t ever blame them for it.

I’ve made my bed, and now I have to sleep in it.

**TWELVE**

## SULLY

NEVER IN MY WILDEST DREAMS DID I THINK LIFE WOULD COME to this. I was happy on my own. Mostly. But as I look out over Belfast, I realise I wasn't truly living. I hid behind the violence—I basked in it. There is more to my existence than the club. I could have her in my life forever.

But then I remember what I do for the Royal Bastards. I shoulda chosen to be a 1%er. It would have been an easy life, not tied down to anything or anyone. I can't walk away from Monster now. We've been mates for far too long. Perhaps it's time for me to decide. Maybe having a life here in Ireland with the family I've come to love is what I should be thinking about.

Long term, I didn't see myself here forever. I thought that after a few years, I'd tell Monster I'm out. But the longer I stay, the more I yearn for the family dynamic that comes so easily to us here. And I know Monster far too well. He wouldn't agree to it. No, he *definitely* wouldn't agree to it.

I glance over my shoulder, taking in the beautiful woman who's in my bed. I didn't expect to get involved with anyone, not right now. As I watch Clover sleep, I wonder what would happen if I were to ask her to marry me one day. It's not somethin' I could ever consider before, but she's here, spendin' the night in my bed, not hers, and wakin' up in my home. The desire to claim runs through my veins. It's only been a few days fer us, but it already feels as if it's been months.



I wonder if Monster felt this way about Miren. When he first saw her, did he want to lose his mind because she wasn't his? I know he was protective over her, which is how I'm feelin' over this wee thing.

There are no second chances, not in my life. I walked away from a woman before. Well, back then she was a lass. It woulda been wrong for me to even consider bein' with her. I was too old, and she was too innocent. But this is not some girl, Clover's a woman. And as I look at her, I imagine her with shorter, dark hair. Beautiful, innocent. I was just a lad myself.

And then it hits me.

It feckin' slams me right in the chest. And that's when I realise who I'm lookin' at. When we first met, there was an inklin' of familiarity. I wanted to say I knew her, but it woulda been spittin' shite. Now I'm lookin' at her asleep, I realise it has to be her. The wee girl from all those feckin' years ago.

When I walked out, I wanted so much to tell her I'd be back fer her one day, but I didn't. Instead, I didn't look back. I know Clover. I know her better than she thinks. *But why didn't she tell me? Was it because I walked out?* I buried any feckin' thoughts about happy ever after deep down. It isn't in the cards for me. This is my life now, and I can't bring her into it. She deserves to live in the light, not the darkness that's swallowed me whole. She may accept the rough and tumble in my bedroom, but the life of the motorcycle club isn't for her.

I should make the decision. It will be easier than forcing her to walk away. Because that's what she has to do. It's not a choice. I'm goin'ta force her to leave. I've pushed people away from me before. It won't be difficult to make her see who I really am. Once she realises I'm a brute, she'll want to run instead of stay. That's what I need.

I make my way over to the bed where Clover is still asleep. The sheets cover some of her porcelain skin, but her pert nipples are peaked. My mouth waters to taste them, to bite them until she's whimpering beneath me. My cock throbs at the thought.

She's so fragile, but so strong. She's taken all I have to give, and I know she would gladly take more if I gave it. But now the party's over and the celebrations are done, it's time to go back to normal. Or what I perceive as normal. She's a distraction. One I could get lost in, over and over again. It's not a good thing, especially when we have work to do.

A new threat, and an old threat. Both need our focus, my focus. I'm not sure why the cartel have arrived in the UK, but I'm goin'ta find out. I haven't seen them in years. A flicker of a memory slams into me, and I stare long and hard at her, at the woman in my bed.

There's been somethin' familiar about her over these past few weeks. I couldn't pinpoint why, but the nigglin' in the back of my mind hasn't left. Even while I was fuckin' her, enjoyin' her body, it was as if I knew her.

Perhaps I'm readin' too much into it, but my intuition has always been sharp. I've spent my life honin' my skills, and this time, it feels different.

She looks up at me, her eyes fillin' with tears. Even though we didn't talk about what's going on between us, I know she's about to shatter the bubble we created. Call it intuition or whatever else the feck it is. I know when bad news is about to fall on me.

"I need your help," she whispers as she looks at me. "I wanted to tell you last night, but...but I was scared."

Havin' her naked in my bed, lookin' at me as if she's about to cry isn't helpin' my beast from roarin' inside me. It wants out. It needs to know what the feck this girl has gotten herself into.

"What is it, Clover? Ye can tell me anythin'. Ye know that by now."

"He's going to come for me, and he's going to kill me."

Her words slowly sink into my soul. I'm already breakin' all my rules for her. I should focus on work, on the club, but as much as I try, I can't fight how she makes me feel. It's wrong

to want her as much as I do. It's feckin' bollocks to crave her like I do.

I knew there were secrets she's been keepin', and even though I wanted to shake them out of her, I've let it be. But now that she seems to be on the edge of confession, I wait. Holdin' my breath, I keep my hands fisted at my sides. If I don't, I'll grip her shoulders and pull her into my arms. It's not what she needs right now, though. I have to treat this gently. I'm not a gentle person, not by any means, but with her, I'm goin'ta have ta be.

But before she can admit anythin' to me, I say, "I know who you are, wee thing. I remember."



Keep reading for a sneak peek into the next book, Sully!  
Coming to you June 23rd.

# **SNEAK PEEK INTO SULLY**

*The Past - Fifteen Years Old*

Death, the visitor that most of us try to hide from, to run from.

Nobody *wants* to die, but there's no running from what's inevitable.

When I was a little girl, my father sat me down to explain it. He had to because I kept asking where my mother was. I went to school and watched as the other kids' parents would drop them off and give them hugs and kisses.

Mama died and there's nothing we can do to bring her back. Dad tells me she was a woman who came with a force behind her. She was a storm, raging through life, and he was the only one to tame her. For a time.

Over the years, he told me how much I reminded him of her. Now I'm a teenager, it's as if she's a living, breathing entity inside me. Deep inside, I know she was strong. Even after all the stories my father told me, I realize I'll always only have his *version* of their life together.

I pieced together the roller coaster my mother was on while being married to the man who raised me. It wasn't easy. Life never is. The photos we have at home show her as a happy, smiling woman. She doted on Dad—it's obvious in the way she looks at him in the pictures. Each one shows just how her gaze tracks his. They were the perfect couple, until I came along. There was unconditional love there. Pure, innocent love.

There wasn't anything tainting her view of him. Even though Dad has always been a part of the motorcycle club, he was good to her. He loved her more than he loved his own life. But now I'm the only part of her that's left. And I know it hurts him that she's not here to see me grow up.

The men in my family come from a long line of heroes, facing death and forcing it to its knees. I'm sure one day I'll be the one to face death. My father taught me to look it right in the eye and not flinch. I figured I would be strong, that I'd be just like him. And I want that. There's no way I'm going to be a weak person, not even in the face of danger.

He's made sure I've grown up with a hardened shell. Don't trust anybody who isn't part of the family. The men who would do anything for Dad are the same men who would do anything for me. And since I was a little girl, I believed it. I lived by the law of the club.

But as I wait for him to walk out of church, I wonder if this will always be my life. Dad says he wants a better life for me. He doesn't want me stepping up to run the club, but if anything were to happen to him, I know I wouldn't be able to walk away from the family who helped raise me.

Dad would much prefer it if I were all grown up and studying for a degree at some fancy-ass school. I doubt I could ever sit in an office or walk around in heels and a designer labelled outfit.

It's not me. I'm the tomboy who'll be walking around with inked up arms and riding a bike because that's what I've known and come to love. I've witnessed that the roughest looking people are usually the kindest. I'm not saying everyone is the same, just from my short life experience. But who knows what could change in the future.

I've been passionate about a few things in my life so far, but I've always been focused on getting lost in art. My favorite class trips were visiting art museums. Being able to see what the masters created all those years ago is a privilege. It's how I want to be remembered one day.

When I'm eighteen, I'll train with the tattoo parlor that did all my dad's ink. I'll be famous for my drawings one day. I won't work in some suit and tie world where I don't belong.

I flick through my iPad Dad got me for Christmas and find the design I started a few days ago. Crossing my legs, I ignore the noise of the bar and focus on dark lines which are illuminated on the screen. The clubhouse has always been a hive of activity. Even though I prefer the quiet, there's a sense of belonging in being so close to the family I grew up with. They may not be my blood, but they're loyal and they love me.

Each of the men my father rules over would die for me. It's as if I lost one mother and gained at least a dozen dads. Sometimes more when the other chapters visit. Being the daughter of a motorcycle club president comes with perks. But it also puts a damper on the need for a normal life.

Most boys don't talk to me. Most are afraid. My friends all have boyfriends already, but I've never even been kissed. My dad says it's a good thing, that boys only hurt you in the end. But he's never hurt any woman in this club—he's never even punished me if I've done something wrong.

The clinking of glasses is soothing as the prospects get ready for a party tonight. Being of Irish descent, Dad always celebrates St. Patrick's Day with an all night drinking session. There'll be music, dancing, and hooking up. That's what the kids at school call it. I may not be entirely innocent, learning about the birds and bees from my friends, listening to the stories they tell me. Their folks sat them down when they turned twelve and explained what happens when a man and woman love each other. My father has avoided that chat with me, and if I had to be honest with myself, I'm glad he has.

I'm far from considering having a boyfriend. Even though Lindsay, my best friend, has a boy she kisses sometimes, I find it all too emotional. She's constantly worried about her clothes and hair, while I love my short cropped, black, spiky look.

I'm lost in thought about the day when I will want a boyfriend, when the doors finally open and the men file out.

Some of them greet me. Others ruffle my short, black hair. I wanted it like my mama's, black and super short. It's a boyish haircut, but I love it.

"Hey, Clover girl," Dad says as he nears me.

But I can't focus on my father, who's staring at me. Instead, my gaze lands on the person behind him. He's a man. One I've never seen here before. He's standing half hidden, but it's as if he's taking up the whole room. As if he's sucked all the air from my lungs, and he's stolen my breath.

He doesn't smile. He doesn't move. I force myself to look at Dad and smile.

"Hey, Dad."

But when I look back at the stranger, he's staring at the screen on my lap. The design I've drawn. I quickly lock the device and stand. My dad pulls me into his arms and presses a kiss to the top of my head. He's always been affectionate, which is rather strange for a man who looks as scary as he does. With tattoos covering his arms and neck, and even a few on his hands, he most certainly gives off an air of danger.

"This is a good friend of mine from Ireland. He's going to be staying here for the party tonight," Dad tells me as he turns to look at the stranger. "Sully, this is the princess of The Kovenant." Dad is so proud of saying those words. He introduces me like that to everyone and anyone who will listen.

I force myself to meet the intense stare of this man, because that's what Sully is. He must be in his mid-twenties at least. He doesn't look like the young prospects who are hoping to patch into the club. He's got dark stubble on his jaw, as if he hasn't shaved in a few days. His hair is messy, with soft curls at the nape of his neck. I've seen handsome men before. Some are on posters stuck to my wall. Most of them from eighties rock bands, mainly because my father introduced me to that genre of music.

But this stranger isn't anything like those guys either. He's not smiling, and he most definitely isn't bothered that I'm



even looking at him. He doesn't meet my eyes for a long while, but when he does, I see it. There's a darkness that seems to flicker in the dark orbs looking at me. He doesn't smile, only offers a nod in greeting, and I'm disappointed I can't hear his accent. My father may be Irish, but he was born here, so he doesn't have the lilt I've heard on television.

"I need you to go to your room," my father whispers in my ear. "I'll call you when we're done and you can come down for pizza with the rest of the youngsters."

Since I was a child, Dad has always kept me at arms length when it comes to the serious matters within the club. I am allowed in the bar area, but when there are meetings, or if something important is happening, I'm meant to be in the main house. This time, it seems, it's no different.

"Okay." I drag the word out in frustration, and I'm pretty sure I notice a hint of a smile on the stranger's face. It's so small, I would have missed it if I wasn't staring at his lips.

I've not really had a crush on any of the boys at school, but this is not a boy at all. He's tall, quiet, and dangerous, and I can't stop my heart from slamming against my ribs when he looks directly at me.

His eyes seem to look right through me, as if he's seeing my soul.

As I make my way out of the bar, I glance over my shoulder one last time. If he's from Ireland, he may not be around for long. And I might never see him again. One last look. That's all I need. But it's also the biggest mistake I'll ever make because I know I'll never forget the handsome stranger who stole my teenage heart.

When I get to my bedroom, I shut the door and flop onto my bed with my iPad. My father doesn't know that most times, I've been listening in on his meetings. I do it because I want to make sure I know what's going on. If he's in danger, I have to know.

His life is always threatened by enemies of the club, so if he's walking into a situation where he could be hurt, I'd rather

know beforehand. I've spent my short life preparing for the worst. I don't believe in fairy tales, thinking that happy ever afters happen. They don't. Stories are just that—fiction.

Even though I try my best to focus on the sketch on the screen, I can't. All I can think about is the man downstairs. Sully. I whisper his name out loud, just once. And I decide I like the way it tastes on my lips. On my tongue.

I roll over onto my back and stare at the ceiling. The image of him is ingrained in my mind. It's as if my brain took a snapshot, a forever photo so I never forget what he looks like. I don't want to forget.

Perhaps this is my first real crush.

I can't help but giggle thinking about him kissing me. I'm only fifteen, and he must be at least twenty-five. That's a big difference. Men like him would never wait for a girl like me. That only happens in movies.

My life is no movie.

[PREORDER SULLY TODAY!](#)



Have you met Monster? If not, dive into the first book in this romantic suspense series now!

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Dani is a *USA Today* Bestselling Author of seductive and deviant romance.

Her books range from the dark to emotional, but every hero is alpha, and each heroine is strong-willed, bringing the men down to their knees.

She now lives in the UK, after moving from Cape Town, exploring cemeteries and old buildings while plotting her next book.

When she's not writing, she can be found binge-watching the latest TV series, or working on graphic design. She has a healthy addiction to reading, tattoos, coffee, and ice cream.

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