



MARCUS & LANA

# his to steal

THE UNFORGETTABLE SERIES  
BOOK ONE

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INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR  
AUTUMN ARCHER

# **HIS TO STEAL**

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THE UNFORGETTABLE SERIES #1

INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR  
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# CONTENTS

Acknowledgments

RELEASE UPDATES & SNEAK PEAKS

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Chapter 19

Chapter 20

Chapter 21

Chapter 22

Chapter 23

Chapter 24

Chapter 25

Chapter 26

Chapter 27

Chapter 28

Chapter 29

Chapter 30

Chapter 31

Chapter 32

Chapter 33

Chapter 34

Chapter 35

Chapter 36

Chapter 37

His to Keep

Dear reader,

RELEASE UPDATES & SNEAK PEAKS

Also by Autumn Archer

About the Author

*Glenn, for his continued patience, love and honesty.  
Darren, for always being on this journey of life with me.*

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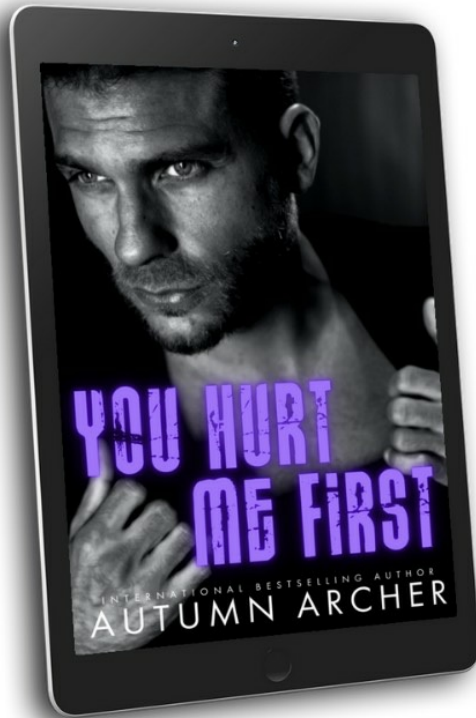
This is book one from the *#1 Best Selling Unforgettable Series*. A debut novella from Autumn Archer who believed she could, so she did.

Autumn writes hot romance aimed at your heart. She enjoys writing stories that will tug at your heart strings, making you reach for the tissues to wipe away tears of laughter or compassion. She dabbles in both the romantic suspense and romantic comedy genres.

*Where there is darkness, there will always be light.*

*For more details, please visit her website:  
[www.autumnarcher.com](http://www.autumnarcher.com)*

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“Come on, babe, it’ll be fun. We’ve talked about it for ages. Now let’s just do it.”

Lana inhaled sharply when Rory banged his fist on the steel door. Bluesy beats flooded through the opening as a short balding man appeared. His obsidian suit blended into the darkness, presenting a tiny bobble head resting atop a crisp pinstripe collar. “Names please,” he demanded.

“Rory O’Hare and my plus one, Lana Craig.”

“Right this way, Mr. O’Hare.”

They followed the stalker man along the dimly lit corridor and through a set of double doors. Her shallow breathing became short, panicky gasps and her stomach flipped. “Rory, I don’t know if I really want to do this.” She reached for his hand but it was slotted in his trouser pocket.

Rory didn’t hesitate, now they were finally here, there was no going back. All the talking and planning, never mind the exorbitant cost. His friend, Ross gave him the ‘in’ they needed to join the exclusive club. All for a calculated thrill of having your perfectly satisfactory cake at home while enjoying a three-tiered chocolate fudge cake with all the trimmings in Verto Veneri. An apt name for the elite club, held in The Fitz Hotel.

“I’ll leave you both with Donna Marie, she’ll take good care of you.” Bobble head backed away.

“Well, who have we got here then?” A tall willowy woman approached them. Her tawny hair was slicked back into a high ponytail with fluttery false lashes framing tiny amber eyes. A fire engine red nail traced over the list of

names on a diamanté encrusted iPad as Rory did the introductions – again, referring to Lana as his plus one. Damn him. They had lived together for over a year and in her eyes that made her more than a significant other.

“Well, love, you’ll have the best craic tonight. We’ve got plenty of availability.” Donna Marie’s gaze lingered on Rory’s well-filled, navy jeans, then her inflated lips curved to a sassy smile.

Lana’s skin prickled, a jealous heat surged up her neck. She smoothed her palms over rounded hips, as her wide blue eyes darted around the room. Unsuspecting onlookers would have no idea that the gathering of suited and booted guests were here for one reason and one reason only – consensual partner swapping.

“Do you need me to run through the Terms & Conditions of your contract?” The woman’s eyes widened in an attempt to raise her neat brows, only they didn’t budge.

“No,” Lana replied, fiddling with the ends of her silky blonde hair that curled at the tips. “Rory...wait,” she whimpered as he trailed behind Donna Marie like a dog in heat.

She led him to the mirrored bar where a solid wall of yellow light glowed like the summer sun. Lana’s high heels dug into the carpet, her shaky legs refused to move. What she would give to be carefree, to revel in the anticipation of events awaiting her – instead, she was jumpy and unsure. A wave of anxiety rippled through each muscle. *Come on now, Lana, you agreed to try this...it’s just a bit of fun. Get over it already.*

Rory shook hands with a slender, porcelain doll who had poker-straight raven hair that glistened with a sheen and teased the top of her peachy ass. Lana could only see her side profile and was in, no doubt, that the fine doll was in her early twenties. Her cheeks puffed as she blew out a gust of air.

*Really? I have to compete with that?*

“Hey!” A hand lightly touched her bicep. “You look like a rabbit in the headlights.”

Lana turned towards the smoky voice of a pixie-faced woman with choppy peroxide hair framing high cheekbones, cut with exact precision at the nape and skin hidden behind layers of flawless makeup. The low-cut lavender dress left nothing to the imagination, ending midway up her spray-tanned legs. Claspings a champagne flute were fingers adorned in diamonds and gold.

“First time huh?” She winked.

Lana's cheeks pinked. "That obvious?" Her lips tugged at one corner.

"Oh honey, you just gotta chill out and go with the flow." The woman's eyes flickered with the sexual hunger of a predator.

"Didn't really know what to expect – just a little stage fright I guess." Lana felt the need to justify her palpable shock as she looked over her shoulder to watch Rory run his hand down the young woman's arm.

"Wanna know a secret? My first time was scary as hell, too, but now I can't wait for the invitation to hit the doormat. It's like Christmas coming early every single time." The-elfin woman's lips spread across her dainty face.

"The men seem a lot older than I expected." Lana scanned the guests.

"Don't you know, sweetheart, the older the guy, the more experience he has?" She inhaled deeply, raising her shoulders to her ears as if remembering a sexual exploit that gave her cause to shiver. "What's your name, sweetheart?"

"Lana." She held out her hand.

"Janice. I'm here with my hubby, Justin." Janice didn't opt for the handshake, she lunged in for a bear hug, finishing with a light kiss on Lana's cheek. "Let me buy you a drink, sweetheart."

She hooked her arm in Lana's, giving it a subtle squeeze as they approached the bar. It was at that point when Lana realised Rory and his new friend had vanished.

Janice nattered freely about her chain of hair and beauty salons. She was quite the savvy entrepreneur, confidence dripping off every word. Lana, on the other hand, was quietly relieved that the conversation flowed around Janice, not that she had anything to hide aside from being a plain old office worker and not a money-spinning mogul. It paid well enough. Rory owned a mechanic business and the property they lived in was left to him by his grandmother after she passed away, so their cash was pretty much their own bar the utility bills. Although it didn't exactly make them rich, not even in the same league as the big earners and high flyers that attended Verto Veneri. Lana and Rory were little fish swimming with great whites.

"Beauty is the future. Every woman wants to look and feel her best. We have multiple salons in both north and south of the border, offering everything, from injectables to eyelash extensions." Janice beamed. "You must call into the Belfast branch for a Californian wax. Men love a smooth pussy." She winked.

“Oh, Janice, if that was aimed at making me feel better...it failed.” Lana slumped down, resting her head in her hands.

Janice clipped Lana’s arm in swat. “Oh, wise up! A young hottie like you should be off sowing her sexy wild oats.”

Lana puffed air threw her nostrils. “I’m hardly young. I’m thirty.”

“Yeah, and I’m forty-five and what I’d give to be in my early thirties again with less wrinkles and more stamina.”

A few gins later and Lana had almost forgotten the reason for joining Verto Veneri – the risky plan to hook up with a sexy hot stranger. Alcohol buzzed through her veins. She felt giddy and lightheaded from both the spirits and Janice’s banter.

“If you’re really lucky, you might even catch a glimpse of the owner, Marcus McGrath. Jeez, what I’d let him do to me.” Janice fanned her face with a napkin and popped an olive between her teeth. “When the club first opened, he would mingle with the guests, but now he has a waiting list of members longer than Royal Avenue. The guy doesn’t need to show up anymore.” She lowered her eyes to her diamond-cluster wedding ring.

“Did he take part?” Lana tilted her gin making the ice cubes tinkle against the glass.

“Not that I know of, sweetheart, although he is well known for his debauchery. Women drop at his feet wherever he goes. And to be honest, if he walked in this room right now, I would fall at his Italian hand-stitched shoes... and unzip his well-packed trousers.” Janice giggled with a rasp, “As if being sexy a sin wasn’t enough, he’s also a multi-millionaire. I’m surprised he isn’t a billionaire by now. They say the guy never has the same woman on his arm longer than a day. He’s a quintessential lady-killer.”

Lana pursed her lips and scowled. “Sounds like an arrogant arse to me.”

A smirk tugged Janice’s lips. “An unattainable, sexy arrogant arse.”

Lana loved how relaxed her new acquaintance was, and how she helped take the edge off the night’s expectations. Janice helped Lana to remember why she became a member of the elite club in the first place. It was harmless

fun.

*Sure, I can do this. I can enjoy myself; after all, Rory has given me a hall pass to relish in a night of wild sex with a stranger.*

The room spun a little as Lana sucked up the last of her gin through a black straw. “I’m just going to nip to the loo.” She pushed off the stool and held onto the bar for support.

“Okay, sweetheart. I’m going to work the room now anyway. As much as I’ve loved meeting you, I didn’t come here for a girly night. I need to find myself some beef.” She cackled. “Call into the Lisburn Road branch for a chat. I’m there through the week for a few hours each afternoon.” Janice stood, threw her arms around Lana’s neck and squeezed tightly.

“I will.” Lana nodded and grabbed her bag from the bar. “It was really nice to meet you. Thanks for keeping me company.”

Tiny lights lit up the long row of empty cubicles. Lana looked at her blurry reflection in the toilet mirror.

*Oh, man, how many drinks did I have?*

Dutch courage spilled into a drink binge. She riffled through her small leather bag, unscrewed her lip gloss and concentrated as the pink liquid stained her full lips.

*Sober up, Lana, for goodness sake, or you’ll fall asleep before getting your clothes off.*

Running the tap until the water felt icy cold, she shoved her wrists underneath. The refreshing chill helped stimulate her drowsy senses.

“Right, let’s do this. Let’s check out the beef,” she giggled lightly as the words drifted past her lips.

She stumbled out of the toilets, her shoulder clipping the door frame. Hands steadied her. “Easy there,” came a voice to her left.

Whirling around, she faced a short, pale man. Watery grey eyes leered at her through round frames. His hand sprung out from a moss tweed jacket, held inches from her stomach, waiting. “You called for beef?”

Lana believed in first impressions with a firm handshake as a must. Show no fear on all occasions, and tonight, she was feeling courageous – but this guy was staring at her like she was supper and was old enough to be her dad.

“No, I said, ‘I must check my teeth.’” A golden pinkie ring nipped against her fingers as his grip tightened. “You know, for seeds.”

“Ah, right. I’m Benny Bingham.” His free hand rubbed over a receding salt and pepper hair line. Mr. Bingham clearly wasn’t her type. Middle-aged

stumpy guys just didn't cut it. He was probably pleasant enough and by the cut of his suit he was rolling in cash, which meant absolutely nothing to her. This guy was definitely not a candidate for a lustful sex romp. No doubt he was just being friendly while on a quest to find an eligible older lady to bait.

"Lana... Lana Craig." She tugged her hand free of his lingering hold.

Benny's beady eyes sized her up, sliding from her heels right up to her long blonde hair. She felt a light tug on her scalp as his fingers gently wrapped a curl and let it fall. "What a beauty. It's great to stumble upon new blood. Is tonight your first?"

*What the hell? Is this guy a vampire, or just a weirdo?*

The hairs on her neck rose. "Umm, yeah, first time," she replied, raising an eyebrow, her lips barely curved upward.

"Perfect! I like bonding with the newbies. You're so voluptuous and fresh." He licked his thin lips like a lizard.

A rush of prickles skidded down her spine, screaming out in a warning. This guy was a creep.

*I bet he likes kinky weird shit.*

"I'll chat with Donna Marie to see if we can get a room together. Would you like to get a few drinks first?" His bushy eyebrows lifted.

*You have to be kidding me? What have I done to deserve this?*

She cleared her throat. "No, thanks. I'm good."

Benny hummed low in his throat. "Let's go upstairs right away then."

Her jaw dropped and she sucked in a gust of his overpowering cologne. "No way!" She stepped back. "I'm not hooking up with you. You're old enough to be my dad. That's just wrong, you're such a creep"

Benny cracked his neck from side to side and drew in a long steady breath. "You won't last two minutes in this place. I'll see to that," he said in a controlled low tone.

“**T**he members list has increased over the past few months, Mr. McGrath,” Gordon, the accountant, announced. “We have an extensive waiting list of potential new clients now. Demand is through the roof.”

Marcus nodded. Verto Veneri was a rampant success in the underworld of the rich and salacious. Money was no object for the club members, who secretly blanketed their shenanigans under the terms and conditions of the club. Day-time facades played out as blissful monogamous relationships, yet by nightfall, the couples frolicked and cavorted with strangers – sometimes the same stranger when it suited. Business deals were deliberated, partners were exchanged, and marriages pushed beyond the confines of fidelity, but most importantly, desires were met.

The Fitz Hotel was co-owned by the McGrath brothers. One of many hotels they owned throughout north and south of Ireland, with several dotted around Europe and America. Marcus, the eldest of the two, ran Verto Veneri which was a strictly members-only club, with evenings announced by invitation one week in advance. It quickly became a lucrative investment, hitting the ground running from the day and hour, the elite list became accessible.

After years of wedded bliss, couples often buried their hunger for sexual experimentation and this way, they could have a multitude of different partners without sneaking around behind the other’s back. After all, they were married, not dead from waist down.

Marcus himself had never married. At the age of thirty-nine, he had zero



desire to tie the knot and have a flimsy piece of paper as a constant reminder. There was point tethering himself by name and legalities to just one woman, not when he could have the whole lot.

“The numbers have exploded in the south, too.” Marcus pointed out as he studied the documents on his desk. “Further expansion is needed. We’ll buy a few more hotels, Gordon. Find me some options.”

“Of course, there are plenty more hotels to snap up, Marcus. The turnover has more than exceeded our annual forecast already, and it’s only September.” Gordon pushed his glasses further up the bridge of his nose.

Marcus swilled amber liquid in his crystal cut glass. “Look into it. E-mail me with the possibilities,” he commanded, downing the whiskey in two swigs.

“Yes, Mr. McGrath.”

Marcus turned away from the gangly accountant, averting his gaze to the streets below. Gordon gathered his papers, stuffed them into his folder and left.

Marcus also owned a commanding portfolio of residential properties throughout the world, including a substantial investment in numerous distilleries where he branded his very own McGrath Gin and Whiskey. He would spend weeks partying with friends on an impulse, anywhere in the world, with no one to answer to. Just the way he liked it. It was just Marcus and Jamie McGrath, doing what they do best – making money.

His phone vibrated in his pocket. “Marcus, we have a situation with one of the new members.”

“What happened?” he snapped.

“Apparently, one of our long-standing members, Mr. Bingham, had a disagreement with a younger woman. She’s new to the club.”

“What did she do?” he growled into the phone.

“She disrespected him. He wanted to partner up with her, but she refused, said he was too old and called him a creep. That violates the ‘care and consideration’ rule, sir.”

Marcus sighed. “I’ll need her file. Bring her to me, and I’ll dissolve the contract. We can’t have this behaviour leaking out. Seal it.” He threw the mobile phone on the glass desk, removed his suit jacket and sat back in a sleek chair, swivelling towards to the night sky.

*She’s probably a precocious little gold-digger, on the hunt for a good-looking sugar daddy. Isn’t that what all women want? Find the guy with the*

*bugling bank balance and reel him in like a prize trout.*

Marcus wasn't that fool. He hadn't set up his club to help women find financial security. The terms and conditions stipulated that couples must have been together for a minimum of one year. Bank account details and utility bills were required as evidence, but over the years, some girls had gone to great swindling lengths to get on the list.

Moments later, a knock on the door brought his thoughts back to the room. A member of staff peeked around the door. "I have a Ms. Craig here for contractual dissolution."

"Have you given her the file with the signed contract?" he asked with his back to the door, still gazing out at the city.

"Yes, sir."

"Come in, Ms. Craig."

Lana held the red wallet that contained her contract, bank account details, medical reports and a confidentiality agreement. Bingham was surprised she didn't want to hook up with him. He'd marched off like a brat who didn't get a new toy. A chill skittered down her spine, recalling his pokey eyes trailing over her body. Rory had no idea that she'd been sent upstairs to talk over their contract. The fact he had disappeared without uttering a word left her a little unnerved. It was so easy for him to slip away, with someone else, no looking back, and no loving kisses to make sure she was okay.

Now she was standing in a luxurious office suite, facing the high back of a chair. Large windows framed the orange-hued sky, glowing from the street lights below. The Harland and Wolff canary yellow cranes, known as Samson and Goliath, dominated the Belfast skyline. Leaning forward, she tossed the file down on the desk. Only an iPhone, a desk lamp and an empty glass occupied the space. The folder skated across the sleek surface, slipping off the edge, each page gliding to the dark carpet below.

"What the..." The man jumped up with the energy of a panther, spinning around to face her.

Her eyes widened like saucers. "I didn't mean for that to happen." Her fingers flew up to her mouth.

*Holy. Shit!*

He was the sexiest man she had ever laid eyes on. A navy waistcoat clung to his broad shoulders, tailored perfectly to fit his solid torso. Poking through the crisp white unbuttoned collar was bronzed glowing skin. Dark inky

stubble sprinkled his strong jaw, shaved hair above his ears lead to a mound of slick coal-coloured hair at the top. Intense emerald green eyes were all over her.

Slowly, he crouched, his gaze never left hers as he gathered the papers. “Ms. Craig?” His voice was deep and sexy.

“Uh-huh.” She nodded, clenching her small bag under her bicep. “I’m with Rory O’Hare. He’s my boyfriend – the one who talked me into this shit.” Alcohol pumped around her veins in a rush to reach her brain.

He raised a sceptical eyebrow letting his eyes dawdle on her skin-tight black dress that was laden with lace to the knees and a plunging neckline hugging her ample breasts. This man exuded power as he stood, legs slightly apart, silently surveying her with a sweep of those dazzling green eyes of his. Her insides heated, matching the rosy pink glow of her cheeks.

“And you read the contract, Ms. Craig?” He lightly drummed his fingers on the paper.

She pulled her shoulders back and let out a soft sigh. “Uh...no, not really.” Her voice sounded strained, holding back her nerves. “Rory just got me to sign it and then told me a bit about the rules, but I didn’t think it was that serious.”

He cleared his throat as she wobbled, her stiletto heels indenting the plush granite carpet. “Do you often break the rules, Ms. Craig?” His dangerous gaze paused at her parted lips.

Lana’s heart slammed against her sternum. Each quickened breath visibly expanded her chest. Swallowing hard, she tried to generate moisture. Her tongue peeked out of her mouth as she licked her lips, tasting sweet strawberry gloss.

Her eyes narrowed, recalling Benny Bingham’s suggestion. “That guy made my skin crawl. That’s not what I signed up for.” With a flick, she tossed a length of hair over her shoulder and stood her ground.

“How would you know what you signed?” he asked, both eyebrows raised. “A contract is binding and should always be read prior to signing. You could have sold your soul to the devil, Ms. Craig.”

Lana’s chin dipped to the floor and she gulped, loud enough for him to hear her swallow. Her lashes fluttered as she inhaled a long breath. After a few seconds, her gaze floated up to his handsome face. His eyes sparkled in the light with golden flecks that glistened like fiery sparks. She had never encountered eyes so intriguing before. “So are you the Devil, Mr. ...um?”

She paused.

The corners of his mouth curved upward in a lazy smirk. “Yeah,” he said in sultry timbre. “You can call me Marcus, Ms. Craig.”

*Ah! The arrogant owner himself.*

She could see why Janice had been so enthralled by him. He was the epitome of ruggedly handsome, wearing a fitted suit that moulded the shape of his body to precision.

“It’s Lana, my name is Lana.” She licked her lips again.

There was something charming and dangerous about this guy. His expression was unreadable as he stared at her.

Marcus broke his intense scrutiny, drawing his gaze to the details contained on the documents. She felt instant relief. Her blood pulsated, thrumming in her throat amidst the silence.

“How long have you and Mr. O’Hare been together?” he asked, still focused on her personal details.

She pouted, her forehead scrunched as she counted the latter few months. “Two years and three months.”

Those enchanting green eyes of his lifted from the words on the page, locking with hers. “Do you intend to marry him?”

Folding her arms across her chest, she hugged her bag tighter. “Marry him?” She shrugged. “What’s that got to do with anything?”

Marcus angled his head, his beautiful full lips pressed together in a firm line. “So you’re not in a serious relationship?” His tone lowered to a growl like he was angry.

Lana scowled, dropping her protective embrace as her hands clenched. “Of course it’s serious, I wouldn’t have moved in with him if I didn’t think it was going somewhere. Not that it’s any of your business.” Her finger-tips skimmed the desk, steadying herself.

An odd look flashed behind his eyes and he rounded the desk in two confident strides. The instant intimacy initiated a surprising shiver. She inhaled the masculine musky scent that came with his close contact and felt tingles catapult straight between her thighs.

He was the devil, and he knew exactly how to melt her into a puddle of desire with just one look.

**A**n unusual feeling knotted his stomach and tightened his ribs. This gorgeous, entrancing woman was in a serious relationship with some guy. The same guy who brought her here, to a sex club and for some unknown reason, that fact really bothered him. He didn't even know her, but he sure as hell wanted to do bad things with her. She appeared out of nowhere. A sexy temptress with an hourglass figure to die for and juicy pink lips that he wanted wrapped around his dick urgently.

"It's my business when you're a member of my club, Lana," he rasped. His gaze never wavered, focusing on those wide ocean blue eyes that reflected tiny sparkles of light. "Tell me what happened downstairs?"

She stepped sideways, leaning even closer to the desk for support or to keep a safe distance from him. "Rory vanished shortly after we arrived. He left me on my own," she admitted. "It's my first time in a place like this. I felt like I'd been thrown to the lions." And now she had been handed on a plate to the devil himself.

His jaw tensed. "The man you consider a potential husband abandoned you the minute you got here?" Marcus expelled a puff of air through his nose in disgust, startled by the blood scorching through his veins like liquid fire.

He had only just laid eyes on her, yet anger simmered under his skin when he released her boyfriend had left her all alone in a place like Verto Veneri; in fact, what shocked him most of all was the intense feeling of lust combined with a need to protect. The edge of the pages crumpled as his fingers tightened.

"I'm sure he's fucking someone else right now, without a care in the

world for you, beautiful,” the words ambled out of his mouth with brutal honesty. There was no need to sugar coat the harsh facts.

Her head bowed and a quiver of guilt shook his bones. "It was all Rory's idea," she sighed, sliding a hand to her hip and repositioning the fabric nestled close to her thigh. "He promised me it was just innocent fun - a bit of risky behaviour that wouldn't have any consequences."

Marcus tapped his index finger to his mouth and expelled a long breath from his nostrils. She looked small and fragile but that fine, sexy body was built to tease. He found himself fantasising about the hidden skin beneath her dress.

"He loves me." She protested with a pinched expression. "It will make our sex life better." The word sex crackled in the air like a flare, making his dick twitch. "I know exactly why we came here, Mr. McGrath." Her ocean blue eyes held his gaze. "I was supposed to find a guy for myself. Rory has carte blanche to fuck whoever he wants but I draw the line at sleazy creeps like Bingo Balls."

Her arms folded in a comforting self-hug and her eyes misted ever so slightly. It was obvious she was trying to convince him, and herself, that she wanted to be a member of his secret sex club, but her actions spoke louder than her words. Her silky blonde strands framed the confusion painted on her pretty face and her rigid posture told him she was unsure, if not a little scared.

*Bingo Balls?* Marcus smiled inwardly, holding back a bubble of laughter that dared to ripple in his chest, blasting shards of light into his caged heart. His expression remained stern, only his lips twitched. An unusual desire to shelter Lana Craig niggled amidst his yearning to taste her luscious pink lips. She wasn't his usual super model type. She was naturally beautiful with sexy curves in all the right places. Her vivid blue eyes penetrated his soul while her silky Northern Irish accent tightened his groin. It wasn't a harsh broad accent like the city girls, but more refined and pronounced. A voice that men would pay good money to hear across the phone lines. His renowned sexual appetite had never been satiated by just one woman and most likely, never would.

*Why does she keep licking her lips?*

"Sit," he commanded. "We need to discuss the implications of your actions, Lana."

He strode towards two white symmetrical sofas, setting her papers on an oblong coffee table, waiting for her to sit. Lana chose the sofa opposite him,

nudging an ochre cushion out of the way. Marcus edged around the glass table ledge and sunk down beside her. Resting his arm across the back of the sofa, he appeared casual and relaxed as he observed her like she was prey. Lana, on the other hand, kept her back stiff and straight, knees pressed together and ankles crossed.

Facing ahead, her eyes darted right, daring to look at him.

“Lana, when a client breaks the rules, we terminate their contract with immediate effect,” he said without regret, “That means they can never come back or re-join in the future.”

She sighed loudly, her shoulders rounded. “Rory spent a fortune getting us a membership. He pulled together the extortionate annual fee after months of saving and working long hours.”

Marcus scratched the shadow on his jaw. “It also means that your...” he paused. “That Mr. O’Hare will not be permitted back either. The contract is per couple.”

“Really?” She spun around to face him, her beautiful eyes glazed in shock. “Rory will be furious.”

He couldn’t care less if that pathetic excuse for a boyfriend was angry. Not his problem. Marcus leant forward, his elbows resting on his knees. “Perhaps we can come to an agreement then?”

Her eyes flared. “Depends on the terms,” she replied before holding her breath.

He couldn’t help but stare at the lace creeping up her silky thigh. “I don’t think you are in a position to negotiate, Lana. I could chuck the both of you out now.”

Who was he kidding? He wouldn’t chuck her anywhere other than on the floor, before he fucked her. His fingers traced the outline of her cheek, catching in her tousled hair. The odd sensation that coursed through his body was like an electrical current, rocketing right down to his dick from his dirty mind. Her head lowered like she felt it too.

“I’ll forget your abuse of the rules, Lana, just this once.” Her pale skin was so soft, even more luxurious than the most expensive fabric hanging in his closet.

Lana released a long breath through pursed lips. As she fiddled with the small bag wedged in her armpit, her elbow brushed his hand. Adrenaline burst through his body and his mouth snapped shut. A growl rumbled in his throat compelling her to stand upright, putting much needed distance between



them.

“Not so fast.” He stood, his lips pressed together tightly. Lana looked up under her lashes, her sweet face inches from his. A dark ring of navy blue circled her ocean coloured eyes and, in that split second, he swore he would sink beneath the surface.

Reaching forward, he cupped her cheeks and forced his mouth down onto her glossy pink lips. Marcus stepped into her trembling body. She instantly tensed, her palms shot up as if she wanted to rip his strong hands away, yet, oddly, she didn't attempt to move them. Her jaw slackened and she welcomed his tongue with hers. A sweet combination of alcohol and strawberries tasted like pure fucking heaven. With leisurely licks, he searched and teased, stroking the inner rim of her lips.

His left hand seized the hair at her nape, tugging her head back while his teeth grazed a path to her ear before finding their way back to her inviting mouth. She hummed with delight, sending an intense vibration into his chest. It was heaven and hell, innocent and sinful. He ended the hungry kiss with a suck of her tongue before pulling back. Lana's fingertips brushed across her swollen lips and her legs snapped together like her insides were on fire.

“Are you wet, Lana?” His lips halted momentarily, a mere breathe away from the shell of her ear.

“No! Of course not. It was just a kiss. Which shouldn't have happened.” Those silky soft cheeks of hers flushed and her eyes glared with fire.

The corner of his mouth hitched up in a knowing smile. “I bet you are.”

She tried to shift, but he yanked her hips into his groin.

“I'm not, you, asshole.” She sucked in a deep breath to manage the obvious lie.

“If you're wet, then I won't terminate your contract,” he taunted, a raw lust lacing his words.

He loved the buzz of adrenaline rocketing through his body as he watched her squirm, knowing rightly she was ready for him.

A soft restrained moan gusted from her lips as the pad of his thumb tilted her chin up. His dick hardened with such force that he swore he would pass out from all the blood rushing to the same place, at the same time. Without warning, he grabbed the hem of her dress and wrenched it upwards to her ass. Slipping his hand between her quaking thighs, his fingers gently grazed the fabric of her panties, yanking the lace to the side. Her back straightened and she drew in a sharp breath. Swiping his fingers across her slick heat, he

inhaled the clean, fresh fragrance of her skin. “Hmm, you are wet, Lana, really fucking wet,” he growled. “And you know what that means?”

Lana's forehead dropped against his broad shoulder in defeat. She rocked against him, secretly enjoying the sensation of his long fingers as they traced her sensitive skin.

*Can I really let him do this? I'm supposed to be Rory's girl.*

Ultimately, the expensive membership was for sexy scenarios, yet this situation felt forbidden. This guy was the owner, a serial womaniser who took pleasure in taking women and, seemingly, taking women who didn't belong to him. Her head spun, the desire to have his sinful fingers inside her was agonising, confusing and needed.

"Please stop," she whimpered, unsure if she actually wanted his gratifying torment to stop or continue.

Her body was responding to Marcus in a way she never imagined possible. The unbearable throbbing between her legs was driving her over the edge of sanity. She willingly melted into his hard body, thankful he didn't relent as requested. A finger finally dipped inside, giving her exactly what she craved. Lana panted wildly as electricity jolted to her core. She never had this heady reaction when Rory touched her there.

"Marcus." Her arms wrapped his neck and her bag thudded to the floor. "Holy, shit!"

"You feel so good." His voice arced through the silence, capitulating tingles from her scalp to her toes.

There was no mission of stopping him now. The need to have his hands on her skin overruled the fact she was already someone else's. His touch felt known to her, like they were meant to connect, to be together, even though

they had only just met.

Marcus continued to pulse his fingers while his lips took hers with a violent passionate kiss. He tasted amazing and his hunger only added to her already heightened arousal. She hung on to him, pressing into his chest. His skilful thumb kneaded her throbbing nub and her insides greedily clenched his fingers. She was rising higher and higher, feeding off the crazed lust that brought her to an earth-shattering release, shuddering into him. Her cheek nestled into the rich material of his tight shirt as she tried to regain her ragged breathing.

Those powerful fingers of his fell away and he tugged down her dress like it was a routine exercise. Her palms rested on his shoulders, steadying herself as she tried to collect her thoughts.

He dragged his wet fingers over her bright pink lips, teasing her tongue, then he raised them to his own mouth and sucked.

“Don’t break the rules, and we won’t have to discuss dissolving your contract again,” he said with a huskiness that made her heart rate soar all over again. “Good night, Ms. Craig.” He threw her a lopsided smirk and unravelled her arms.

Her hands balled, her body tensed. The cocky asshole made her climax in mere seconds and then bid her goodnight only seconds after.

She observed him closely, eyeing his confident gait as he sauntered to the office door, pulled it open and tapped his fingers on the solid wood. His gaze was distant, drawn to the corridor outside of the room. Lana snatched her bag from the carpet and marched out of his office. She hesitated, looking over her shoulder, staving the urge to hurl an array of profanities at him. “Goodnight, Mr. McGrath.” She lifted her chin high and strutted off with as much courage as she could find in her unravelled composure.

**W** *hat the hell just happened?*

He lost his head when that sexy as fuck woman entered his office with her perfect round breasts taunting him in a clingy little black number. He couldn't tell if it was the dress that made her look totally fuckable, or if it was just her. And those glossy pink lips of hers that belonged on his dick... *hell yeah!*

Dragging a hand over his bristles, he recalled the intense sensation that charged straight to his balls when he finally touched her. It nearly forced him to fuck her over the desk. She was so warm and inviting, never mind the heat of her wet pussy that clenched his fingers, begging for more.

Marcus nodded to himself because getting her out of the room was the best plan. Sure, he was an ass for finger fucking her to a climax and then throwing her out at haste, but damn, he needed to feel how wet she was for him. Had he not opened the door when he did, then would have broken the rules. To never get involved with a woman, never mind a Verto Veneri client. He wasn't part of a couple, nor did he want a long term relationship, or any kind of relationship for that matter.

Marcus hit speed. "Donna Marie has Rory O'Hare been successful tonight?" he barked into the receiver.

"He sure has, left a while ago with Jacqueline Simpson. They're in room 505, Mr. McGrath." Donna Marie was paid good money to run The Fitz leg of Verto Veneri. She made it her business to know everyone and everything while they spent time in the club. It was her job to organise each event and chose which night in the month suited best.

Marcus left his office and marched to the security room which housed the CCTV footage for the entire hotel. He shook hands with O'Brien and Donovan who kept an eye on the club members outside of their bedroom antics.

“Show me the Verto bar,” he commanded.

He studied the screen, quickly locating Lana as she entered the busy bar, wandering aimlessly through the guests on the hunt for her asshole boyfriend. Marcus knew Rory was, otherwise, entertained. Lana was alone and the prey of every sex ravenous male who had yet to pair up. He felt an odd twang of possessiveness, or was it just anger at the thought of those parasites skirting around her, hoping to get inside her panties, just like he had. Watching intently, he hoped she would leave, untouched by anyone else.

This gorgeous woman had just strolled into his life, a lustful temptress who filled him with an unfamiliar feeling of longing, like he wanted her, to own her. The only problem with that crazy idea was the fact she was with Rory and Marcus didn't really want to keep her, or any other woman for that matter.

Lana sauntered to the bar, pulled out a ten pound note and set it on the counter. The bar girl slid the cash away. “Same again?”

“Yes please.” She wondered if one more drink would put her lights out for the night. Much to her dismay, she noted the gin bottles were aptly named ‘McGraths’. Now she was forced to think about Marcus again, not that he had left her thoughts since their dirty little encounter. She wanted to put him out of her head, to the back of her mind, locked away in a file of memories that would fade as each solitary second without his lips passed. The persistent tingle between her legs grew stronger with every replay of his sensual kiss. She was so turned on and it was Marcus who had awoken her excitement, making her feel crazy and daring.

Couples huddled in the shadows, sparking mutual interest before racing to the reserved rooms in The Fitz Hotel above. Neither Rory nor Janice were anywhere to be seen. Marcus was right, Rory didn’t care about who she was with or what she was doing. Then it hit her like a steam train. All this time, she’d been consumed with thoughts of Marcus McGrath without giving a second thought for Rory’s whereabouts, or the fact he was currently having sex with a complete stranger. Rory was openly cheating on her, as agreed. After her run-in with Marcus, she was sexually revved up and unbelievably frustrated. Perhaps Rory was right – this could be fun with the right guy. Maybe she just needed to find someone who fitted her brief list... but absolutely not that hot sexy smug asshole, Marcus.

1. Tall but not lanky – *Similar height to Marcus*
2. Dark hair – *He had shiny jet black hair...that smelled of exotic spices*
3. Hot – *Physically attractive and hot-blooded... Marcus was clearly both*
4. Well built – *Some muscle definition would be adequate... Marcus looked like he had them in abundance*
5. Funny – *Was he funny?*
6. Clean – *His scent was intoxicating*
7. Good teeth – *He had perfect, straight white teeth*
8. Below forty – *He didn't look forty...but then age is just a number, right?*
9. Knows how to kiss – *Jeez, Marcus sure knew how to kiss...*

*Stop thinking about Marcus bloody McGrath, the undisputed seducer of all women.*

She felt disgusted with herself. How could she give in to such a man, knowing she was just another of his conquests? He knew he had the ability to seduce her, and that's exactly what she allowed him to do.

After deliberation, she realised that Rory didn't meet her entire list of sexual partner requirements. Yes, he was tall with teeth perfected by train track braces when he was a teen and sometimes he could be really funny, too, but his auburn cropped hair scattered with a shimmer of gold against pale freckled skin didn't exactly fit the bill. His athletic build was more lean than muscular. Despite scoring a six out of nine, Rory was good to her, they loved each other and one day she would marry him. If he thought this experience would be good for them, to grow sexually and bring more fun to the bedroom, then she would go along with it.

*Why the hell not?*

Lana sipped from the long stem glass, eyeing the remaining members. Most of the men appeared well over forty and those who looked younger were in the clutches of horny women. She sighed into her glass.

From her left a tall man joined her at the bar. Light creases framed kind chocolate eyes and grey flecks scattered through sable hair, making her think



he was possibly in his early forties. Nevertheless, he was handsome and suave, in a pale blue shirt that gripped a sporty physic. She wondered if age really mattered in a place like this and recalled Janice's advice on the older man with more experience.

*Is that why Marcus was so skilled and sexy and attractive and hot?*

"Hey, sweetheart." He held out his large hand. "Can I sit with you?"

He waited politely until Lana nodded, wrapping her hand firmly around his. "I'm Lana." She smiled up at him. "Nice to meet you."

"Carl," he replied, "and the pleasure is all mine."

He nodded to the waiter. "Guinness, and whatever the lady is having."

"Oh, I have one here, thanks anyway." She tapped the full glass with her fingernail.

"Please, sweetheart, let me buy you a drink." His lips curved upward to meet his warm eyes.

Lana lowered her shoulders and slipped to the edge of the bar stool. "Okay then – a Gin and T please."

Carl made himself comfortable and talked about his logistics business that focused on the transportation of luxury goods. He owned a fleet of nearly one hundred vehicles, which were mainly based in the UK. Joining the club had opened many doors for his business as well as his sex life. His wife, Lorraine, was Scottish and they lived in London, flying over to Belfast for every secret club night, when they had the time.

There was no sexual spark; in fact, Carl was verging on tedious. Yet on first impressions he was charming with a clean-cut handsome edge. His flirtatious knowing smile and frequent lingering touch made Lana's decision simple. Carl would be a good choice to break the ice with.

"What do you do for a living?" His attention was solely on her as he raised his glass to his lips.

"Stuck behind a desk all day shuffling papers, unfortunately." She giggled and swept the lengths of her hair behind her shoulders with a sultry flick.

The delightful throb between her thighs had dispersed yet she desperately wanted it to return so she could get the first night in Verto Veneri over with.

Drawing a breath deep into her lungs, she exhaled with control. "Do you want to be my first, Carl?" She peeked up at him under her lashes. Her false confidence was fuelled by the many alcoholic drinks that sloshed around in her belly.

He leant back in the bar stool and put his hands behind his head. “WOW, straight in there, Lana,” he replied, his eyes sparkling in approval. “I’d be honoured. I knew you’d be up for it.” He winked. “I love getting a hold of the new members. Seeing it from a fresh set of eyes makes the whole thing even more of a turn on. I’ll go get us a room.”

She blinked rapidly and threaded the ends of her hair. “Okay then. I’ll go freshen up.” She nodded, edging off the bar stool and tugging the hem of her dress down.

“I’ll head upstairs and get ready. Donna Marie will give you a key card when you’re ready.”

“Fine. I’ll see you in the room,” she almost squeaked in a high pitch tone as the reality sank to the pit of her stomach.

“**T**he girl at that the bar, Lana Craig, who is the man with her?” Marcus snarled into the phone.

“Carl Reed. Is there a problem?” Donna Marie replied with a cautious tone.

This was the second call he had made to her this evening. Normally, he let her run the show, without any interference, but tonight he had a reason to check up on the members, or to be precise, a certain female who was stuck in his thoughts like a revolving door.

His fingers curled tightly around the receiver. Lana came here to fuck a stranger. She paid good money for the pleasure and the idea of her actually doing it, drove him insane.

“Just keeping an eye on the girl. I don’t want any more scenes like earlier. I hope you smoothed things over with Bingham?” he quizzed.

“Of course. I fixed him up with another new recruit. A lady closer to his age.” She half laughed. “He’ll be more than happy now. Don’t worry, I’ll keep an eye on him.”

Marcus didn’t give a fuck about Benny Bingham. Not when the oh-so-sexy woman from his office was about to hook up with an asshole - in his hotel. He slammed the phone down. “Where the fuck did she go?”

Donovan flicked through every camera angle until he finally spotted Lana exiting the washrooms. She strutted across the floor with that sinful ass of hers swaying and golden locks bouncing with each step. Her hair was laced with a delicate fragrance and had felt so good weaved around his fingers earlier. Donna Marie handed her a key card and pointed to the lobby. A

sudden thrill jumped in his veins. He liked watching her, without her permission, for all the right reasons, of course.

The elevator doors closed, blocking her from sight. Donovan quickly switched to the next camera which gave them a bird's-eye view of the square space. They watched as Lana tapped the key card to grant access to the top floor. When the elevator drifted to a halt and the doors pinged open, she lingered momentarily. Her hesitancy told him she was scared and tipsy. Maybe it was the long slow walk to the penthouse or the fact her stiletto heels wobbled with each short step.

“Donovan, deactivate that card immediately.” Marcus slammed the desk with an impatient growl.

His adrenaline spiked when Lana readied herself to swipe the black plastic card and unlock the penthouse door. He knew she had drunk too much. When he took her glossy lips before, they were laced with strawberries and citrusy alcohol. The flavours mixed together in a mind-blowing combination that was equal parts familiar and divine. She tasted even better than he anticipated, and those lips were still haunting his thoughts. Now she would be incapable of fending off the crazed ideas of a pervert in a hotel room. That was his rationale for blocking her access to the suite. It was all to do with alcohol. Nothing else. Except the crazed need to protect a woman who he didn't even know.

Donovan's eyebrows lifted. “Sir?”

Marcus flung open the door. “Just do it,” he snapped over his shoulder. “Don't let her in that fucking room.”

Carl Reed was planning to fool around with Lana in the penthouse suite. No way, not in his hotel. Not while he owned the club. And her boyfriend, fuck him, he was banging some woman who paled in existence compared to her, with not a care in the world for her safety.

Lana poked the button outside the elevator, looking back over her shoulder at the penthouse suite doors. This had to be a sign. She didn't want to have random sex with Ken, or Callum or whatever his bloody name was. The only name on her lips was, Marcus. She wondered if the other members needed a spark of sexual attraction, or was it just the thrill of being with a random person that got them off? It must be the act of doing something illicit and naughty without consequences that kept them coming back. Her prospective ice breaker didn't incite any desire, not like Marcus had. Just his name alone made her swoon and her pulse skip.

The elevator doors retracted to her sanctuary, only this time it was occupied. There he stood, one arm raised high, leaning on the mirrored wall, his head lowered. Her breath caught.

*Marcus.*

Her thoughts scrambled and she tried to make sense of why he was standing there, silently staring at her. The man who made her climax with only his fingers and showered her skin with electrifying goose bumps was gazing her way with mesmerising eyes and a look she couldn't decipher.

This same man used his overwhelming sexual attraction to lure her in and then set her adrift. It was one hundred percent consensual, yet she hated the audacity of his quick brush off and the unexpected heat that was now stirring between her legs. She wanted him to kiss her again, to feel the warmth of his body close to hers and in that second, she wondered if he felt the same.

His handsome face wore a wolfish smile, with searching eyes framed by thick black lashes, and his stance was domineering and powerful. "We meet

again, Lana Craig.”

Her heart pumped so fast that her head felt dizzy and she stepped back from the elevator, dipping her chin to break away from his intense spell.

After her second step back, his hand slid down the wall. “Get in, Lana.” His voice was cold and stern.

“Fuck you,” she blasted out.

“Get in, Lana.” He stepped closer.

“Why? Because I messed up, again? For your information, Mr McGrath, the key card wouldn’t work. It wasn’t my fault this time. So, you can’t chuck me out, you...you, brute!” she stammered.

The corners of his mouth curved upward. “Brute? I’ve been called many names, but I don’t think that’s been used in this century.”

The alcohol had made her weary, she put her back against the wall, swept her hair out from behind and flipped it over her shoulder, letting her silky tresses cascade over her breasts. She sighed. “I can’t get in that elevator with you.”

She wanted to, oh boy, did she want to. The throbbing heat between her legs begged her to step inside his lair, only that was the problem. She wanted him more than any man she had ever met, including Rory.

In one stride he was before her with this large hand held out. “Come on, Lana. Get in.”

Slowly, she reached out and set her tiny hand in his. A delightful rush of adrenaline tingled down her neck and she held her breath as he escorted her inside the elevator. Reluctantly, she yanked her hand free from his grip when the door shut and the walls closed in. The air was thick in the confines of the small space, with his musky cologne forever ingrained on her senses as the one smell that would eternally make her heart swoop. A deep desire to taste his perfectly shaped lips both overwhelmed and terrified her.

She cleared her throat. “I’m not going to have sex with you, Marcus.” Her tone lacked conviction.

His eyes narrowed, fixated on the digital display as the numbers dropped away. At minus one, the doors slid open. Coolness prickled her flustered skin. They were underneath the hotel; petrol fumes invaded the sensual smell and made the reality all too real. A set of headlights lit up the concrete car park, reserved for only a handful of guests. A sleek black Mercedes Benz halted before them. Marcus reached forward and opened the passenger door, his gaze never connected with hers.

“Get in,” he ordered.

Her brows furrowed. “Where are we going?”

Marcus fingered his golden cuff link while he took a step away from the car, putting a cavernous gap between them. “You’re going home, Lana,” he said huskily. “The next time you come to my club, don’t drink so much.”

Her heart plummeted, she stared at the car in horror.

*He’s sending me home – not chucking me out. He thinks I’m a complete eejit.*

In the back of her mind she secretly hoped he would whisk her away for a night of raw, passionate sex. Instead, he was rejecting her, denying her sexual need, punishing her for drinking and leaving her dazed and unsatisfied.

Marcus was dismissing a silly girl who tried to play with the grown-ups. Her eyes lowered and she gulped back the lump forming in her throat.

“**W**hat about Rory?” She looked up him with big startled eyes that were either telling him she was disappointed or worried about her boyfriend.

His back stiffened. “I don’t give a fuck about him,” he snapped. “My concern right now is ensuring you get home safely.”

He didn’t get any enjoyment from being an emotionless asshole towards this beautiful woman, especially when she had crawled right under his flesh and was licking his heart with her sweet strawberry-flavoured tongue. In blunt terms, he had to, for her sake and his. He wasn’t interested in fairytale’s or relationship goals, and she was with another man, considering marriage. Those were the cold hard facts. Yet every time she looked up at him with those big blue eyes, a weird feeling ate him up inside and it scared the hell out of him.

It was taking every ounce of restraint to hold back from grabbing her, feasting on her heaving tits, and taking that mouth of hers to places on his body that would make his hard on happy. He needed to regain control and get her out of his line of vision and out of his head.

Lana clambered into the back seat of the car. The door slammed shut. Marcus backed up a few steps, unable to see through the tinted glass. He turned away and hit the call button, waiting patiently for the elevator to arrive.

The engine purred as the car rolled away. An overwhelming tightness tugged at his ribs. His neck twisted and he gazed back over his shoulder to watch the car drive up the narrow ramp to the streets above.



His mouth tightened to a firm line. She was gone and he could finally breathe again, even though the air was better when she was with him.

**T**he mattress sank. Cold skin agitated her cosy slumber. “Hey, babe,” came a whisper in her ear. Lana rolled over to find Rory snuggled up in their puffy duvet, eyes like slits.

“You okay?” he muttered.

Seriously, is that all he could say? After he fucked off and left her alone in the devil’s lair so he could cheat on her with a pretty little brunette. At least her escapade was harmless heavy petting.

She cleared her parched throat. “I’m fine. Did you have sex?”

A slow breath left his lungs. “I sure did, babe. She was a right fire cracker!”

Her heart pinched. “Oh really – in what way?” She fluffed her pillow with deep punches.

“Shhh, babe, we can talk about this after sleep. I just need sleep,” he murmured.

Checking her phone, Lana realised that it was 7 a.m., Sunday morning. Having returned home just after midnight, she had fallen into an alcohol-induced coma. Cursing the gin for her pounding head, she grabbed the packet of pills from her bedside cabinet and snapped two out onto her palm, knocking them back with a slurp of lukewarm water. Rory grunted in a semi snore, he was asleep. Did he look any different now that she knew? He still had those cute soft lips and fair eyelashes, but those same lips had been on some random girl’s skin – hopefully just her mouth. Lana’s stomach heaved, imagining the possibilities of his sordid sexual affair and her lungs shuddered with disgust.

Nevertheless, a seismic shift had cracked through her heart, and she couldn't shake off the memory of last night. After Rory's 'fire cracker' confession, she ought to be seething, spitting fury at him in a green-eyed rage but in reality, she was more upset at Marcus's rebuff than her boyfriend's infidelity.

After thoroughly scrubbing the kitchen and mopping the floors, Lana poured herself a strong coffee, dribbling in the last of her almond milk. The best way to forget a hangover was to clean, with the addition of pain relief and caffeine. The best way to forget the face of Marcus McGrath was to... damn it. The entire time she wiped another surface, his handsome face popped into her thoughts, even when she vacuumed, her mind wandered to his mesmerising green eyes glittered with flecks of gold. She had never encountered an eye colour so captivating and unique before. They were something else entirely, with the ability to reach right inside her.

The floor boards creaked above head as Rory clicked on the shower, it was a quarter past three in the afternoon, and he had finally emerged from a deep sleep. Lana had so many questions to ask him about last night, and a weight of dread sat heavily in her belly. Before they decided to join the club officially, they had discussed this very situation umpteen times, both of them promising to always be honest, no matter what. She had waited patiently all morning to find out what happened with his firecracker, yet if he crawled back into bed and delayed the inevitable conversation, then she would be happy enough to put off a while longer.

Rory bounced down the stairs, a large bath towel draped around his slender hips, his hair sopping wet. "Mornin', Lan," he chirped like the cat who got a taste of the cream and made off with the whole lot.

Her lips slowly curved upwards. "Hey, you, do want coffee?" She raised the jug. "There's plenty left." Knots twisted her stomach and nerves stuck in her throat like flitting insects. She watched him pour coffee into his 'She's Da Boss' mug, which Lana had bought him after a difference of opinion over paint. He relented without too much persuasion, so she purchased the mug by way of a joke to remind him who wore the trousers.

Rory flopped down beside her on the leather corner sofa, tipping his head backwards. His rich chocolate eyes lingered on her face and she could feel her cheeks pink under his scrutiny. She stayed quiet, wondering who was going to talk about last night first.

After a few seconds of silence, Rory spoke. "You okay, Lana?" His voice

was low. “Did you meet someone last night?”

Her heart jumped. “I didn’t have sex, Rory, if that’s what you mean?” she blasted, feeling a wave of guilt swell in her chest.

His eyebrows shot up and he reached out to stroke her arm. “Babe? Are you pissed at me?”

Lana shuffled her hips around to face him. “Rory, did you have sex with that doll girl?”

“Doll?” He snorted. “Yes, Lana, I did. But that’s why we went there, so we could experiment with different partners. You knew that. I really thought you would have embraced it more. I feel like a dick now.”

Lana inhaled in a gust, feeling her eyes glitter with tears. She didn’t want to cry, but the whole situation felt like one big confusing mess. Before her, sat *her* man, who loved her but how could he truly love her when he wanted to be with other women? “Did you enjoy it?” her voice cracked.

Rory fidgeted with the towel, loosening it from the tight grip around his waist. “Babe, I can tell this is upsetting you, perhaps we shouldn’t get into it.” He sighed lightly.

Her temper snapped. “Did you fucking enjoy it, Rory?” she yelled. “You made a promise that we would be honest with each other.”

Rory lowered his eyes, barely shaking his head. “Look, Lana, it was a one-night stand. Of course it was exciting. It’s what we both signed up to. C’mon, babe.”

A tear trickled down her cheek, and Rory swept it up with the pad of his thumb. Grasping her hair, he nudged forward and pressed his lips over the next fallen tear. His mouth caressed her salty streaked cheek, his long eyelashes fluttering as he left a trail of tiny kisses.

“Did you kiss her, too?” she barely croaked.

Rory exhaled slowly, his breath warming her damp skin. “Yes, babe, but not like this, not with meaning,” he muttered before slamming his lips to hers again. His hungry mouth devoured her.

Pulling away, he gazed at her under hooded lids. “I want to imagine you getting fucked, Lana, tell me you did, please.” His voice turned thick and hoarse and his eyes swam with a sudden rush of lust.

“I didn’t, Rory. I swear I didn’t.” *I wanted to. I wanted to be with Marcus McGrath, but he sent me home.*

“I know, babe. I believe you. Pretend,” he whispered. “Just tell me someone fucked you, Lana.”

Her head lowered as he sucked and licked her earlobe. “I can’t, Rory. I can’t.”

“Make it up.” He urged.

The hot tingle that surged over her skin when Marcus had put his lips to hers was glaringly absent when Rory kissed her in the same way he always had. She wanted to please him, to create a fantasy that blew his mind. In the end, they both came home to each other, back to their life together.

“Yes, Rory, he fucked me hard, so hard.”

“Oh, Lana,” he growled.

She opened up the Marcus McGrath folder from her archived memories and spilled out the explicit description of what she wished he had done to her. An intense heat burst over her skin, swelling her sex, driving her wild. She imagined Marcus taking her in the elevator and let the idea escalate, bringing her to the edge of climax.

Within a few seconds, Rory discarded his damp towel, hoisted off her pyjama bottoms and plunged his thick hardness into her heat. Lana forced her mind to reconnect with the reality of her situation. She was with Rory, not Marcus. Grabbing his slender hips, she shunted him deeper inside her. A fierceness gleamed in his molten eyes, forcefully pounding into her, his hand stretched up and seized her neck. Shunting her forward, Lana’s head slid off the edge of the sofa, her vision of the room upside down, his fingers slowly tightening around her throat.

“You like that?” he growled, each finger pressing against the racing pulse in her jugular.

Her eyes bugged, sensing Rory was getting off on his new power kick. Hearing his shallow pants and grunts made her feel disconcerted. This wasn’t Rory, this wasn’t how they usually made love. This time, he was rough and aggressive, minus his usual tender and respectful ways. Panic mounted when he kept his fingers locked, trapping her body beneath his weight. She wanted him to stop squeezing so hard, her throat was closing over, her breathing constrained.

“Stop!” she gasped, grappling with his hand to release the pressure and digging her nails into his skin.

Suddenly, his firm grip released, and his curious dark gaze was met with a roguish smile. She lay there, a little shocked and unsure but allowed him to continue thrusting until he finally groaned with a satisfying climax. Her arousal had shrivelled up and died the instant his fingers had dug into her

windpipe and his face contorted with pleasure.

Shoving him to the floor, she scrambled to find her bottoms. “What the fuck was that, Rory?”

He lay on the soft shaggy avocado rug, his eyes closed with a wide contented grin on his face. “It was just a bit of play, babe.”

Chuckling his towel over him. “Well, I don’t like that shit, Rory. You don’t even know what you’re doing. It’s dangerous.” She stepped into her pyjama’s and covered herself quickly.

Rory dragged the towel away from his hairless torso and propped himself up his elbow. “I wasn’t actually going to strangle you, babe. You’re such a prude,” he said with a chuckle.

Lana stormed out of the living room and stomped up the stairs. “Fuck you!” she yelled. “If you try that again, I’ll knee you in the balls.”

She could count the amount of partners on one hand, and granted they hadn’t been exhilarating or adventurous, but she was no killjoy. She wanted to have fun just as much as him, to feel the adrenaline of dirty sex. Anger bubbled through her veins like hot lava. To hell with Rory for calling her a prude, and to hell with Marcus for not fucking her.

*Next time, I won’t hold back. I want to have a wild time, too but not like that, not being strangled.*

Lana sat at her cluttered desk, a murmur of busy employees simmered around the office. She slapped another memo note on her monitor, 'toothpaste'. She recalled Rory's huffing and puffing while he rummaged through the bathroom cabinet earlier, his toothbrush stuffed in his mouth.

He had thrown together some leftovers and made a tasty omelette for their dinner, then apologised for calling her a prude. The guy remained adamant that he was only trying something new in the hope it would add a bit of excitement to their sex life. After a few minutes of grovelling, he assured her that he wouldn't tighten his fingers around her throat again, if that pacified her. She definitely didn't want him to do it again. It scared the crap out of her and sure as hell didn't turn her on, nevertheless she felt like a total let-down.

Lana read and then re-read the hefty report that landed on her desk that morning, but jumbled words just floated around in her head, interrupted by thoughts of Verto Veneri. She took solace in the fact that her thoughts were her own and none of her colleagues knew that she was day dreaming about a man who wasn't her boyfriend. She couldn't imagine any of them joining the elite club, not even her friend Amanda, who would flit from man to man like a beautiful red-headed faery.

"Good weekend?" Amanda called over the adjoining desk divider, her bouncy red curls sprawling down her shoulders.

Looking up from her report, tucking her hair behind her ear, Lana tilted right, peering around her monitor. "It was okay. What about you?"

Amanda stood, unbuttoned her denim jacket and tottered around to the edge of the desk. Shoving a mass of unread pages into the middle, she perched daintily, pulling her tight black trousers up at the knees. “Oh. My. God. Guess who was out on Saturday night?” She hunched down, close to Lana’s ear.

Lana lifted her chin and met Amanda’s pale green eyes, her porcelain skin glowed with the youth of being twenty-something. She tapped her pen, waiting on the gossip that Amanda so often divulged. “Don’t tell me, it was James?”

Her forehead creased and her thin lips pursed. “How did you know?”

“I can see it all over your, ‘I’ve had sex’ face.” Lana smirked.

Amanda’s skin grew rosy, her low-cut ivory top exacerbating her flushed neck. “Jeez, is it that obvious?” Her nose wrinkled. “Is that why Richard grinned at me like a horny dog this morning?”

Lana’s gaze descended to Amanda’s ample cleavage. “I doubt that’s why he was grinning. Perhaps you gave him an eyeful.”

Amanda’s long fingers grappled the opening at her top in an attempt to heave it higher. Her eyes twinkled under the lights.

“He was amazing in bed, you know. I’ll tell you all about it at lunch. Does 12 noon, suit you, we’ll go to the deli? I have a meeting in ten minutes, so I’ll just see you downstairs, okay?”

Lana flicked her gaze to the bottom of her monitor where the digital clock displayed five past ten, which meant two long tedious hours until lunch. Two hours of mundane report reading, two hours until she could escape the squeaky seat that held her captive at her desk.

Her phone rang. “Lana, a delivery guy has left a bunch of flowers for you. What floor are you on?”

She inhaled sharply. “You sure they’re for me?”

“Yup, the card says, ‘To Lana, we will finish what we started’.”

*Who are they from?*

They couldn’t be from Rory, it wasn’t his style to send beautiful flowers. The best effort he made on her last birthday was a dying bunch of carnations from a bucket at the petrol station. There was absolutely no chance that they were from Marcus McGrath either because he started and ended it all in the space of a few hours.

“You know where my desk is, right? Sixth floor, near the printer, Johnny. Thanks.”



“I’ll be right up.”

Moments later, Johnny, head of security, wandered down the room, his face hidden by the large spray of vibrant yellow roses.

“I’m sure they cost a few quid!” Johnny offloaded them onto her desk.

They were magnificent, with a subtle sweet scent that reminded her of late spring. She checked the small card but there were no initials. If Rory didn’t send them, then who did?

Lana stared at the pretty bouquet for the next hour or so. The delicate petals were much more appealing than the black words on the personnel report. The man two desks down disturbed her daydream when he slung on his coat and announced his plans to grab a beer at the pub.

Having a few minutes to spare before meeting Amanda in the foyer for their lunch date, Lana dashed to the ladies’, her sanctuary when she needed space, mindfulness. Dropping her bag on the wall shelf, she located her mobile and texted Rory,

*‘Hey. What time will you be home? xx’*

Within a few seconds, her mobile vibrated, a sharp instant buzz.

*‘Zac wants to go for a few pints after work. Don’t wait up x’*

And there it was, their life in text messages and Rory’s life with his friends. She decided not to ask him about the flowers just yet, in case they were from someone else. Not Marcus, of course.

She dusted bronzer over the apples of her cheeks, smoothed on and blotted her pink lipstick and finished off with a spray of her favourite perfume. Glancing at her watch, she watched the digits change, announcing it was noon. She slipped into her leather biker jacket, scooped up her bag and flew out the door to the stairwell.

Amanda stood in the corner of the foyer with Richard Gifford, a broody man, hair as black as coal, cropped so closely to his head that it almost resembled a bathing cap. His long eyelashes adorned light grey eyes, and when he smiled at Amanda, his pouting lips spread across his face in a rakish grin. There was a sizzle in the air between the two, but neither would admit to the other that they fancied the pants off each other. Amanda made it common knowledge to all who would listen that she wasn’t interested in hooking up with a guy on a permanent basis, yet in reality, her heart was in Richard’s hands. It was obvious that her sheer stubbornness to commit was killing them both from the inside out.

Amanda flipped her curls. “Lana! Let’s get out of here.”

Richard nodded at them both and sauntered off towards the elevator. Amanda's gaze trailed after his tight ass, her eyes filled with sadness and lust.

She sighed loudly and snatched her bag from the tiled floor. "Right, let's make like a tree and leaf." She sniggered. "I'm starving."

Lana ruffled her fingers through her long tresses and hummed in agreement. "Me too."

The glass doors slid open onto the street and they ambled outside into the balmy late-summer breeze.

Amanda's hand tightened in a death like grip around Lana's arm and she halted mid step. "Holy crap, Lan, look at..."

Her words floated into the ether as Lana's heart thundered in her chest, her skin warmed all over. Parked opposite the dreary grey building was a sporty steel grey Lexus, with Marcus McGrath leaning on the bonnet, wearing a dark blue suit, the jacket left open to reveal cobalt lining where his hand rested in his snug trouser pocket. He displayed the confidence and charm of a man who was used to getting whatever or whoever he wanted.

Marcus strode towards her, hastily closing the distance between them. "Lana." He nodded, his eyes hidden behind gold-rimmed aviator sunglasses.

She gulped. "Marcus," her voice sounded oddly strangled.

There she was, reflected in the gloss of his brown lenses, her wide eyes filled with fright.

"How do you know this guy?" Amanda tapped her elbow, her high-pitched tone stabbing the thick fog that swirled around Lana's head as she inhaled his virile musky scent.

With one hand, Marcus whipped off his sunglasses, slotting them into his top pocket. The sunlight glinted on his gold watch, startling her daze.

*Why the hell is he here?*

"Lunch?" His eyebrows raised and his green eyes called to her, tempting her away from a dull lunch date in the deli.

"Me...Why?" she stuttered.

Marcus cleared his throat. "To eat, Lana, that's all," he said rubbing the short hair at the nape of his neck.

Lana's stomach flipped with a weird flutter, mixed with a resounding yes and a hesitant no. She shifted from foot to foot, aware that Amanda was openly gawking at him, her jaw slack and her eyes darting between both Lana and the unannounced handsome man.

Her startled gaze cut to Amanda. "Can you give me a minute please?"

She bobbed her head and glared in a silent plea.

“Ummm, sure, Lan, I’ll head ’round to the deli. See you there in five?” Amanda frowned, edging back.

Marcus stepped into her, his hand brushed her wrist, beckoning her towards the car. “Don’t wait for her,” he said flatly.

Amanda’s eyes bulged like saucers. “Lan?” she mouthed not so subtly. “Who is that guy?”

Lana gulped when she glanced up at his face. Nerves jumped in her throat and her skin tingled with his overwhelming close proximity. She wanted to go with him, but she belonged to Rory. It was one thing to have arranged nights of sex when your partner was aware of it, but it was another to have a secret rendezvous in the afternoon with a powerful sexy as fuck man who made her wish she was single. Her conflicted thoughts were clearly visible, prompting Marcus to lean in and whisper, “Just lunch, beautiful. I promise.” His breath caressed her ear, showering her skin with tiny delightful bumps.

“Okay, Marcus.” She nodded, tipping ever so slightly closer, drawn to his intoxicating charm. “See you back in the office,” she called to Amanda who was walking away, her head turned over her shoulder to watch.

He led her towards the Lexus LC, its sleek ergonomic design the perfect fit for the audacious owner. Tan leather upholstery cupped her body, the smell so new and fresh that Lana wondered if it had ever been driven before today.

The car purred along the busy streets of Belfast, stopping at the many red lights that were dotted around the city. Shifting gear, Marcus glanced sideward, his lustrous green eyes wandering all over her. “You look stunning.”

There was no way she looked even remotely stunning. She was mentally exhausted after the whole Rory debacle, never mind the fact that her dreams were violated by a certain sexy male called Marcus, causing her to wake up in the middle of the night with a deep ache to fuck him. She felt below power, dark crescents marring the delicate skin under her eyes.

Ignoring his remark, she changed the subject. “How do you know where I work?” Her fingertip tapped the leather seat at her thigh. “That information wasn’t on the forms we filled out.”

Marcus let out a slow breath of air. “I can find anyone, anywhere, Lana.”

Her brows furrowed and her hand drifted to the zip on her jacket to stop her from reaching out and dragging her nails through this hair. “Why did you

find me?”

“I just thought we could grab some lunch together, having already been acquainted at the weekend.”

She dared to glance across at him and noted the sexy smirk on his face that said he knew exactly what he was doing. “Acquainted?” She sucked in a breath of air as the memory of his magical touch buzzed through her body. “Is that what you call it?”

“Well, we were merely introduced. I only got to know a little bit about you.” He gripped the steering wheel.

Turning her gaze out to the bustling streets, Lana blushed. “You got to know a little more than you should have, Mr. McGrath,” she accused.

He chuckled, the sexy sound rumbled through the car and tickled the hairs on her skin. “Are you flirting with me, beautiful?” His eyes fixated on the road ahead.

Lana clenched her palms. “No, I am not.” Her tone was sharp. “Where are you taking me?”

“Back to my apartment, I have lunch waiting for us.”

She expelled a short puff of air through her nose. “A bit presumptuous, don’t you think?”

“Even if you didn’t accompany me, I still have to eat.”

“And the flowers, were they from you too?” she asked.

His brow creased. “Flowers?”

“Yeah. The yellow roses that came to my office earlier. Were they from you?”

He half shrugged. “Sorry, Lana. I didn’t send you any flowers. They must be from your not-so-better-half.” A slow smirk curled up the corner of his mouth like he was proud of himself for the quip.

Lana sucked in her lower lip. Rory had clearly made a concerted effort to make up for nearly choking her to death and having sex with someone else. Yet there she was, asking the hot stranger whose car she was in if he was responsible for the thoughtful gesture. The truth was, Lana wished Marcus had sent them. A twinge of disappointment pinched her heart.

The tips of his fingers tapped the leather steering wheel. “You would know if I sent you flowers, Lana. Your whole office would be filled with them. A woman like you deserves more than a few roses stuffed in cellophane. I would buy you a whole field of flowers. Anyway, you belong to someone else, so it wouldn’t be appropriate for me to send you flowers.” His

shoulders raised to his chin with an air of nonchalance.

Her head jerked back and she let out a girly giggle. “Oh really – no flowers, but taking me back to your apartment in the middle of the day to grab lunch *is* appropriate?”

Marcus hummed in the back of his throat. The delightful sound vibrated in her chest and made her lips stretch wide with an uncontrollable grin.

“Look, beautiful, I said lunch, and that’s exactly what I meant.”

*Damn. Damn. Damn.*

**T**hey arrived in the Titanic Quarter, alongside a sweeping curve of glass-fronted apartments. He buzzed the intercom and advised the receptionist that he required entry to the basement car park. The slow descent brought them near to the elevator doors, he parked the car, jumped out and jogged around to open the passenger door. Offering his hand, she latched on, and he hoisted her out of the low seat, pulling her body close to his. Marcus lingered a fraction of a second longer than he should, then stepped back and slammed the car door shut.

The elevator stank of polish until the doors slid shut and all he could smell was the dominating heady scent of Lana Craig. She remained at one side and Marcus at the other. With her eyes low, she didn't look at him. The air crackled like a lightning storm and he found himself wishing he would touch her all over again.

Marcus hadn't been able to think about anything else since he watched her leave Verto Veneri almost two days ago. She was a vision of natural beauty, with her creamy soft skin, enticing loose bed head curls and her mind blowing, tantalising taste. He lay awake at night, replaying the idea of her hypnotic blue eyes gazing upwards while she licked and sucked him. It was a rash decision to bring her to his city crash pad when she clearly belonged to another guy. The truth was, he had to see her again, if only to banish the unusual feeling of permanent arousal that aggravated him every time Lana sashayed into his mind.

Women were indispensable, that's the way it had always been, yet this woman drew him closer with her sweet smile and killer body. He half hoped

she would be really annoying or have a bad habit that would rule her out in two seconds flat. He sighed inwardly, doubting Lana would do anything to irritate him.

But he had to find out, once and for all.

The top floor apartment was light and airy, decorated in muted tones, with ceiling-to-floor windows drawing the Belfast Lough and the distant Isle of Scotland into the room like a magnificent painting.

After tossing his keys in a small leather-clad tray on the otherwise empty console table, Marcus strolled across the reflective tiles, towards the extensive open-plan kitchen. On top of the white marble counter sat two bowls, two crystal glass flutes and a golden magnum of champagne decorated with a black ace of spades, submerged in a clear ice bucket. The rest of the surfaces lay bare, apart from a black coffee machine.

He just wanted to have lunch with her – that's all.

Lana's eyes were drawn to the beauty that lay outside. She adored nature and the feeling of freedom that enveloped her while she absorbed its beguiling splendour. If truth be told, she hated living in a cramped townhouse with a measly concrete yard at the back. Its only saving grace was the view of the sea to the front. The same view that Marcus looked out upon from this very room.

The pallid furniture sat neatly, organised with Feng Shui precision. The main sofa placed alongside a solid wall avoided the impressive windows, allowing the natural light to flood the entire space. An opulent mirror captured the outer landscape, drawing it into the blank room. There were no family photos, soft furnishings or space-filling objects that offered a sense of his character.

Lifting the golden bottle, Marcus popped the cork. "Champagne?" he asked, interrupting her visual inspection.

She realised he had removed his suit jacket, leaving only his waistcoat and crisp white shirt on display. Something unknown pulled her towards him, he was magnetic.

"I shouldn't really, I need to be back in the office before two." Lana wandered through the space, stopping a few steps away from him, unable to trust herself if she was any closer.

"It will go nicely with your lunch, Lana, one drink and one meal, then I will drop you back." He poured the sparkling liquid, nodding to her as he pulled out a bar stool, summoning her to sit. "I hope you like Crayfish Linguine."



She watched him simmer water in a copper pan while warming a rich creamy sauce. He looked very much at home in the kitchen. Comfortable and sexy as hell. Once the linguine was al dente, he combined the two, dishing it between the bowls.

A proud smile graced his lips. "Eat up, beautiful." He nudged a bowl towards her and slid a fork across the space between them. His hand hesitated, she reached for the cool stainless steel letting her fingertips brush his in the exchange. Sucking in, she retracted the fork like he had just injected her with adrenaline.

Her mouth watered as the pasta wrapped around her fork. "Ummmm," she crooned. "This is divine. Did you make the sauce?"

He cleared his throat. "Not this time. I love to cook, but generally, I don't have the time, so my chef does it all. He prepares dishes in advance and freezes them for me, depending on where I am in the world."

Her eyebrows lifted. "He goes with you when you leave the country?"

"Mostly, he loves travelling, so it suits him. I pay well, too."

A strand of linguine skimmed her chin, the sauce clinging in a pearl of creaminess below her lips. His eyes widened as her tongue darted free from her lips, missing the majority of the mess. In a flash, he reached forward and swiftly wiped away the remnants. Without hesitation he licked it off his thumb. Her pulse jumped and her startled gaze cut to the bowl.

She could feel the rush of heat warm her cheeks as she fought off the tingles spreading through her body, torturing her with suggestions. "So...you like to cook?" She willed herself not to stammer, searching her scrambled mind for something to say, anything other than what she was really thinking.

"I learnt how to cook when I was young. My dad worked long hours, so I made sure he had a hot meal at the end of the day." He rose, opened the fridge and returned to the kitchen island with a bottle of water. "Want some?"

Her forehead creased. "Aren't you having champagne? It's the nicest I've ever had."

"Not when I have to get behind the wheel with precious cargo in the passenger seat," he said huskily, his right eye subtly winking at her. "I buy cars to enjoy them, not to let someone else drive them on my behalf. If I'm out for the night or on business trips, then I call my driver."

Marcus angled his head as her eyes drifted up to meet his.

"Where was your mother?" She stabbed the pasta.

His expression tightened and his eyes closed momentarily like he was

debating his answer. When they blinked open, she saw a hint of sadness flash behind the stunning shade of green.

“She died when I was nine, I took care of my brother, Jamie, and my dad as much as I could.”

The fork clanked against the bowl and her hands curled, restraining herself from reaching out to him.

“I’m sorry to hear that, Marcus.” She sipped the champagne. “I’ve been blessed to have had both parents all my life. Granted they uprooted and moved to France, but they’re only a phone call away.” Her nails traced the rim of her glass. “So why did you invite me to lunch?” She threw him a dubious look.

His shoulders pulled back as if removing himself from the past and stepping into a business meeting. “I wanted to get to know you and discuss your reasons for joining the club,” his voice was deep and raspy. “Are you not satisfied with your current partner?”

Her cheeks burned hot. “That’s kind of personal, don’t you think?”

“Agreed,” he replied, popping a tiny piece of crayfish into his mouth, chewing and swallowing, “Would it be easier for you to answer the question if we knew each other a little better?”

“I guess so.” The corners of her mouth tugged and she shifted a little closer.

Clasping his hands together on the counter, his professional manner anticipated a negotiation. “Well, you already know a little about my mother – so what else would you like to know before you answer my questions?”

She didn’t feel it was right to pry into his mother’s untimely death just yet, the sadness from his eyes had quickly dissolved, hidden behind a wall that she so desperately wanted to climb over, but now wasn’t the right time.

“Do you actually live here?” Her gaze followed the clean lines around the adjoining rooms. “It’s really nice here, but it’s like a show home, soulless and un-lived in.”

“I only stay here when I’m in the city on business. This isn’t my home.” He tilted back and slotted his hands behind his head, forcing the fabric of his shirt to tighten around his wide biceps.

Her breathing stuttered. “Why not stay in one of your hotels?”

Marcus returned his hands to the counter and grabbed the ice-cold bottle of champagne, refilling her glass to the top. “It becomes monotonous when staff constantly run around trying to impress all the time. I find it puts

management under pressure and irritates me. They need to focus on providing superior service to the guests, not faffing around me. I like to get away from business and shut the door on it when I need to.”

Swallowing the refreshing heady nectar, Lana blinked slowly. “A guy like you needs space?” She laughed, a sceptical eyebrow slid up.

A hint of amusement curled his lips upward. “Does that surprise you, beautiful?”

Her insides flipped when he called her beautiful and she wondered if he actually meant it, or if he called every woman beautiful. “I just thought you would always enjoy company.”

“Company?”

“You know – women. Your reputation precedes you, Marcus.” Her shoulders lifted to her ears and she chased food around the bowl.

“And what would you know of my reputation? Have you been investigating me, Lana? I’m flattered.”

“Oh...I, I,” she stuttered, “I wasn’t looking you up or anything, someone told me on Saturday night that you’ve had more women than hot dinners.”

“And you believe everything you hear, beautiful?” He laughed. “I’ve had my fair share of the ladies, that’s true, but my reputation has been somewhat embellished over the years. I even heard that I have a shark in a swimming pool.” He rolled his eyes and puffed air down his nose. “I’m certainly not cruel to animals.”

Lana’s head swirled with the champagne. “I’m glad to hear it, Marcus. I’m a huge fan of animals, including sharks. I would’ve been forced to change my opinion of you.”

“Interesting. What is your opinion of me, Lana?” His eyes narrowed, dawdling on her lips, waiting for her response.

“Well, a handsome guy like you can have your choice of any woman he chooses, from anywhere in the world. I would say you’re a very spoiled man, Mr. McGrath.”

“Handsome indeed. Wow, Lana, some would say you are flirting with me,” he laughed with a deepness that reverberated delightfully through her body.

She bit back a giggle and took a steadying gulp of the champagne. “Maybe I am.” The words were so silent that she doubted he heard them.

Marcus let out a slow deep breathe. “I have my fun. Anyway, I don’t believe in love and marriage.”

His bold statement knocked the wind from her lungs. Marcus wasn't interested in relationships or commitment. A strange swirl of disappointment nipped her heart and instantly her eyes dropped, and her smile slipped away. For some odd reason she was devastated by his revelation, yet Marcus wasn't hers, hell, she wasn't even his. But hearing him say those words out loud was like a knife jabbing into her gut.

Looking down at her lunch, she pushed the almost empty bowl forward, clanking the fork in after. "That was delicious, Marcus, but I really should get back to the office now."

**M**arcus noted a subtle flare as her pupils dilated, almost blackening out the dazzling blue, then rapidly contracting. Had he blinked, he would have missed it.

It was true, he didn't believe in love and never put himself in its path, purposefully extracting his emotions from the equation during every female encounter. Love was just unnecessary nonsense that got in the way of having a good time. He did, however, love his wonderful, kind mother, more than anything in the world, and when she was ripped away from him at such a tender age, his world ruptured. Over the years, Marcus ultimately taught himself to numb the feelings that haunted him every day thereafter. Fuck feelings. They were just a mash of unacceptable emotions that made you weak and susceptible to pain.

Growing up as a teen, he focused on making money, building the McGrath Empire and welcoming his younger brother, Jamie, to the helm when he was old enough to understand the art of making millions. He indulged in women for fun, answering a primal need, never letting them get close enough to ignite any feelings. The few women who he consciously decided to fuck became an irritation. He got tired of their demands and constraints. He was always more than respectful and straight to the point when he grew bored of them.

Yet here he was, with a woman in his personal space, discussing elements of his private life, with a burning need to know everything about her. Marcus could have anything he wanted, and right now, he wanted Lana. Unfortunately, she was with a guy who didn't appreciate her and his half

assed plan to banish his overwhelming Lana arousal was failing drastically.

A fleeting thought of her climbing on top of the counter and crawling towards him like a naughty kitty made his dick strain against his trousers.

He stood, his mouth formed a tight straight line and his brow creased. “Thank you for joining me for lunch, Lana, I’ll take you back now.” He turned away from her, repositioned the hardness in his trousers and scooped up his suit jacket.

Lana took a deep breath and slid off the stool. She felt utterly perplexed.

*Why the hell did Marcus randomly appear outside my office, bring me here for lunch and then quiz me about joining Verto Veneri? Why did I come with him, more to the point?*

Her head spun and heart bucked when she realised they would be apart again.

As she ambled towards the door, words began to rush out of her mouth like they had a mind of their own and a mission to get her in trouble. “It was all Rory’s idea. He wanted to join the club,” she spurted. “I didn’t at first, but then he talked me around to the idea. He sold it to me as thrill, for both of us, but when I arrived on Saturday night, there was no one of interest. Until I met...” her words broke away.

“Until you met who?”

*Stop talking!*

She had said too much, way too much. Surely it was obvious she held back the name because it was his. It wasn’t appropriate to tell Marcus she wanted him or that she dreamt about every minute of the day. There was no way on earth she would tell a womaniser that she was attracted to him. Anyway, she had to get back to the office – to her home – to her boyfriend.

Inhaling deeply, she strode across the room to the exit. “I can’t say. It doesn’t matter,” she mumbled.

Lana sensed his approach, feeling his sudden closeness from behind, initiating excitement that was bordering on dangerous. She spun around, hair

whipping her shoulders, to find his body next to hers. Prickles surged across her scalp, rocketing down her back. She gazed into his hooded eyes. This situation was wrong, all wrong. It wasn't partner swapping, it was plain old cheating.

She swallowed hard, biting back the flutters in her throat. "I need to go, Marcus, or I'll get in trouble with my manager."

His fingers brushed down her arm. The electricity sparking between them ignited wild desires.

"I need to know if you really want to marry him." His hot breath caressed the side of her face.

"I can't answer that right now," her words tripped out through ragged breaths. "I don't know anymore."



**M**arcus stood back, the devil on his shoulder coaxing him to take her, bite her hard nipples and feast on her warm, wet slit. Deep in the darkest part of his mind, he was fucking her relentlessly, spurred on by her pleased screams. A pang of guilt broke through his consciousness. If they were going to fuck, it would have to be under the roof of Verto Veneri, cloaked in the T&Cs that made it perfectly acceptable to have sex outside of her relationship. He had to fuck her, one way or another, and rid himself of the unwelcome feelings. That way he could move on, done and dusted, all avenues explored and satisfied.

Leaving the apartment, he drew an invisible boundary, keeping Lana at arm's length for his own sanity.

Neither said a word during the ten-minute car journey. The suffocating silence was thick with lust. Her fidgety hands, smoothing over her thighs, made him think she felt it too.

*Ummm, those thighs deserved to be parted and draped around his neck.*

He stopped outside her office and rounded the car to open her door. Taking her hand, he helped her out, steadying her with a light hand to the waist. Her eyes searched his with an emotion he didn't want to find, until she dropped his hand. With his palm pressed to the dip of her lower back, inches from her sexy ass, he escorted her to the sliding doors. Towering above her, he leant down and kissed her temple. "Have a good day, beautiful."

Her lips barely moved. She just gazed up at him with those ocean blue eyes, all sexy and seductive like a fucking silent siren amidst the raucous unethical thoughts in his head. He nodded and turned away, without looking

back.

Guilt flooded him as he marched to his Lexus, slamming the car door behind him. Yanking the seatbelt over his shoulder, he readied himself to press down on the accelerator, but he glanced out the side window instead. The double doors had clamped shut in front of her face, yet she remained in the same spot where he had left her. Sunlight bounced off the glass, reflecting on her body in shards of coloured light that highlighted her provocative curves. Her luminous appearance was almost ethereal, yet she looked lost.

In that instant, Marcus wanted to be the one to find and keep her.

**W**ednesday arrived with a black envelope on the doormat. Lana sliced it open with a knife and pulled out the matching card with golden cursive script.

*You are invited to attend Verto Veneri  
Friday, 25 August, 8 p.m.*

Oh. My. God. She wasn't ready for this. It was too soon after her recent experience.

Rory had pulled an all-nighter on Monday night, after drinks with Zac, he weighed in at 2 a.m. in the morning, but last night, he didn't bother to come home at all. The perks of owning a workshop and employing several mechanics meant the start times were optional as long as someone else was there to pick up the slack. Rory used to party hard when they first dated, but as time went on and they settled into a relationship, he came home from work more often than he went out. Lately, he began to rekindle his partying ways. Lana texted him while she waited for the bus to work.

*Hey – another invitation to Verto for this Friday!*

*Aren't they supposed to be monthly?????*

There was no reply. She knew his routine by now. He had probably crashed on Zac's sofa in a drink coma, to return to the land of the living by noon.

The bus sped up the motorway, giving Lana time to muddle over the invitation. Could she really return to The Fitz? It might mean she would see Marcus again. That wasn't a good idea, but it was certainly making her heartbeat race and her mind wander. She reprimanded herself for the excitement coursing through her veins when she let herself daydream about the mysterious Mr. McGrath.

No, she needed to stay away from his sexual temptation. It wasn't fair on Rory. No matter what, she couldn't cheat on him, even though it would be hidden under the terms of the club. The fact was, she lusted after Marcus, way too much and she was certain that one more taste would be her downfall. The man had the power to excite and thrill... and then ruin her.

With the new night in Verto Veneri looming, she decided to leave work early and visit her new friend, Janice, in the beauty salon.

Packing away her stationary, to prevent Magpie Marty from stealing it, she heard Amanda clip-clopping down the room.

"I haven't had a chance to talk to you yet, Lana Craig. I've been stuck in meetings." She looked down as Lana locked her cabinet. "Where do you think you're going?" Amanda slammed her notebook down on the desk.

"I'm taking a half day. I have an appointment with the beautician." Lana only half lied.

"Who the hell was that sex on legs the other day? Where have you been hiding him? Are you and Rory over?" Amanda blasted out all in one breath.

"Rory and I are most definitely not over. That's just some guy." Lana nibbled her lower lip.

Amanda's fiery red curls bounced like tight springs as she shook her head. "Some fuckin' guy, Lan? Really? It looked like you were going to jump each other's bones. I felt like a right gooseberry. You better watch yourself, girl. It never ends well when infidelity seeps out of the woodwork."

Lana lowered her eyes. She knew exactly why Amanda was angry. Her parents divorced when she was fifteen, putting her amidst a battlefield. It was a very traumatic time, resulting in her non-committal, blasé attitude towards relationships.

Lana rubbed her friend's arm. "I know, it's just Rory and I have got ourselves into something, and I don't know if I can get out of it," she lowered her voice. "I'm really confused."

"Tell me it's not drugs, Lan, please," Amanda begged.

Lana shook her head and held up her hands. "Hell no, of course not. Drugs are for losers and all that, I'm not an eejit."

If she was forced to think about her predicament, she would reconsider her response. Sexual attraction was an intoxicating drug. Marcus was a drug, and she was addicted, even though she didn't know him. There was something about Marcus McGrath that sucked her in, made her feel alive and left her wanting more.

Amanda rested her hands on her narrow hips. "That guy reeks of heartbreak, girl. Please be careful. He looks familiar though, where did you meet him?"

Lana pushed in her chair and walked to the stairwell, with Amanda hot on her heels. "He owns a few hotels. He's called Marcus McGrath." Her heartbeat fluttered when she said his name out loud, like she was accepting him into her life.

Slapping her hands together, Amanda gasped then pressed a fanned palm to her breastbone. "McGrath? Like, thee McGrath, multimillionaire business man? The biggest playboy north of the border – any border."

"That's the one," Lana replied, her eyes drifting to the ceiling to stop tears forming.

"Oh shit, Lana, you fancy him, don't you?"

"I'm with Rory." The words stuck in her throat.

Amanda pursed her lips and crossed her arms over her chest like a mother waiting on the truth from her child. "That's not what I asked, Lana. Do you like McGrath?"

Exhaling a slow deep breath, Lana shunted open the stairwell door with her shoulder. "I barely know him," she paused, "but I'm inexplicably drawn to him. When I'm near him, I can't even think straight."

Shoving her foot between the closing door and the frame, Amanda poked her head through the gap. "You need to be honest with yourself, Lan, then you need to be honest with Rory." Her expression was stern but there was kindness lurking behind her eyes.

"I love Rory," Lana protested.

"But are you *in* love with him?"

There was no easy answer to that question. Before meeting Marcus she would have chanted a resounding 'yes', but now she had no idea if it was true love or if it was just the comfort of being with someone.

Janice threw her arms around Lana, air-kissing both cheeks and pulling her by the hands into the back office.

“So good to see you again, sweetheart,” she cooed, fixing a strand of Lana’s hair. “Are you here for a wax?”

Lana pulled the invitation from her bag. “Not this time, but thanks. Did you get one of these?” she whispered, looking back to ensure the door was shut.

Janice balanced on the edge of a plush lilac chair and opened the top drawer of her desk. “I certainly did. I nearly fainted.” She lifted out a pearly pink diary and leafed through the pages. “I’ve checked and there has never been an event planned a week apart.”

Lana returned the black card to the safety of her bag. “Who sets the dates? Who arranges the events?”

“As far as I’m aware, that’s Donna Marie’s job, but I guess Marcus has the overall say. He must have good reason to have another one so soon and in the same hotel. Perhaps he’s testing the water for more frequent times to accommodate the growing number of members.” She patted her lips with a long sparkly nail. “Anyway, who cares, as long we get some extracurricular bedroom activity.” Janice winked, sporting a mischievous smile on her thin puce-stained lips.

Setting her bag on a velvet chaise lounge, Lana sat. “Did you get lucky on Saturday night?” She smiled, watching Janice’s eyes light up.

“Sure did,” Janice cackled, “Some young thing – well, he was thirty-five and full of energy. You?”

Lana sighed. “One guy was a contender, but when I got to the room, my key card wouldn’t work.”

“That’s unusual.” Janice sat back and tapped her long nails together.

“I know, right. That’s what I thought. I ended up going home after that.” She shrugged, purposely leaving out the part about Marcus.

“What about, Rory? How did he get on?”

“He had no problem hooking up with some young thing called Jacqueline.”

Janice shifted in her seat and coughed into her curled fist. “Jacqueline Simpson? Black hair, in her twenties?” Her voice strained.

Lana’s eyebrows pulled together. “Yes – why?”

“Oh, Lana, she’s an odd one. One of the guys told Justin that she was into all sort of weird kinky stuff.”

Lana’s heart raced. “Like what?”

“I don’t know, sweetheart, Justin stays clear of her. Rumour has it that her husband, Ciaran Simpson is a gangster, a real bad bastard.”

*Is that why Rory tried to strangle me?*

Janice stood. “You’ve gone an unsightly shade of pale, sweetheart. Are you okay?”

Lana’s mouth was dry, her head pounding. “Could you get me a glass of water please?” she asked softly.

That night, Lana soaked in the bath tub, her thoughts spiralling out of control. Rory wanted to join the club for fun, but something felt off.

*I should be enough for him. Perhaps I need to be more adventurous.*

He tried something new the last time they had sex, and she blasted him for it. There was no way she could go to Verto Veneri, especially if she was shit in the bedroom department. Anyway, the only man other man she would consider having sex with was Marcus. The guy clearly wasn’t lacking in skills and experience. All this only highlighted the fact she didn’t. Although something told her he would be commanding and take full control and that idea alone made her heart pound.

*That’s it, I’m not going on Friday. Rory can go on his own. I need to stay away from Marcus – end of story.*



Friday soon rolled around, Rory half-heartedly attempted to persuade her to go with him to Verto Veneri, but Lana came up a lame excuse and said it was her time of the month, so she had horrendous stomach cramps. She didn't want to lie to him, but she couldn't go the club... and see Marcus. The way she saw it, it didn't matter to Rory if she went or not because he was going to experiment with another woman regardless, so, effectively, Lana wasn't needed.

"Just go on ahead, Rory, I'll be okay here. I'll go to the next one." She suggested, wondering if she would ever go back.

"If you're sure, babe. Love you." He lightly kissed her lips.

"Will you be home tonight?" she asked, watching him button up the pale blue shirt she had bought him a few weeks ago. He was handsome in a roguish way, his new chestnut stubble filled out his jawline, adding a masculine touch to his otherwise baby face.

Rory brought his gaze to her reflection in the mirror as he tucked in his shirt. "Lana, I don't know, I don't need to feel like I have a curfew." He doused his hands with cologne, patted his cheeks and then turned to face her. "Look, whatever happens, happens – okay, babe."

Her lips tightened and her brow creased, anger swelling in her veins like venom. "I'm not your bloody mother, Rory. I'm only asking if I can expect you home. It's common courtesy to let me know in case something happens to you. I am your girlfriend – aren't I?"

He flicked his hands up and drew his shoulders back. "What's that supposed to mean?" he spat out. "Of course you're my girlfriend. You live here, don't you?"

Lana launched off the bed. "Yeah, I might as well live in the house by myself for all I've seen of you lately. You could be out shagging the whole of Jordanstown and I would have no idea. A bunch of stupid flowers once in a blue moon doesn't build a relationship." He came home straight after work on Thursday and crashed into bed, without having dinner or speaking. It was like living with a lodger, or a stranger.

Rory grabbed her wrists, his eyes filled with fury and jaw clenched. "We agreed to this, Lana. *You* agreed to this, so don't start trying to paint me as the bad guy here. I've been letting off some steam, even you like space!" His grip tightened. "And why the hell would I buy you flowers? You know they're a waste of money, just wilting away in water."

Her heart lurched, she knew he was right. Lana willingly signed and

authorised her approval for him to fuck whomever he wanted in the Verto Veneri club, and she was content in her own company, suiting herself.

“I just don’t feel like I can give you what you need, Rory.” She sucked in a ragged sob, feeling uncertain for their future.

“Look, babe, you’re my girl. Okay?” He kissed her forehead, freed her wrists and sauntered out of the bedroom like nothing was wrong.

As she watched him leave, Lana decided to be more open to whatever new sexploits Rory wanted to try, if it meant bringing them closer together again. She was going to make their sex life even better, so he wouldn’t need to get it elsewhere. An odd feeling fluttered in her chest, doubting her resolve to make things better. Being honest with herself, she knew their sex life should be enough for him and if it wasn’t, then there was no point being together.

That’s when the plan hit her. She would stream a few risqué movies and study the techniques, then surprise him with something new. But then someone else’s lips would be kissing him tonight. The question she had to ask herself was the cold hard truth – could she enjoy touching him, knowing he’d cheated again?

She jumped into the shower, letting warm jets of water sluice over her tense limbs. Then she dried herself with a fluffy towel and put on her favourite pyjama set of jersey shorts and a tank top.

She was fully prepared for a night in all alone with a litre bottle of gin (definitely not McGrath’s), large bag of potato chips and her laptop. Settling in the cosy living room with a tall glass crammed with crushed ice, cucumber slices and a double shot of gin, she sat back and began her research.

A few drinks and the entire bag of salty potato chips later, Lana was feeling brave enough to watch some short erotic movie clips. The moaning and groaning from a raven-haired woman filled the tiny room as her partners, both well-built, banged into her from both ends, completely void of emotion. This wasn’t new to Lana, she’d watched porn before; however, the random title of the clip ‘Spit Roasting Rochelle’ had spiked her interest and made her giggle.

Suddenly, a loud thump broke her naughty fascination. She clicked pause and crept to the hall, only to hear persistent loud banging on the door. Flicking the safety chain across, Lana inhaled slowly and peered through the gap as she opened the door.

Her heart rocketed into her throat, beating for freedom. It was a stern-

faced Marcus McGrath, kitted out in dark denim jeans, a navy shirt that hugged his muscular torso and tan brogues. His wonderful body was framed by the glassy Lough in the distance.

*Oh shit!* “Just a minute while I take the chain off,” she panted.

Closing the door gave her a fraction of a second to gain composure.

*Why the hell was he here and not at the club?*

Her trembling hands brushed a few crumbs off her chest. Then she combed her fingers through her hair and breathed into her palm. Thank goodness she had eaten plain potato chips and not Rory’s sour cream and chive.

When the door reopened, his jaw was clamped shut, his brooding eyes glaring at her. “Can I come in please?”

*Never invite the devil into your house, Lana.*

She didn’t heed her own thoughts, consciously inching back to allow him entry.

Marcus McGrath, the sexiest man alive was standing in her living room, inches away from the paused movie on her laptop, which thankfully faced the wall. His brooding presence stunned her, blurring her thoughts with just one glance. Fidgeting with his car keys, his eyes were drawn to her shapely bare legs moving upwards to her braless breasts and hard nipples poking through the thin material of her top.

Her arms slid around her chest in a bid to shield her obvious arousal. “Can I get you a drink?” she spluttered.

“Please.” His deep husky voice scattered little prickles of delight over her skin. “Water will suffice, I’m driving.”

Lana spun around, still hugging her chest, knowing that her tiny shorts would creep up her buttocks when she walked, but she couldn’t hoist them out from between her ass cheeks in front of him, so she marched into to the kitchen without looking back.

“I seem to have interrupted you.” He filled the doorway to the kitchen, his arm resting on the architrave above his head. “If you wanted action, then why didn’t you show up at the club?” His beautiful full lips hinted a smirk.

“You haven’t interrupted me. I was just having a night to myself. I wasn’t feeling well, that’s all.” The cold water gushed out of the tap and splattered her chest.

The left side of his mouth rose. “Does porn make you feel better?”

Holy shit, he looked at the laptop. Cringe. How dare he show up

unannounced and make her feel so – so bloody turned on.

Lana slammed the glass of water on the counter beside him. “There you go. Now, how can I help you?”

He gulped down the water, a trickle escaping the edge of his mouth, rolling down through his dark bristled chin. For a fleeting moment, she wanted to be that tiny droplet, kissing his warm skin. She watched his glistening full lips as he pulled the glass away and wiped his jaw.

“Why didn’t you turn up?” he asked, locking his narrowed eyes with hers.

There was no point in being honest with him, she wasn’t prepared to be another notch on his bed post, even if her body ached for him. The swelling between her legs grew as his husky voice echoed through the kitchen. Lana didn’t attend because the only man she wanted to hook up with was standing right in front of her. She couldn’t trust herself with him or become a huge sexual disappointment. How could she be around a man who made her feel so impulsive and horny. The same man who was in her home and who wasn’t her boyfriend.

“Like I said, I wasn’t feeling well.”

“And now?”

“Yes, I’m feeling better, if not a little tipsy.”

“I was hoping to see you in the club tonight.”

Her gaze dropped to her toes. The intensity of her heart slamming against her sternum, begging to break free from her tight ribs was making her woozy. She wanted him to touch her; in fact, she needed him to, more than anything or anyone she had ever met. Marcus moved further into the room, closing the distance between them, staring at her intently. “Were you trying to avoid me?” He reached out and padded her chin with his fingers, tilting her face up.

She sucked in a gasp, thrilled by the jolts of sin from the slight contact and lost in his dangerous vigilant gaze.

“I...I guess I was,” she stammered.

Without warning, Marcus jerked her body into his chest and crushed his lips down on to hers with such force and hunger that she willingly surrendered, parting her lips to give his inviting tongue access.

**M**arcus needed this kiss, to taste her sweet strawberry lips and feel her warm skin all over again. Earlier in the evening when Donna Marie had informed him that Rory entered the club alone, he was furious. Trying to remain calm, he considered the possibility that she would arrive later, so he waited. Then two hours slipped away and she still hadn't shown up. So he stormed into the Verto Veneri bar, searching for her dickhead boyfriend, Rory. The arrogant wee shit was flirting like a pimple faced, horny teenager with none other than Jacqueline Simpson, the same girl he fucked last week. The two were entwined in a passionate embrace, playing footsie like lovebirds in the honeymoon phase. Marcus didn't care one iota that he was interrupting. He needed to know where Lana was, and he needed answers right that second.

He towered over them. "You're meant to be here with your partner, Mr. O'Hare," Marcus had growled.

Rory's eyes shot upwards to greet the tall brawny man whose face was impassive.

"My girlfriend isn't feeling well, so she stayed at home. I didn't think it would be a problem if I came along anyway." The ballbag had the audacity to run his fingers along Jacqueline's naked thigh, towards her hidden panties.

A pang of worry for Lana's well-being promoted further questions. "She's ill? How sick?"

"Eh, yeah. Just women crap. Sore tummy or something." Rory shrugged his shoulders like he didn't care.

The asshole was enjoying his freedom while Lana was at home, clearly

unwell. Selfish fucking prick. Anger had bubbled under the surface of Marcus's steely stare. There was no point kicking Rory out, in case he ran on home, back to Lana, or maybe he would've left with his new girlfriend and gone elsewhere. Either way, he wasn't prepared to run the risk of Rory going back to her, not when he wanted to see Lana.

"Next time, bring your partner. This isn't a speed dating venue," he snapped, turned on his heels and strode away.

Now, he was finally with the sexy woman who haunted his every thought and made him feel like he was losing his mind.

"Lift your arms," he commanded.

Lana obliged, raising her hands high and letting him tug the tank top over her head, casting it to the floor in a heap. Her eyes closed briefly and her pretty pink lips parted. In that second, she looked even more beautiful. Just as quickly as her eyelids fluttered closed, they opened, gifting him with an ocean blue gaze that pleaded him to taste her. His nails scraped across the soft skin on her narrow waist when she nudged into his groin, wearing a seductive smile. The urge to strip her naked and take her was mounting to a necessity. Bringing his head to her perfect breasts, he licked and sucked her pert nipples, causing her body to react with a violent shiver. This is what he came here for. To have Lana Craig all to himself, just once and then walk away, like he always did.

Lana's head swam with lust as his teeth grazed her skin and the sweet sting from his bristles scratched and teased. A low hum in the back of his throat shot straight to her core, sending her wild.

"Oh my..." she cried as he bit one nipple a little harder, sending a shock through her muscles like a volt of electricity.

Her fingers threaded his thick hair, forcing him to bite down harder. The glorious pain was eased by his warm, wet tongue as it glided over her flesh with a delicate pressure. The feeling was both heaven and hell – right, but so very wrong. Throwing all thoughts of guilt and consciousness to the wind, she allowed herself to enjoy his pleasurable torture and accepted his warm kisses that showered her naval until his powerful hands yanked down her shorts. He hoisted her up onto the counter top, spreading her legs and stepping into her so they hooked around his hips.

"Fuck, Lana, you're so beautiful. So fucking sexy."

Marcus crouched down and set the back of her knees on his shoulders. His long fingers opened her fleshy folds, his face moved closer so his lethal tongue could lick her swollen nub. Her body convulsed as he sucked, the soft moans escaping her throat were almost alien to her.

A daring finger dipped inside while his insistent tongue drove her to the edge of climax. "Come for me, Lana, come over my face."

She looked down to find his attention focused on her face, watching her with those emerald green eyes, so intense and searching.

The combination of his suggestion and the look on his handsome face made her explode. Her hips shunted upward, grinding into his mouth.

Marcus's husky growl rumbled through her core, reaching her stomach. Knowing he was affected by her in this way, turned her on even more.

She floated back from her heavenly stupor when he stood tall, cupped her cheeks and mixed their tastes together, tracing the insides of her mouth with his sinful tongue, whirling and twirling with hunger.

Lana lunged off the counter and into his open arms, their bodies slammed together. Skimming her fingertips over the buttons of his fly, Marcus groaned into her mouth. Tugging at the buttons, she popped open each one, before shunting his jeans past his hips, with his boxers adjoined. Springing to attention, his magnificent thickness took her by surprise. Her eyes widened, and she drew in her lower lip with anticipation.

"On your knees, Lana," he ordered, and she obeyed.

Looking up under her lashes, she licked his thick shaft from his sack, all the way to the tip. "Hmmm, wrap those fucking lips around my dick," he growled, stuffing his hands into her hair. "That feels so amazing. That's it, beautiful, suck my dick, just like that."

Her heart bucked wildly, loving how his voice was strained and his fingers locked tightly at her scalp.

Thrusting deep into her throat, he tugged her back, angling her face so he could meet her wide gaze. Marcus had her now, just like before. She had given in to his charm, to the uncontrollable lust that was tearing through her body.

Deepening her movements, the tip of him hit the back of her throat and she felt his balls tightened in her palm.

"I'm going to come," his words rushed out with urgency.

But Lana held her mouth tight and continued with long draws from root to tip. Warm saltiness spurted into her throat. She swallowed every last bit, smiling shyly when she pulled back.

"Holy fuck, Lana," he said, yanking her to stand. "I'm going to fuck you so hard."

Those words were all she wanted to hear but when they came out into the open, her heart skidded to an abrupt stop. This was all wrong. The overpowering need to have him inside her throbbed with an excruciating need, but this was her home with Rory. She wasn't in the club and this was cheating. Marcus wasn't a stranger anymore, he was an obsession that had taken over her mind. If she surrendered to him fully it would be the end of her relationship with Rory. Whatever she wanted to happen next, would ring



danger because no one else could make her feel the way Marcus McGrath did, not even her boyfriend.

Lana's arms folded around her stomach and she stepped back. She lusted after someone else. Did that mean she shouldn't be with Rory anymore? She certainly couldn't have Marcus because he wasn't a one-woman man. He was playing a wicked game and by the sexy smile on his lips, he was enjoying every fucking second of it.

He stepped into her, grinding his hardness against her sensitive bundle of nerves, teasing and taunting with a promise of something she desperately wanted. Those tempting lips of his swooped down and landed on her mouth with a kiss that was so fervent and hard that she gasped.

Throwing her hands to his chest to keep a safe distance, she stole her lips away. "Stop." Her voice was shaky and uncertain.

His eyes widened like she'd slapped his cheek. "What's wrong?"

"This is wrong. We shouldn't do this, Marcus. Especially not in this house, not ever." She doubted her own words as they echoed in her ears.

His head tipped to her neck and he inhaled deeply, then he whispered against her skin, "Something as good as this can definitely not be wrong, Lana."

Pushing him back, she twisted away from him and scrambled to gather her clothes. "Please, Marcus. Please stop," she pleaded. "I'm so confused."

He just stood there, staring at her with messy hair hooking his brow, daring her to come closer. His jeans puddled at his ankles and a sexy scowl darkened his tight features. "I want to fuck you, Lana."

She hugged the tank top close to her chest. "I'm not like the rest of your women, Marcus. I won't just drop at your feet when you demand. I'm in a relationship with Rory, and this is *his* house. Now, please stop. I won't do this to him." Her head shook but her body remained on high alert, sensitised and aching for his touch.

A powerful hand swept the hair back from his brow while he slowly gained control of his heavy breathing. She could see the internal battle flash behind his stormy eyes and secretly hoped he would take her anyway. This was all her fault for letting things go too far, for teasing him with false hope of a happy ending for his dick. He stood back, took a deep breath and rounded his shoulders in what was almost a light shrug. They stood in silence for a moment, then Marcus finally pulled up his jeans, turned and sauntered away, leaving her all alone in the kitchen.

Her heart lurched, hearing footsteps that took him away from her, the sound magnified in the heated silence. If he had looked back, he would've seen the tears spill down her flushed cheeks just before the front door slammed shut behind him.

Rory returned, looking rather worse for wear, shortly after ten the following morning. Bleary-eyed and sickly pale, his monosyllabic greeting irked her to the core as he trudged up the stairs and slumped into bed.

This was truly the craziest scenario she had ever encountered. Her boyfriend had spent the night with another woman, which she knew about beforehand, yet she turned away the man who ignited a soaring blaze of passion in her soul. Her heart ached as she recalled the frustration on Marcus's handsome face when she told him to stop. She willingly led him on, teased him into thinking they would have sex. No doubt he went back to his apartment with a better replacement. They weren't hard to come by for a guy like him. He just had to walk into a room, and women gathered like vultures. A wave of jealousy washed over her, or was it regret. The devil had offered her a taste, and she wanted more.

Flipping open her laptop, she paused for a second to ensure Rory was still asleep, then typed the name Marcus McGrath into the search engine. Reams of links displayed before her eyes.

*'McGrath dines out with Ally Doyle in Barcelona, May 2016'*

An old picture popped up, and even though it was dated a few years ago, her silly heart shattered. She studied his sultry smile and glossy white teeth, the same teeth that had both bitten and teased her. Marcus looked ever the charming devil in a jade green polo shirt that resembled the glint in his eyes. His dinner date, on the other hand, was a stunning blonde of model proportions, with her hand on his shoulder and puckered lips ready to kiss his

golden skin.

A sucker punch landed in her gut, who was she kidding? A man like Marcus would have his fun, then dump her in the trash the minute he got bored. She didn't want a fleeting affair, that was pointless.

After deleting the search results, she sucked in a knowing gust. Marcus was a fantasy, a guy she had to shake off. Lana had to forget about the unforgettable Marcus McGrath. She needed to focus on her real relationship, with Rory, and that meant asking him to leave Verto Veneri.

**A** week had passed, and Rory remarkably returned home from work, most evenings. He arranged to take Lana out for dinner mid-week so they could spend some quality time together.

He chose her favourite French restaurant with a shabby chic décor and Parisian ambiance, as close to Paris as Belfast would allow. The cladded walls were a smoky grey, littered with varying frames showcasing French landmarks. They were seated around a table with mismatched chairs. Fairy lights twinkled majestically overhead, and the flame of a candle danced as the centrepiece.

Lana studied the menu like a child in a sweet shop. “Oh, the Cassoulet sounds delicious.” She licked her lips.

Rory grinned. “I’m going for the 40 Day Dry Aged Beef. Then you can have some of my beef later.” He chuckled, grabbing her hand over the table.

She smiled up at him, the low lighting shadowing his features. Tonight, Rory was kind and funny, loving and considerate. The way he used to be in the early stages of their relationship – the guy who she fell in love with.

The evening was perfect, and she remembered all the reasons why they were together in the first place.

“Rory, I don’t think I can go back to Verto Veneri,” she whispered, holding the menu up for privacy, screening their faces.

His eyes glistened and his mouth curved at one corner. “I know, babe. I got the feeling it wasn’t for you. So how about we just forget the whole thing?”

Her heartbeat skipped. “Really? You would be happy to leave it, for me,

for us?” she gasped.

He shrugged half-heartedly. “Sure. I don’t want to lose you, babe. So whatever it takes. On one condition though.” He took a slow intentional breath. “Don’t give me hassle when I stay out with the guys. I need to have some sort of release, Lana. It’s important to me.”

Rory was giving up the very thing she thought he needed because he knew she wasn’t comfortable with it. In that moment, she accepted his love for her, but in the back of her consciousness, Marcus still preoccupied her plentiful dirty thoughts. She wondered how long it would take to conquer her lustful feelings for him and make more room for Rory again. It had been an unbearable torture, constantly thinking about him, his kissable lips, his powerful touch, never mind the recollection of his muscular tight torso beneath her hands. All she truly wanted was a release, with him, a way to banish him forever. Lana wanted to fuck Marcus until the sun came up, just once, and then move on, but the week hadn’t been kind and he still taunted her.

She would be utterly foolish to dispute her feelings for Rory in the hope of what? Marcus wasn’t chasing her, taking her to dinner, living with her, loving her.

Rory was her happily ever after.

Nudging the stem of her wine glass, she forced a sweet smile, guarding her inner thoughts. “I want this to work, Rory, so by all means, go out with the guys and have fun. As long as I know that I’m what you really need.”

“You are, babe. You’re exactly what I need to come home to.”

That wasn’t quite the declaration of love and desire that she had hoped for, but Rory wasn’t the best at expressing feelings, so she left it at that.

Slivers of marbled cheesecakes and a ramekin of molten chocolate sponge cake arrived shortly after their meal, followed by petite pastel macarons. The sumptuous chocolate tasted blissful alongside the deep cabernet sauvignon suggested by the waiter, which stained her lips a luscious berry red.

Rory had gone silent, his eyes followed her hand as she tasted the treats, then, as if in slow motion, he pulled out a small black box from his blazer pocket and flicked it open. “Lana, you already share my home, so why not share the rest of my life – do you want to get married?”

*Holy shit!* “Rory!” she gasped, gazing at the modest trio of sparkling diamonds embedded on a gold band. “You want to get married?”

“Well, it would be a pretty shitty joke to ask and not mean it, babe.” He grinned across the table, the light sparkling in his eyes.

Diners turned, anticipation lingering, magnifying her answer under the spotlight. A creeping flush warmed her neck to her cheeks. She wanted to say yes, hell, if it were two months ago, she would have prized the ring out of his hand, but tonight, she hesitated. Marcus asked her if she intended to marry Rory, and at that point, she realised she wasn't sure. Now, here she was, with an engagement ring in the middle of the table and Rory waiting patiently for her answer.

Truthfully, she loved him, and that would never change. He was offering his fidelity, and now the rest of his life joined with hers. Marcus hadn't offered anything and never would. The future was clear and Marcus wasn't in it, well physically anyway. He'd already proven to be unforgettable, but Rory was here, with a sparkling ring and his heart set out for all to see.

“Yes!” She removed the ring from the velvet box and slid the cold gold band onto her finger, instantly feeling its weight.

**A**manda made light work of spreading Lana's exciting news around the office. She was bombarded with congratulatory handshakes and well-wishing emails, lifting her hand repeatedly to show off her precious ring. It was such a fuss, most of it false from nosey people who rarely spoke to her yet now they pretended to be interested in her engagement, only to gawk at her ring for the inevitable back office chit-chat.

It was Friday afternoon, a week since it was announced. "Have you set a date?" Amanda peered over her monitor as Lana typed up a report.

Drawing her attention away from the screen, Lana looked up. "Nothing set just yet. We aren't in any rush to get married at the minute."

Amanda's eyes narrowed. "Really? You haven't talked about when the big day will be?"

Quickly dropping her chin, Lana shifted on her seat. "Nope. Just taking it day by day."

The squeak from Amanda's chair grew louder as she wheeled round. "I told you to be honest with yourself, Lan. Do you really want to marry, Rory?"

*Why do people keep asking that question?*

Lana gazed down at the potential life sentence on her wedding finger.

Amanda grabbed her arm. "Oh shit, Lan. You still want that guy, don't you?"

Her eyes misted and she cleared her throat. "I can't stop thinking about him. I know he's a playboy and has no intention of being with me but..." Her words trailed off, emotion bubbling under her armoured flesh.

Amanda whipped out her mobile phone and began tapping the pad of her forefinger on the small screen. “Look for yourself, Lan. The guy is an asshole. That pic was taken a couple of days ago in Marbella. He’s not thinking about you.”

There, on the screen was a picture of a fancy yacht, three stunning women scantily clad on the sun deck and Marcus lazing back, slicked back hair, a deepening tan and donning nothing more than ass hugging black swimwear. Aviator sunglasses hid his observation of the beauties before him.

“Not just one girl, but three to play with. Three women, Lana.” She emphasised the word three and raised the matching amount of fingers.

He looked so incredibly sexy, just kicking back like the world was his to own. Lana’s heart splintered into a million pieces. She was a fool to think he wanted her, let alone care for her.

With a mischievous twinkle in her eyes, Amanda grinned. “Anyway, Lan, you’re marrying, Rory, and I have a surprise for you.”

Lana shifted her eyes slowly around, her neck stiff. “Oh no, what have you done?” She winced, loathing surprises.

Amanda clapped her hands, expelling a high-pitched shriek. “Bubbles after work, of course. A few of us thought it was very necessary to celebrate your impending nuptials.”

Lana gulped. “Who is going?” Dread weighed her mouth to a flat line.

“Don’t panic, it’s just Richard and Fi, then Ronny will join us after football training, at about 8 p.m. Geraldine wanted to come, but she has to help her mum.” Amanda rolled her eyes. “And me, the party planner and bridesmaid?” Her head cocked like was waiting for approval. “Or maybe just the best friend in attendance?” She grinned widely, baring her teeth.

Lana sighed. “I haven’t given it any thought, Amanda. As for tonight, I’m so not dressed for the occasion.”

“That’s why I brought you this bad boy. You might be getting hitched, but your shackles haven’t been secured just yet.” Amanda dragged a cerise pink dress from a plastic carrier bag and held it out.

Grabbing the dress, Lana held up the sparse material. “Seriously, Amanda? That’s not a dress for after-work drinks. Are we going to a club? I’m not down for that, not tonight.” Lana scowled and tossed the dress back over to Amanda.

Tutting loudly, Amanda scooped it up and thrust it into Lana’s hands. “Oh, Lan, chill out. We’re going to The Fitz for food and drinks. Is that



cosmopolitan enough for you?”

Widening her eyes until they almost popped out of the sockets, Lana brought her fingertips to her lips. “You know who owns that place, don’t you?”

“Yes. But do you really think he’s going to be there, at 5 p.m. on a Friday afternoon? I think we both know he’s otherwise occupied in Marbs. He has more than business on his mind, girl, and that’s the truth right there.”

Amanda was right, Marcus didn’t look like he was planning to return to Belfast anytime soon. She resigned herself to the fact that she was going out and set about quickly clearing up her work, allowing time for a bit of post-office beauty prep in the washrooms.

The dress was a snug fit, hugging her hourglass curves like Jessica Rabbit. The bold colour was more Amanda’s style than her own, but it actually pleased her when she looked in the mirror. Luckily, it went well with the nude heels she had chosen that morning. Riffing through her makeup bag, she found a mini eyeshadow in dark mauve, which she teamed with black eyeliner and two coats of jet black mascara. Finally, a sweep of bronzer along her cheekbones, forehead and chin, followed by her cleavage, a spritz of her favourite perfume, and she was good to go.

Amanda whistled, falling out of the narrow stall next to Lana. “You should wear bright colours more often, girlfriend. You look seriously hot.”

“So do you – but then you always do.” Amanda always dressed to perfection, and today was no different. A cobalt blue dress clung to her slender frame and her exposed limbs glowed with a perfectly executed golden self-tan.

“Right, let’s round up the others and get the hell out of here, it’s Friday afternoon and I’m ready to party!” Lana grinned, butterflies swirling in her stomach.

**I**t had been a while since the girls had ventured out together. Lana was secretly glad her best friend went to all the effort of arranging a night out with the few decent colleagues they worked with.

The excited rowdy group wandered through the main entrance of The Fitz, rather than the unsuspecting side door that led to the private Verto Veneri bar. Chandeliers hung from the carved plaster ceilings and lamps glowed warmly on polished tables by low-slung, beautifully upholstered chairs, elegantly dotted around the teak-clad foyer. A floral scent emanated from the elaborate fresh flower displays, exuding wealth and luxury. It was a bustle of guests ready for a night in the city, scurrying staff dressed in three-piece black suits and the remaining business professionals who used the corporate suites.

They were shown to the main bar by a well-mannered twenty-something hottie, with a tight backside and boyish grin, who then offered to take their coats. Setting up camp in one of the coveted discreet soft leather booths, Richard ordered a pint, and the girls ordered two bottles of Prosecco to share.

“What’s the craic then, Lana?” Richard supped the froth from his silky black Guinness. “You guys got a date set for the big day?”

Lana had a soft spot for Richard, she knew he was madly in love with Amanda but didn’t want to face her inevitable rejection. He was hot-blooded but kind, a little rough around the edges and full of wicked banter.

“No. We aren’t in any rush. It will all fall into place eventually,” she replied.

His bushy black eyebrows rose, crinkling his forehead. “A girl who isn’t

in a rush to plan a wedding. Take a picture, this is a rare species of woman.”

They all laughed, Lana too. So what if she wanted to take her time and enjoy the engagement stage? She raised her shoulders in a casual shrug. “There’s a lot to think about. I’ll buy a few bridal magazines at some stage and get ideas.”

Fi, a plump chirpy girl from County Down, with ruddy cheeks, massive breasts and a voracious thirst for anything alcoholic, drained her glass of Prosecco and poured another. “I have my wedding planned already, and Jo hasn’t even proposed,” she honked.

“Do you think he’s gonna ask?” asked Amanda.

Fi snorted loudly. “He either asks me or he dies. Simple.”

The friendly banter continued over a light dinner of shared tapas. Lana excused herself when Rory’s name appeared on her mobile phone. Dipping into a side corridor with a slight sway, she answered the call, “Hey, what are you up to?”

“Hey, babe, I’m on the way home just now. Do you want me to grab a takeaway?”

*Oh crap!* In the rush to get ready, she forgot to tell him that she was going out. “Sorry, Rory, I’m out with ones from work, celebrating our engagement.” Her head was a little woozy with alcohol and she pressed her back to the wall.

“Okay, cool. I’ll just head to the pub instead. I’ll see ya later.”

A door opened and closed behind her. “Okay, have a good night.” She ended the call. No, ‘I love you’ or ‘I miss you’ left either of their lips.

“Lana,” called a deep husky familiar voice, whipping a seductive shiver down her spine.

She spun around to meet the man who had consumed her every thought since their first meeting. He was immaculately dressed in his signature navy suit, but this time, he wore a pale pink shirt, casually unbuttoned at the neck. His alluring green eyes narrowed as he quietly observed her.

Flustered and panic-stricken, she just gazed up at him, lost in his presence.

“You look...sensational.” He strode down the corridor towards her with self assurance, oozing sex appeal and that amazing smell of him.

He was so close, after all this time. A suffocating silence swallowed her composure. Her heart rate went from a stutter to a sprint, bouncing off her ribs and tiny black smudges floated past her eyes.

“Marcus.” She gulped, her mouth drained of saliva. “I’m here with colleagues from work.”

Fumbling with her mobile phone to make sure it was turned off, the twinkle from her engagement ring caught her eye. Her hand dropped to her hip. A stab of guilt made her look over her shoulder, they were alone.

“I didn’t think you would be here, Marcus.” As the words trailed off her tongue, they sounded thoughtless.

He exhaled a sudden puff of air and she knew that whiskey laced his lips. “Congratulations on your engagement. I hope the two of you will be very happy together.” His tone dropped a few degrees, bordering on frosty.

“Oh.” Lana swallowed with a loud gulp. His stance widened and his hands slid into his trouser pockets. “How did you know?”

The green of his eyes didn’t sparkle, they turned dark and cold like a forest in the dead of night. His gaze cut to the three diamonds on her left hand and his body language said it all. Instinctively, her right hand grabbed her left, covering the ring.

“Did you have a good time in Marbella?” Her jealousy spilled out for them both to hear. “I saw a picture of you partying.” She was trying so very hard to keep her cool, even though her stomach clenched and her heart pounded.

He bowed his head. “A picture can say a thousand words, Lana.”

His husky cadence clung to her name in an oh-so-sexy way, making her squirm. Crossing her chest, she tightened her arms in a self-hug. “So you weren’t in Marbella, on a boat, with three half naked girls?”

Marcus cleared his throat, and a smile played at the corner of his mouth. “Well, if you put it that way, then yeah. I was.” Removing his hand from his pocket, he flicked his wrist and checked his golden watch. “I have a meeting to attend. I hope you enjoy your evening.”

She looked up at him under her lashes, her lips parted. “I, I…” she began, hoping to stall his retreat. In her confusion, all she could think of was his hard body crushing into hers.

“It was good to see you, beautiful. My driver is waiting.” His jaw ticked, working the muscles on each side.

“Your driver? I thought you liked to drive?” She took a quiet, controlled breath.

His eyes flashed with emotions that she couldn’t read. “Have a great evening. Goodbye.”

That last word held more meaning than she could accept. He was saying goodbye, for good. Lana opened her mouth to speak but her hysterical thoughts couldn't cobble together a sentence. The urge to scream at him, grab on to his strong arms and stop him from leaving compelled her to tilt forward, but she didn't utter a single word. She needed to feel his beautiful lips on hers, to taste his intoxicating manliness, to drag her fingers through his silky hair and feel his hungry hands on every inch of her body. Instead, she silently watched him saunter to the door and vanish.

It was a gut-wrenching sight that she was now very familiar with. Marcus still had the same effect on her, that same captivating pull that stopped her in her tracks like a defenceless animal in front of head lights. From the minute their paths crossed, Lana was consumed by him. She knew he was bad news, and now she was engaged to Rory, and Marcus was all over the next line of females who walked his way.

Shaking with adrenaline and unadulterated lust, she half ran, and half walked back to the table. Her head and heart were spinning out of control as she threw herself into the booth and hoisted the bottle of Prosecco out of the ice, filling her glass to the top. She knocked it back in a long guzzle.

"Jeez, Lan, you're white as ghost and unusually thirsty. Is everything okay with Rory?" Amanda's hand curled her arm and squeezed.

Lana feigned a wide smile. "Yeah, all good, I'm so glad to be out. This is a celebration, let me top up your drink."

As they clinked glasses, a short tawny-haired bartender approached the table, with two golden magnums of champagne. He cleared his throat. "These are compliments of Mr. McGrath. He informed us that, Ms. Craig is celebrating her engagement tonight. Congratulations!"

There was silence as the group stared at Lana, her cheeks flaming. "Thank you."

She recognised the bottle of champagne, with the black Ace of Spades, the same Armand De Brignac that she drank in his apartment when they had lunch together a few weeks ago.

Richard shook his head, heaving the spare bottle from the ice bucket, while the bartender popped open the other. "Shit, Lana, you didn't tell us you knew Marcus McGrath. Those bottles are like four or five hundred pounds each."

"There's plenty more where they came from, we are under strict instructions to give Ms. Craig whatever she wishes this evening, courtesy of

Mr. McGrath.”

Her heart melted, turning into a mush of blood and goo that seeped through her rapidly pumping veins. Lana didn't want his generosity, she just wanted him, and the thought of spending his money didn't sit easy with her while she wore Rory's ring.

“That won't be necessary, the champagne is more than generous,” she said, then smiled politely as the bartender nodded.

They all tried the champagne, even Richard, and then Ronny when he finally arrived. It was a decadent gift, and every sip of the sparkling golden liquid reminded Lana of him; if that was his intention, it worked. The truth was, she couldn't stop thinking about him, regardless of his thoughtful presents or the fact she was getting married to another man. She recalled their first kiss, their first touch and the first time he looked at her like there was no other woman in the world. The guy clearly had his charm tactics perfected and polished.

Having eaten and drunk to excess, Richard staggered to the bar to get the bill. He returned empty-handed. Their entire bill had been settled by Mr. McGrath over the telephone.

A tall doorman dressed in a black knee-length coat swaggered up to the girls like he'd pumped weights during his break, his elbows pointing outward and his shoulders pulled back.

“Which one of you ladies is, Ms. Craig?”

Amanda planted her finger on Lana's cheek. “Her. This little minx with the ring on her finger.” She swayed into Lana and giggled.

“I will escort you to the car, Ms. Craig. A driver is waiting to take you home.”

“What do you mean? I didn't order a taxi.” Her brow furrowed.

“Mr. McGrath gave the order to ensure you got home safe and sound.” He stood there patiently. “He arranged for a town car. It's waiting right outside.”

“Right,” she whispered. “A town car. I can just as easily get the bus home.”

“No, Ms. Craig. Mr McGrath was very clear in his instructions.”

“Come on, Lana.” Amanda shunted her hip into Lana's. “It will save the fare home. I'll hitch a ride with you.”

“Okay. Can we drop my friend home first please?”

Without hesitation the man nodded and replied, “Of course, Ms Craig. Whatever you need.”

As the car rolled through Belfast, heading North, Lana gazed out at the shimmering city lights, wondering what Marcus was doing now and who he was with. How could she have such intense feelings for a man she barely knew. It was purely sexual, there wasn't anything else to it.

The next day, Lana lay on her bed, with the morning sun burning through the window, wishing the room would stop spinning. She arrived home safely before Rory staggered in at 1 a.m. He flopped into bed beside her, stinking of stale smoke and alcohol.

Freshening up in the shower, he whistled cheerfully, shouting out to her that he was going to play pool in the afternoon; needless to say, the invitation didn't extend to her.

The relentless pounding in her head was the aftermath of too much champagne. Rummaging through her bedside cabinet for painkillers, she found an empty packet. She rolled over to Rory's side, in the hope to find something worth scavenging for in his drawers. A jeweller's receipt was neatly folded, hidden under his balled-up socks. It wasn't fair to put a price on your engagement ring, and she knew not to look, but in her delicate and needy hungover state, curiosity clouded her judgement.

The receipt showed a balance for two items, a three-stone gold ring and a diamond pendant. The necklace was marginally cheaper than her ring.

*What the hell?*

Her birthday wasn't for another few months, perhaps he got a special deal and was holding it back until then. Although, Rory had never been one to pre plan, ever. He was still preening in the bathroom, so she leant forward and kicked the door to a near close, then hastily pushed aside the rolled up socks, hunting for a black velvet box for just one peek at the necklace. He had it hidden well. She gave up the search seconds before the bedroom door swung open.



Dripping wet, with only a towel in his hand, Rory dabbed his lean torso. “Why are you still in bed, Lana?” he asked, knowing fine rightly she was feeling worse for wear.

Sitting up on her elbows. “I have a headache. It feels like a migraine.”

He walked to the edge of the bed, bent over and kissed her temple. “Oh, babe, I’ll get you some tablets from downstairs. Hold tight.”

Rory bounded down the stairs, leaving his towel behind. A low vibrating buzz stirred her, it was coming from his bomber jacket hanging on the back of the door. She rolled off the bed and took the phone from his pocket.

*‘Will b late. Same place @ 1p.m. instead. J. xx’*

Who on earth is J? She opened the text and saw several others that preceded it.

*‘Got something new. U will luv it! J. xx’*

Then one from Rory.

*‘I have something 4 u 2 R. xx’*

Hearing him bounce up the stairs startled her sneaky snoop, she froze, with the phone in her hand, then scooted back onto the bed as he strolled back in the room, buck naked.

“What are you doing?” He frowned, his eyes glued to her hand that

clutched his mobile phone.

“Your phone buzzed.”

“Right, thanks.” He snatched it from her hand, threw the box of pain relief on the bed and turned off his phone.

Lana wanted answers, especially now the air had dropped to sub-zero. A warning bell rang in the back of her mind, telling her something was wrong.

“Rory, who was that?”

“Zac’s mate.” His shoulders looked tense and his expression hardened.

“And he ends his texts with a kiss?”

Rory’s eyes narrowed to a glare, his breathing was deep and fast. “What is this, Lana? What the fuck are you trying to say?” he admonished, vulnerable in his naked state.

“I’m only asking,” she snapped, rising to her knees on the bed, her fists clenched, anger swelling in her belly.

He dropped the phone into his jacket pocket, selected a clean pair of boxers, then swiped his jeans and tee from the window chair. “No, you’re prying like a fucking police officer.”

“Are you serious?” she spat. “I’m entitled to ask you, we’re engaged after all, aren’t we?”

Lana saw a swirl of anger in his eyes as he dragged his jeans over his hips. “And what a mistake that’s turning out to be. I can’t even have friends without you snooping around like Miss fuckin’ Marple.”

This wasn’t Rory, he was acting unusually aggressive towards her and being oddly defensive. Her gut was screaming wildly, and the realisation settled in her mind, she couldn’t trust him anymore.

Once fully dressed, he shrugged into his jacket and made for the door. Lana positioned herself between him and the exit. “A mistake, Rory? Really? Take the ring back then and fuck off,” she hissed between her teeth.

How dare he act like an immature kid. Yanking the ring off her finger, she thrust it forward. “Here, take the stupid thing then.”

His eyes lowered to her open palm, the ring glistening in the beams of light that flooded their bedroom.

“Fuck you, Lana, you’re such a child. Get in the real world and grow up,” he scolded.

She didn’t want the ring now and being honest with herself, she shouldn’t have accepted it in the first place. Finding the text messages was the catalyst for her epiphany. They weren’t exactly proof that he was having an affair, but

they sure as hell pointed to it like a flaming beacon. She didn't want to be with Rory anymore, and she couldn't have Marcus.

"Fine!" She slammed the ring down on the chest of drawers. Rory pushed past her and flew down the stairs, slamming the front door as he escaped.

She wasn't an idiot. He'd spent more nights out with his mates than at home with her, even though he gave up the club. So much for being a loved-up couple who were recently engaged, they hadn't had sex since the night he proposed, and even then, it was mediocre. Lana tried to get aroused but she could only get turned on by pretending she was with Marcus fucking McGrath.

Lana cursed herself for using Marcus as a dirty secret sex scenario instead of focusing on her actual partner, but the fact was, he did things to her, he made her feel alive, he kept her awake all night with his body on her mind and he helped her to get through sex with her fiancé.

She desperately wanted to know if he thought about her too, or if he was with those women from the photograph. *Where they were touching his body like she wanted to?*

It was obvious that her feelings for Rory had changed. She needed to move out. Immediately.

“**T**hanks for letting me crash on your sofa,” Lana slurred, downing the last drop of Prosecco.

Amanda sat opposite, her legs tucked beneath her buttocks, wearing chequered all in one pyjamas. The cosy one-bedroom city apartment was minuscule compared to the vast open space that Marcus occupied when he stayed in the city. The living and kitchen space were combined, with one door leading off to a tiny bedroom and another to a shower room no bigger than a shoe closet. Bon Jovi’s *Livin’ on a Prayer*, from the best of the ’80s playlist filled the background while the girls drank the fruity fizz, putting the world to rights.

“No probs, Lan. I’m sorry it came to this,” she said softly, resting her hand on Lana’s shoulder. “You did the right thing leaving Rory. Without trust, your relationship is doomed.”

Wrapped in a fleece blanket, Lana hugged her knees, holding the flute out for more. “From the minute I met McGrath, my world changed. You were right. I just needed to admit it to myself. I do love Rory, you know. Well, I thought I did,” she mumbled, tears stinging her eyes.

Amanda trudged over to the fridge in fluffy unicorn slippers and seized another bottle, popping the cork. They both cheered in unison as it catapulted across the room, ricocheting off the wall and missing their heads by a whisker.

“Do you really think he was cheating on you?” Amanda slumped down onto the arm chair opposite Lana.

“My gut is always right. It’s like a well-tuned instrument – implement –

intuitive thing, whatever – it works.” Lana’s head was a dizzy. “Don’t worry, I’m going to find my own apartment as soon as possible and start over with my life. I need to be *me* for a while. Take up some hobbies or something.” She clanked her glass with Amanda’s.

“You should let Marcus know that you’re single now.” Amanda raised an eyebrow and hummed.

Lana slugged the bubbles back. “No way. I need time for myself. Anyway, the way that guy makes me feel isn’t healthy.”

“What are you afraid of?”

“Him... and his monster cock.” She hiccupped.

Amanda gasped, her groggy eyes suddenly wide and intrigued. “Seriously, hot and well-hung. Damn, girl. What are you waiting for? A one-night stand for rebound sex is a fantastic idea. Zero hassle and zero commitment. You’ve just broken up with your fiancé, and Marcus clearly has a commitment phobia. It’s a win, win situation.”

The possibility of spending one night with Marcus had merits. She wanted to know how good it would feel to be under him, but mostly she just wanted his lips all to herself. Surely, one night of sex would help to stamp out the heat burning between her thighs. Perhaps this could be the new carefree and non-committal, Lana. “Maybe I should...”

Amanda shrieked, her curls flinging off her shoulders as she bounced on the chair and snatched Lana’s phone. “Call him. Plant the seed that you’re in Single Town.”

Lana expelled a long breath. “I don’t have his number.”

“Lan, a guy like him must have a secretary?” She raised a cynical brow.

“Wait. Yes, there is someone who could pass him a message.”

She scrolled through her contact list. “There she is,” she enunciated with a slow slur, scrutinising the small letters blurring on the screen.

The contact answered, “Donna Marie, speaking.”

“Oh. Hi. I need to speak to Mr. Marcus, I mean McGrath. Marcus McGrath. Please.”

“Who am I speaking with?” Donna Marie hissed down the line like she wasn’t impressed with Lana’s drunken nonsense.

“Lana Craig. Is he there?”

“Lana, Mr. McGrath has handed the running of the club to me, so if you have any queries, please feel free to direct them my way,” she replied coolly.

“I just need to speak to him,” she pleaded.

“I’m sorry, Ms. Craig, Mr. McGrath isn’t here.”

Silence.

“Oh right, have you got his number then? I’ll call him directly.” Lana persisted.

“No, Ms. Craig, I can’t give out Mr. McGrath’s personal information. Good night.”

Lana dropped the phone. “That witch hung up on me. How rude.”

Amanda removed her knuckles from her teeth, giggling like a school girl. “Oh, Lana, you sounded like a Muppet.”

Both girls laughed in harmony. Lana spilt drink over her bare thighs, squealing as it trickled down to her fluffy slipper socks. A shrill ring from her mobile phone made her leap forward. She seized her phone from the floor. A withheld number flashed on the screen.

She scowled. “Who the hell is this?”

Amanda threw her arms up over her head and stretched. “It might be lover boy,” she teased. “Or Rory, maybe you should let him know you’re safe.”

“Hello.”

“Lana, are you okay?” Marcus’s deep gravelly voice made every single hair on her body stand to attention. “Donna Marie said you were looking for me.”

“Marcus, hi, ah, yes, I, um, just called to say hi.” She almost lifted off the chair in shock. “How did you get this number?”

“Are you drunk?” he growled.

“Just tipsy.” Oh God, she had made a big mistake calling him after two bottles. “Just a little.”

“Where are you?” he demanded.

“I’m staying with my girlfriend, Amanda. Well, she’s not my girlfriend, she’s my best friend. I don’t have a girlfriend or a boyfriend, not even a fiancé for that matter.”

For a split second she felt like he was going to say something, but he just sighed instead. “Get some sleep, Lana. Don’t leave Amanda’s house in that state,” he ordered, then the line went dead.

Lana gulped, pulling the blanket back over her sticky legs, then hiding her face in her hands.

“Holy shit. He hung up, too. I’m mortified,” she muttered in disbelief of the humiliating conversation that just played out in real time.

Amanda tried so hard to control her fit of giggles, but she wheezed and sucked in a grunt through her nose. “Lan, you’re so funny. That was one hundred percent awkward,” she cackled, reaching over to her iPod to hit reshuffle.

The girls called it a night at 3 a.m. Lana fell asleep, thinking about Marcus, which was a regular occurrence these days. She dreamt about his stubbly angular jaw, gorgeous green eyes and his sinfully soft lips trailing kisses along the inside of her thigh.

A loud knock jerked her awake, tearing her away from the best sex dream ever. She rolled over and fell off the sofa. Clambering up from the floor, she glanced at the kitchen clock – it was just after seven thirty in the morning.

“Amanda? Some crazy person is at your door,” she yelled, wincing as her head thumped with the loudness of her own voice.

Amanda didn’t stir, the banging continued. For goodness sake. She didn’t have any cash for the window cleaner or any other bloody debt collector. She caught a glimpse of her pale face, with dark shadows under her eyes and bright red dehydrated lips. At this minute, there was nothing she could do to make herself presentable for whoever was on the other side of the door.

Gingerly opening the door, she jumped back as Marcus stormed in, carrying a brown paper bag, wearing a black sports cap.

*Oh, this is just beyond embarrassing now.*

As if the late-night-booty-call fail wasn’t bad enough, now he was in front of her, looking sexy as hell in loose fitting track pants and a tight tee. She stood before him looking like she got hit with two bottles of Prosecco, never mind drinking them.

“Here.” He opened the bag and pulled out a small bottle of clear liquid and a packet of powder. “Mix the powder in this for your hangover. Then get dressed,” he ordered.

“Get dressed?” she croaked, taking in his casual attire. The cap shaded his eyes, giving him a dangerous edge that made her gut twist and her thighs clench.

“Firstly, because those shorts are cut so high up your ass, and secondly because you’re coming with me, back to my place.” He pulled his shoulders back, folded his arms and widened his stance as his gaze dawdled on the skimpy shorts.

Marcus wanted her. He wanted to take her back to his place. It would be super easy to get home from his city apartment, so she could leave straight

after they have mind blowing sex, as if anything with Marcus would be less than mind blowing. A one-night stand with her hot crush looked promising.



**M**arcus had finally reached the small city apartment after a long night of waiting. Before he could reach Lana, he had to find out where her friend lived, and that meant getting his investigator on it straight away.

Right now, she was downing the pain relief and vitamin combo that he swore by for hangovers. When she shuddered with the bitter aftertaste, her eyes watered, making them even more blue. He missed those dazzling baby blues. Her bed-tousled hair and skimpy sleepwear jolted his dick awake. The second he heard her enticing voice on the phone last night, he was stunned by the urge to have her. For what he could gather, she had broken up with her useless boyfriend which made his decision to find her, all the more urgent. Now he had to focus on keeping his hands to himself without tugging the lengths of her hair, forcing her face down on the sofa and hammering into her from behind.

“Just throw on some sweats and track shoes, and let’s go,” he said huskily.

“I’ll need to get a few things.” She pranced to the couch and rummaged through a kit bag. As she bent over, the hem of those barely there shorts slid up, her perky ass cheeks peeking out at him. His temperature was rising, to off the fucking thermometer.

“Are you ready?” He pinched the bridge of his nose when she looked up with those bright blue eyes and gifted him with a devastatingly sexy grin. “I’ll get you whatever you need, let’s just get out of here.”

After she threw on jeans, a tee and trainers, Marcus led her to his car. Her

hair swayed as she walked, brushing his hand that was firmly positioned on her lower back. A dog barked in the stillness of the early morning agitating his pounding head.

He opened the passenger door, watching intently as she slipped in and clipped her seat belt. As he took in the view, his mind wandered to how little she knew. All his staff at The Fitz were instructed to contact him the minute she had any dealings with the hotel. Having sank a couple of whiskey's earlier in the evening, he was forced to wait until he could consider driving, even when her friends address lit up his phone. He paced the floors until he could make his way to her, unable to understand why it was eating him up inside. Why did Lana Craig torment him so much?

Now she was responding to his touch with warmth in her eyes. A gaze that he wanted to wrap himself up in forever.

Lana sat back and relaxed in the sleek upholstered bucket seat of his sporty car. She gazed out the window, watching the world go by as the car picked up speed. “Lisburn? Why are we heading away from the city?” she asked, noting the huge green highway sign at the side of the road.

“My home is in Fermanagh. I’m taking you there for the weekend.”

“The weekend?” The plan was a one night stand, so she could run off without any awkward after chat.

“Did you have other plans?”

“No.” Now she could chase the fantasy of having a man like Marcus for a bit longer. The idea had merits and warnings.

Monday would arrive soon enough. Carpe the fucking Diem. Her life needed an injection of fun, temporary escapism from the stress, hurt and drama that she found herself in after the split from Rory. The night she met Marcus was the first time, ever, when she truly felt alive, when her heart began to beat a fierce rhythm that mimicked his. Admitting those feelings scared the hell out of her but being beside him now, gave her a contentment that had long been missing. Nothing would hold her back from going all the way with him tonight. The smooth ride and comfy leather seat lulled her lashes to flutter uncontrollably, her eyelids drooped and she drifted asleep.

Musical beats vanished into silence. A hand rested on her thigh, instantly alerting her to waken. With a jolt, her eyes sprung open to see Marcus’s incredibly handsome face with a hint of a smile on his kissable lips.

“We’re here, beautiful.”

Marcus's home was set amidst sprawling green fields, sheltered by thick spruce on both sides. An elegant hedge of silver birch lined the long driveway, leading to a modest two-storey Georgian cottage, perfectly symmetrical on either side of the white door which was framed between panes of glass. Sash windows dotted the soft grey stone façade, reflecting wispy clouds in the blue sky. It was both charming and unexpected. Not a home she would associate with a multi-millionaire playboy. It was idyllic and peaceful.

The car was parked up on the gravel drive in front of the house, where dappled sunlight enhanced the vast expansive countryside, swelling her heart with a deep emotion of freedom. It was utterly breath-taking, and she wondered how magical it would be during a flurry of thick, fluffy white snow.

Tiny cream pebbles crunched under foot as Lana followed behind him to the door and into the wide hallway. The large slab floors were worn with time, earthy and dark in contrast to the freshly painted sage walls and ashen cornicing. All the doors leading off the space were closed. Her feet itched to investigate.

"It used to be the coach house. It dates back to the 1800s. The stables and courtyard are what really sold it to me, although I've done work to it, extending considerably out the back."

He sauntered ahead, opening a door and beckoning for her to join him. "This used to be the kitchen, and then I added on the rest."

An enormous garden room with exposed natural stone walls hugged sage green picture window frames. They seamlessly exhibited the view beyond of Lough Erne, nestled in lush greenery. Shards of light streamed in through the glass lantern high above her head, warming the scent of each sweet Jasmine that blossomed in the heat of the sun-drenched room. Along the wall to her right, a long sofa swayed from ropes, smothered in silk cushions, facing the serene natural setting. To her left, handcrafted kitchen units swept around the expansive corner, surrounding an enormous island with a natural wooden countertop. Bronze pendants dropped from the ceiling, reflecting fragments of copper light on the surfaces. It was simplistic, but every detail methodically executed with no expense spared.

She examined every little detail. "This room is stunning, Marcus."

Strolling to the corner of the room, he crouched down and tossed a log into a wood-burning stove. Lana ambled over to his side. "Can I help you?"

The kindling wood crackled and glowed and the charred smoky smell reminded her of a time less complex, when she helped her grandfather light his fire in the winter.

The corners of his mouth met his sparkling emerald eyes, he rose to a stand, placing both hands on her shoulders. “Just relax. I’m sure you’re still feeling delicate after last night? The rescue powder will make you feel a little groggy but it’s amazing stuff.”

With a feather light touch his hand slid down her arm, until his fingers locked her wrist and he led her towards a low armchair beside the log pile.

“Sleeping on the way helped. I feel much better, thank you.” A sigh escaped her when she lowered to the chair and his hand retreated.

“You can freshen up if you like.” He crossed his arms over his chest and looked down at her with that unreadable look that he wore so well. “And then I’ll show you around.”

“Sounds good,” she replied, then remembered all her toiletries were at Amanda’s.

Sinking back into the chair, she studied the glass room. “It’s not where I imagined you to live, though it’s miles better than your city crash pad.”

Marcus chucked another log into the burner. “I have quite a few properties where I can stay at any time; however, this is where I call home. My father and brother both live close by. I come here to think and recharge my batteries.”

Her gaze was drawn towards the reflective lake in the distance. “I can see why. It’s a little piece of heaven. I absolutely love it here.”

“Good. I’ll show you to your room.” She wanted, desperately, to reach out for him but she just latched onto his waiting hand and lifted off the chair, keeping her urges locked down.

“My room?”

“Yes, you’ll have your own bathroom, too. My housekeeper has organised the cabinets for you, but if there is anything else you need, then I’ll arrange for it to be delivered as soon as possible.”

“I’m not staying with you?”

He laid his hand on her shoulder and jerked her closer without saying a word. As he escorted away from the kitchen, he teased a wisp of hair that tickled her neck.

Daring to look up at him, she found his mouth curled at the corner in that sexy way he did so well.

*Why does he want me to sleep in a separate bedroom? Was this not going to be a dirty weekend under the sheets...the same sheets?*

Lana opened her mouth to say something, but her nerves lodged in her throat.

“What’s wrong, beautiful?” His arm slid away to open the bedroom door.

Her heartbeat thrummed and she lowered her lashes, hiding a look of confusion. Stroking her chin with his knuckles, Marcus hummed. “Take a shower. Make yourself at home.”

“Thanks.”

“This is your room for the weekend. Come and find me when you’re ready.”

Marcus strolled away, his rock solid ass looked amazing in jersey fabric. It took all her effort not to run after him, just to slide her hands beneath the layers for a quick squeeze.

The bedroom was impressive with that brand-new smell mingling with fresh cotton and natural wood. A calming view mirrored the same lough she saw downstairs, but at a higher aspect. Dazed by the splendour, she wandered to the hefty bed frame.

Pushing through twin doors, she crossed into a large adjoining bathroom that was five times the size of her old bedroom in Rory’s house. Creamy marble covered the vast floor space, walls and shower, which was big enough for a whole family to use at the same time, plus the dog and maybe a goat.

A skitter of nerves whirred in her stomach, anticipation of the weekend making her jumpy and excited. Whatever Marcus had planned, would ultimately lead to sex and that thought alone was enough to make her lightheaded and lustful.

**M**arcus paused outside her door, listening to the shower kick into action. Lana was naked, in his house, only a few steps away from his twitching hands. The last time they were intimate, she threw him out before he could finish what he'd started, to rid himself of the maddening drive to have her.

His cock strained against his trousers, begging him to burst in on her but he lingered at the door instead. Dropping his chin, he debated his next move.

She willingly came with him to Fermanagh.

She wanted this too.

*Fuck it!*

He barged into the steamy room, quickly locating her. There she was, massaging body wash over her sumptuous hips. He dragged his tee over his head, revealing a black tattoo of Roman numerals across his left pectoral and toed off his trainers. Stepping out of his track bottoms, he kicked them out of the way.

With a singular mission on his mind, he charged towards the glass cubicle, watching as her eyes flared and her chest rose with rapid bursts

Her lips drew in between her teeth when the glass door slammed behind him, locking them in. In one step he was right in front of her sexy body, only to be met by her palm, warning him to keep a distance. Reaching for the bergamot and lime-scented body wash, she squeezed out a glob and rubbed it between her hands. Slowly and seductively, the creamy lather mapped her curves, sliding over her full breasts, soft fleshy belly and drifting down to her ass. The water trickled down her pale skin, frothy bubbles clung to areas that

he desperately wanted to lick and bite. Lana was putting on a show and he was boiling over with a painful need to own her.

His breath shuddered from his lungs and his hands balled by his sides. She continued to tease and taunt him with her wandering hands, gliding one down to her soft dark curls. A wolfish growl thundered in his throat as her fingers swirled. Her hooded eyes locked with his and those baby blues deepened with lust.

The pulse in his throat thrummed and he inched forward, readying himself to shove her against the tiled wall. An overwhelming desire shadowed his thoughts, consumed with the need to slap her sweet peachy cheeks and watch as they reddened, matching the colour of her sinful lips. His dick throbbed, skimming his tight stomach, ready and aching. A few seconds more of her wicked torture and he would be close to an explosion, but he was adamant he'd be balls deep inside her first. The intense excitement was intriguing, sure, he'd been turned on before, but right now he was about to lose himself. His spine tingled when Lana held her breath, focusing her gaze on his length.

Within the blink of an eye, he pinned her to the wall, water blasting down on his tight shoulders as he crushed into her breasts. She sucked in a sharp gust of air.

"I'm going to fuck you so hard, Lana," he growled into the curve of her neck, cuffing her biceps with a tight grip.

"Please, Marcus, I want this too. I need to feel you inside me," she pleaded.

Lowering his head, his lips brushed hers and his fingertips dug into her soft skin, trapping her.

"You want me now, beautiful?"

"Yes."

"No backing out?"

"No backing out," she panted.

"Beg me to fuck you, Lana." His teeth grazed her jaw and he muttered into her damp skin. "Beg me."

"Please, Marcus, please."

Lana was so beautiful, so sexy and fascinating that his heart pinched just being in the same room as her. His nails traced the dip of her narrow waist, skating between her parted thighs. The soft walls of her inner passage tightened snugly around his fingers while his thumb rubbed her sensitive



nub. Those sweet groans made him tug her fleshy lower lip until her nails dug into his back. They kissed with an intensity that was passionate and hot, scattering tingles all over his body. Angling her head with his thumb and forefinger, cupping her jaw, he held her in place, securing her with a firm grip. Her pebbled nipples rubbed against his chest as her pelvis pushed into his pulsating hand. She was ready, on the verge of climax. The need to claim her, to take as his own became an overpowering quest. He needed to have his dick inside her when she exploded. Breaking their kiss, he stood for a beat and gazed down at her heaving breasts. This was the moment he would succumb to her charm and the spell would finally be broken. He would be able to leave her behind as a distant memory. Removing his fingers, he left her panting against the wall with a startled look on her pretty face.

“Wait here,” he ordered.

As he stepped out of the cubicle, he shook his head lightly, cursing himself for being such a damn fool. The loud inner chatter in his head, mocked and laughed. There was no way once would be enough, which is why she was here, for the whole weekend.

**L**ana clawed her skin, waiting and watching as he selected a foil packet from a drawer under the sink. The intense swell mounting between her legs had become unbearable. She needed a release, with him, all over him. Rubbing her fingertips over the steamy glass, she observed his skilful movements, watching him roll a thin veil down his thick long shaft. Marcus's legs were apart, his feet planted wide and his hand wrapped around the base of his dick. His naked form was toned and tight, with wide muscular shoulders of power and strength. A scattering of fine hair dusted his flexed chest and the skin was deepened with a tan, adding to his rugged manliness. His legs were lean and brawny and his face so very striking. This commanding man was preparing himself for her, and she was beyond ready.

The pounding in her chest made her feel faint, especially when the glass door opened and his strong arms bumped her pelvis into him. His body was warm and welcoming, the touch exhilarating and safe.

Positioned in the corner, he shunted her upwards, and she willingly spread her legs, folding them around his hips. Without hesitation, he found her heat and nudged into her entrance, bit by bit until he fully buried himself inside her. The controlled upward thrusts were deep and intense. She was full, stretched like never before, and it felt amazing.

Up until this point she could only imagine how good he would feel, and now she was finally able to surrender to him, with a reciprocated desire fuelling their kisses.

She moaned into his mouth. "That feels so good."

He pushed in deeper, holding the tip at her sweet spot, causing her insides

to quiver. She was seconds from losing control. Marcus knew exactly what she needed to send her screaming over the edge of sanity. "Come for me, baby," he growled throatily, digging his fingers into her thighs.

On command, she let go, giving into an orgasm that rippled through her muscles. She screamed out his name, her eyes rolling and his thrusts hard and fast. Her insides convulsed, tightening around him. Still impaled on his hard cock, Marcus continued to ram into her, over and over. Scraping her fingernails across his shoulder blades, she clung by the insides of her legs, panting into his neck. With one swoop, he hoisted her up further, pressing her shoulders into the tiny tiles and pushed deeper inside. Lana yelled out in pleasurable pain, it felt so long, nudging the entrance to her womb.

"Look at me," he ordered.

Lana lifted her head and locked eyes with his dark green lustful gaze. Releasing her legs, he pushed them down and spun her around. "Bend over."

Fanning her fingers on the wall, she bent over, her back to his chest. His throaty growl made her tingle and those hot lips brushing the arch of her shoulder electrified her senses.

The welcome feel of his hardness locating her entrance brought her to tiptoes in anticipation. Again, he took her, faster and more furious now he was able to drive in with more control. A large hand snaked her hips, gliding to her clitoris. The sensation of his fingers combined with his driving thrusts made her insides liquify until she shuddered, climaxing in a wave of intense currents that swirled from her groin to her solar plexus. She twisted and panted, her shaky legs buckling at the knees. Marcus tensed, bringing his arm to her waist to cradle her from behind. His face fell to her hair and he pressed his lips to the crown of her head, before swivelling her around so they were face to face.

The water spray rested on his thick lashes, glistening like diamonds. A wide contented smile graced his lips. She peered up at him, smiling shyly and then tipped her forehead into his chest. Still dazed, she stayed there and stroked the smooth skin by her face, feeling it prickle at her light touch. Her heart bucked wildly, hot jets gushed over their entwined bodies and his arms wrapped her neck, holding her tightly.

She felt safe, happy and satisfied but it was all too much, too intense, too real. The sex had been better than she ever dreamed possible, never to be repeated with anyone else. Those stupid dangerous thoughts headlined in her mind, she wasn't sure if she could let him go.

A stir of emotion brought her arms around him tighter. Marcus nestled his cheek on top of her head like he didn't want to let go either.

They just stood in the shower momentarily, their hearts beating together but their thoughts unknown.

**M**arcus stood back, observing her, following her fingers as they raked through the ends of her matted hair, squeezing the residual water with a towel. This was an intimate act of voyeurism that he had never indulged in before. He'd never felt the need to hang around after sex and was unconcerned with what women did once the deed was done. But now, with Lana, there was an odd feeling lingering in his chest like he wanted to make her laugh, or he wanted to help her dry the soaking locks clinging her bare shoulders.

“So, what’s the craic between you and the fiancé?” Her wedding finger was diamond-free and his patience had worn thin now he’d had her all to himself.

Her eyes dawdled at the tattoo across his heart, X-XI-MCMLXXXVII. Patting her arms with a towel she sighed lightly. “I shouldn’t have agreed to marry him. We’ve been growing apart for some time now. I just didn’t want to admit it.” Lana dropped the towel to her feet and stepped into him, pressing her hips into his thighs. She traced the outline of his tattoo, pausing her finger over his heart. “Or, maybe I only realised how I felt when a certain sexy as fuck man forced me to climax in his office,” she whispered, then tugged his nipple with her teeth.

A low masculine chuckle reverberated in his chest and he cupped her cheeks with his palms. “You loved every bit of it, beautiful.”

“Yeah, I did, and you knew it.”

Propped up on tiptoes, she ran her tongue along the dip in his throat, initiating another excruciating hard on. It nudged the smooth skin of her belly

and she inhaled sharply.

Scattering tiny kisses from his nipple to his tattoo, she stopped over the black ink. “What does this stand for?”

His back stiffened. “It’s the date of my mother’s death, 10 November 1987. The date my life changed forever.”

Lana gasped, her eyes bugged, and she pressed her palms into his chest, angling herself backward.

“Marcus.” Those wide baby blues never left the inked numerals.

“What, Lana? What’s wrong?” His chest tightened at her reaction.

“I was born on 11 November 1987 – the day after.”

He stood still, their silence swallowed a frenzy of thoughts. Marcus breathed deeply and his jaw tightened. Standing before him, she looked small and fragile, perfect and sexy. He had studied her contract and personal documents more than once, yet he failed to notice her date of birth because he’d been too consumed with the fact she belonged to another man.

*Were they connected by the universe in some fucked up way?*

This was too much. The emotions dancing in his chest were out of control. This was unexpected, all of it. Instead of getting his fill of Lana Craig, he wanted more. Now Lana, or fate, or whatever the hell it was had just added his mother into the mix. He cleared his throat. “I’ll leave you to get sorted. Once you’re ready, come and find me in the stables.” He jerked a hand through his hair.

Lana tugged him closer as he tried to step away. She pressed her lips lightly to the ink and peered up at him through sexy ebony lashes that fluttered with a come-hither sweep. He dished out a tight smile, unsure how to react. Snaking her hands around his neck, she lifted to the balls of her feet. Soft wet kisses teased his stubbled cheek, reaching his mouth. Her lips clung to his, invoking a shiver that spread from his scalp and ended at the base of his spine.

Lana would be his ruin.

“See you at the stables,” she whispered, dropping her arms and chewing the inside of her mouth.

He nodded quietly and sauntered out the door with a towel wrapped around his hips and his thoughts buried.

**W**hen Lana left the bathroom, she was surprised to see a plethora of clothes, all laid out on her bed, from satiny underwear to trousers and tops. She selected a barely-there thong and matching filigree bra, a far contrast from her usual semi-padded seamless variety. The designer pale blue jeans were the perfect size, setting off her shape neatly. Then she slipped into a bubble-gum pink cashmere pullover that was super soft and luxurious on the skin. Both were a great choice for the cooler late summer afternoon. Lastly, she opted to wear her own white track shoes instead of picking from the five pairs of boxed shoes at the foot of the bed; after all, he told her to meet him at the stables and she didn't mind getting her old ones mucky.

She followed the stone-floored corridor to the garden room orangery and gazed out to the motionless lough, perfectly still. The sun had started its slow decent, illuminating the water like a sheet of glass. To the right, a black horse weathervane rested high on the steeple of a small clock tower and she guessed that's where the stables were.

A pebbled path twisted and turned through colourful clusters of shrubs, sheltered by towering pine trees. A gentle breeze carried a fresh floral fragrance mixed with sweet cut grass. Marcus's tattoo played on her mind, the odd coincidence of the date being a day before she was born. She casually shrugged off the silly romantic nonsense as an unfortunate fluke, even though there was a flicker of hope nestled in the rhythm of her heartbeat. She wanted to believe in a fairy-tale, to allow herself to consider a man like him wanting more than just a weekend. Those passionate kisses steered her thoughts in

one direction, all leading to him. Whatever would happen over the next few hours was just his idea of fun. Lana knew he wasn't hers and this would all be over by Monday.

She entered the stone built stable yard through a large archway, paved underfoot with the original cobbles. Arches mirrored each other along the parallel walls fitted with wide stable doors. In the centre of the rectangular space was a large fountain. A rearing bronze horse spouted a jet of water from its mouth, filling the pool beneath.

"Lana." Marcus's husky voice drifted across the yard and settled on her skin with a sizzling welcome. Catching a glimpse of his handsome face at the farthest stable, she trotted over. The dark stall was relief from the low sun when she stepped inside, wondering why he was in there. Her eyes narrowed, adjusting to the light and searching the shadows. At the far end she found a large, fluffy dog bed, and him.

"This is, Varia, the love of my life."

Marcus was sitting on the rubber floor, his long legs stretched out and a small, tubby tan dog lay sleeping on the cushion. He rubbed its ears and swept a gentle hand over the napping mother-to-be.

His eyes gleamed. "She's going to have a litter any day now. I need to be here to make sure everything is okay. The Vet wants her to rest as much as possible, not that she can waddle too far."

This powerful commanding man was patting a dog like it was his everything. In that split second she witnessed a different side to him, a softer, gentle side that made her heart swoop. Lana adored animals and had considered rescuing a puppy many times. Rory had allergies which were mainly brought on by pollen, but she felt it unfair to bring a dog into the house, to then remove it if he was allergic.

She crouched down, keeping her distance so she didn't startle Varia. "What breed is she?"

"Border Terrier. I had her mother before her and kept Varia from her only litter."

The heavily pregnant dog resembled a cute otter and she snorted out a contented breath letting her tale bop lightly.

Marcus ruffled the hair on its head one last time and stood. "I thought you'd like to meet her."

With a light nod towards the dog, he strolled into the sunlight streaming through the open door. Khaki cargo trousers wrapped his muscular thighs and



a white casual fit shirt brought out the colour of his golden skin. She followed behind, gazing at his broad shoulders and strong hands that secured the stable door behind them. “My yard staff have been watching her day and night.”

When his gaze met hers, she moved closer with a smile playing on her lips. “She’s well catered for, and a very lucky girl to have the undivided attention of Marcus McGrath.” She tilted into him, just a fraction.

He stroked a finger along the curve of her jaw with a light touch and then winked. “There’s another girl who has my attention, too.”

“Oh yeah?”

Catching her face in his large hands, he lowered his head and took her mouth in a slow, deep kiss that made her toes curl and her pulse race. Right or wrong, the idea of a one-night stand frittered away into the balmy air. Sliding his fingers through her hair, he held her head firmly until his lips broke away. “Yeah, you have my attention, beautiful.”

*Just for the weekend?*

His strong arms came around her, holding her close to him. It was a feeling of safety mixed with desire and she knew her heart was playing a different game to his.

“Do you like horses, too?” He kissed the crown of her head.

“I love them.”

“Let’s take a walk through the fields. They’re out at the pasture. The ones in this yard belong to my brother, Jamie. They’re mostly retired race horses. I used to ride but haven’t been in the saddle for a long time now. Maybe tomorrow we could go for a horse back ride through the fields?”

“I’ve never ridden before. I’d love to have a go, as long as you promise I won’t fall off?” She nudged into him with her shoulder.

His arm slid down and snaked around her waist. “I’ll protect you, beautiful. You have my word.”

They spent the afternoon walking through vast green fields, chatting openly about themselves. The conversation was easy and relaxed between them. Marcus had let his guard down, he was more than just a ruthless, controlling business man with women and money on tap.

“Why did you join the club?”

Lana took a slow, quiet breath and kept her eyes to the overgrown bramble hedges. “He wanted to.”

“And you didn’t?”

“I wanted to make our relationship work. I felt like I wasn’t enough for

him.”

“He’s an asshole, Lana. You’re more than enough for any man. Maybe a little too much.”

Her head whipped around, her eyes searching his. “Too much?”

Marcus didn’t reply. His arm tightened and he twisted her around, lowering his forehead to hers. “I’m getting hungry.”

“Me too,” she whispered.

She wondered if he was actually thinking about food because his eyes swam with emotions, giving her heart a reason to buck.

Marcus brought his hot lips down, covering her mouth with his, gifting her with a tender kiss that left her feeling warm and dazed. When he pulled back, she took a minute to gather her thoughts, to pull them down from the absurd heights of hope.

Clearing her throat, she internally warned herself to lock protective armour around her heart, reminding her silly mind that Marcus was charming and suave with every woman he met.

It was too late, Lana was falling for him. Hard and fast.

Deep and unprotected.

The high moon lit up the ripples on the lake like a torch light and by the time they ambled back to the coach house, the sky was bursting with stars. Lana shivered. The temperature had dropped to a cool breeze. She loved how Marcus instinctively nudged her closer to his side, guiding her back along the path.

He prepared penne al'arrabiata, taking charge in the kitchen like he did in the shower. She perched on a tall stool by the island with a large glass of red wine in her hand and a contented smile stretched across her cheeks. As he worked, Marcus displayed a flow of expertise, executing the final dish to perfection.

The deep red Italian Merlot stained her bottom lip to a dark plum shade.

"I've been thinking," she began. "Do you believe that things happen for a reason? I mean, perhaps I was born after your mother's death so the universe could bring us together."

His eyes flicked up and he stopped tossing the salad leaves. He stared at her for a second before speaking, "And what do you think the universe wants me to do with you?" The low sultry tone ignited a fire in her core.

"Oh, I don't know." She laughed quietly, holding the glass to her mouth. "It was just a silly thought." She tipped the wine and took a sip.

Marcus moved around the island with slow, confident strides and rested his palm on her lower back. "Perhaps you're right, Lana. The universe wants us to fuck, all day, every day. I want to fuck you. Right here. Right now."

He spun her around and inched between her thighs. Tilting forward he brushed her lips with the pad of his thumb. The twinkling lights above

reflected in his emerald eyes like sparkling sunlight on beads of morning dew. Her lips parted and she held her breath. His sinful mouth melted into hers with a deep intensity that made her groan and sigh and shake. His palms slid under her pullover, drifting to the lacy bra. The low growl in the back of his throat was followed by strong hands gripping the fabric and tugging the garment over her head. Her hair fell around her shoulders, framing her caged breasts and heaving chest. Leaning back, he inspected the view.

“You’re so fucking beautiful.” His voice was deep, coaxing the hairs on her nape to prick.

Lana pushed into him and slid off the tall stool. She hurriedly unbuttoned her jeans before his wandering eyes and pulled them down to a heap at her ankles. “I should thank you for these, too.” She pouted, angling her hips.

She bent forward and toed free from her jeans. Instantly, Marcus lunged forward and ripped off her flimsy thong. His fingertips dug into her ass cheeks with violence and need, and his wicked tongue dragged over her skin. She remained bent forward, with her head to the ground, her hands steadying her.

“Spread your legs, Lana,” he commanded.

Her heart was thumping in her chest. Between her legs, a blazing heat rushed to her clitoris. She needed him inside her again, but it was clear that his intention was to tease and torment. Marcus was taking his time to play with her, to enjoy every inch of her skin before giving her what she needed most.

Dropping to his knees, he buried his face between her cheeks. Marcus ran his tongue up and down with hungry sweeps. It was thrilling and hot and better than anything she had felt before. He commanded her body with know-how, with experience garnered from his dirty past. Slowly, he traced her perineum, making his way to her front and inserting his tongue. As it dipped in and out, he palmed her ass cheeks wide, exposing her tight back passage further.

“Marcus, that feels so good.” She gulped back the pulse pounding in her throat. “I’ve never had anything in there before.”

The sweet pressure of his palms fell away, and his mouth retreated. He rose up to a stand, smoothing his hands over her prickled skin. “Stand up,” he ordered with a growl.

She pulled herself up, shaking and panting.

“Climb on to the kitchen island.” He tapped a clear space on the high

surface. “I want to see your ass as you climb on, then stay on all fours.”

The tingling between her thighs intensified as she willingly carried out his orders, baring her exposed flesh to him. She teased with wide exaggerated movements that exhibited her wet folds.

Remaining on her knees with her ass in the air, she waited with hungry anticipation. The sensation of his lips heating a trail across her skin initiated a quiver, then out of nowhere he slapped the same spot, no doubt pinkening her skin. Lana shuddered and yelped, only to feel pleasurable silky warmth swirl over the tender spot. A flurry of prickles scattered over her scalp and she butted her ass into his face.

He continued to seduce her with flicks and licks until her legs wobbled and she whimpered in need of a release. “Please, Marcus, please.” Her voice strained and his hand met her ass again with a loud slap.

He was no longer between her legs, his touch missing from her sensitised skin. Whipping her head around, she met his stormy eyes. “Please, fuck me!” she begged. “I want you, like before, in the shower.”

With a swift smack, he slapped her ass again and she watched his gaze land on the subtle wobble. Swooping back down, his lips fluttered kisses covered the sting, his teeth gently biting. A palm worshipped her flesh with firm strokes and the fingers on his other hand dipped inside her heat.

“Rub yourself, Lana,” he ordered.

Her fingers quickly found her swollen nub, circling and rubbing in the same rhythm as his fingers.

The climax was hard and forceful. A strangled groan filled the room, yet she didn’t hear her own throatiness as she lost herself in his hungry touch.

“I’m going to have you now, Lana. Climb off.” When she turned around to face him, Marcus was kicking off his shoes.

He stretched out a hand to help her down from the counter top, sweeping her naked body into his arms and dropping her to a stand before him. The look on his handsome face was confusing. Those gorgeous eyes of his had darkened with lust but his mouth was tight and his expression stern.

“Walk to the sofa. Slowly,” he ordered.

Every command he gave, she willingly responded. Sex with Rory was bland in comparison. He never took the lead or ordered her to do anything. She found Marcus’s voice alone was enough to arouse her deepest darkest desires, but the thought of what he wanted to do to her, ignited her sexual curiosity. Lana knew that she would do anything he asked of her.

Stepping one foot before the other at a leisurely pace, she pranced as seductively as she could, praying she didn't look like an amateur from behind. Gaining confidence, she paused at the leather sofa, turning her gaze over her shoulder to meet his smouldering eyes.

“Bend over and offer your pussy to me, Lana.”

She did just that, her head on the soft buck skin, her legs spread.

“What do you want me to do with this, Lana?” he asked, trailing his fingers over her wet folds while his other hand pulled a condom out of his back pocket. He unbuttoned his jeans as she lay there fully exposed, surrendering herself to him.

Her insides quivered, hearing the foil packet tear open. “I want you.”

“I want to fuck you so badly, beautiful.” His shirt landed beside her and he kicked his trousers across the floor.

“Please, Marcus,” she whimpered.

“The universe wants us to fuck.” His fingertips dug into her skin. “Do you think you can handle my cock inside you again?” He hesitated, waiting to nudge inside her.

“Yes, Marcus. I need it. More than anything. Please!” she pleaded, bobbing her ass in a wicked plea.

Putting both hands on her slender waist, he pressed his hardness to the opening and shunted deep inside her with a low gravelly grunt. One hand grabbed the length of her hair, tugging her head backwards. She was under his complete control, Lana submitted to him without regrets and loved every minute of it.

Her insides constricted, clenching him tightly until he slipped out and spun her around, pushing her back onto the sofa. Without hesitation, he plunged his throbbing length back where it belonged. His fingertips gripped her jaw, uniting their gaze and he crushed his mouth down to hers with a violent hungry kiss that bit and tugged, tasted and took everything she had. Her throaty groans matched his deep hedonistic growl when he released into her trembling body.

Once she floated back down from the best sex ever, Marcus swept her up in his arms and carried her through the house, to his bedroom. Long windows looked out over the impressive stables and silvery lough. The wooden furniture was bulky and masculine, right down to the imposing brick fireplace and log burner, softened only by a brown cowhide rug and an oval wicker dog basket.

The fresh Egyptian cotton sheets felt cool as he lay her down on the super king size bed. His heated gaze wandered over her cleavage. He drew in her lower lip with a gentle suck. A pleasurable groan gusted from her throat when her skin tingled. Her arms folded around him, pressing her chest into his.

This time, the kiss was sensual, with slow long sweeps and a deep drawn out intensity. It was one of those kisses that felt sexy yet loving, inviting and hungry. This kiss was different from all the rest, like Marcus was trying to show her how he felt without having the words to tell her.

**M**arcus covered her prone body with the duvet as she slept. A soft dreamy moan escaped her throat as he caressed the curve of her cheek with the side of his thumb. Those sweet sounds had him hooked. Everything about this woman was addictive.

When he planned this out in his head, he wanted her to have her own bedroom, to keep things simple, with no misunderstandings. He thought she would need time to readjust after her broken engagement, but watching her sleep, confirmed his fucked-up feelings. There wasn't a hope in hell he would allow her to leave his bed, not now.

This was new territory and he was uncertain about where it would lead. Lana had sucked him in with her curvy body, stunning looks and sweet voice. Having her here, in his home, felt right, like she belonged by his side. Whether those feelings would burn out after time was unknown, but the thought of her leaving made him antsy and angry. He wanted her all to himself until he could figure out what the fuck was going on.

His phone vibrated on the bedside cabinet. Reaching out, he answered the call, knowing that Roger, his stable manager, would ring when Varia, was having her pups.

Unexpectedly, Donna Marie was the late-night caller.

“Marcus, we have a situation. One of the club members has been murdered.”

Leaping out of the bed like a stealth panther, he darted into the hallway, “Who?”

“Jacqueline Simpson, she was strangled.”



“Verto wasn’t on this weekend, so why is this any of my concern?” he snapped. Granted, it was a shame the young girl was dead, but what could he do? It wasn’t on his time.

“She was with Rory O’Hare, in The Fitz, Marcus.”

The line went silent. “Shit!” Marcus pressed his palm to his forehead and let out a long puff of air. “Are you sure it was him?”

“It’s confirmed, Donovan picked them up on the security cameras. Rory was seen leaving the room after the emergency services were called by an anonymous male caller.”

“Where is he now?”

“We don’t know. I doubt he’ll get far with her husband hot on his tail.”

This was bad news, very bad news. Marcus had to protect Lana from the fallout. He had to keep her away from Rory, for her own safety. That also meant he had to leave Fermanagh to sort out the legalities of having a death in his hotel, not to mention track down Ciaran Simpson, the notorious Belfast gangster who taught simple lessons of respect with a gunshot to the knees.

Marcus and Ciaran had history, spanning years of a friendly affiliation. The two men had the same connections and it was a given that Ciaran would get his name on the club list, whether it was good idea or not. Now Marcus needed to smooth things over with him to ensure Lana’s safety was a priority. If Ciaran found out that she and Rory had been engaged, Ciaran would hunt her down for revenge and Lana would get caught up in the cross fire of Rory’s fucking stupidity.

Marcus scribbled a quick note and left it on the kitchen counter. He arranged for his chef to arrive early in the morning, to prepare breakfast, lunch and dinner in his absence. The desire to wake up beside her for another round ate away at him when he stood over her in silence, watching her sleep. Her lashes fluttered against her pale cheeks and those kissable strawberry lips were inviting and perfect.

Instead of snuggling up to her sleepy warmth, he turned away and left in the dark of night, to protect her. Lana Craig was his now, and he would rather die than let anything bad happen to her.

Lana hadn't heard him leave, being so sexually satiated, she slept better than she had done in years. A muffled clatter came from the kitchen below. In her rush to see him cook up a culinary storm for breakfast, she padded down the stairs towards to the noise. Rounding the corner, without a pick of clothing, she came face to face with a young man wearing a hessian apron. His round hazel eyes nearly popped out of his head as he gawked at her buck naked body.

"Oh my god!" Her arm snapped to her chest and the other covered between her thighs. "I'm so sorry, I thought you were Marcus," she squealed, hunching forward as if that was going to help hide her bare skin.

"Sorry to disappoint you, honey, but I'm the chef, Freddy. He left a note for you." Freddy pointed to the counter, then smirked behind his curled fingers, pressing his mouth. "Eh, maybe you can read it later when your hands are free," he said through a chuckle. "I'm making waffles for your breakfast, they'll be ready in a few minutes if you want to come back when you're sorted."

Backing out of the room, she cursed herself for being so foolish. Of course he left, he used her like a disposable toy. That was the easiest way for him to get rid of her, just leave and wait for her to do the same.

She showered, alone, with just a heavy heart for company. Dressing in jeans and a tee, she checked her mobile. There were umpteen missed calls from Rory. Rolling her eyes, she chucked it on the bed. There was no way she could talk to him right now, not in Marcus's home, where she'd made love to a non-committal handsome man.

Just as she was about to turn away, the name Marcus appeared as an incoming call.

With trembling hands, she answered. “Lana, did you get my note? I’m sorry, I had to leave for business.” His voice sounded rushed, not his usual air of calm.

“No. I haven’t read it yet. However, your chef got an eyeful when I barged into the kitchen completely naked.” She pressed her palm to her belly, hoping to hear a hint of jealousy in his reply.

“Freddy likes guys. Just as well, or I’d have to sack him for looking at you and he’s worth his weight in gold.” His tone was direct with zero emotion attached. “Look, Lana, I have urgent business to deal with in the city today.”

“It’s okay, I get it. I’ll be out of your home by the time you get back.”

“Lana. Don’t fucking leave. I’m not sure when I’ll be back, but I need you to promise me that you will be there when I return.”

His words were like a tonic to her soul, relief lit up her heart. “Marcus, I have to be in work tomorrow. I can’t hang around here waiting for you.” She sighed lightly because staying Fermanagh to wait for him to come back, overruled her shitty job in the city.

“Lana.” He warned, his tone urgent. “Do not leave Fermanagh. I’ll be back as soon as I can,” he ordered. A hint of desperation broke his raspy tone.

“Is everything okay?” Her heartbeat faltered.

“Yeah, beautiful. Just wait for me. Promise me that you’ll be there when I get back.”

She could ring her manager and ask for a few days off, wait for Marcus to return and then head back mid-week.

“I need you to check on Varia, too. Hopefully, I’ll be back before the pups arrive. My driver took me to Belfast last night, so the car is there if you want to explore a little, or feel free to take one of the horses out, but please don’t go far.” His voice rumbled down the phone line, scattering chills over skin.

Her mouth widened at both corners. “I promise to be here when you get back, Marcus,” she said softly, unsure if he knew she was grinning like a love drunk puppy.

“Good. I’ll get the chopper back tonight at the latest, I need to sort a few things out and then I can work from home.”

“Okay then. I’ll wait for you.”

“Lana...” The line went silent for a beat. “I really enjoy fucking you.”

She gulped hard. “I really enjoy being fucked by you. I promise to wait here, so hurry back.”

“And I promise to spank your fine ass when I get there. See you later, beautiful.” The line went dead.

The phone dropped to bed and she clambered over the sheets to his pillow. A subtle sexy scent of Marcus McGrath laced the fibres. Inhaling deeply, she hugged it close to her chest and shook her head. This was getting out of control.

A sugary sweet aroma of waffles drifted through the house, luring Lana to the kitchen. Slotting her phone into her pocket she joined Freddy, throwing him a shy smile. He fastidiously prepared a fresh fruit salad. His narrow waist and broad shoulders were moulded into a neat black tee under the apron. His gorgeous russet hair was pulled back in a knotted bun at his nape.

Hearing her enter, he looked over his shoulder. “Your breakfast will be ready in a sec, Ms. Craig.”

“Please, call me Lana,” she replied, brushing off the formalities of having a personal chef. “Do you prepare *all* Marcus’s meals?” The concept was alien to her.

“Mostly, but he’s a great cook, too,” he answered, layering an oval platter with sliced kiwi. “I mainly cook for him in his other properties, like when he is working or partying. He likes to be alone when he comes here, the cleaners arrive the minute he leaves. They’re never here when he is.”

Butterflies danced in her stomach. The sheer mention of him partying and the thought of him being with three women at once like the photo from Marbella stabbed her with reality. When Marcus carried her to bed last night, something changed in his eyes. She felt a profound shift, a feeling of complete togetherness. It felt like they had made love, slow and sensual, their eyes locked and their lips clinging to the others, not wanting to let go.

Yet doubt shrouded her hopeful thoughts. No doubt Marcus fooled all the other women he fucked, too. Luring them into a false sense of security before hacking them off from his life-giving artery.

“Does he party much?” Her fingertips reached for the note with her name on it.

Freddy turned to face her, pouting his lips. “He’s the best boss I’ve ever had, so it’s probably a good idea if I don’t get into too much detail, but, yeah, the guy likes to party hard.”

Climbing onto the tall stool, facing Freddy, she tapped the unopened note. “I wasn’t prying. It’s just...” Her voice wobbled.

His palms flung up. “Oh, stop the bus! You love him?” he gasped. “I just knew it. Marcus never brings women back here – like, I mean, never! This place is his private getaway from everything and everyone.”

Her pupils grew and she sucked her lip. “Really? He’s never brought a woman here before?”

Freddy ran his long fingers along his cleft chin, looking left in thought. “No! Not during my time of employment. It’s only ever me, his dad or the gorgeous Jamie. I’ve worked for Marcus for over five years now.”

She flipped open the page to find Marcus’s handwriting.

*I have business in the city. Sorry to leave without waking you first. You’re beautiful when you’re sleeping. I’ll back soon. Promise me you’ll still be there, naked and wet.*

*Marcus*

“Marcus wasn’t sure what you wanted to eat so he told me to make everything. I’ve made all this for you, Lana. I hope there’s something here you’ll enjoy?”

Her gaze lifted to watch Freddy wave his arm theatrically across the selection of glorious tropical fruits, various hard and soft cheeses and cold cuts, from salami to smoked salmon. A rack of warm, stacked waffles were artistically drizzled in maple syrup. A carafe of freshly squeezed orange juice was positioned beside a copper-rimmed cafetière filled to the brim with dark aromatic coffee.

“Oh, Freddy, it all looks yummy, thank you. You didn’t need to go to all that trouble.” She beamed, her fingers clutching the page. “I feel bad that you were called out at short notice. I can sort myself out if you had plans for today.”

His mouth widened to a cheeky grin, baring bright white teeth. “Thank you, Lana, but this is my job.” His left shoulder shrugged casually, and his head tilted a fraction to meet it. “I could think of worse ways to spend the

day. Now, would you like a mimosa?” He tapped his cheek with his index finger and raised his brows.

Her forehead wrinkled. “Mimosa?”

Clanking glasses in a low-level cupboard, he peered over the counter with rakish golden-brown eyes. “OJ and champers. A little early morning indulgence. As long as you aren’t planning to drive anywhere? Marcus would kill me.”

The mobile phone buzzed in her pocket and when she slid it free, Rory’s face was on the screen.

*Why won’t he just leave me alone?*

She declined the call.

“Something up?” Freddy stood tall with a wide rimmed champagne coupe.

“Just my ex. He’s been phoning all morning. I should take his call and talk it over with him rationally, but I want to enjoy my breakfast before I start that conversation.”

“Do you want to get back with him?” Freddy widened his eyes and pressed his hands to his hips.

Her lips parted and she sucked in a sharp burst of air. “Hell no. I’ve fallen for...” She gulped in a gust of air as Freddy slapped his hand over his mouth.

“You really do love him,” he squealed, clapping his hands together repeatedly.

Lana lowered her eyes, afraid she had cursed herself by daring to even think it. “Please, Freddy, I beg you, do not tell Marcus.” She pressed her palms to prayer position. “It’s way too soon to know what this is, never mind talk about the L word.”

“Oh, honey, my lips are sealed. Although I’m guessing the feeling is mutual; otherwise, we wouldn’t be standing here together.” He winked and poured the orange juice.

Lana was skimming the fluffy clouds. The idea of a man like Marcus being in love with her was absurd, there was no way on earth he would settle for someone like her. The phone buzzed again, a text message appeared.

*‘Please pick up. Please.’*

Her heart plummeted, breaking her euphoric daydream. Rory had never been one to express his emotions, but she could tell he was suffering.

Freddy flicked his wrist, waving his hand at the phone. “Just call him. Put the poor sod out of his misery.”

Lana knew he was right. The longer she delayed the inevitable, the harder it would be. She owed it to herself to put their relationship behind her, whether she and Marcus were a long-term item or not.

The phone buzzed again. He was certainly persistent in his pursuit. Taking a slow deep breath, she answered. Freddy strolled past her, winking in support.

“Rory, can I call you back, I’m...”

“Fuck, Lana, I’m in so much shit right now. I really need your help,” he interrupted. “This is crazy shit, Lana. I swear it wasn’t me.” His voice trembled.

“What wasn’t you, Rory?” The hairs on the back of her neck pricked.

“I didn’t kill her, I didn’t kill, Jax – well, I didn’t mean to if I did. Oh, I don’t fucking remember,” he croaked through raspy breaths.

*Killed? Someone was dead?*

Lana’s breath caught, her thoughts spinning out of control. “I don’t understand. Who is Jax, and how were they killed?”

“Look, Lana, I need to see you face to face. I’m hiding out in a mate’s house, but I need to get to the bottom of this before the police get to me, or worse. I just need a fucking chance to prove that it was an accident. I just can’t remember.”

Lana’s head dropped, she knew she would have to leave the sanctuary of the coach house. Rory needed her and there was no way she could tell Marcus or have him involved in any way. He was a well-known business man who didn’t need to be associated with a scandal of this magnitude.

“Why can’t you go to the police and tell them what happened?” she demanded, unsure how she alone could help.

“Lana – will you help me, please? I didn’t murder her. I woke up, and she was...” The tremor in his voice made her heartbeat thump in her throat. “She was so cold. Her eyes were open, just staring at me, but she wouldn’t answer. It was just me and her, alone in the room. Oh fuck, Lana. Please, babe.”

His last word was like a flame thrower, scorching her skin. She used to love that endearing expression, but now it made her nerves stand on edge. A

woman was dead, and Rory was the suspect.

“Please, Lana, I’m begging you. Help me sort this shit out,” he pleaded.

First things first, she needed to get supplies from their house, his house. Then walk him through the whole sordid incident and try to piece it together. If that failed, she would force Rory to hand himself over to the police. He had to, he was the only suspect to a homicide.

“Okay, Rory. I’ll head home and get some of your stuff together. Text me the address of where you’re staying, and I’ll meet you there.”

Freddy sashayed back into the room as she ended the call. Bile stung the back of her throat as she tried to swallow. Dropping down, she stood and pushed back the stool, pressing her hands on the counter to balance herself.

“What’s wrong, honey? You’re deathly pale.” Freddy drew close to her side.

Her eyes misted. “I’m sorry, Freddy. I have to leave immediately. I’ve just received some distressing news, and I need to get back to the city.” Her words cracked as the realisation of Rory’s predicament settled.

“Of course, but I won’t let you drive on an empty stomach. Please sit for a few minutes to catch your breath and have a bite to eat. I’ll pack some of this up for you in a hamper.” He patted her shoulder gently, but she turned and threw her arms around him.

She needed Marcus, his strength and his confidence, but all she had right now was the adorable chef, Freddy.



**F**reddy packed the hamper into the Lexus. He threw together a picnic lunch, consisting of the cold meats and crusty bread, popping in some basil pesto and spicy chutney. He siphoned off the hot coffee into a flask.

“Thank you, Freddy. It was really nice to meet you.”

“No worries, honey. Hopefully we’ll see a lot more each other.” He winked. “Drive safely.”

Lana considered phoning Marcus, to tell him she was breaking her promise, but she knew he would try and stop her – and succeed. There would be plenty of time to explain after she helped Rory with his life changing predicament. Marcus would have to understand why she needed to help Rory in his darkest hour, not because she was in love with him, but because he still reserved a small space in her heart. Lana couldn’t bear the thought of Rory being hung out to dry, for something he allegedly didn’t do, without at least trying to help.

The long drive back to Belfast was tedious. Her mind flitted from one horrendous thought to the next.

*What if Rory did kill the girl? By mistake.*

After all, his nails had bitten into her neck only weeks ago when they were having sex.

She finally arrived at his house in Jordanstown, hesitating at the front door. Memories of her time spent there with Rory flooded back, a time before Verto Veneri. Her life had changed so much since that fateful decision. Lana’s for the better and Rory’s, well, his life could be well and truly ruined.

Holding a deep breath, she found the door unlocked. Entering the hallway, her eyes darted to the ransacked living room. It looked like a whirlwind had crashed through the house, leaving the smashed television in the middle of the floor and furniture upturned. Fear forced her up the stairs, to the bedroom, where she stopped abruptly. A fresh bouquet of vibrant yellow roses soaked in a crystal cut vase on her bedside cabinet amongst the devastation. Their clothes were strewn across the room, drawers trashed and the cotton sheets rolled back and draped over the bottom of the bed. Her eyes narrowed. She gulped back the lump of terror forming in her throat when she caught sight of the black dress worn on her first night to the club. It was the only item neatly laid out on the mattress with the same stilettos placed on the floor directly below.

A creak startled her. Lana slapped a hand over her mouth. “What the fuck?” she stammered, barely audible.

The hair on her scalp lifted. Fear restricted her lungs, crushing them in a vice like grip.

*Run!*

Something was wrong – very wrong. Another muffled noise drifted up the staircase. Someone else was in the house. She had nowhere to hide, no escape route. The hammering heartbeat against her sternum, thundered in her ears as footsteps climbed each step. She whirled around and darted behind the door, pressing her back flat against the wall. The unfortunate choice of hiding meant she couldn’t see who entered the bedroom until the door slammed shut. Her eyes squeezed shut for a split second. A chilling laugh tore at her heart when they pinged open. “Finally, you’re here. It’s about time.”

Lana gasped in preparation to scream but a large hand smacked over her mouth. Fisting her hands, she slammed into his firm torso. The familiar, handsome face before her wore a broad sanctimonious smile. A sharp sting pierced her bicep. Her legs trembled and her knees buckled as the walls closed in. From a rampant beat, to steady thrum, her heartbeat slowed. A blanket of darkness swallowed the room. The world hid in the shadows of her mind as the sedative blended with her blood and her heavy lids shut out the face of her captor.

To be continued...

**Find out what happens next in [His to Keep](#)**



MARCUS & LANA

his  
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THE UNFORGETTABLE SERIES  
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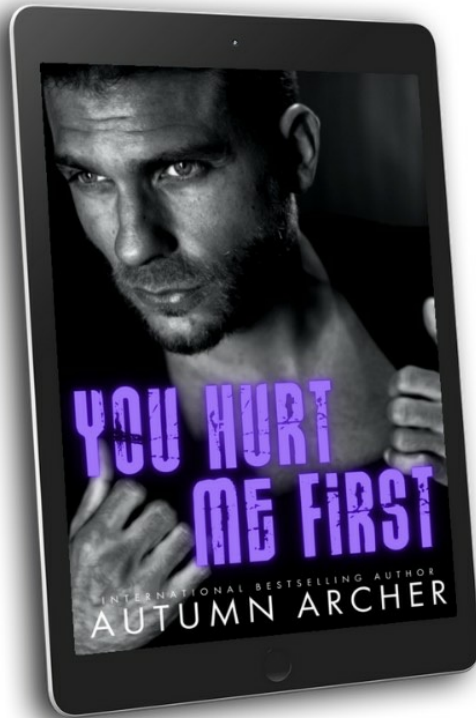
Thanks for reading my debut book His to Steal.  
Are you curious to find out what happens to Lana in the next book? Their story continues in His to Keep, and you will be pleased to know that book 2 is longer and action packed.

You'll love this book filled with suspense and page melting scenes.

I'd like to throw love around like confetti - all over my editors, Allison (@excessivereader) and Pam (@love2readromance). Every author needs a supportive team. You guys are my A Team!

If you've enjoyed the series, please take the time to let me know what you think!

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Autumn is an International Bestselling Author from Northern Ireland who writes romance aimed at your heart. She's a teen wrangler, dog slave, star-gazer and matcha lover who thrives on the written word.

Her novels delve into the darker element of life at times, giving her romantic suspense books a curious edge, with alpha men who have to work hard to win over strong women. That being said, she also loves to write sweet and swoony books to make you giggle.

Autumn's books follow her soul, with equal parts playful to enigmatic.

*"When there is darkness, the light will always follow."*

She mostly hangs out on Instagram but you can find her here too:

