



FINN

DUBLIN KINGS

L . K . S H A W



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DUBLIN KINGS, BOOK 4



L.K. SHAW

Finn

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CHAPTER 1



TEAGAN

AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, MEN CAN SUCK IT.

I glare at the back of the rude asshole I'd had the misfortune of sitting next to during the flight, grab my carry-on bag from the overhead compartment, and disembark. Despite my annoyance, as I make my way up the jet bridge, some of the tension bleeds from my shoulders. The gate area is teeming with people. I dodge several of them blocking me from the exit and the taxi rank, casting furtive glances over my shoulder, reassuring myself I'm not being followed.

You're fine. Safe. He's back in Berlin. He has no idea where you are.

The minute I step outside, I breathe in the fresh Dublin air. God, it's so good to be home. The reason I'm back threatens to overshadow my happiness, but I bury it in the dark recesses of my brain, determined to make the best of my time here. For however long that might be. The driver of the first taxi in the queue opens the door and I slide into the backseat. He circles around the back, gets behind the wheel, and glances at me over his shoulder.

I stumble over an address I'm not used to giving. Aside from the short visit I made to check on Imogen a couple months ago, Berlin and London have been my home.

"You got it." He pulls away and I settle more firmly into the seat.

We're barely two minutes from the airport when the driver glances in his rear view mirror at me. "Are ye visiting?"

"No, I live here." Although that's not entirely true.

"Ah, welcome back, then."

I smile placidly and turn my head to stare out the window, hoping he'll take the hint that I'm not keen on conversation. Thankfully, he does, because the remainder of the trip is spent in blessed silence. He stops in front of my building and while I get out, he grabs my bag from the boot and hands it to me. I pay him the fare, and he nods his head.

"Thank you." I pull the handle up from my luggage and tow it behind me.

The entryway is quiet. Then again, it is the middle of the afternoon and most people are working. I climb the stairs until I finally reach my front door. I open it and take in the clean scent with a hint of floral. The cleaning lady must have been here recently. At least I'm coming home to a clean flat.

Once I toe off my shoes, I head to my bedroom. I'd hired an interior designer when I first moved in to give it a complete makeover. I wanted it to be a calming oasis where, the minute I entered it, I left my stress and worries and anxieties at the door. Up until today, it worked. But not even the pale yellow walls, the cool blues of the accent chair, or the sight of my massive bed with its sky blue tufted velvet headboard is enough to keep my thoughts from spiraling.

Unpacking can wait a bit longer. I flop onto my back on the bed. I stretch my arms up above my head and take in a deep, cleansing breath. I'm going to have to call Imogen soon, but I'm not quite ready.

You know what she's going to say.

Which is why I'm waiting.

I close my eyes and breathe in and out slowly, lengthening my exhales each time until, at last, a nominal amount of peace settles in my chest. Finally, I sit up and make myself put away my belongings. Next, I head for the kitchen where a stack of mail sits. Most of it is probably junk since everything is paperless these days. But as I go through it, I find a few envelopes that contain things I need to take care of.

After I've opened every piece of mail there is, I blow out a huge sigh and walk back into my bedroom to pick up my phone. I've put it off long enough. Lying on the bed, I wait for Imogen to answer.

"Hey, are you in town?" she says, her tone pitched with excitement. I'd never guess she could have been killed two weeks ago at her brother's wedding.

"Hi. Are you feeling better?" I ignore her question.

"I'm doing okay other than getting a little annoyed with a hovering, over-protective maniac," Imogen raises her voice with the last few words like she's speaking pointedly to someone nearby.

"Cut Liam some slack. You were being held at gunpoint right in front of him not that long ago. He may be a bit of a psychopath, but he's a psychopath that loves you."

She sighs. "I know, which is why I'm tolerating the hovering. Nothing's been the same since the Moroccans tried

to kill all of us.”

I still can't believe that Imogen's Da is the head of the Irish mafia. Or that there are people who want to see the Donnellys dead. And apparently Liam as well because of his connection to them through her. “Are you really doing okay?”

There's a far longer pause after I ask this time.

“Some days are better than others,” she finally admits. “I've had more than one nightmare. Who would have thought my life would turn out like this? I'm just a death-metal-loving goth-girl hacker who sits behind a computer all day.”

There's a bitter humor in her voice. I try to come up with something else to say, but I've stalled long enough.

“I'm back in Dublin. How about I come over tomorrow? We can order takeaway, and afterwards we'll eat our weight in cheesecake and drink far too much wine.”

Imogen nearly screeches. “Why didn't you tell me you were home before now?”

“I just got to my flat from the airport.” I pause. “I wanted to surprise you.”

I've only lied to Imogen once before, and it was about something so stupid I barely remember what it was.

“You have no idea how happy this makes me. I've missed you so much. Talking and texting just aren't the same as in person.” Her pout is evident all the way through the phone. “You better get over here first thing in the morning. I want to spend the whole day with you catching up on everything. You can tell me all about Ben.”

My stomach dips at the name and there's a flutter of panic inside my chest cavity. I can barely form words, but I force

them out. “We broke up.”

“Oh no, I’m sorry.” She makes a sympathetic noise. “I know how much you liked him. I’d really been hoping he was the one.”

Every part of me wants to blurt out the truth, but I can’t do it. Imogen’s dealing with enough shit and doesn’t need me to pile my own problems on top of hers. “It’s probably for the best. You know how much I travel for my job. Long distance relationships rarely work out anyway.”

Especially when a boyfriend turns into a jealous monster who accuses his girlfriend of cheating every time she leaves the house. Or when he threatens to kill her and whoever else she’s fucking if she ever leaves him.

“How long are you home for?”

I blink and focus on the present. “I’m not sure, yet.”

“Be prepared for me to hang out with you every day you’re here then, so I can store up all my Teagan time before you have to leave again,” she says matter-of-factly.

“I can’t wait. See you tomorrow.” I end the call and flop my arm out to the side. The phone tumbles from my fingers onto the bed.

There’s a part of me that can’t believe I ran. But the greater part can’t believe I stayed so long. I cover my face with my arm to block out the sunlight filtering in through bare window. Deep down there had to be a reason why I never let my lease run out and why I continued to pay rent on a flat I didn’t even live in ninety-percent of the time. The only person who knows my address is Imogen. I have no family left. It’s one of the things she and I had somewhat in common when we first met.

I never knew my pedar and my mādar died a year before I went to Uni. Other than Imogen, I'm alone. It might have bothered me before I met Ben. But after everything he's done, being alone is welcome. It means I'm free. Safe. A shudder runs down my spine and a cold, uncomfortable sensation settles in my belly.

Needing a distraction, I jackknife up and off the bed. A long, hot shower sounds good. I need to wash off the travel odor anyway. If I'm lucky, the water will also wash all my thoughts away. At least for a little while. But even as I grab some clean clothes from the wardrobe, it's pretty clear I'm only fooling myself.

CHAPTER 2



FINN

SOFT HANDS CARESS MY BACK BEFORE SLENDER ARMS WRAP around my waist. The woman presses the entire length of her naked body against mine and kisses the skin between my shoulder blades. The musky scent of sex perfumes the air.

“Why don’t you come back to bed?” Aoife murmurs as one of her hands skates down the front of me.

She barely brushes the root of my cock before I step away, forcing her to loosen her hold. I shouldn’t have asked her to come up here. Given her false hope. Like a coward, I keep my eyes focused on the lights that cast a faint glow over the city.

“You should probably go.” I say it as kindly as I can.

The silence that follows is deafening.

Forcing myself to turn, I face her, doing my best to school my features and keep my gaze trained above her chin. Aoife, on the other hand, isn’t keeping her emotions in check. Hurt fills her eyes, along with a sheen of wetness she quickly blinks away. She sniffs, clears her throat, and straightens her spine,

forcing her shoulders back and her chest out. It's not a pose meant to seduce, but rather to shield.

"Yes, I suppose I should." Aoife turns and quickly slips into the dress and panties I'd helped her out of a few short hours ago.

I continue standing there as she steps into her heels, picks up the purse she'd dropped just inside the entrance, and turns the handle of the door. She pivots a half-turn and scans my face. Whatever she sees on it causes her to nod so infinitesimally I might have missed it, as though she's confirming something to herself.

"See you around, Finn. Or maybe not." With those softly spoken parting words, Aoife's gone, closing the door behind her with a quiet snick.

Christ. I'd never meant to hurt her. I take the blame for it though, because I broke my own rule about fucking any of the casino's former floor girls. More than once. Or in her case, at least a dozen times over the last six months. *You should have known better.*

I should have made myself more clear regarding the boundaries of our...arrangement. At least then, if—when—Aoife caught feelings, I could have said "I told you it wouldn't be anything more than fucking." Not that I would have said it that way, because I'm not that much of a bastard, but maybe it would have helped ease some of my guilt.

I turn and stare out the mirrored glass window again, unconcerned that anyone on the outside might be able to see my nakedness. A restless uneasiness has been plaguing me over the past month and I can't pinpoint where it's coming from. When the Moroccans attacked our family during Aidan and Sorcha's wedding a couple weeks ago, my first thought

was that this is what my instincts have been warning me about. Except it wasn't.

Tired of wracking my brain and coming up empty to its origin, I walk into the bathroom to wash up. After I've removed Aoife's scent, as well as the sticky remnants of come from myself, I put on a clean suit from the closet. I lock the door of the suite, head to the elevator, and make my way to the casino floor. I don't spend a lot of time down here since I have plenty of employees to act as security, but on occasion, I'll wander around to observe the games in play. Mostly because I need to keep myself acquainted with the members of our exclusive establishment.

I weave in and out of the tables, pausing at a few for inane greetings and pleasantries with some of our richest patrons. The ones who keep our coffers full. We cater to their every need, especially since that prick boyfriend of my sister's will, no doubt, do what he can to lure members away from us when his casino opens.

"Aren't you supposed to be upstairs in between the thighs of some woman?"

Pivoting, I come face-to-face with someone I never expected to become friends with, considering our family history. I smirk at Declan Campbell and shake his outstretched hand. "Sadly, she had to leave early."

"Pity."

"What brings you to our humble establishment tonight?" I ask. "Taking notes to pass off to Liam on how to make his future casino less tacky?"

He barks out a laugh and glances around. "I'd hardly call this place humble. And you know as well as I do that despite

slowly repairing our relationship—or at least as much as it can be—my adoring cousin is still a twat. I like you far more than I like him. Which means, your business secrets are safe with me.”

“I almost feel sorry for the poor bastard if he can’t even get his own family to like him.” I pause. “But I don’t.”

Declan and I continue our trek around the casino conversing casually. We come to a stop at the bar. I turn to him. “Drink?”

“I’ll take a Guinness.”

I nod at the bartender. “A glass of The Devil’s Keep as well, please.”

While we wait for our drinks, I lean back against the surface behind me. “How’s Aran?”

“Recovering, no thanks to you. He barely limps now.” Declan side eyes me, but there’s no animosity in his tone.

I throw up my palms in a half-hearted apology. “You know as well as I do that I was only following orders.”

When Liam bought out the shipping company we used to illegally import weapons, he blocked all incoming shipments from our German suppliers. In retaliation, several of our organization’s soldiers and I paid a visit to Declan and Aran’s house. By the time we left, both men needed to go to the hospital. Which is why it’s surprising we’ve managed to become friends since then. “Have you talked to Imogen?” Declan asks. “Is she doing okay after what happened at the wedding?”

“Da and Nora have spoken to her more than me, but I called her a couple days ago. It sounds like she’s doing all right physically, but is still a bit shaken up.” Rage burns inside

my gut that the Moroccans almost harmed her. “She’s tough, though. It’s just going to take a little more time. I will say one thing about Liam, and that is he definitely loves my sister.”

“A fact that shocks me more than it does you.”

I don’t doubt it. Campbell had only become a threat to his former stepda’s organization—and by association, ours—within the last five years. Which means his cousins know him far better than we do. And based on conversations with Declan, Liam hasn’t given a shit about anyone in twenty years. He’s ruthless, cold, and heartless. Except when it comes to Imogen.

The bartender returns with our drinks and I take a small sip of our family’s favorite whiskey, savoring the oaky flavor that burns its way down my throat. Warmth settles in my stomach.

I glance over at Declan. “You never did say what brings you here.”

“Aran has a new woman he’s trying to impress and he asked me to give him a bit of privacy for the evening. What better place to kill some time on a Thursday night than here? I’m feeling lucky.” His gaze follows Shannon as she leaves the bar with a tray full of drinks.

“I’ve learned a valuable lesson in the years since I’ve been running this place.” I take another drink as Declan pulls his attention from the woman’s ass back to me and arches an eyebrow.

“And what is that?”

“Don’t fuck anyone in a place you frequent. Things get messy when it turns to shite.” I gesture with a finger in Shannon’s direction.

He chuckles. “Noted.”

“I’m feeling a bit restless myself so maybe I’ll join you for a hand or two.” I stride to the nearest poker table with two empty chairs.

Aside from raising or calling bets, there’s little conversation from the men surrounding us. My brothers and I have gotten used to it whenever we sit in on a game. Cian and I take perverse pleasure from the fact, but we don’t abuse our intimidating presence. We want the members to relax and enjoy themselves. We don’t want them thinking about the fact we’re relieving them of their money most of the time.

Declan wins a few hands, as do I, but by the time we finish, one of the members takes home the final pot.

“Congratulations, Oren.” I reach across and shake his hand and nod to the remaining seated men. “I’m calling it. Enjoy your evening gentlemen.”

The man on my right rises as well and we head for the bar again.

Declan turns to me once we have our drinks. “What’s going on with you tonight? Something feels off.”

I glance over at him. It’s strange that in the short time we’ve known each other, Declan has already gauged enough of me to know I’m not myself.

“I don’t know what it is.” My gaze scans the room. “It’s almost as if I’m bored.”

His brow wrinkles. “Bored with what?”

“Everything. All of this.” I sweep my arm out. “Look around. We belong to the two most powerful families in Dublin. We’re rich and people envy us. We can have anything we could ever want or need. Lately, though, it’s almost as if there’s something missing.”

I haven't even mentioned this to Cian and Aidan. Then again, they've been preoccupied. "Maybe you need to take some time off. Aren't you the one who told me you're almost always here? Why not take a break?" Declan suggests.

Because this casino is mine. Without it, I'm not sure who I even am.

CHAPTER 3



TEAGAN

WITH TWO BOTTLES OF WINE IN HAND AND A SMALL overnight bag slung cross-body over me, I tap my knuckle to the bell and wait. Barely any time passes before the door is flung open and Imogen throws herself at me. Laughing, I stumble back a step under her attack, but she steadies me.

“Oh my god, I’m so glad you’re here. Come in.” She takes the bottles from my hand and gestures with her head.

I follow Imogen into the bowels of the massive house. It’s exactly how she described. Although she mentioned it, I can barely hold in the gasp at the waterfall spilling down one entire wall of the living area. It doesn’t do my imagination justice. Jesus, it’s stunning. Same with the massive fireplace built into the opposite one.

“Liam left for the day so it’s just you and me,” Imogen says over her shoulder.

If she hadn’t told me what happened at her brother’s wedding, I’d never have guessed she’d been held at gunpoint only a couple weeks ago. She appears to be the same Imogen

I've been friends—sisters—with for a decade. Nobody knows her better than me. Not even Liam.

We pass through the dining area and into the kitchen that's clearly designed for a person who knows how to cook. The massive black cast iron stove is intimidating to someone who survives on nothing but takeaway.

“Good god, you weren't lying when you said this place was obscenely over the top.” I glance outside and catch a peek of a towering stone plinth with a matching gargoyle perched on top of it.

She places the bottles on the counter, pivots with a laugh, and leans back bracing herself with her elbows. “Aidan and Cian say it's pretentious. They're not entirely wrong. But I've gotten used to the place. My favorite parts are the conservatory and the swimming pool.”

I set my bag down on the floor out of the way. “You have an actual conservatory?”

Imogen smirks. “Yes. Although I don't recommend getting down on your knees in there. It's not the most comfortable.”

“Ew.” I scrunch my face up. “Why'd you have to ruin it for me? Now all I'm going to think about when I walk through it is you and Liam getting freaky in there. I'll never be able to look him in the eye again.”

She bursts out laughing. “God, I've missed you.”

“I've missed you, too.” More than she'll ever know.

Imogen rises up with a huge grin and claps. “All right, let's get this party started.”

Instead of opening the wine—it is only ten in the morning, after all—she grabs two bottles of red lemonade from the

fridge as well as a platter of scones, cream, and jam.

“Here, let me carry something.” I step over, pick up the drinks, and follow her out of the kitchen .

She sets the food on a table, plops down on the sofa, swiveling to bring one leg up onto it, and pats the cushion next to her. I pass her her lemonade and mirror her position.

“I know I asked you this yesterday, but do you know how long you’ll be home this time?”

“For now, indefinitely. I’m asking for a transfer from our corporate headquarters to one of the offices here.”

The space between Imogen’s eyebrows wrinkles. “But I thought you loved all the traveling? Plus, what exactly are you going to do spending all your time in an office? How are you going to monitor systems and all the servers if you’re not on site where the main network hubs are? Doing it remotely isn’t nearly as secure, you know that.”

“It’s only temporary. I’m actually looking for a new job entirely. One that will keep me in Dublin for a while. I just haven’t told my boss, yet.” I’ve tried to imbue some excitement as well as sheepishness in my voice about moving back for a while.

Imogen scans my face. I sulk a little and huff. “I thought you’d be more excited that I’ll be in town for the foreseeable future.”

She glares. “Of course I am. I’m ecstatic.”

“Then be excited.” I give her a pointed stare.

Her expression softens but there’s still a flicker of worry in her eyes. “I’m sorry, you’re right. Yes, it makes me so happy

that we're going to be able to spend more time together. I want you to meet my family, too, while you're here."

Thankful for the opening, I take it. "How *is* the whole new family thing going by the way? Everyone playing nice?"

Imogen pauses and it's clear she doesn't want to let the previous topic go entirely, but finally she chuckles. "Liam is playing as nice as Liam can play. Although he's been extra grumpy because he owes Cian for saving my life and he hates being in Cian's debt. For now, they have a common enemy in the Moroccans, so they're working together. But for fuck's sake, the both of them are trying to prove they're these big bad alpha males. Honestly, it's turned into nothing but a dick swinging contest."

"One big, dysfunctional family. I bet you guys are a lot of fun at reunions." I snort.

Imogen winces. "It's been a challenge, but I'm doing my best to make everything work out between us all."

"What about you and Nora?" I take another sip of my lemonade.

She bobs her head side-to-side. "I'm still not ready to forgive her, but we're spending time together. Getting to know each other. Same with Carrick."

"I can't wait to meet them."

While we eat our scones, we talk about the latest security protocols I'd put in place at the Deutsch Bank in Berlin after a potential hacking scare. It's great to be able to talk code with someone else who actually knows what the hell they're doing. Imogen is the one who keeps me on my toes. I use my cyber security skills to help giant corporations keep not only all the hackers like her out, but their servers and other financials

secure. More than once she's managed to bypass all the firewalls I'd put in place. I'm great at my job, but she's even better at hers.

Imogen pops the last bite of scone in her mouth and washes it down with a swig of lemonade. "All right, how about we go swimming for a bit? You brought your suit, right?"

"After you texted me in *all caps* telling me to, of course I did."

She sticks her tongue out and picks up the platter with the few remaining scones. I grab out empty bottles and follow her into the kitchen.

"I'm going to clean up in here, but why don't you go ahead and get changed. Head back through the living room and down the hallway closest to the fireplace you'll find a bedroom on the right you can use." Imogen points in the general direction. "I'll meet you back in here."

I pick up my bag from where I'd dropped it and follow her instructions, which are easy enough not to get lost. I hope. Thankfully, I find the room without any trouble. From my bag, I pull out the yellow string bikini I purchased at an adorable boutique during one of my trips to the Amalfi coast. I'll admit it makes my tits and ass look amazing. I strip down to almost nothing and exchange my ugly, everyday bra and underwear for the barely there scrap of sunshine magic.

There isn't a mirror in here so I can adjust things, but Imogen can help if I need it. I throw my hair up quickly into a messy knot on top of my head, grab the towel I'd also brought, and make my way back the kitchen.

I come to an abrupt halt in the living room at the sight of the far-too-attractive man standing on the other side of it.

His heated gaze slowly travels down my entire body and back up until his eyes meet mine. The casual curling of his lips bring forth a dimple on the right side of them.

“You’re not Imogen,” he draws out in a seductive tone.

I chuckle at the obvious. “No, I’m not.”

We both keep our eyes on the other until finally he arches an eyebrow. “That usually leads to the other party offering a name.”

“I don’t like to do the usual thing.”

He steps closer until he’s only a foot away, but I remain where I’m standing. “I’m Declan, in case you were wondering.”

“I wasn’t, but it’s nice to meet you, Declan.” I soften the statement with a smile.

He palms his chest dramatically. “You definitely must be friends with Imogen. Only someone who spends far too much time with her can be this brutal.”

“I’ll take that as a compliment.”

Just then Imogen comes from a different hallway than the one with the bedroom I’d changed in, wearing a black tankini and carrying a towel. Her gaze lands on Declan and widens in surprise and then a toothy grin appears. She rushes over and gives him a huge hug.

“Oh my god, what are you doing here?” She draws back and her gaze bounces between us. “Declan, this is Teagan, my best friend in the whole world.”

He over exaggerates a pout. “I thought I was your best friend in the whole world.”

“You’re my best friend out of all of Liam’s cousins.” She gives him another cheeky grin.

“Two beautiful women insult me in one day. That might be a record. I’m not sure my ego can handle it.”

Imogen snorts. “Your ego will survive and you know it. There are plenty of other women in Dublin that drool over you. You’ll be fine if two don’t. Besides, how did Teagan insult you? Did you try and schmooze and charm her and she turned you down cold?”

Declan barks out a laugh and glances over at me. “Something like that.”

My cheeks heat that I was probably a little rude.

“You still didn’t tell me what brings you here. Liam’s not home.”

“I see that now. It’s no big deal. I was just dropping off some paperwork for him about the casino.” Declan pulls some folded sheets of paper from his back pocket.

“Why don’t I put them on his desk?”

He hands them to her and she disappears down the hallway with an “I’ll be right back” over her shoulder. Declan gaze lands on me again.

“I didn’t mean to come off as rude,” I apologize.

He grins, this time with actual amusement. “Don’t worry about it. Like Imogen said, my ego can take the hit. Although I will say it isn’t often that an attractive woman blows me off.”

I wince. “If it makes you feel better, it’s not you, but me.”

Declan chuckles. “Isn’t that what women say when they break up with a man and try to let them down easy?”

“I suppose if we hadn’t just met, that might be true.” I shrug. “But in this case, it really isn’t you.”

“Well, if you’re in town long enough and you change your mind, give me a call.” He glances to where Imogen disappeared. “Let her know I said bye and I’ll talk to her later.”

I nod. “Of course.”

Declan turns and walks away. Just as Imogen comes back the sound of the front door closing reaches me.

“Where’d he go?”

“He said he had to leave, but he’d call you later.” A memory tickles my brain. “Is he the cousin that helped you get to Carrick’s house after Liam kidnapped you?”

She smiles fondly and tugs my arm, pulling me forward with her as she walks. “That would be Declan. Liam’s still pissed about that.”

I’m sure. Declan seems like a nice enough guy, but Ben was nice at first, too. That didn’t turn out so well.

CHAPTER 4



FINN

I STEP INTO THE QUIET HOUSE. A RARE OCCURRENCE OVER THE last few weeks with the addition of two twelve-year old boys and a six-year old girl. Seconds later, Kellen and Carson bound down the stairs.

“Morning, Uncle Finn,” they greet me in unison.

I smile at the name. Nora’s almost gotten them to call her Mhamó, which she’s beyond excited about. Her and Da. “Good morning. Isn’t this early even for you guys to be up?”

They exchange glances.

“We’ve been up for an hour,” Kellen says. “Aisling had a nightmare and screamed the house down.”

Christ. “How are you two doing? Any nightmares for you? It was pretty scary what happened.”

They shake their heads. Carson shifts on his feet and his eyes dart back and forth a couple times. “I’ve had a little trouble falling asleep, but that’s it.”

“Sorcha found someone for us to talk to about it with which has helped,” Kellen adds.

“That’s good. There’s nothing wrong with asking for help when you’re scared about something.” My brothers and I have been surrounded by violence our entire lives. I’ve almost become immune. Sorcha and her siblings were thrust into this life. Of course they’d be traumatized. “Are you heading to breakfast then?”

They nod their heads. “Make sure you save some for the rest of us.” I wink.

The two of them just grin and then hurry off toward the kitchen. Even if Nora’s not in there yet, she will be soon. I head for the wing of the house that I’ve shared with my brothers for the last decade. Since Sorcha and the kids moved in, I share it with her, Aidan, and Aisling.

At first the common room where we sometimes hang out together appears empty, but in the dim light I can make out Aidan lying on the couch. I feel bad for the poor bastard. Married two weeks and he’s been sleeping out here for the entirety of his marriage. He stirs and rubs his hands down his face. I close the distance until I’m standing in front of him. He opens his eyes and recoils.

“Jesus. What the hell are you doing hovering over me like a creeper?”

I snort and take a seat in the nearby chair while he sits up. “Pussy.”

He gives me the finger in response.

“I heard Aisling had a nightmare?”

Aidan’s entire body deflates. “She hadn’t had one in a week. I really thought they were gone, but I should have expected it. She’s just a little girl who experienced something traumatic. The boys act like they’re handling everything okay,

but you know how we were at twelve. Acting far tougher than we really were.”

“I saw them in the hallway. Carson said he’s having a little trouble sleeping, but neither are having any nightmares at least.” I lean back in my chair. “How are things with Sorcha? Not great, I imagine, if you’re still sleeping out here.”

He leans forward and braces his forearms on his knees. His hands hang between them. “I’m giving her the space she asked for while she decides our future. Lucia stopped by right after the attack to talk to her. I keep hoping that whatever she said to Sorcha made some sort of positive impact. We just got married for Christ’s sake. We’re supposed to be spending the rest of our lives together not on the verge of her leaving me.”

“I’m sure processing the fact she or the kids could have died is a lot. None of them—especially Sorcha—were prepared for what happened at your wedding. She loves you though. That has to mean something.” I wish I could promise him that things will work out, but I can’t.

“If only that was all it took. Maybe sometimes love isn’t enough,” Aidan says in a rough tone.

As harsh as it might sound—and I would never say this to my brother—maybe Sorcha isn’t meant for the kind of life we live. Where danger can occur at any time. We’ve all gotten lax over the last couple decades with the truce that had settled between Dónal Sheehan and Da. Up until some dumb fuck kidnapped a civilian friend of our top enforcer a few months ago—under the guise of working for the Moroccans— they managed to keep their business to themselves.

After we launched an assault to rescue them, their leader Ayman Naji declared war. I guess they figured Aidan and Sorcha’s wedding was the perfect place to take us all out at

once. Since then, we've launched several strategic attacks against their businesses and a few of their gathering places. There have been deaths on both sides, but the Moroccans' casualty rate has been far higher.

I stand and clap him on the shoulder. "I really do hope things work out between you."

He barely nods so I leave him alone and head to my room for some sleep. Declan and I went back to my office for a few drinks and discussed the Euronext Dublin well into the night. We've both invested heavily in various stocks, some of the same ones, in fact, and he has a similar head for numbers that I do. No one in the family, not even Da, has an interest in the stock exchange. They all trust me to invest our family's money any way I see fit.

Once I walk into my room and shut the door, I strip off my clothes and take a quick shower before climbing into bed. I stare up at the ceiling, the swarming discontent returning in the quiet. I'd told Declan last night that it was like I'm bored, but that's not really it. Maybe it's the fact that both my brothers have found love and they're moving forward with their lives. While I'm happy for them, it also feels as though I'm being left behind.

Flopping onto my side, I punch the pillow to try and get comfortable. I close my eyes, as if that will help and force my mind to let go of it for the moment. It could be minutes or it could be hours, but I finally drift off.



A BUZZING AWARENESS BRINGS ME OUT OF SLEEP. I TURN ONTO my back and lie there a minute longer until I throw back the

blanket and get up and ready for the day. My stomach growls reminding me it's been since last night that I ate. I head through the common room and find Aisling sitting at the makeshift desk Aidan created for her. She's bent over a sketchpad, and her tongue peeks out of the corner of her mouth in concentration as her hand moves across the page.

"Hey there," I say quietly trying not to scare her. I'd bit back almost calling her little nightmare, the nickname from her siblings considering her name actually means dream. I didn't want to give her any reminders she's been having them.

Aisling raises her head and smiles. "Hi Uncle Finn. You slept really late."

I close the distance.

"What are you drawing?" I squat down next to her.

Aisling sets down her pencil and lifts the pad for me to get a better look. "It's all the twinkle lights we're going to put in my room."

Sure enough, there's a forest full of trees on the paper, but she's decorated each one with small starbursts. For a six-year old, she's pretty good. In a year or two she'll probably be excellent.

"It's beautiful."

Aisling beams up at me, and then her expression stutters. She loses the glow and turns solemn. "Uncle Finn?"

"What?"

"Will the twinkle lights keep the bad men away?"

Ah, fuck. I drop to a knee, gently palm the back of her head, and look her straight in the eye. "The bad men can't get

you here. You're safe. Aidan, Grand-da, and I won't let anyone hurt you."

"Do you promise? Da said if you make a promise to someone you have to keep your word."

I place my hand on my heart. "I swear it."

"What do you swear?"

Pivoting on my heel, I find Sorcha walking toward us carrying a tray with two plates on it. Aisling gathers her art supplies and pushes them to the far side of the desk.

"Uncle Finn swore he'll protect us from the bad men."

Sorcha's steps stutter, but she quickly recovers and sets the platter down. She darts a quick glance in my direction. "I'm sure he will, too. Now, it's time for supper."

I stand and let Sorcha set out their plates. "I'll let you two eat."

Aisling's already taken a bite, but her sister nods briefly at me before she takes a seat. I leave them and head for the kitchen, the scent of food growing stronger the closer I get. Nora, Da, and the boys are there with full plates. Da glances up at my arrival and welcomes me with a grin.

"Are you joining us this evening?" he asks.

I hadn't planned on it, but it's hard to pass on one of Nora's home-cooked meals. "For a little bit, but then I need to get to the casino."

Nora sends Kellen and Carson into the dining room and follows them.

"How are things there?"

“Same as always. The Flanagan boys lost more of their uncle’s money.”

Da shakes his head. “There’s going to be trouble if they don’t put a halt to their gambling.”

“I can always send them over to Liam’s casino. They can be his problem then.”

Da chuckles. “That might not be a bad idea.”

I load up my plate and glance toward the doorway. “The clan leaders are all coming to the casino tonight to strategize our next step.”

His mouth tightens. “Good. Make sure Liam’s present as well.”

“I will.”

He and I join Nora and the boys at the table. Kellen and Carson keep up most of the conversation.

Under normal circumstances, Campbell wouldn’t be allowed to step foot in *Anamacha Caille*, but since he owes a life debt to Cian, there’s nothing he can do to us. Not unless Cian forgives it. Something I don’t ever see happening. He’ll lord it over him forever unless Nessa puts a stop to it, which she most likely will. Both she and Imogen want everybody to get along. I suppose it can’t be easy for them to be stuck between two people they care about.

Who knows? Maybe after we put the Moroccans back in their place, peace will settle between Campbell and our family. As long as he and Imogen are together, we’re all going to have to come to terms with the fact we’re stuck with each other.

CHAPTER 5



TEAGAN

TODAY HAS BEEN ONE OF THE BEST DAYS I'VE HAD IN A LONG, long time. We swam earlier, then Imogen took me on a tour of the conservatory and the grounds. When was the last time I'd been able to let my guard down and have fun without watching over my shoulder or worrying I'd do something to set Ben off?

The fact I can't remember scares me.

"Oh my god." Imogen cackles and nearly falls off the couch. "Do you remember that time when I hacked into that shitty professor's computer and uploaded a program that Rick Rolled him every time he tried to open a document?"

I laugh and nearly spew wine everywhere. "I completely forgot about that. He was so pissed, especially since a virus was attached to it for when they tried to remove it."

Unrepentant, Imogen snorts. "He deserved it after what he did to that poor girl. As always, the man is the victim and the girl seduced him. It was her fault he stuck his dick in her. Fuck that guy and fuck the patriarchy."

She raises her arm up above her head nearly spilling the wine from the glass she's holding.

“Men are arseholes,” I chime in. “Every single one of them. But especially Ben. I hope that piece of shit gets an itch on his balls that he can never scratch.”

Imogen lowers her arm and pierces me with a sharp glare. “Wait a minute. We hate Ben? What happened between you two? I thought you said you broke up because long distance relationships were hard.”

Cursing the wine, I drop my gaze and fidget with the stem of my glass.

“Hey.” She lays her hand on my leg, sounding surprisingly sober. “What's going on?”

There's no use trying to hide it from her anymore. Imogen is stubborn as hell and with me opening my big mouth, she'll never let it go. I let out a deep sigh and lift my gaze to meet hers.

“He got possessive. Jealous,” I finally confess. “Any time I left the house he accused me of cheating on him. I wasn't really going to work, he said. He would grab my arm tight and grill me about where I was really going. Who I was really seeing. If I had to go out of town for a job, he would call my cell non-stop until I was forced to shut it off.”

“Oh Teag, I'm sorry.” Her eyes harden. “You're right, he is a piece of shit. I'm so glad you broke up with him.”

“Actually, I didn't. I mean, I did. He just doesn't know it.” I swallow hard and my throat clogs. “Two days ago he went crazy, screaming he'd kill me and whoever I was sleeping with and destroyed my flat. He...he hit me. It was the first time, but it wouldn't be the last. He left soon after, and the minute I

knew he was actually gone, I packed a carry-on suitcase and left. Stayed at a hotel that night and got on the first flight back here I could find.”

Imogen takes my wine glass from my hand, places mine and hers on the table, and wraps her arms around me. I lay my head on her shoulder.

“Jesus. I wish you would have told me. I would have flown to Berlin and made Liam come with me. He would have kicked Ben’s ass. Probably would have shot him, actually.”

“That’s why I didn’t say anything. This was my mess to clean up. I didn’t want to involve you in something that could get you or Liam in trouble or hurt. I know you Genny. You don’t back down from anything. Besides, it might have stopped Ben for a short time, but as soon as he thought he could get away with it, he would have been back. He would have followed through with his threat to kill me. I just know it.”

She squeezes me. “I’m glad you got away from him. Is that the real reason you’re requesting a transfer?”

I nod against her. “I can’t go back there.”

Imogen leans and pushes me to sit upright. Her fierce glare bores into me. “You’re damn right you’re not going back. I’ll kick your ass if you do.”

She would, too. “You’re a scary woman, Imogen Walsh. You know that?”

“Damn right I am. Now”—she grabs our wine glasses off the table and hands me mine—“we drink to new beginnings without that shitbird, Ben.”

I tap the rim of mine to hers with a small German cheer. “Prost.”

Imogen scrambles off the couch. “It’s time for cheesecake.”

Since I could use a refill, I follow her into the kitchen. She brings the dessert out of the fridge, slides it onto a large plate, and grabs two forks from the drawer. Most people would cut it into pieces, but that’s not our thing.

“I’ve been thinking about this all day.” She lifts it to her nose, takes a huge whiff, and moans like she’s having an orgasm. “God, this smells so good. I haven’t each cheesecake in so long. It’s almost better than sex.”

“I’m clearly not doing my job then,” a deep grumble comes from the other side of the room.

I turn just as Imogen squeals, smacks the plate on the counter, and launches herself into Liam’s arms. He catches her around the hips, his palms gripping her ass, as she wraps her legs around his waist and plants kisses all over his face. I try not to laugh at Liam’s startled expression. This can’t be the first time Imogen’s been tipsy around him, can it? It must be if he has no idea how handsy and affectionate she gets. A pang of pure envy slams into me and I turn away to grab the bottle and top off my glass.

“Why don’t I get this response every time I walk through the door?” There’s amusement in his tone.

“Because I’m not drinking wine.” There’s another loud smack and then a light thud.

I finally turn to face them. Imogen’s standing, but she’s still holding onto Liam whose arm is wrapped around her shoulder.

“Hey.” I give a half-hearted wave. “Nice to see you again.”

“You as well, Teagan.” He raises an eyebrow, which is understandable. The last time I was here I wasn’t too friendly to him. Then again, he had just kidnapped my best friend. Even though he and Imogen fell in love, I still don’t trust him entirely. Imogen will deny it until her dying breath, but her heart is fragile. I don’t want him to break it.

“You and I might be taking a trip to Berlin.” Imogen pokes Liam’s chest and I cringe.

She’s not so great at keeping secrets when she’s been drinking either.

“Oh? For what may I ask?” His gaze darts over to me.

I make myself not flinch under his flinty stare.

“Teagan might need an ex-boyfriend—you know—taken care of.” Imogen snarls and runs her finger across her throat. “That fucknut hit her and threatened her, too.”

Liam goes rigid. Time to defuse things.

“No one needs to do anything. Ben is in Berlin and I’m here. He doesn’t know where I’m staying or that I even came here. I just want to forget all about him. Please.” My gaze darts between the two of them, my eyes pleading.

Imogen huffs. “Fine. But the offer is always open, isn’t it babe?”

“Teagan only needs to say when.” If Liam’s stare had been intense before, it’s nothing compared to how his eyes are laser-focused on me. It’s a disconcerting sensation, because there’s wrath burning in their depths. *Jesus, he’s serious.* He would actually kill Ben if I asked him to.

I swallow. “Thanks.”

What do I say to a man who just said he would murder someone for me? Without even blinking an eye. Entirely uncomfortable with the direction the conversation has turned, I grab the plate filled with cheesecake.

“You want to help me eat this or am I going to devour the whole thing myself and be absolutely miserable?” I lift my arms slightly like I’m presenting it to her.

“Sorry babe, cheesecake calls.” Imogen pops up on her toes and kisses Liam with a loud smack.

I snag my full glass of wine and hustle out of the kitchen and away from Liam’s intensity. I’m definitely going to need more to drink after this. My heart pounds as I set the plate on the sofa cushion between where Imogen and I had been sitting. She plops down on the other side of it and picks up her fork before digging in for the first bite. I take mine a little slower.

“And Liam wonders why I love my favorite bakery so much. This. This right here is why.” She moans again in appreciation.

After a couple bites, Imogen finally glances at me. I’m not sure what she sees on my face, but she gets that stubborn tilt to her chin. “I’m not sorry I told him. Someone needs to know what Ben did to you. Especially since Liam can take care of things, if for any reason that fuckwad does find out where you are.”

While I appreciate the fact Imogen cares so much about making sure I’m safe, it also makes itchy that Liam knows my personal business. “I know. Thank you for looking out for me.”

Imogen’s eyes soften. “We always look out for each other. It’s been that way for ten years. You’re my best friend and I

don't want anything to happen to you.”

“It won't.”

We go back to eating our cheesecake—Imogen with far more gusto than me—but the whole time I can't ignore the faint warning at the back of my mind that something bad is coming.

CHAPTER 6



FINN

I NOD AS I PASS ENNIS WHO MANS THE DOOR. EVER SINCE HE fucked up and let Dónal Sheehan make it into the casino a couple months ago, he's been extra vigilant. That lapse led to Cian and Nessa getting together—and Sheehan getting dead—so it all worked out in the end.

Considering it's still early the tables are surprisingly full. I'm not complaining, but I'm curious as to why. Liam refused to come tonight when I first reached out—something about Imogen having a friend over—but when I mentioned another raid against the Moroccans, he was on board.

Making my way across the floor, I reach the lift, scan my card, and take it up to the restricted top floor, where only family and invited guests are allowed. It's quiet up here. Too quiet. Which leaves me unable to drown out my thoughts. My brain hasn't stopped running for almost a month. It's why I haven't spent much time alone.

I unlock my office door and step inside. The lights turn on automatically and I head for my desk and boot up my computer. Once it's running, I switch on the security feed that

Imogen hooked up and study it while I wait for everyone to arrive. The on-screen images change every twenty seconds to a different position on the casino floor as well as the bar. With the new cameras we installed, there's a three-sixty degree view.

Since adding the additional security, I've caught one of the floor girls stealing and another "servicing" some of the members. For a price. Normally, I don't pry into whatever the women do, but I draw the line at taking money for sex. I'm not against prostitution, but I'm not going to jail for it.

My gaze is drawn to the feed of the front door of the casino just as Liam steps through. A grin tugs at my lips at the black-, teal-, and purple-haired woman who appears right behind him. And then there's a thump of some kind in my chest. Imogen's arm is looped around the arm of another woman. Christ, she's stunning.

Dark brown hair is piled on top of her head giving me the perfect view of her slim neck and heart-shaped face with arresting eyes and plush red lips. A few tendrils cascade down to brush the top of her shoulders—one of which is bare, as the collar of the shirt she's wearing dips down exposing it. Her jeans accentuate her hourglass shape and my fingers itch to trace the curve of her hips.

I study her face again. There's something so compelling about her features. She's not Irish, that's for certain. As if a tether is pulling me, I quickly head for the lift and make my way back down to the casino floor. A good host greets his guests personally, after all. The quiet inside of the metal box is broken by the din of conversation the second the doors open.

Trying not to appear overeager, I measure my steps as I scan the room. Towering over nearly everyone, Liam is easy to

spot. I make my way forward until his gaze lands on me. The craggy and rough-hewn edges of his face indicate a hard life. Neither he nor Imogen speak of it, but from a few overheard whispers, it's no wonder Liam has hated everything and everyone.

“Donnelly,” he greets me with a tone of derision.

“Campbell,” I mimic his tone before my gaze skips over him and stops on Imogen.

She grins and loosens her hold on the woman at her side and gives me a brief hug. “It’s nice to see you, Finn.”

“You, too. You’re looking well. Are you still holding up okay?”

Imogen narrows her eyes. “I really wish people would stop asking me that. You all are acting like I’m some delicate flower or something.”

I hold up my hands in surrender. “I won’t ask again.”

“Thank you. Oh,” she twists and drags the woman forward. “This is Teagan, my best friend from uni. Teagan, this is Finn.”

“A pleasure to meet you.” I reach out my hand, and she places hers in my palm.

Her skin is petal soft and the sweet fragrance of blackberries engulfs me as I stare into eyes that remind me of chocolate. Rich and sweet. A hint of pink darkens her cheeks.

“You as well.” Far too quickly she pulls her hand from mine.

Already I miss touching her. Jaysus, what’s wrong with me? Someone clears their throat, and I blink, breaking eye contact with Teagan who’s already looked away. I glance at

Imogen who presses her lips together, as though holding back her amusement. Liam, on the other hand, scowls. Even more than he usually does.

“Can I get you ladies a drink?” I’m not ready to walk away yet.

“I thought we were supposed to be having some meeting?” Liam grumbles.

“You’re the first one here. Might as well have a cocktail while we wait for the others to arrive.” Without waiting for another excuse, I head for the bar and wave over the bartender.

I don’t glance over my shoulder, secure in the fact they’re following me. Or at least that Imogen and her lovely friend Teagan are. Finally, at the man’s approach, I pivot a half turn. Sure enough the three of them are here, although Liam’s off to the side.

“We’ll both have a glass of shiraz,” Imogen says.

I stare at the other man with an arched brow. He grits his teeth. “Whiskey.”

After relaying our order, I give them my full attention. Or at least Teagan. “Are you just here for a visit?”

“No. I recently moved back after living in Berlin and London for the last five years.” Her husky voice washes over me.

“How did you like Berlin?” There’s this sudden urge to know everything about her.

Teagan shifts and glances at Imogen who thins her lips and clenches her jaw. She turns her gaze back to me, but she won’t quite meet my eyes. “I enjoyed it for a while, but I missed Dublin.”

There's more to that story. "There's no better place than here."

She smiles, but it doesn't ring sincere. The bartender comes back with our drinks. I pass the women their wine and make to pick up Liam's whiskey, but he's already got it in his hand. *Glad I didn't waste any Devil's Keep on him.* I doubt he'd appreciate the flavor as much as our family does.

Movement to the right of him draws my gaze. Cian and Aidan approach. The former glares at Liam's back. There will most likely always be bad blood between the two. As if sensing my brother's stare, Liam turns toward them and goes rigid.

Cian and Aidan finally reach us. They ignore Campbell and focus on Imogen and Teagan. Despite the fact both men are taken, it doesn't stop me from taking a small step closer to Teagan. As though I'm claiming she's mine. Aidan's lips twitch.

"Imogen, I'm so glad to see you." Aidan greets her with a hug. Cian steps up next and repeats the embrace and greeting.

More introductions are made. As much as I don't want to walk away, it's probably time to head up to the office. More of the clan leaders and Da should be arriving any minute. I swivel toward Teagan.

"It was a pleasure meeting you. I hope we meet again soon," I can't help but tack on.

The corners of her mouth lift, but once again I get the impression that it's an automatic reaction of forced politeness. I stuff down the disappointment and walk away, leaving Liam and my brothers to trail behind. No one speaks until we reach the lift.

“Marking your territory already are we?” Aidan quips.

Liam’s head jerks in my direction and he narrows his eyes. “Don’t even think about it.”

I bristle at his tone. “Excuse me?”

Cian and Aidan both stiffen and inch slightly closer to me. I appreciate the united front they’re offering, but I don’t need them to fight any battles for me. Perceived or not.

“Teagan is under my protection. She doesn’t need you panting after her.” Liam practically sneers.

If I weren’t already interested in her, then his words have only made me more so. I’m a Donnelly. No one, not even Liam Campbell, tells me what I can or can’t do.

“The last time I looked—and trust me, I looked—Teagan is a grown woman who I’m sure is quite capable of making her own decisions.”

“Not about this,” he growls.

“Why don’t you worry about Imogen and keep your mouth shut about anyone else,” Cian snaps.

Ignoring the fact that the lift door slides open, the two men close the distance between each other with a single step. I hold the button to keep it there while Aidan quickly moves in between them with a hand on their chest. “Why doesn’t everyone take a deep breath and relax? There’s way too much testosterone in this lift at the moment. Besides, I doubt neither Imogen nor Nessa wants either of you coming home tonight with battle wounds. Save it for the Moroccans.”

For a few tense seconds, neither men loosen their rigidity. At last, Cian’s the first to back down. Probably with the threat

of Nessa getting upset. The man is nothing if not devoted to his woman and wanting to keep her happy.

“If we’re done here?” I snark and exit the lift.

Slowly, the three of them follow, with Cian taking up the rear. I move past them and reach my office. Once inside, everyone except Liam takes a seat. With the glares being exchanged, everyone is still on edge. None of us trust Campbell.

I head to the bar, pour three glasses of whiskey, bring them back to Cian and Aidan, and then take a seat behind my desk. The tense silence is loud. Normally, my brothers and I would catch up and discuss business, but not tonight. Not with Liam here. Thankfully, we don’t have a long wait before there’s a sharp rap and Da enters. Behind him are several clan leaders that are part of our organization.

Everyone files in and Da shuts and locks the door behind him. He glances around the room, his gaze pausing on Liam, before launching into what we’re all here for. How to take down the Moroccans.

CHAPTER 7



TEAGAN

I’VE HAD DINNERS WITH SOME OF THE RICHEST BUSINESS owners in Berlin and London, and none of them can top the type of money I’m surrounded by in the Donnelly’s casino. It’s almost indecent.

“So that was interesting,” Imogen remarks.

I turn from my perusal to find her staring at me with amusement glinting in her eyes. Damn. I’d kind of been hoping she would leave it, but this is Genny. She doesn’t *leave* anything. I take the bait. “What was?”

“Finn was in to you.” She scrunches up her face. “I’m not sure how I feel about my brother and my best friend together though.”

“First of all, we’re not together. Nor are we going to *be* together. He was merely being polite.” I try to deflect, but she’s not having it.

Imogen snorts. “There was nothing ‘polite’ about the way Finn was looking at you. He completely forgot any of the rest of us even existed.”

My cheeks heat, because I had definitely got that impression as well. I admit to being flattered by the attention. Except after Ben, I have no interest in dating for the foreseeable future. I no longer trust my own judgment. “I’ve sworn off men, remember?”

“I thought you were just swearing off shitfuckers named Ben?”

Them too.

“All men. Especially dangerous ones. Look what happened to you being with Liam and related to the Donnellys. I’m not like you, Imogen. I’m the straight-laced one, remember. The one who remains on the other side of the law. Where it’s safe and I can pretend I’m badass. I’m just boring Teagan who plays around with computers.”

She loops her arm around mine and squeezes. “You are anything but boring. You’re amazing. Smart. Fun. Funny. Kind. Beautiful. The best friend a girl could ask for. You’re dependable, not straight-laced. There’s nothing wrong with that, either.”

“Dependable sounds like the tagline for diapers,” I deadpan.

Imogen growls. “Come on. You clearly need another glass of wine.”

Considering I’ve barely finished the one I’m currently working on, I definitely don’t. “How about I finish this one first and reassess after?”

“Fine.” She huffs. “But we’re going to go play some Blackjack and spend Liam’s money.”

I snort and let her lead me to the nearest table. Before long there’s a stack of chips in front of us both—one high enough

to make me sweat a bit—and as soon as the two cards are in front of me, I place my first bet. I win far more often than I lose and soon I've accumulated another two stacks of chips and drawn a crowd.

Imogen, on the other hand, is down to only a handful of chips. She's shit at cards.

I'm having a lot more fun than I expected to and I can feel my muscles loosen and relax. *I didn't realize how tense I've been.* Encouraged by the increased number of members observing, my bids grow higher and maybe a bit more reckless. I shouldn't be so cavalier about Liam's money. Then I remember he *did* kidnap my friend and I don't feel as bad.

"Twenty, and we have another winner," the dealer calls out and scoops my cards up.

I draw in my winnings and turn to Imogen, who's lost the last of her chips. "That's it for me, I think. I want to quit while I'm ahead."

Grumbles come from all around, but I ignore them. Imogen swivels in her seat to glare at the people standing behind us. "Piss off."

I bite back my laughter. I suppose that's one way to get rid of them. A different gentleman than the one who dropped off our chips arrives at the table. I let him take everything I've won back to the cage to cash out, and Imogen and I wander around.

"That was fun." I chuckle. "The perfect way to top off the perfect day."

Imogen shoulder bumps me. "I'm glad you've had a great time today."

"The best."

“Impressive play back there.” A voice I’m sure I’ve heard before says.

We turn and Declan Campbell strolls forward.

“What are you doing here?” Imogen asks.

“I should ask you the same thing.”

She waves her hand in the general direction the men went earlier. “The boys are having some meeting so I thought it would be fun to come with and show Teagan the casino.”

Declan nods. His gaze flicks to me and a lazy grin appears. “Looks like someone got lucky tonight. Nicely done.”

“Thank you.” A small part of me is soaking up the fact that two brutally gorgeous men have flirted with me tonight. I mean, what girl wouldn’t?

“Maybe I’ll get lucky as well.” There’s no mistaking the suggestive tone. Especially since he drags a lazy gaze over me.

“Okay, enough of that. How about getting us a drink? You’re buying though. Liam’s already going to side-eye me at the amount of money of his I lost.” Imogen grabs his arm and drags him toward the bar.

He barks out a laugh as we stop in front of it. I step up on the other side of her.

“Serves him right,” Declan says. “He has far too much of it and I’m glad to see that if anyone is relieving him of it, it’s going to be the Donnellys. And you know as well as I do, that he won’t say a damn thing about it. Liam lets you get away with far more than he would anyone else.”

Imogen smirks. “That’s because I’m the one who gives him blow—”

I smother the rest of her sentence with my hand over her mouth. Declan makes a gagging noise.

“No. No. Nope. Keep that shit to yourself.” I glare at her and she narrows her eyes right back.

Reluctantly I lower my arm and brace myself for when she finishes the sentence.

“You guys are such babies,” Imogen says instead, her gaze bouncing between us.

“No one wants to hear that about their cousin,” Declan gripes.

“I’m firmly on his side.”

Imogen rolls her eyes. “Traitor. You’re supposed to be *my* best friend.”

Thankfully we’re interrupted by the casino employee. “Miss? Congratulations on your successful evening.”

He discreetly hands me an envelope that I quickly shove in my bag. “Thank you.”

“Maybe Teagan’s buying drinks tonight,” Imogen quips.

Declan glances over at us as the bartender arrives next. “What sort of gentleman would I be if I let a beautiful woman pay? I’m buying.”

“Two shiraz, please,” Imogen orders for both of us without skipping a beat. If she didn’t know me so well, I might be annoyed at her presumption. Except she does, so I don’t put up a fuss.

“Guinness for me,” Declan adds and then turns to lean against the bar. “I don’t suppose it’s been long enough for you

to have changed your mind about meeting me for a drink? And this one doesn't count."

I have to give him credit for at least being persistent. And if he's willing for me to turn him down again, this time in front of Imogen, he really must not be worried about his ego. I do like his confidence, but I'm already shaking my head. "Afraid not."

He grins good-naturedly. "You can't blame a man for trying."

The bartender sets our drinks in front of us and I pick mine up while Declan withdraws his wallet. I probably should offer to pay, but a single glance at him and I resist. Somehow I can tell he was serious about being the type of man who wouldn't let a woman buy his drinks. I don't get a sense that it came from a misogynistic place either.

"They'll let anyone in here, won't they?" Liam pulls Imogen to him and wraps a possessive hand around her waist. He glares at his cousin.

Declan stiffens. "Yes, I guess they will."

"Nope." Imogen shakes her head and pinches Liam's side. He doesn't even flinch. "No dick swinging tonight. Teagan and I are here to have fun. It's been the best day so far. Neither of you are allowed to fuck it up."

Both men continue glaring at each other before Liam tips his head. "Only because you asked so nicely."

I snort, cover it up with a cough, and take a quick sip of my wine. Or at least I mean to. Instead, I stop with the glass pressed to my lips and meet Finn's startling blue eyes. There's a flare of heat in them and then he shifts his gaze to Declan—who's moved to my side—and back to me. It's barely

noticeable, but there's a slight thinning of his lips. What is that all about?

Slowly, he approaches and stands so close he's nearly touching me. Despite the narrow distance between us, he still leans in. Almost as though he's sharing a secret. "I heard you made out well at the Blackjack table tonight? Congratulations."

The warm, woody scent of teakwood surrounds me. It reminds me of the childhood hikes I used to take with my mādar in the Hyrcanian Forests whenever we visited her homeland. I ignore how good he smells. *Nope, not happening.*

"Thank you." I put on the smile I use in tedious business meetings and hope he takes the hint. I'm not interested. Taking a sip of wine to wet my suddenly dry lips, I glance over at Imogen who's got that irritating smirk on her face again. Declan is studying Finn and Liam is glaring at him. A thick tension comes out of nowhere to settle around us. Suddenly, Imogen yawns. Loudly. She doesn't even bother covering her mouth. I bite back my laugh. It's the same tactic she used in uni when she wanted to ditch someone.

"Sorry, boys," she addresses all of them. "I'm exhausted. And I'm sure Teagan is as well. I think we're going to head home."

She steps away from Liam, plucks the full glass of wine out of my hand, and sets it on the bar. Then she practically drags me away from the three men and doesn't wait to find out if Liam is following. Most likely because she knows he'll be right on our heels. This is why Imogen's my best friend. She's gotten me out of more than one uncomfortably awkward social situation.

“I love you. You know that, right?” She does know, but everyone likes to hear it once in a while.

She barks out a laugh. “Of course I do. What’s not to love? Right, babe?”

“I’ll refrain from answering until I know what I’m agreeing to,” Liam replies since her raised voice—and glance over her shoulder—clearly indicates she’s asking him.

Imogen shakes her head and squeezes my arm tight. “I love you, too. Which is why I’m really glad that one day you’ll be my sister-in-law. But we’re going to have to make Finn work for it.”

I sputter and cough. “Never mind, I take it back. I hate you.”

“No you don’t. But fine, I was just kidding.” She bats her lashes at me. “Maybe we’ll be cousin-in-laws instead, then.”

“You really are the worst.” There’s no heat in my tone though. “There will be no in-law of any kind happening. I’ve sworn off men, remember?”

All Imogen does is side-eye me. Maybe if I say it enough times we’ll both believe it.

CHAPTER 8



FINN

I DRAW MY GAZE AWAY FROM TEAGAN'S RETREATING FIGURE only to be met with Declan's closed-off expression.

"What?"

He shakes his head. "Nothing. She just doesn't seem like your type is all."

Annoyance sparks. "I wasn't aware I had a type."

Declan shrugs. "Everybody has a type. Even you."

"I suppose next you're going to tell me that Teagan is *yours*." Why is a fire burning in my gut at the thought of the two of them together?

"She and I just met earlier today at Imogen's house. I don't know her well enough yet to determine if she is or not. But what I do know," he emphasizes "is that somebody hurt her. I think recently, too."

I want to track down whoever this unknown person is and beat the hell out of them. "What makes you say that?"

“Because I pay attention. And a woman usually only brushes off a guy she just met by saying ‘it’s not you, but me’ when her heart’s been broken and she’s trying to get over it,” Declan says matter-of-factly.

“So you did ask her out, then?”

He snorts. “Of course I did. She’s beautiful, and she’s Imogen’s best friend. I trust your sister’s judgement on what makes a person best friend worthy. Boyfriend-worthy, on the other hand, is where Imogen’s clearly not to be trusted for smart choices.”

I have to laugh at that, because he’s not wrong. “So she turned you down flat, huh?”

“Sooo flat.” He widens his eyes for emphasis.

“I guess we’ll find out if my luck is any better than yours.” It’s almost a dare for him to object.

Declan doesn’t take it. Instead he claps my shoulder. “Don’t come crying to me when she shoots you down.”

“I’ll keep that in mind. As much as I’d enjoy standing around to talk, I need to get back upstairs. There are some numbers that aren’t adding up.”

He raises his beer bottle. “Have fun with that.”

I nod and head for the lift. Almost immediately the image of Teagan comes to mind. This fascination I have doesn’t make sense. What is it about her? I can’t explain it, but I want to figure it out. Except I can’t at the moment, because business has to come first. Especially when it’s possible one of my employees is stealing from us.

Loyalty is the one thing we require of anyone who works for us or who belongs to our family’s organization. There is no

sin against us worse than betrayal. Caitlín has told us stories about what her Italian brother-in-law over in Brooklyn does to traitors. Every member of their syndicate is tattooed with a crown when they're initiated. If that member betrays them, they burn the crown from their body before ending them. A fitting punishment really.

I get to my desk, pull up all our accounting records, and sift through them. Based on what's in front of me, I suspect it's going to be a long night.



A LOUD BANG HAS ME BOLTING UPRIGHT AND REACHING FOR the gun in my top drawer only to stop when my sleep-blurred eyes land on a laughing Aidan. My pounding heart slows.

“You have a little drool, right here.” He points to a spot on his own face, and I swipe at the opposite place on my own.

“You're an asshole.”

He crosses the room and plops himself in the chair in front of my desk. “I'm having an amazing day and nothing you can say is going to hurt my feelings.”

“Why's that? Did you finally grow a pair?”

“Nope, not even bothered. Because early this morning Sorcha told me she, Kellen, Carson, and Aisling aren't going anywhere.”

I grin widely. “That's great news. I'm really happy for you. I know how hard the last couple weeks have been on both of you. As well as the kids.”

Aidan nods. “I really thought I was going to lose her. I never knew what love was until Sorcha.”

That familiar thread of envy wiggles its way through me. Both my brothers have found their person which is only a reminder that I'm alone. An image of Teagan flashes behind my eyes. I blink it away. She interests me, but that's a long way from being in love.

"I'm glad it's worked out for you two. I doubt that's what brought you all the way into town to tell me, though."

"No. Da sent me here because we have a problem." Aidan's tone turns serious.

I sit up in my chair. "What problem?"

"Someone—most likely the Moroccans—set fire to the shipping vessel that arrived overnight carrying our most recently acquired merchandise from our German suppliers. The entire thing sank before they could put the flames out." He pauses. "Everything on board was destroyed. On top of that, we found the body of one of the dock workers under our employ. He'd been shot in the back of the head."

"Fuck." I slam my fist on the desk top. "How did they get past security? Not only that, but how did they know a shipment arrived, let alone which carrier it had come in on?"

Aidan stares at me with a knowing glance. *Someone told them.*

"Money is missing from the casino." I don't believe in coincidences.

"What? How much? Who?"

I gesture to the still open computer in front of me. "The how much is what I've been working on since last night. As far as the 'who'? I don't know. Yet."

Aidan sits quietly for a minute. “Do you think it’s one person betraying us or are there more?”

I shake my head. “I don’t know. Who has motive? Or opportunity?”

His eyes meet mine. “There’s one person I can think of off the top of my head.”

“He owes us a life debt.”

Aidan leans forward. “That only means he can’t physically harm any of us. But he sure as hell can try to put us out of business. And what about that cousin of his? Declan. He’s here frequently and the two of you spend a lot of time together. Da, Cian, and I still don’t understand how he can be friends with one of the men who put him and his brother in the hospital. Maybe it’s a ruse.”

My immediate reaction is to deny that Declan would do something like that. Except I stop myself. *Haven’t you also questioned how you two could become friends?* Is it possible that I’ve been blind? I clench my fists. If he’s been playing me this whole time, then I don’t care if he is Liam’s cousin, he’s a dead man.

“Let me worry about Declan. If he’s betraying us—him *or* Liam—then I’ll take care of it.”

Aidan nods. “For Imogen’s sake, I really hope it’s neither of them.”

So do I.

He stands and glances down at me. “Keep me or Cian informed if you find something out.”

“I will.”

Aidan walks out of my office, closing the door behind him. I stare at the numbers on the screen. No matter how long I worked through them last night, I still can't find the source of the discrepancy or a total amount. It's there somewhere. I just have to keep searching. In the meantime, since I should give my mind a break, there's something else I need to do.

I shut down my computer and head out of the casino to where my car is parked on the street in a family designated spot. After a quick stop at Imogen's favorite bakery for a couple things, I make my way toward the north side of the city. *You don't even know if she's still there.* Yet I continue on until I stop in front of an ostentatious home. I grab the bag, both cups of tea, and walk to the front door.

After my knock, several minutes pass. I glance at my watch. Christ. It is a little early. They're all probably still asleep. I knock once more and ring the bell for good measure. Moments later, it's jerked open and a gun is directed at my face.

"For fuck's sake. What is it with you Donnelly's coming to my door at god awful hours? I'll ask you the same thing I asked your brother when he came barging in here a few weeks ago. Give me one reason I shouldn't shoot you?"

"Because then you'll get blood on these scones, and you know how much Imogen loves them." I show my teeth in a cheeky grin and hold up the bag.

Liam whirls away and grumbles something under his breath about pussies hiding behind a woman. I ignore him and step inside, glancing around. Good god. Aidan is right. This place *is* pretentious.

"Finn? What are you doing here?" Imogen moves toward me.

“I brought breakfast.” For a second time, I raise the bag.

She rushes forward with a squeal and snatches it out of my hand. “Oh my god, is this from Mannings?”

“Of course. Do you really think I would bring you and your guest second-rate scones and tea? Fortnum’s Ginger and Sicilian Lemon, right?”

Imogen quirks her lips and rolls her eyes. “You know, you should be far less obvious.”

I palm my chest and bat my eyelashes. She just shakes her head and takes one of the to go cups. “Come on. Teagan is probably still asleep, but I’ll wake her.”

As much as it pains me to, I stop her. “No, don’t disturb her.”

“I’m already awake.”

My head jerks up and my gaze zeroes in over the top of Imogen’s head. The main reason I’m even here approaches.

“I didn’t mean to wake you.” *Didn’t you, though?*

Teagan waves her hand. “It’s fine. Did I hear you say you brought breakfast?”

Imogen pivots to face her friend. “He brought Mannings.”

Dark eyebrows rise and Teagan cocks her head. “That feels almost like a bribe.”

I give her my most innocent look and offer her the second cup. “I hope you like Fortnum’s as well.”

Her fingers graze mine and a small spark flares from the touch. Teagan takes the drink and quickly pulls her arm back. She clears her throat. “Not as much as Genny, but it’ll do.”

My gaze flicks to Imogen whose eyes are filled with amusement. “Genny?”

“Only Teagan is allowed to call me that, so don’t get any ideas. Now, if you’re done flirting with my friend, the scones are getting cold and I’m hungry.” She pivots and walks away from us. “You better have brought jam and cream.”

A quick glance confirms a pink hue colors Teagan’s cheeks.

“Would you mind if I joined the two of you for breakfast?” She opens her mouth and I hold up my hand. “There’s no pressure and no expectations of anything more than that.”

A short silence settles before she breaks it. “Just breakfast.”

I nod in agreement. I’ll take it. To start, anyway.

CHAPTER 9



TEAGAN

THIS IS A BAD IDEA. A REALLY, REALLY BAD IDEA. I SENSE Finn's eyes on my back as he follows me into the kitchen. Imogen glances up at our arrival and a smile ghosts across her face before she lowers her head and puts a scone on each of the plates she's set on the counter.

"Grab some knives, will you, please?" She gestures to the drawer where they're kept.

I take a step in that direction, but Finn's voice stops me.

"I'll get them. You're a guest."

While he crosses the room, I fidget with the lid on the cup and try to focus anywhere but on him. Both he and Declan are equally attractive with their dark hair—although Finn's is near-black— and razor sharp jawlines dusted with the perfect amount of scruff. While Declan's eyes are a gray that remind me of a windswept storm, it's Finn's blue eyes that seem to pierce me all the way down to my soul. Liam's cousin doesn't affect me in nearly the same way as Imogen's brother does no matter the brief amount of time I've spent with him. There's something about his presence that has my body on high alert.

This is just breakfast.

I'll remind Finn—and myself—that as many times as I need to. I'm not in any kind of headspace to start seeing someone. Ben made sure of that.

A warm heat radiates through me. I glance up to find Finn standing close enough to touch.

“Are you all right?” he asks softly.

“What? Oh, yeah.” I wave away his concern. “Just drifted off for a second.”

I get the impression he doesn't believe me. Shaking it off, I take a deep, cleansing breath and straighten my shoulders. “What can I do?”

“We're good,” Imogen says. “Everything's out and ready to eat.”

Sure enough the containers of jam and cream are open and sitting next to the plates. Imogen's already slathering hers. Finn sweeps his arm out.

“After you.”

I stride past him and do my damndest to ignore his woody scent and the way my body is completely aware of him. “Thanks.”

“My pleasure.”

Finn's suggestive tone rolls over me and a small shiver skates down my spine. My belly heats. Flustered, I set my cup on the counter and snatch up a knife. I keep my gaze focused on the task in front of me as though it takes all my concentration. With the heat of those eyes boring into my back, it does. Once I have all the jam and cream I want, I take

my plate and tea to the dining room where Imogen is already seated.

“What happened to swearing off men?” she whispers loudly.

I dart a glance toward the kitchen. “It’s just breakfast.”

“Mmhmm. If you say so.”

“I do.”

She clamps her mouth closed as Finn walks in. He sits across from me. Damn it. I want to kick him under the table for forcing me to have to meet his eyes every time he talks. Even when he’s not talking. I may have only met him last night, but he strikes me as the person who does everything with intention. I should be annoyed since I’ve already made it clear I’m not interested in anything more than this meal. But somehow I can’t find it in me to be.

Thankfully Imogen monopolizes the conversation. I could kiss her. Until Finn turns his gaze from her and locks it on me.

“Cyber security, huh?” he asks. “That sounds complicated.”

My gaze bounces to Imogen. Damn. I’ve missed half the conversation. I set down my scone, take a sip of tea, and clear my throat. “It can be. It’s exhausting, because there’s always some hacker out there who is trying to make a name for themselves.”

I give a pointed stare at Imogen. She throws up her hands with a laugh. “I’ve already made a name for myself in the community. No need for me to impress anyone anymore. They all know what I can do.”

She isn't bragging either. Few hackers are as brilliant as her.

"You still working for Paddy, I take it?" Finn asks.

"Going on a decade. It still blows my mind that all this time my own cousin has been one of my clients and I had no idea." Imogen shakes her head.

Liam walks in just then, pauses at the sight of Finn, and glares. "Why are you still here?"

"These lovely ladies invited me to stay for breakfast. Sorry, I forgot to bring you anything."

I almost laugh because we definitely didn't invite him, and the fact he's so flippant amuses me. It's not that I don't like Liam, but it's kind of nice to see him humbled a bit. Or at least as humbled as someone with his amount of self-importance can get.

Imogen heads over to him.

"Be nice," she whispers audibly and rises up to give him a kiss.

I glance at Finn who winks at me and one side of his mouth curls up. A dimple appears. I've always had a weakness for a man with dimples. Which is what got me into trouble in the first place. Ben has them. The sight of that small little furrow is a good reminder that no matter how aware I might be of Finn, I'm nowhere near ready for a flirtation.

"Where did you go just now?"

My head jerks up and I meet his eyes. I glance to where Liam and Imogen stood, but they've disappeared somewhere, leaving me alone with Finn. I'm going to kill her. My gaze darts back to him still waiting for an answer.

“I really appreciate you bringing over breakfast.” I’m not answering his question.

He sits back. “But?”

“But whatever this is”—I gesture between us—“it isn’t going to happen.”

This time, Finn slowly leans forward and rests his forearms on the table. “And what exactly do you think *this* is?”

Flustered by the intensity of his stare, I struggle to answer. “This...this...”

“Attraction?”

I huff in exasperation. “Yes.”

A slow grin forms on his lips. “So what you’re saying is you’re attracted to me?”

“Yes. No.” I growl. “You’re far too smug. You know that, right?”

“So I’ve been told.” His smile hasn’t left.

I take in a deep breath and release it. “Look, I’m going to tell you the same thing I told Declan.”

“It’s not you, it’s me,” Finn beats me to it.

I’m not sure how I feel about the two of them discussing me. “Yes.”

“That’s a cop out.”

I sputter. “Excuse me?”

He leans back again, far too relaxed and looking far too good in the suit he’s wearing. His black hair, so similar to

Imogen's, shines from the light coming in through the windows. Is it as soft as it looks? *Focus.*

“I said, that’s a cop out. If you’re truly not interested in me, then say so. But if you are, then don’t try and hide behind some lame line. What are you so afraid of?”

I’m afraid to open myself up again.

I’m afraid I’ll never trust myself again.

I’m afraid of being hurt.

I’m afraid of *Ben.*

But I don’t say any of those things. Instead, I get to my feet and walk out of the room. Wood scrapes the floor behind me. I don’t get far before Finn latches onto my arm. Unable to control my response, I flinch and throw my hand up to block a blow that doesn’t come. Instantly, he releases me and I step away.

“Teagan,” he says softly. Gently. “I’m not going to hurt you.”

“I’m sorry.” The words spill out of me automatically. It’s what I’ve been conditioned to say these past few months. Every time Ben lost his temper.

Finn shakes his head. “No, I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have grabbed you. It’s my fault.”

Stupid tears fill my eyes. Moving so slowly, he closes the distance between us and ever so carefully wraps his arms around me. My fingers clench his shirt as my tears wet the fabric. I breathe in his comforting scent and let the warmth of his body soak into me. We stand at the far side of the dining room, neither of us speaking. Finn just holds me and lets me

cry. I never cried, no matter how many times I was screamed at. Berated. I didn't even cry when Ben hit me.

I let the tears wash away all the uncertainty. The pain. The fear. Every emotion I've been holding back over these last few months. I cry until there's nothing left but exhaustion and a sliver of hope that everything is going to be okay. Reluctantly, I loosen my grip and move away. Finn lets me go. I swipe at the remaining wetness dotting my eyelashes and sniffle.

"Thank you for being so nice."

"You don't have to thank me, Teagan."

I let the soft way he says my name wash over me. I'm not sure what happens next. There's a larger part of me that's embarrassed by my breakdown. Especially in front of Imogen's brother. I shift my weight the tiniest bit. As if sensing the overwhelm I'm feeling, Finn gives me a bit more space.

"I enjoyed breakfast, but I'm sure Liam thinks I've worn out my welcome," he says with a small chuckle.

Somehow I manage a small smile. He stares at me a moment longer and I hold my breath, hoping he doesn't say anything else. He grants my wish, because he nods shallowly. "Maybe I'll see you around."

"Yeah, maybe." I'm not sure either of us believe it.

"Take care of yourself."

And then Finn walks away. I stumble back into the wall and slowly slide down until my butt hits the floor. Pulling my knees into my chest, I rest my chin on them and hug myself tight. That's how Imogen finds me. She sits down—her hip pressed to mine—and wraps an arm around me. I lay my head on her shoulder and we sit there quietly together.

CHAPTER 10



FINN

SO MUCH FOR GETTING WORK DONE.

“You’ve been distracted for days. And it has nothing to do with the missing money from the casino.” Aidan pours himself and me a glass of whiskey.

Cian sits in one of the extra chairs in my office already working on his drink. The two of them stopped by for some unknown reason. Based on the glances they keep sharing, this feels like some kind of intervention. Whatever it is, they need to make it quick since we’ll be opening in less than an hour and I need to go back to combing through the accounts.

“I’m not distracted.”

It isn’t often we’re all together like this unless we’re meeting with Da and the other clan leaders. Even more so since Cian and Nessa moved into her childhood home. Something that surprised Aidan and me considering the house had previously belonged to her Da. Especially given how much hatred Cian held for the man. Not only because he abused Nessa, but also because he’d almost killed her.

“You’re a shite liar, you know that, right?” Cian remarks.

I glance at Aidan who brings my whiskey over. “I feel like we’ve had this conversation before, but I liked it much better when it was about Aidan’s lies.”

He drops into the chair next to Cian and raises his glass. “To none of us being shite liars.”

We copy the gesture. I take a sip and let the burn travel down my throat to settle warmly in my stomach. Aidan leans forward with his elbow resting on his knees.

“Lies aside. What’s got you distracted?”

The two of them are stubborn and once they lock onto something, they don’t let it go. I’m annoyed that I’ve become the object of their focus. There’s no point trying to redirect or brush them off. Neither of them will stop pushing until I’ve told them everything.

“Imogen’s friend Teagan.” It spills out of me.

Cian and Aidan share a glance that ratchets up my irritation level.

“What’s that look for?” I snap.

“Should have known it was woman trouble.” Cian nods.

“It’s not trouble. I just...”

“Can’t get her out of your head?” Aidan cuts in. “Think about her constantly?”

I glare at him. “Yes.” She hasn’t left my mind since the morning I last saw her almost a week ago.

He laughs and sits back in his seat. “Welcome to the club.”

“What club?”

“The club of men who have met the woman that brings them to their knees,” Cian explains.

“Teagan hasn’t brought me to my knees. I hardly know her.” But I want to.

“It doesn’t matter,” Cian points out. “The minute you start thinking non-stop about a woman is the minute you’re done for. There’s no letting go. Trust me. It’s the exact same thing that happened with Nessa and me. I knew nothing about her. Not her likes or her dislikes. But every time I looked at her, I saw a spark of something that only continued to grow bigger until it consumed me. I suspect your time is coming.”

I stare at my brother. “You’re not serious are you?”

“Dead serious.”

“If you can’t stop thinking about her, then why don’t you do something about it? It’s not as though you’re with anyone. Unless, of course, she is.” Aidan adds.

“No, she’s not. At least I don’t think so.” Just remember her reaction to my clasping her arm makes me see red again. “She’s...skittish. Somebody has hit her. I’m guessing an ex.”

Both Cian and Aidan’s expressions turn fierce.

“I hope you have something extremely painful planned for him,” Cian grinds out. “And whatever it is, we’re in.”

As much as we’ve fought and disagreed over the years, the one thing I can count on is my brothers having my back. I loosen the death grip I have on my whiskey glass so I don’t break it. “I have no idea who, or where, he is. Although, if it is her ex, I suspect he’s in Berlin since that’s where she was living before moving back here.”

“Have you asked Imogen?” Aidan inquires.

“No.”

Cian raises his eyebrows. “Why not?”

“If Teagan wants people—me—to know, she’ll tell them. I don’t want to go behind her back and invade her privacy. It doesn’t feel right.” I pause. “Besides, the last time I saw her she made it pretty clear she’s not ready to date anyone.”

“Why does it have to be all or nothing?” Aidan asks. “How about trying to be her friend? I mean, look how well it’s worked out for me. Sorcha and I fell in love.”

Cian snorts. “Is that before or after you spent the first two weeks of your marriage with your wife barely speaking to you and sleeping on the couch?”

Aidan gives him the finger. “Fuck off. Sorcha and I are good. Great, even. Because we started out as friends and had built trust between us.”

I stare at my older brother. His suggestion isn’t a bad idea actually. I’ve never been just friends with a woman before. Not really. I glance at Aidan. “It’s certainly worth trying.”

“Exactly,” he says.

“Good luck,” Cian adds and gets to his feet. “Now that we have that settled, I’m heading home. Nessa and I leave in a couple weeks for Brooklyn for Caitlín’s wedding, and I want to make sure I have everything I need.”

This time, Aidan and I share a glance. I grin and turn back to Cian.

“You picked up her ring, I take it?”

He nods. “Earlier today. Now it’s just waiting for the perfect moment. I don’t want to upstage Caitlín since we’re

there for her wedding after all. I've heard women get weird about that kind of thing."

I'm really happy for him and Nessa. "I'm sure you'll figure out the right time. Congratulations, Cian."

His gaze moves between Aidan and me. "Can you believe that barely six months ago it was just us three and Da? Look at our family now. We have a sister! I've added Nessa and Aidan's got not only a wife, but three damn kids. I have no doubt that before long, Finn, you're going to bring someone into the family as well."

Aidan laughs. "Now all we need to do is convince Nora to marry Da."

It came as a shock to all of us that Da's long-time mistress Nora was Imogen's biological mother and he her father. It's been an adjustment for all of us since finding out the news.

"I'm sure we will," Cian says and sets his glass on the bar. "We'll talk later."

Once he's gone, Aidan turns to me. "Take it from someone who's been there. If you're going to be Teagan's friend, then you need to be her friend. Don't make anything between you sexual. I'm not saying you two will fall in love like Sorcha and me, but if you're really interested in her, meet her where she's comfortable."

Since I'm sure he's only trying to be helpful, I swallow down my sarcastic comment about not being an idiot. Instead I just nod. "Understood."

He stands. "I'll let you get to work. If you need anyone to talk to, you know I'm always available."

"Thanks. I appreciate it."

Aidan heads out the door as well and I sit back in my chair and nurse my drink. Friends with Teagan. Will she even accept that much from me? Guess I'll find out. But not tonight. Tomorrow, though, I'll call Imogen and get a phone number. Having to be satisfied with that, I boot up my computer and open the accounting software.

Hours later, eyes blurry, I stare at the screen and all the numbers that have run together. I've cross-checked everything. The books say one thing, but the money being reported at the end of each night aren't matching. Not even the security cameras have picked up who might be pocketing it. I've watched hours and hours of footage.

"Fuck." I slam the lid down on the laptop and push away from the desk.

I need another drink and then I need sleep. After a single shot, I head for the suite I sleep in more often than not. Once I'm undressed, I climb into bed and close my eyes. Immediately my brain pulls up an image of Teagan and then I drift off.

Gentle hands roam over my back and down my shoulders. I turn and Teagan smiles up at me. Her top front tooth is slightly crooked. She doesn't say anything. Just lifts up onto the balls of her feet and presses a kiss to my lips. It's sweet, and yet a fire sizzles and burns through my veins. I palm her bare ass and drag her closer. A breathy moan spills from her. She rubs her pelvis against mine. The musky scent of her cunt fills my nose. I breathe it even even deeper.

Teagan's nails score my back. Not hard, but enough to send a shiver straight to my throbbing cock. Fuck. I grit my teeth. The sensation of her skin against mine only makes me

harder. I want to bury myself deep inside her until neither of us knows where I end and she begins.

I grip her hips tightly and hoist her up, my lips never leaving hers. Teagan wraps her long, supple legs around my waist, pinning my cock between us. The pressure is both agonizing and yet not enough. Wet heat spreads across my flesh from where our bodies meet. Careful not to trip over anything, I walk forward carrying her towards the bed. I set her down gently and she stares up at me with chocolate eyes gone dark.

A seductive smile appears on a passion-kissed mouth and Teagan crooks her finger, beckoning me closer. Her small pink tongue peeks out to tease me. I'm dying for another taste of her. Dipping my head, I cover her lips and drag a stuttering breath from her. Another moan escapes from her throat.

I kiss my way across her jaw and neck, nibbling lightly here and there. Teagan tilts her head to give me better access. I take full advantage of it. I lick a path downward. Pert brown nipples rise up as though begging for their turn. I lift my gaze until our eyes meet and then latch onto the first one. Her back arches, pushing her breast up. I devour her.

"More," she whimpers.

Teagan moves her hands from my shoulders and her fingers tunnel through my hair. Her fists clench gripping me tight as though she can't bear for me to stop. I have no intention of doing any such thing. Not until she comes apart beneath me with my cock inside her.

"Tell me again what you want." It's a hard demand.

"More," Teagan repeats.

"More what?" I want her begging.

“Kisses. Touches. Everything.”

I give her exactly what she asks for, kissing my way down her stomach to breathe in her scent. Beneath the musky scent is a hint of blackberries. My tongue flicks out to tease Teagan’s swollen clit. I palm one breast, pinching then rolling the hardened tip between my fingers and slowly insert a finger from my other hand into the hot, wet heat of her cunt.

My mouth and fingers work in tandem to bring her to the pinnacle of pleasure. She squirms and bucks beneath me and I bite down on her clit with a sharp nip to keep her still. Only Teagan does the complete opposite. She screams and digs the sharp point of her nails into my scalp. Her pelvis jerks up so sharply she nearly bucks me off.

Her cunt clenches my finger and a full tremor rushes over her body. Liquid spills from her soaking the sheets. She cries out again, my name echoing through the room in the sweetest symphony. Unable to hold myself back any longer, I move and line my cock up with her entrance and thrust my hips forward, impaling her on my length.

My eyes jerk open and I suck in air. I’m fistfucking my cock and almost explode, but I squeeze the base of it to hold my seed back. My heart pounds like a drum. I shudder with the need for release. Like a teenage boy who’s jerking himself off for the first time, it’s coming and there’s no stopping. I let go and let it happen. When I have nothing left, I drag myself out of the bed and into the bathroom for a shower.

I stare at myself in the mirror. How am I going to try and be just friends with Teagan after that?

Christ. I’m so fucked.

CHAPTER 11



TEAGAN

MY DESIGNED-TO-BE ZEN ROOM HAS LOST ITS ZEN. IT DOESN'T matter that everything is where it's always been and everything looks the way it's always looked. Even my bed doesn't feel right. In fact, nothing feels right anymore. Berlin isn't home, but I'm not sure Dublin is either. I've been gone too long. Yes, I've missed Imogen, but maybe I've changed too much. I'm definitely not the same person I was when I left for London five years ago and then Berlin the year after that.

From the hallway my intercom buzzes. I throw back the duvet and hurry out to it. It's probably a good thing since I've been moping in bed for way too long today.

"Yes?"

"I brought takeaway and a friend. Let us up." Imogen's voice crackles with static.

Shit. I'm glad I at least put on regular clothes, even if it is only leggings and a t-shirt. She'd never let it go if she found me still in my pajamas since it's nearly one. I press the button to release the lock on the front door of the building and open my own while I wait. Footsteps plod up the stairs until her tri-

colored head appears first and then the rest of her follows. In her hand is a brown paper takeaway bag. Right behind is a pretty woman I've never met. Her hair is down around her shoulders and a pair of sexy librarian-esque glasses is perched on her nose. I'm envious of the stunning yellow and white wrap dress that hugs her curves perfectly.

Imogen pivots and gestures toward her. "Teagan, this is Nessa, Cian's girlfriend."

"It's so nice to finally meet you. Imogen has told us so much about you," Nessa says kindly.

"Please, come in." I step back so the two of them can walk past and close the door behind them.

Imogen leads us to the kitchen and sets the bag on the counter. The scent of my favorite restaurant fills the small space. "Did you get me corned beef and colcannon?"

She glares at me with eyes widened in disbelief as she pulls out small white takeaway containers. "Of course I did."

I blink innocently. "Just checking."

Imogen glances over at Nessa. "Teagan and I started getting food from Davy Byrne's during our...second year at University, wasn't it?"

"That sounds about right."

She continues emptying the bag and then folds it up and sets it on the other counter. "We ordered from there at least once a week, if not more. And every time, no matter what, Teagan ordered the exact same thing."

"Hey." I gasp in offense, circling around to get utensils for us. "You're not supposed to make it sound weird. I just know what I like. Why make it hard on myself trying

something new when I always end getting what I really wanted in the first place? At least with colcannon, I know I'm going to enjoy it."

Nessa laughs softly. "I completely understand. More often than not I tend to do the same thing."

"See?" I gesture. "Nessa gets me."

Imogen snorts, peeks inside the first container, and passes it over to me. "This is yours."

She does the same thing with the second one. "This one's mine. Which means this one is yours." She hands the third container over to Nessa and then grabs three glasses from a cabinet and fills them with filtered water from the pitcher in the fridge.

"I'm sorry I don't have enough chairs at the table for all of us. But we can go into the living area. It's where I usually eat anyway." It's been too long since I've entertained anyone.

"I'm a no fuss kind of person, so I don't mind," Nessa says relieving me of the pinch of guilt for not being a better hostess.

We take our food and drinks into the other room. Imogen drops into the chair while Nessa and I take the sofa.

"How goes the job hunt?" Imogen mumbles around a mouth full of food.

"Not well. Every single manager I talk to says I'm over-qualified for the position." It's really pissing me off too.

"You know, I can always refer a couple of my clients to you. Nothing big or, you know, illegal." She grins.

I'm not that desperate yet. "I'll let you know. Thank you for the offer."

Imogen stares for a minute before I turn toward Nessa. “I love your dress, by the way.”

A hint of pink fills her cheeks. “Thank you. Cian’s cousin Caitlín picked it out for me on one of our shopping trips. I have no eye for fashion—nor do I care about it. I’m all about comfort and casual. Except she’s made it her life’s mission to pick out all my clothes. Which, truthfully, I don’t mind. She has far better taste than I do anyway.”

“Well, she did a great job with that one. It’s beautiful.”

“Wait until you meet her.” Imogen chuckles. “That woman is a force to be reckoned with. I’ve never known anybody who can be both obnoxious and yet funny and charming like her. If you thought I didn’t have a filter, Caitlín surpasses even me with the whole saying what’s on her mind thing.”

“She certainly lets you know how she feels about things, that’s for sure,” Nessa adds with a small laugh.

“I can’t wait to meet her.” A lack of filter is one of the things I love most about Imogen. A person always knows where they stand with her.

I dealt with too many people growing up who said one thing to my face and something entirely different behind my back. Mostly my mādar’s family. If Caitlín is even more blunt, then I’m sure I’ll love her.

“When she and Roarke get back from their honeymoon, we’ll have to call Sorcha and Lucia and have a ladies night out,” Imogen announces and glances at me. “Sorcha is Finn’s sister-in-law and Lucia is married to Caitlín’s brother.”

It’s also been far too long since I’ve gone out with friends. I had a few acquaintances in Berlin, but they were closer to colleagues than friends. It had taken me too long to realize that

Ben had kept me isolated from everyone. One more reason to be grateful I'm away from him.

"I can't wait for my first trip to America. Cian and I are going to Caitlín and Roarke's wedding in Brooklyn," Nessa chimes in. "It'll be my first plane ride, too. I'm so nervous."

"It's going to be great," Imogen reassures her. "You and Cian will have a great time. Eat some New York pizza for me, please, and tell me if it's as amazing as I've heard everyone say it is."

"Oh, I will."

Imogen then launches into a story about her latest hacker job while I sit back, enjoy my lunch, and savor being around girlfriends again. I've missed this so much. Just as we finish eating, Imogen holds up a finger.

"Before I forget," she swallows. "Finn texted me earlier wanting your phone number. Are you okay with me giving it to him? I told him I would ask."

My heart stutters for half a beat. It's been five days since he walked out of Imogen's house after my epic breakdown. Five days where I cringe at my reaction to him when he did nothing more than clasp my arm as well as at my inability to control my emotions. I swallow. *Tell her no. Two little letters. N-o.*

"I suppose it's all right," I say instead and mentally smack myself.

Clearly she hears the uncertainty in my tone, because she cocks her head. "Are you sure? If you don't want to talk to him, I'll tell him to bugger off."

"No. No," I hurry to assure her. "It's okay. Really. You can give it to him."

Imogen narrows her eyes slightly, but tips her chin. “I’ll text him with it later then.”

“Okay.” A swirling sensation starts up in my belly. It’s a combination of trepidation and excitement.

That’s all I’m going to be thinking about the rest of the day. Finn’s call. I’d gotten the impression when he left Imogen’s house that he had no interest in pursuing the... attraction between us. At first I’d been relieved. But if he asked her for my number, then maybe I’m wrong.

“As much fun as this has been, we should probably get going.” Imogen picks up her glass on the floor near her feet and stands. “I need to head into my office soon. I’m expecting a call from Paddy about a job he needs me to do for him.”

Nessa and I get up as well and we all walk to the kitchen to toss out the containers and put the glasses and utensils in the dishwasher. I give Imogen and Nessa both a hug.

“Thank you for bringing lunch over. I’ve been going a little stir-crazy here being alone.” I glance over at Nessa. “And it was so nice meeting you.”

She smiles wide. “You too. I’m looking forward to our girls’ night out when Cian and I get back from Brooklyn. I have years of them to catch up on.”

I blink at that. I’ll need to ask Imogen about it later. I walk them to the door and close it behind them. Turning I sag against it with a long sigh. From the living area, my phone rings. Maybe it’s someone calling me about a job. I rush into the room and answer it.

“Hello?”

“You’ve been a very bad girl, Teagan.”

I nearly drop the phone at the sound of Ben's voice. God, I'm going to be sick. "How did you get this number?"

Before leaving Dublin I blocked him. Changing my number was the first thing I did after arriving back in Dublin.

"What did I tell you would happen if you ever tried to leave me?" he asks, completely ignoring my question. "You only brought this upon yourself."

My hands are shaking and my knees almost buckle. It takes me a moment, but as the silence lengthens, I pull the phone from my ear. The screen displays a picture of Imogen and me on our graduation day. Bile rises in my throat. I run into the bathroom and barely make it to the toilet before I throw up. More vomit comes until there's nothing left in my stomach and I collapse onto the floor. The cold tiles feel good against my fevered skin.

I lay there long enough to get a cramp in my side. Pushing myself up to seated, I lean against the wall while my whole body shakes. Finally, I manage to get to my feet and stagger into the living area like a zombie. I pick my phone up from where I dropped it and pull up my favorites. Seconds later, it's ringing.

"Hey," Imogen answers. "Did you miss me already?"

"I think Ben found me."

There's a split second of silence. "Lock your door. Don't open it for anyone. We'll be there in ten minutes."

"Hurry. Please." I do as she says.

"I'm already out the door." Imogen ends the call.

I go into the kitchen and grab a knife from the drawer. Then I go back into the living area, sit on the couch with the

blade clutched tightly in my hands, and wait.

CHAPTER 12



FINN

I STARE AT THE COMPUTER, BUT MY GAZE IS UNFOCUSED. I'VE been waiting most of the day for Imogen to text me. What if Teagan tells her not to give me her number? I can't remember a time when I was this hung up on a woman. Have I ever been?

Every time I pick up my phone to text Imogen, I slam it back down on my desk. This is ridiculous. Maybe I should call Aoife. Except she's not the person consuming my thoughts and making it difficult to concentrate on anything else. Fuck it. I punch the screen for Imogen's number and wait. She answers after a couple rings.

"I can't talk at the moment."

Her voice doesn't sound right. I straighten in my chair. "What's wrong?"

"Look, Teagan needs me right now. I have to go." She ends the call.

What the hell? Did something happen to Teagan? Without even pausing to think, I jump out of my chair, throw on my

suit jacket, and head for the lift.

“Come on.” I drum my fingers against my leg as I wait for it to arrive. Why is it taking so long?

Finally the bell dings and the door slides open. I barely cross the threshold when I push the button for the ground floor. Once again, it takes forever to get there. I ignore the people trying to get my attention. There’s still a bit of light left in the sky when I make it outside and into my car.

“Shite.” I don’t have Teagan’s address.

I’ll start at Imogen’s place. The roads are far too crowded for me and more than once I lay on the horn. Curses spew from my mouth. Impatience nips at my heels until at last I come to an abrupt halt in Liam’s driveway. The soles of my shoes pound on the concrete and I ring the bell incessantly. The door is ripped open.

“What the fuck do you want?” Liam snaps.

“Where’s Teagan?”

“For Christ’s sake.” He walks away without closing the door.

For the second time in a week, I step into Campbell’s house. The only rooms I’ve been in are the kitchen and dining room so I make my way in that direction. They’re both empty. I head back to the entryway and am about to search every room when Liam comes back. His shoulders are rigid and there’s a tick in his right cheek beneath his eye.

“They’re this way.” He spins and moves in the direction from where he just came.

I follow him through the living area and down a hallway where he stops outside the first room on the right. He gestures

with a slight head tilt. Slowly, I step forward until I stand in the doorway. Teagan and Imogen are on the bed. Imogen sits with her back against the headboard and Teagan is on her side with her head in Imogen's lap. Her eyes are closed and my sister is stroking her friend's hair.

Imogen lifts her head and her eyes widen in surprise. Liam walks away.

“What are you doing here?” Imogen whispers.

“I was worried.” My voice is just as soft. “What happened?”

She glances down at Teagan who hasn't stirred. Since I haven't been kicked out yet, I come farther into the room and stop when I reach the side of the bed. Tear-stains line Teagan's cheeks. Every protective instinct rears up inside me. I want to pull her in my arms and make sure no one hurts her again.

“Her ex-boyfriend called,” she finally says. “Threatened her again.”

My body goes rigid. “The same one who hit her?”

Imogen's head pops up. “She told you?”

So it's true. “I took a wild guess.”

She lets out a sigh. “Ah. I wondered. She didn't say what happened between the two of you before you left the other day, but I knew something had after I'd found her.”

“Does he know where she is?”

Imogen shrugs. “I'm not sure. He knows she's not in Berlin anymore.”

“I'll take care of him.” Whoever he is, he's going to regret threatening Teagan.

“Why? You don’t even know her.”

I glance back down at the woman who’s consumed my thoughts during every waking hour and even while I’m sleeping. I’ve never believed in love at first sight. I’m not saying that’s what this is. But there’s something between us. Or could be. I’m sure of it.

“Because I can.” It’s the only answer I have for Imogen.

She’s quiet another minute as she continues running her hand over Teagan’s head. “Are you planning on killing him?”

Yes. “That depends on him, I suppose.”

There’s a knowing in her eyes that says I’m probably lying, but she doesn’t call me out on it.

“I don’t want her going back to her flat alone,” Imogen says.

“She can stay in the suite at the casino.” I’d invite her to the manor, but it’s gotten crowded.

“Is anyone going to ask me what I want?” Teagan opens her eyes and slowly pushes herself to seated. Pink tinges her cheeks as she swipes a few stray strands of hair off her face.

Imogen turns toward her. “About anything else but this, yes. You’ve already told me you don’t doubt Ben will follow through with his threat. He’s already found your phone number. What happens when he shows up at your door?”

“Dublin is a big city, and you’re the only one who knows where I live.”

“It doesn’t matter, T. You and I both know that if he’s that determined to find you, he will.” Imogen clutches her friend’s hand. “Will you please stay at the casino? At least until that cocktwat has been taken care of. For me?”

I keep my mouth shut and let the two of them work things out. *Say yes, Teagan.* I send the unspoken request out. Her gaze flicks toward me but she quickly focuses back on Imogen. The two stare at each other, neither giving an inch, until finally, Teagan's body deflates.

"Fine." She holds up a finger when Imogen opens her mouth. "But only for a week. If there's no sign of Ben by then, I'm going home."

If her ex is willing to track down her phone number after a week, call and threaten her, then he's not going to give up finding her. Even if it takes another week. Maybe not ever. The guy sounds unhinged. That only means I have to find him first.

Imogen must realize that's the best offer she's going to get because she nods. "Thank you."

"I need to get some of my things." Teagan swings her legs off the bed and stands.

"I'll drive you there and then take you to the casino if you'd like." The sooner I can get her under our tight security the better.

For a second, I'm not sure she'll agree, but finally she meets my gaze. "I appreciate it. Sorry to put you out."

"You're not putting me out. No one lives there permanently. It's a place where anyone in my family can crash if we don't feel like driving out to our estate. I'll make sure they all know that you'll be staying there. No one will bother you. We also have round-the-clock security." I'll need to get a description, or better yet a picture, of this Ben bastard so I can show it to any member of security who mans the door. I want to know if he tries to step foot into the place.

Teagan glances at Imogen who's rounded the bed and wraps her in a hug. My sister whispers something in Teagan's ear, but they're too far away for me to make it out. After a minute or so they separate and Teagan faces me.

"I'm ready when you are, I guess."

I walk out of the room. Footsteps follow. Liam has made himself absent as we head out the front door and toward my SUV.

"Call me when you get settled, please," Imogen calls out from the doorway.

Teagan nods and raises her hand in farewell. I walk her to the passenger side, which makes her blink, and open it.

"Thanks." She climbs in.

I come back to the driver side and glance over at Imogen. "I'll make sure she's safe."

"You better." There's a bright sheen in her eyes. "Oh, and Finn? Hurt him. A lot. Even if it's permanently."

"It will be my pleasure."

She turns and disappears into the house. I climb behind the wheel and after a brief check on Teagan I drive away. I break the silence shortly after we leave.

"Where to?"

Her address is in a quiet, but upper class neighborhood. Given her career, I'm not surprised. As I head that direction, Teagan stares out the window. I hate the way her shoulder curl in on themselves, like she's trying to make herself smaller.

"Do you want to talk about it?" I ask, wanting to hear the sound of her voice.

She barks out a humorless laugh. “Not really, no.”

“If you change your mind, I’ve been told I’m a good listener. Not by my brothers, though. Mostly because I try to tune out everything they say.” Maybe some humor will cheer her up.

Teagan swivels her head partly in my direction and a tiny smile appears. I’ll take it. It’s far better than her being morose.

“As an only child, I wouldn’t know anything about that, but I have heard siblings can be both a blessing and a curse,” she says.

“Mine are straight up a curse. Full stop.” She snorts and it does something to me that I can amuse her under the circumstances. “The things I’ve had to put up with my whole life being the youngest would make you glad you’re an only child. I’m glad Imogen showed up. Now there’s someone younger than me for the rest of us to torment.”

“I’ve known Imogen far longer than all of you. Believe me, if anyone is going to get tormented, it’s most definitely not going to be her.” At last, a full-blown smile creeps out.

I glance over at her and chuckle. “Yeah, you’re probably right.”

In that moment, I vow to make her laugh more often.

CHAPTER 13



TEAGAN

IF A PERSON COULD DIE FROM EMBARRASSMENT, THEN I should be dead. I hate, hate, *hate* that Finn has somehow been placed in the middle of this whole mess. Did Imogen call him to let him know what happened? I don't want to ask why he suddenly showed up at Liam's given the hostility between them and Finn's family. Mostly, because I don't want to be mad at her if she did. But if I'm being completely honest with myself, I'm terrified to go back to my flat.

It's also really hard for me to ask anyone for help. My mādar raised me all by herself. Not once did she ask anyone to help her. She always said to me we were doing fine on our own. Since I never wanted for anything, I believed her. She passed that independent mentality onto me. It was Imogen and her mother Maire who taught me that it's okay to not only ask for help, but also accept it when offered. It doesn't make a person weak or desperate or any of the other reasons my mādar had for doing everything on her own.

I steal glances at Finn and study his profile. It's well past dusk and the street lights have turned on. We pass under them

and with each one his features become clear before falling back into the shadows. Every time I've seen him, he's been wearing a perfectly tailored suit. His broad shoulders fill it out well.

“You're staring.”

I blink and he comes into focus. A small grin is on his face as he turns his head quickly getting his eyes back on the road.

“Sorry.” Another habitual response.

Finn's mouth tightens. “You don't have to apologize to me. Ever. About anything. And stare all you want. I enjoy having a beautiful woman's eyes on me.”

His facial muscles have relaxed and amusement filters into his tone. Heat floods my cheeks. Not only at the compliment, but also at the slight reprimand that preceded it. How long will it take me to break free of Ben's hold on me? I glance out the window. The neighborhood is familiar. Finn turns onto my street and comes to a stop at the curb just down from my building.

“Wait here, please.” He exits the car and I lean forward to keep my gaze on him.

What is he doing? It only takes me a minute before I figure it out. His eyes slowly pan up and down the street twice before he comes around to my side and helps me out of the vehicle. We walk the short distance and I unlock the gated entrance. Finn follows me inside and up the stairs until we reach my place.

I have the key in the lock and turning the knob when he lays a hand on my arm making me pause. I glance up at him.

“Let me go in first.” He pauses. “Just in case.”

I nod and take a small step back so he can slide in front of me. He opens the door and sweeps his hand up and down the wall for the light until he finds it. Slowly, we walk inside. I strain my ears for any sound, but everything is quiet. He holds up a hand and I come to a halt while he moves forward. Finally, he straightens a couple inches and his limbs loosen. He turns back to me.

“Go ahead and get your stuff. I’m going to make a couple phone calls.”

“Okay.” I walk past him and down the hallway to my room.

I turn on the light and let out the breath I’d been holding. Once I drag down the same carry-on suitcase I ran away from Berlin with, I pack it full of several changes of outfits and all the toiletries I need. I glance around my room. What once used to soothe and calm me only makes me anxious and on edge. It’s as though shadows lurk in every corner. Will I ever feel safe again?

The conversation between Imogen and Finn comes back to me. There had been a note in his response when she’d asked if he was going to kill Ben. My eyes had been closed so I missed his expression, but despite his almost denial, there’d been a hint of dishonesty in it. *Or maybe you’re just imagining things.*

Finn is part of the mafia. Considering what happened at his brother’s wedding, violence is nothing new to them. While I don’t understand all the workings of their organization, I’m pretty certain they’re not strangers to murder. Hell, Liam admitted he’d kill Ben if I asked. The fact should terrify me more.

I take a final glance around to make sure I have everything I need, heft my suitcase off the bed, and roll it down the hallway to the living area. Finn stands in the middle of the room holding a small picture frame. It's one I keep on the table next to the couch.

“That was Imogen's and my first year at University.”

He runs a finger over the glass. “God, she was so young. You both were.”

A pang of sorrow hits my chest that he and his family missed out on so much time with her. I understand why Nora gave Imogen up at birth for Nora's sister Maire to raise. She'd been protecting her from Carrick's wife who'd threatened to kill both Nora and her unborn baby. Threatened to kill Imogen.

As someone who'd had a mother who would die for her, I can sympathize with the agony Nora must have been going through to have to give up her child and never be able to know her. Although, the person I feel the worst for is Carrick, Imogen's father. Nora knew Imogen was safe. He didn't even know she existed until a few months ago.

“We've both certainly changed in the decade since it was taken. Our lives' paths have taken us into completely different directions.” One I never imagined mine would take.

Instantly I regret bringing it up. I don't want Finn asking questions I don't particularly want to answer. He sets the picture frame back in its place and glances up at me.

“Are you ready to go?”

What will he do if I say no? “Yes.”

He strides forward and reaches for my suitcase. “I'll take it.”

I glare at him. “You know I’m not completely helpless, right?”

Finn stares at me intently. “There’s nothing wrong with accepting help sometimes.”

It’s like he read my inner thoughts earlier. Teagan Shah doesn’t ask for help. Never has, so why should she start? Except, I can hear Imogen’s voice in my head scolding me for not accepting it when it’s offered. Wordlessly, I pass the handle off to him. His fingers brush mine as he grasps it. The same zing of electricity that sparked between our skin the other time we touched happens again. Maybe it wasn’t a fluke.

I yank my arm down to my side and rub my fingers together. Finn’s gaze drops to it and then back up to meet mine. The world stops turning for a few brief seconds while we stare at each other. Far too soon, he breaks the connection and heads for the door. I take in a long, slow breath to try and slow my galloping heart.

After I lock up, we walk back to the SUV in silence. Like Finn had when we arrived, he scans the street. Taking a cue, I do the same. I focus on the cars lining each side of it and concentrate on any shadows that might indicate someone is sitting inside one watching us. A shiver skates across the back of my neck and down my spine. My pace increases and I lengthen my stride so I can reach the safety of the vehicle faster.

Finn glances over at me as I manage to overtake him. I don’t relax until we’re enclosed inside and he’s heading away from my flat. My gaze drifts to the side mirror and I keep an eye on any moving traffic behind us. Except there isn’t any. We’re alone on the road. No one is following. Finally I relax and glance over at him. Will he tell me I’m being paranoid?

He doesn't though. In fact, he doesn't say anything. Not one to let silences linger, I force myself to make conversation.

"I really do appreciate you letting me lay low for a bit."

His grip tightens on the steering wheel. "I told you already it's not a problem."

So he did. I just can't help but feel like I'm an inconvenience. The need to not bother him wars with the relief of not being alone. Ben's phone call rattled me more than I like to admit. His voice alone yanked me back into the past several months of constantly being on edge.

"How long has the casino been open? Imogen only said a few years. And what made you all decide to start one?"

Finally, Finn's fingers loosen their hold and his shoulders relax. "We first opened for business about six years ago. It was our cousin Caitlín's idea. Apparently her brother-in-law runs a successful one over in Brooklyn. Given everything she told us about it, we thought it was a sound investment."

Considering its success, they were right.

"Plus, it helps to make our organization appear more legitimate on paper and to the authorities," he adds. "It's the perfect front for some of our less...legal activities."

I whip my head in his direction and widen my eyes. Finn glances over at me and one side of his mouth curls.

"What? You didn't think we were completely on the straight and narrow did you?"

"Um, no. I guess I didn't think you would be so honest and forthright about your organization's...activities, as you say." I really hope this isn't one of those 'if I tell you, I'll have to kill you' type situations.

Finn's smile turns into full on laughter. "Don't look so worried. It's not as though the entirety of Dublin doesn't know the types of things our family and the syndicate are involved in. It's more of an unspoken topic. But considering how close you are to Imogen, it's almost like you're family anyway."

Oh god. Does that mean he sees me as nothing more than like a sister? No. Not with the heated way he stares at me. Not that I care.

"I'll be honest. I'm not sure I'm ready for what it means to be a part of your family."

Finn glances over at me. Only this time, I can't read his expression. Did I say something wrong? I shift in the seat as he faces forward again without comment. I'm not sure why, but it's as though a sudden chasm opened wide between us. I'm not sure how to close it though.

CHAPTER 14



FINN

TEAGAN'S WORDS ECHO IN MY HEAD. HADN'T I JUST MADE A similar assessment that Sorcha might not be ready or cut out for this kind of life? Not that Teagan and I are in the same situation as Aidan and his wife, but the fact that I'm even considering how she might fit into our family is certainly telling.

Unlike my brothers before they met Nessa and Sorcha, I've never been opposed to marriage and everything that entails. In fact, I've always kind of looked forward to it when I found the right woman. Except I somehow always imagined she would be someone who fit seamlessly into our family. Who didn't care about what obstacles might stand in our way. Who was more than ready to become a part of my life.

It's just one more reminder that despite the strong attraction we have, neither of us knows the other. With Teagan being just down the hall from where I spend the majority of my time, this is the perfect opportunity for that to change.

"When we get to the casino I'll show you around and introduce you to our security team. Let them know you'll be

occupying the suite for a while so you're free to roam around the casino as you please."

She swivels slightly toward me. "Thank you."

"I know the situation isn't what you'd been hoping for, and I don't want you to think you're a prisoner"—I glance over—"but I'm not sure it's a good idea for you to leave the premises. At least not until we're sure it's safe."

Given Teagan's resistance in staying at the casino in the first place, I expect her to argue.

"It's only for week. I suppose I can manage to keep put for that long."

She already has it in her head that this Ben fucker is going to just give up locating her. I'll let her live under the illusion—for the moment anyway—that she's right. Which means I have a week to track him down first. I'm already waiting for the lecture from either Da, Cian, or Aidan that my head should be on finding out, not only who our thief is, but also on putting the Moroccans back in their place. In fact, we plan on hitting one of their safe houses tonight.

I turn down the narrow, residential street where the casino sits and pull into one of our family's designated parking spaces.

"Must be nice that you don't have to try and find any open spots blocks away from the casino," Teagan remarks with a hint of amusement.

"The perks of having a lot of money to be able to buy special privileges." I wink and exit the SUV so I can grab her suitcase from the back seat.

Placing my hand on her lower back, I escort her to the front door where Ennis stands. As soon as I can get an ID on

the ex, he'll get it.

“Miss...”—I pause and glance at her.

“Shah,” Teagan supplies.

“Miss Shah is a personal guest of mine. She'll be staying in the upper floor suite for the time being. Make sure she gets whatever she asks for. Until I have time to introduce her to the others, make sure everyone knows she's here.”

Ennis nods. “Yes, Mr. Donnelly.”

We stride through the entrance. Tables are full and play is well underway given the late hour. Teagan leans close.

“A please goes a long way, you know.” she says.

“Are you scolding me?” It's an amusing concept.

She lifts and lowers one shoulder. “I'm merely making a suggestion.”

“Noted.”

As we make our way across the casino floor, I draw the attention of several more nearby members of our security staff and introduce Teagan to them as well.

“Whatever she needs, make sure she gets.” I cast her a quick glance. “Please.”

“Yes, Mr. Donnelly.”

We continue forward. She hides her smile. “See? That wasn't so hard was it?”

“Painful to the extreme.” I inject enough sarcasm that she can't hold it back any longer and she grins widely.

“You poor thing.”

We step into the lift and a second later we're enclosed in the small space together.

"I really am." I'm enjoying the teasing banter with Teagan. I lower my tone to one far more suggestive. "What are you going to do to soothe me?"

The adorable pink color spreads across her cheeks again making her appear far too innocent. "I think you're more than capable of soothing yourself."

Unable to help myself, I move closer. She backs up a few steps, and I follow her until she's pressed against the wall. I stop before my chest touches hers, although I lightly caress the flaming hot side of her face with a fingertip.

"But it's so much more fun when a beautiful woman does the...soothing."

Teagan's eyes darken from chocolate to nearly black and the rate of her breathing picks up speed. It's not from fear either. Not with the way she flicks her tongue out to wet her lips. My gaze holds on the shininess of them and the memory of the vivid dream rears up. God, I want to taste her so bad.

The lift comes to an abrupt halt and bell dings a second before the door slides open. Teagan jumps at the sound and quickly scoots around me. I sigh and grab her suitcase handle. She takes a step back as I exit. Never one to not face things head on I don't move any farther except for the middle of the entryway.

"So are we going to ignore what happened just now?"

She won't meet my eyes. "Nothing happened."

"Is that really the lie you're going to tell yourself?"

Finally Teagan shifts her gaze to meet mine. "Yes."

“Why?” I keep pushing.

“Because it has to be.”

I scoff. “Because of that piece of shit ex of yours?”

She crosses her arms and tilts her chin the same way Caitlín does when she’s about to dig her heels in based only on pure stubbornness. “Do you always bully women when you don’t get your way?”

“Oh, is that what I’m doing?” There’s enough sarcasm in my voice to make Teagan glare at me.

“Yes. You told me the other day that if I truly wasn’t interested then to tell you. Well,” she pauses for a breath. “This is me telling you.”

I grit my teeth. *Way to go, dickhead. You should have known better than to push too hard.*

“Understood.” Forcing myself not to grab her suitcase and storm off like a toddler having a tantrum, I calmly reach for it and head to the double doors of the suite. I swipe the keycard in the reader and swing one of them open. Teagan walks in right behind me.

“I’ll put this in the bedroom.”

When I come back, she’s standing in the middle of the living space with her arms wrapped around herself. There’s such a solemn air to her that I want to do nothing more than pull her against me and try to comfort her. But as soon as she spots me, she drops her arms and straightens, wiping any trace of unease off her face.

“Help yourself to anything in the bar or the fridge. I’m going to assume you either blocked the bastard or turned off your phone. If so, I’ll get a burner for you. I will have meals

brought here if you'd like since I usually have meals delivered to my office anyway. Unless you'd rather have takeout delivered. Just let me know." I try to make myself sound as impersonal as possible—to hide my irritation—but I'm not sure how well I'm doing. "If you need anything or have any questions, just dial 0 on the phone over there. I'll leave you to get settled."

I stride past her and just reach the door when Teagan calls out. "Finn?"

Pausing with my palm on the handle, I glance over my shoulder and arch a brow.

"I really do appreciate everything you've done," she says quietly.

With a simple nod, I walk out and softly close the door behind me. The first place I head is to my office down the hall and make a phone call.

"Hey. Did you get Teagan settled?" Imogen asks as soon as she answers.

"Yes. I just left her in her suite so I'm sure you'll hear from her soon. But that's not why I called."

"Is everything okay? You sound weird."

Because I'm pissed at myself. I'm pissed at the fuckwit that hurt Teagan. But I'm also disappointed that she closed herself off from me. "I need you to send me either a description of this ex-boyfriend or, even better, a picture."

There's a rustling sound. "I got you. Give me about twenty minutes."

I glance at my watch. There's still time before I have to meet up with Cian and Aidan. "Call me the second you find

something.”

“Will do.”

Setting the phone down, I head for the bar and pour myself half a whiskey. Not enough to impair my reflexes or senses, but enough to ease some of my tension. I’m going to need to be at full capacity when we attack the Moroccans. My gaze drifts to the wall that separates my office from the suite. What is Teagan doing at this moment? Is she lying in the same bed where I just laid last night and this morning? Where I dreamed about her and all the wicked things I want to do to her?

Impatience nips at me and I pace the length of my office floor while I sip my drink. I glance at the clock on the wall, already antsy with the silence and the wait. Imogen is good, but I need to give her the time she needs without interruption.

I go back to my desk and drop into my chair. Back and forth I rock, my gaze landing and sticking on my phone in front of me. I tap my fingers on my desktop while I wait. Far too many times to count, I glance at my watch and check my phone until finally it rings.

“Did you find it?”

“Of course I did.” Imogen huffs obviously annoyed I doubted her skills. “Check your email. I just sent you a copy of that little shitfuck’s ID. Oh, hold a minute. Teagan’s calling.”

While she switches lines, I quickly log into my laptop and open my email. There in front of me is an image of a soon-to-be dead man. I study him. Depending on a woman’s standards, he’s a nice enough looking guy with light brown curly hair and hazel eyes. Two dimples bookend a toothy smile that reminds me of a shark’s. He’s clean-shaven without a hint of shadow

along his jawline. Nothing about him radiates power. Maybe that's why he has to abuse women.

“Okay I'm here.”

“Everything all right?”

“Yeah. I told her I'd call her back. Anyway, while I was getting his ID, I also managed to locate some recent expenses, including a plane ticket purchased two days ago from Berlin to Dublin. The only problem is that was the last charge made that I've been able to find.” Imogen's tone is pure aggravation. “I'll keep searching though. If he charges anything to any credit card, I'll know.”

“Keep me updated.”

“I will. You better make sure he doesn't find her, Finn.”

My fist clenches around the phone. “He doesn't stand a chance.”

I end the call and dial another number. Imogen isn't the only one with tricks up her sleeve. I'm going to guess that this Ben fucker has no idea the kind of allies Teagan has or that money buys not only power, but information.

“What?” A two-pack a day voice rasps.

“I have a job for you. Meet me tomorrow at one at the usual place.”

“You got it, boss.”

Wherever the little rat is hiding, my contact will find him.

CHAPTER 15



TEAGAN

I HAVE A RIDICULOUS URGE TO CRY. IT'S MY OWN FAULT though. Sniffing back the pressure building behind my eyes, I acquaint myself with my temporary home. If I'm stuck in hiding from a crazy, abusive ex-boyfriend, there are worse places I could be. Giant wall-to-wall windows cover one entire side of the suite. Judging by how dark they are, I'm going to guess they're tinted.

The furnishings are all clean sharp lines in a contemporary color scheme of black and silver with a few pops of color in the pillows that fill the sofa. An abstract shaped white rug lies within the L placement of the furniture and a glass and silver coffee table is centered on it. The strong teakwood scent that fills the place tells me Finn might spend a lot of time in here.

A quick visit to the kitchenette offers a wide range of alcohol including some top brand whiskey and sparkling water. My next stop is the room I've been avoiding. If the fragrance of Finn's cologne in the living area was overwhelming, it's even more so in the bedroom. I'd been engulfed in the woody scent when he cornered me in the lift

and it had taken every ounce of my willpower not to throw myself at him.

I'm so angry at the way I reacted. How I'd so vehemently denied there is anything between us, when all I want is for Finn to wrap his arms around me and tell me everything is okay to be all right. That he'll take care of me. My mādar would be so disappointed. Maybe I'm not as strong as she was. Maybe I don't want to be. It's hard, sometimes, not relying on other people for anything.

My bag sits at the edge of the bed. I open it and take all my toiletries into the bathroom. Once I've emptied my clothes and placed them in two of the drawers of the bureau, I head back out to where the bar is and fix myself a drink. I kick off my shoes and, with my phone in hand, curl up against the arm of the couch with my feet tucked beneath me. I'm surprised Imogen hasn't blown up my phone yet making sure I'm okay. Then again, she trusts Finn to make sure I am.

I did promise I'd call when I got settled, so I tap her number on the screen and take a sip of my gin and tonic while it rings.

"Hey. Give me two minutes, please. I'm on the other line with Finn."

A weight settles in my stomach. What are they talking about? Is he telling her he regrets offering to put me up? Or how much of a coward I am? I take a bigger drink this time. And another.

"Okay, I'm back," Imogen announces. "So, give me all the details."

I choke on the liquid and break into a coughing fit.

"Shit, are you all right?"

“I’m fine.” It’s a raspy and breathy confirmation as I finally clear my throat. “I’m fine, it just went down the wrong pipe. What details exactly are you wanting?”

“What do your new digs look like? I haven’t been up to the family level yet. Is it as obnoxiously upper class as the rest of the casino? Or did Finn manage to make it more comfortable and lived in?” Imogen asks.

Ah, so that’s what she meant and not the details of the near-kiss that happened in the lift. “Um, it’s a little bit of both, I guess. I mean, I’m sitting on the couch and while I’m deathly afraid of spilling anything on it, it’s also remarkably soft and squishy. I suspect the matching chairs and love seat are the same.”

“I should have expected as much. My family tends to not throw their wealth in people’s faces, but shows it in far more subtle ways. Unlike some broody men I know.”

That’s a pretty accurate way to look at it. I’m surrounded by wealth, but it doesn’t make me feel inadequate or uncomfortable in any way. *Kind of like its owner.* God, I really need to stop thinking about Finn.

“Is everything okay? You got really quiet there for a second,” Imogen says.

“Sorry. It’s just been a day and I’m tired.”

She tsks. “Get some rest. Things will be better in the morning.”

Her sudden increase in positivity is a bit unnerving. Imogen has always been more of a realist. At least in comparison to me. “Thank you for being my best friend.”

For some reason overwhelming emotion is threatening to drown me.

“There’s no one I’d rather be best friends with. Now, go to sleep and call me tomorrow, will you?” she instructs.

“I will. Good night. Love you.”

“Love you, too,” she says softly.

I set my phone on the cushion beside me and stare at a spot in the distance until my gaze grows unfocused. A droplet of condensation falls off the bottom of the glass onto my hand resting in my lap. I wipe it off on my pant leg and blink away the haze. I’ve always considered myself to be an honest person. Except I lied to Finn and I’m not sure I’ve ever regretted anything more. There’d been frustration on his face, but worse? His eyes had been filled with disappointment.

Maybe Imogen’s right and things will look better in the morning. I get up from the sofa, toss back the rest of my drink, and rinse the glass in the sink. After turning off most of the lights, I walk into the bedroom to get undressed. I slip into a pair of sleep clothes, perform my nightly ritual of brushing my teeth and washing my face, and then crawl under the covers in the massively large bed.

The sheets have been freshly washed, but there’s still a hint of Finn on them. I bury my face in the pillow and breathe in deep. I’m not sure I’ll ever be able to smell the woody, teakwood scent again without thinking of him.

“Ugh.” I groan and flop onto my back.

I close my eyes and do the breathing exercises my therapist gave me to help control the spiraling thoughts I get from time to time. Maybe I should turn on my soothing music as well. Anything to calm my nerves and anxiety. Except I’m far too comfortable lying here and the smell is actually helping me. I keep breathing in and out until my body loses all its

rigidity in slow increments. Already sleep is creeping in. I'm glad, because I'm so ready for this day to be over.



WHY AM I SO RELAXED? NOT ONCE SINCE I'VE BEEN BACK IN Dublin have I been this well-rested. I shift and the soft fabric rubs across my cheek. A familiar earthy scent comes with it as does the memory of yesterday and last night. Slowly, I open my eyes preparing myself for my surroundings. I'm still lying in Finn's bed in his family's suite. Although, based on how strongly it smells of him, I'd guess it's more his than anyone else's. I glance over at the window. Even with the tint, there's not a hint of sunlight. What time is it anyway?

There isn't a clock in here and I left my phone out in the living room. My stomach grumbles. I haven't eaten since yesterday afternoon when Imogen and Nessa came over for lunch, but then I vomited it all out. No wonder I'm hungry. And thirsty. I should have gotten a glass of water before I went to bed.

I push off the blankets and head into the kitchenette area. Water first. I guzzle half of a glass then check the fridge for anything to eat. Except it's empty. I guess Finn forgot to go shopping. The few cupboards bring almost more of the same. There are a few things there, but nothing that constitutes an actual meal.

We passed a small coffee shop less than a block from here when we arrived yesterday. Maybe they're open this early and I can get a pastie. I pause though. Finn did ask that I not leave the casino. But he also said I could have food delivered. I grab my phone and bring up the local food delivery app. A few quick scrolls and I place an order.

While I wait, I take a quick shower and change into clean clothes. It's been twenty minutes which means the delivery person should be here soon. I slip into my shoes and leave the suite to meet them at the door. The lift bell rings and its doors open. I cry out softly and stumble backward with my hand on my chest.

"Teagan, it's just me." A blood-covered Finn carefully steps out. His left arm hangs loosely at his side.

Finally I get my bearings. "Oh my god, what happened to you?"

"Nothing you should worry about. Just family business." He moves and then hisses, clamping onto his arm.

I stiffen my spine and lift my chin. "You need to have that injury looked at. Come inside and let me see what you've done to yourself."

He tries to wave me off. "It's fine. I can take care of it."

"Damn it Finn, get in there, now." I jab my finger in the direction of the suite.

A small grin curls his lips despite his eyes being glazed over with pain. "You know you're even more sexy when you're bossy."

I hold back my snort. After last night I wasn't sure he'd ever talk to me again, let alone flirt. I need to stop being so wishy-washy. Either there's something between us or there isn't. Tabling that for later, I place my hand on his lower back and guide him to the door. Shit. I don't have a key card.

"Left inside pocket of my suit," Finn says. "I'll make sure you get one before lunch."

As gently as I can, I reach in and my fingers clamp onto it. I swipe it through the reader and let us both inside.

“Is there a first aid kit anywhere?”

He heads toward the living area and points toward the bedroom. “Check under the sink in the bathroom. There should be something there.”

I hurry to find it. Relief floods me and I rush back to Finn with it in hand. My steps stutter, but I quickly recover. He removed his suit jacket and he already has his shirt half unbuttoned with more smooth flesh being displayed with the release of more buttons. He shrugs his good arm out of the sleeve and drags the shirt completely off exposing his entire upper body.

There’s a small patch of hair in the middle of his chest and my vision latches onto the glint of silver in both nipples. I would never have suspected Finn of being a guy with piercings. *Focus Teagan. The man is injured for god’s sake.* My gaze darts to his bloodied arm.

“You have a habit of doing that. Not that I’m complaining,” Finn remarks.

I jerk my gaze upward to meet his. “Doing what?”

“Staring.” His eyes dart to the box in my hand. “I see you found it.”

Jerked out of my stupor, I cross the room. “Sit down, please.”

He gingerly sits just as my phone rings.

“Oh, shit.” I set the first aid kit down and grab the device. “Hello?”

Pause.

“Give me a minute, please.”

I end the call and turn to Finn. “My breakfast is here.”

“Wait.” He holds up a finger and brings out his phone. “There’s a delivery at the front door for Miss Shah. Make sure they’re paid and bring the food upstairs. Please.” Finn tosses the thing on the couch. “Security will get it for you.”

“More perks of having a lot of money?” I grin. “And I noticed you said please.”

His matches mine. “Maybe your manners are rubbing off on me.”

I can only shake my head as I stand next to him and then lower myself to my knees to tend to the nasty looking wound. Swallowing at the blood, I open the first aid kit for something to wipe it off with. Finn lays his hand over mine.

“Thank you for doing this.”

“You’re welcome.” I find what I’m looking for and get to work.

CHAPTER 16



FINN

MY ARM BURNS LIKE A MOTHER FUCKER. SHE RUNS THE alcohol swab over it and I hiss at the sting.

She jerks her gaze up and she winces. “Sorry.”

“It’s fine,” I reassure her. “You know, you’re a much better nurse than my cousin Caitlín. She would have laughed and called me a pussy.”

As was my intention, Teagan chuckles and goes back to tending the wound. “Considering I’d probably be in tears right now if I had this kind of injury, I have no right to call you anything.”

I shake my head. “Nah. You’re stronger than you think.”

She cocks her shoulder, but keeps her eyes on her task. “I’m not so sure about that.”

Almost against my will, I lift her chin with a finger under it until she looks at me. “Don’t discount yourself.”

Teagan’s gaze remains on me for another second and then she gives a shallow nod. I lower my arm and she reaches for the bandages, but she’s interrupted by the knock on the door.

She jumps to her feet and hurries to answer it. Lee stands there with a brown takeout bag. He passes it over with a polite, “Miss” and glances at me before turning away. She closes the door and comes back to her place in front of me, setting the bag off to the side.

“What happened anyway?” she asks, her hands gentle as she places a large bandage over the injury.

“Bullet grazed me.”

Her hands stop moving and I gauge her expression. There’s nothing beyond a slight widening of her eyes.

“I see. Is the other person worse off?”

“People, and yes.”

Teagan’s eyes flick up for only a second and then she’s focused back on adding another bandage. I should tell her that the minute I take a shower all her hard work will be for nothing, but I like how she’s taking care of me. My mother died when I was young—not that she was any kind of mother—so I’ve never known the soft, gentle hands of anyone nursing my hurts. Or someone trying to ease my pain by comforting me.

Words like soft, gentle, and tender don’t exist in our world.

“I’m sorry. For last night.” She finishes bandaging my arms and sits back on her heels. In her lap, her hands are clasped together and she stares down at them.

Calling on every ounce of patience I have, I wait for her to say more. I’m rewarded for it when she raises her head.

“You were right. There is...*something* between us. But I’m terrified of it. Of what it could lead to. I’m not a woman who can do casual. When I’m with someone, I’m all in. And the

last person I was all in with abused not only my heart, but me. I'm not saying you would do either of those things, but I just don't know that I can take the chance that my heart might get broken again."

I lean forward and slowly raise my uninjured arm to palm Teagan's cheek. "All I have is my word. I've never physically hurt a woman in my life and would never. Not only because it goes against a moral code I *do* possess, but also because there are too many women in my life who would make me regret it. I don't think you've met Caitlín yet, but she would be the first in line."

She smiles slightly and curls her fingers over my wrist. "Considering everything Imogen has told me about her, that doesn't surprise me in the least. It still leaves me with the possibility of a broken heart though."

"There are no guarantees with anything in life, Teagan. But I can promise you that if you ever do entrust your heart to me, I will do my best to treat it with the utmost care." Having learned my lesson from last night, I drop my arm and give her some breathing and thinking room. I have no idea where this attraction between us will lead.

That's the best part of it though. The not knowing.

"Since there aren't too many places open this early, I'm going to assume you ordered something from Mannings. Why don't you go ahead and eat? If it's not too much trouble, I'd like to borrow the shower so I can wash up a bit."

Teagan quickly rises and swipes her palms down her thighs. "Of course. This is your place. I'm just a guest. I'll get this stuff cleaned up and eat while you're busy. There were some K-cups in the cabinet. I can make us some coffee if you'd like."

“Thanks. I won’t be long.” Letting her do what she needs to, I head for the bathroom.

On my way, I pass through the bedroom. The bed is unmade and the clothes Teagan wore yesterday lie scattered on the floor. I like getting this slight glimpse into her personality. From a young age our mother made sure our bed was made as soon as we woke up. Otherwise we weren’t allowed out of our rooms. To this day, Aidan and Cian refuse to make theirs, as a fuck you to the woman they hated. I never really hated her. I just felt sorry for her.

Crossing the room, I grab a clean shirt and pants from where I keep extras in the closet and go into the bathroom. It smells like blackberries. Just like Teagan. It might have suddenly become my favorite fruit. It’s impossible to take a shower without getting the bandages on my arm wet, but I do the best I can.

Once I’ve finished and gotten dressed, I go back out into the living area. The strong scent of coffee greets me. Teagan stands within the kitchenette area pouring a cup. She glances over her shoulder.

“Perfect timing.” She finishes filling it up and then hands it over to me. “I wasn’t sure if you took it black or not, so I didn’t add any cream or sugar.

“Thank you, black is fine.”

She picks up her own cup and takes a drink. I follow suit and lean my hip against the counter. “How was your breakfast?”

“Delicious as always. Imogen turned me onto that place years ago. I missed their scones while I’ve been in Berlin. No other place I’ve ever eaten compares.”

“I’ve never had them.”

Teagan gapes. “Are you kidding?”

I smile broadly. “Nope.”

“That, my friend, is a travesty. You haven’t lived until you’ve had a scone from Mannings. Tomorrow, I’m getting you one,” she promises. “I swear you’ll never want to eat another one anywhere else.”

“Those are big words.”

She leans against the counter as well and fold her arms. “I can back it up.”

“I look forward to it.”

A charged silence settles between us as though neither of us are talking about scones. Teagan clears her throat and quickly straightens. She picks up her mug and cradles it between her palms. “I meant to ask if you’d mind me using the television. Aside from a book I’d been reading, I didn’t bring anything to keep me occupied while I’m here.”

“Of course. You’re free to use anything here.”

“Thank you. I’m going to place a small order for a few groceries as well. Just enough to last me the week.”

It’s clear she’s desperate to believe that this is all going to go away in that time, so I let her. If the meeting with one of my informant today leads to my prey, she might be right.

“Let me know when you’re ready to order everything you need, and I’ll give you my credit card.”

Teagan recoils slightly and narrows her gaze. “You don’t have to pay for me. Letting me stay here is more than enough.”

“What happens if your ex can track you card?”

She opens her mouth, but closes it. Then opens it again.
“I’m paying you back.”

I’ve learned to pick my battles over the years and based on her mulish glare, this isn’t one I’m going to win, so I acquiesce. “Fine.”

“Fine.”

Despite the shower, fatigue is hitting me hard. I’d love nothing more than to stay and talk, but I need to get a few hours of sleep before I meet my contact. I rinse out my mug and set it on the counter. “I won’t keep you any longer. Thank you again for fixing me up. And for the coffee.”

“You’re welcome.”

I grab my bloodied and soiled shirt and jacket and let myself out. Normally after a night like last night, I’d crash in the suite. But the couch in my office is going to have to do. I toss the clothes in the corner and call the security room.

“Miss Shah needs a key card for the suite. Can you get one to her within the hour?”

“Yes, Mr. Donnelly.”

“Thank you.”

I toss the phone on my desk and lie down, trying to make myself comfortable. With my attention no longer on Teagan, I’m aware of the pulsing pain in my arm. We lost one of our men last night, and there were a few other injuries, but it could have been worse. The frequency in which we’ve been fighting is taking its toll on us. We need to come up with a way to end things once and for all. Word has been spreading in the

underground network that we're closing in on the Moroccan leader's whereabouts. Let's hope we corner him soon.

A heaviness is beginning to weigh my shoulders down. I still haven't located our thief or narrowed down where the casino is bleeding money. Da hasn't said anything yet, but I expect him to any minute. Hopefully after some much needed sleep and my meeting later, I'll be able to focus on the books again. With that in mind, I close my eyes and try to get some rest.

CHAPTER 17



TEAGAN

I'M BORED.

Bored and antsy. Shortly after Finn left, a gentleman knocked on my door with a key card for me. Since then, I've explored nearly every inch of the casino I've been able to access, even using the stairs instead of the lift to get some exercise in. Not once did I encounter Finn.

I passed his office during my self-guided tour. Had he been in there, or did he return to his family's estate to sleep after I'd taken care of his wound? Imogen and I have talked about the violence she's become a victim of with her connection to them. It's scary witnessing it first hand. I also hate the fact I've essentially kicked him out of this place since it's obvious he spends a lot of time here.

Without any people present, the place is a little eerie. Okay, a lot eerie. It's far too quiet in here. There aren't any windows so the only light is provided by a few wall sconces leaving far too many shadowed corners where someone could hide. It had made me hurry back up to the suite. That was a couple hours ago.

Even my book isn't keeping me entertained. I glance at the time on my phone. Again. Groceries were delivered not too long ago and I put everything away, only keeping out what I needed for lunch. Which I've already eaten. I'm making myself not call Imogen. She has work to do and can't be entertaining me all the time since I'm officially on a leave of absence from my job.

Outside the suite, a door closes. I sit up from where I collapsed on the couch earlier. Is that Finn? Is he coming or going? Before I can stop myself, I hurry across the length of the living area and quietly open the suite's door to peek out. He's standing in front of his office with his back to me, but glances over his shoulder as though sensing my presence. God he looks good. Better than he had this morning when he'd appeared tired, run down, and in pain.

He wrinkles his brow and turns to fully face me. "Is everything okay?"

My fingers have a death grip on the edge of the door. "Oh, um, yeah. I was just wondering if you wanted to come in and watch a movie or something?"

I nearly smack my forehead with my palm. *A movie? Really, Teagan? You couldn't come up with something better than that?*

Finn hesitates a beat too long.

"Sorry, never mind, you're probably busy. Maybe another time." Since when do I ramble?

"I'd love to," he says quickly and walks over.

I startle in surprise, but step aside to let him in. "There's a new comedy that just came out I've been wanting to see. Unless you have a preference for something else?"

“No, that sounds good.”

A weird awkwardness lingers between us for the first time. I gesture to the couch with a small flailing of my arm. “Please, have a seat. Can I get you something to drink or a snack?”

Finally, a small grin appears on Finn’s face. “I’m okay, but thank you.”

I’m acting like a teenager having a boy over to her house for the first time while her parents are away. I take a step toward the living area the same time he does. We both stop. My chuckle is far less natural than his.

“Ladies first.” Finn sweeps an arm out.

I hurry over to the couch and grab the remote. Anything to give me something to do. The cushion dips with his weight as he settles next to me. I could have sworn the sofa wasn’t this small when I sat on it earlier. Expect he’s far too close and his body heat warms my side. I take a quick peek at him in my periphery. He leans back and casually crosses an ankle over the opposite knee.

Fumbling with the buttons, I manage to turn the television on. The smart menu pops up and I click on one of the streaming services I’m subscribed to. I’ve already logged into all the ones I have. Sweat makes my palms clammy.

“Teagan,” Finn says gently and places his hand on my arm.

I jump and jerk my head in his direction.

“Relax. We’re just watching a movie.”

“Right.” I take a deep breath and try to calm my racing heart.

Finally, I locate what I’m searching for and click the play button. With each second that passes, I grow more aware of

Finn sitting next to me and less on the film. Every time he shifts, I hold my breath. Then I have to relax all the muscles I've tensed up. I'm getting so drunk on his scent, the movie is nothing but a blur. I can't concentrate. More than once I'm tempted to open my mouth and interrupt the movie, but each time I stop myself. What am I even going to say? I've never been this tongue-tied around a man before. I don't like that I am with this one.

Movement to my left has me darting a quick out the corner of my eye. Behind my shoulders the cushion moves. Sinks. Without being obvious—I hope—I slowly inch backward in small increments until I brush up against something hard. I can't help it. I turn my head in Finn's direction. His eyes are on the movie I've all but completely missed, but his arm is resting on the cushion behind me.

It's like I'm standing at a crossroads and two choices are staring me in the face. I just have to decide which one to make. Imogen's voice whispers in my ear pushing me in a single direction. Before I second-guess myself, I scoot over until my hip presses against Finn's and I lower my head to his shoulder. He doesn't say anything, but he gently lays his arm around me and tucks me closer against his side.

We remain like that until the credits roll. Finally, I raise my head and Finn turns his toward me until our eyes meet. My gaze drops to his lips and slowly, I lean forward and press mine against them. It barely qualifies as a kiss, but I feel it all the way down to my toes. He lets me lead as I flick my tongue out for a small taste. His mouth parts a sliver in a welcome invitation. I don't deepen the kiss. Not yet.

Instead I acquaint myself with the feel of him. The taste.

I swing my leg over Finn's so I straddle him. He grips my hips and I balance myself with my palms on his muscled chest. Following the movement with my eyes, I run my hands over him, starting with his shoulders and down to his elbows and back up being mindful of his injury.

I glide my fingertips up the sides of his neck until his head is cradled between my hands. Our eyes meet briefly and then I return my gaze to where I hold him. Up and down, my thumbs brush across his cheekbones. With the tip of a finger, I trace a line across his forehead, down his temple, his cheek, and along his jaw. The dark bristles of his facial hair lightly abrade my skin, and a shiver skates down my back causing goose pimples to dot my arms.

Finn's grip on my hips tightens and he pulls me a fraction of an inch closer to him. The hard ridge of his cock slots itself right in the center of my thighs. I'd already been wet, but I grow even wetter. I fight against my body's instinct to rock my pelvis and increase the friction. It might be ready, but my brain hasn't caught up.

I meet his gaze and discover eyes gone nearly black with blown pupils. The intensity of Finn's stare sets my blood on fire. I swallow.

"You won't be upset if we don't go any farther than this, will you? I'm not quite ready yet." The whispered words hang in the air.

"God no." He shakes his head. "I'll accept only what you're willing to give and be glad for it. Take whatever time you need to get ready."

I suck my lower lip. "What if I'm never ready?"

“Then I hope at least we might be able to manage being friends.”

Friends.

“I’d like that.” I pause and brush my lips across Finn’s a final time.

He loosens his hold on me like he knows I need the break and I climb off his lap. My stomach rumbles. I slap my hand over it as though that will stop the sound.

“It’s getting close to supper. Could I tempt you to eat with me if I order something or are you sick of my company?” he asks.

I’m feeling vulnerable at the moment after what just happened, and I open my mouth to politely decline, except that’s not what comes out. “Yes. To eating together, I mean.”

“Excellent. Anything particular you’re in the mood for?”

“Not really.” I shake my head. “I’m not really picky.”

“I have just the place then.” Finn grabs his phone.

“I’ll have whatever you’re having.” I need a breather. “If you’ll excuse me for a minute?”

He nods and I rush into the bathroom. I stop in front of the mirror. Staring back at me isn’t the same reflection from only a few days ago. She’d had tension lines around her eyes and mouth. The brown eyes that normally sparked with amusement and joy had been dull and almost lifeless. This woman in front of me has flushed cheeks and there’s a flicker of...possibility residing inside her darkened pupils.

Laying my hand on my chest, there’s a racing heart beneath it. One that could easily get broken if I don’t guard it.

Except the more time I spend with Finn, the more I want to drop my walls and let whatever might happen between us.

CHAPTER 18



FINN

THE KNOCK ON THE DOOR MUST BE OUR FOOD. TEAGAN RISES, but I hold up a hand.

“Sit. Relax. I’ll get it.”

She settles back against the couch cushion with her drink in hand, and I cross the length of the floor. Lee stands on the other side and hands me the bag from my favorite restaurant. I take it with a nod of thanks and then bring it over to Teagan.

“Is that from Davy Byrne’s?”

I blink. “Yes. How can you tell?”

“Because I would know that takeaway bag from anywhere. It’s one of my favorite restaurants.”

That makes me raise my eyebrows. “Mine, too.”

Excited energy vibrates off Teagan. It’s actually pretty sexy. I take my seat next to her and bring out the first container and the plastic utensils that came with it. “I hope you like corned beef and colcannon.”

She practically snatches it from my hand and moans in a way that makes my cock stand at attention. It's the kind of moan a woman makes during really good sex. "You talked to Imogen, didn't you?"

My forehead wrinkles. Why would she think that? "Not since last night. Why?"

Teagan holds the container up to her nose and breathes deeply. "Because this is the only thing I ever order from there. It can't be a coincidence that you just happened to not only from my favorite restaurant, but also my absolute favorite entree."

I palm my chest with a short laugh. "I swear I absolutely have not talked to Imogen since last night."

She narrows her gaze like she doesn't believe me. Finally, Teagan huffs out a laugh.

"This is just too weird."

"We both have good taste, I guess." I know I do anyway.

As we eat, there's a comfortable silence. Possibly our first since we met. It's either been awkward or sexually charged. This, though, it's relaxed. Like we're old friends who don't feel like they have to fill it with inane conversation. It's a novelty, actually. I'm not sure I've ever sat comfortably with a woman I wasn't related to. Definitely not one I have an intense interest in.

"So is Shah your mother or Da's name?"

Teagan covers her mouth and finishes chewing. "My mādar's. I didn't know my pedar."

"I'm sorry."

She shakes her head. “Don’t be. I’m not. She and I always had each other and I never felt like I was missing out on anything by not knowing him.”

I lean back. “There are times I wish I hadn’t known my mother. She wasn’t a kind person. Then again, I’m sure you’ve heard what she tried to do to Nora and Imogen.”

For a second, anger flashes across Teagan’s face. “Yes, Imogen told me. I don’t like to speak unkindly about the dead, but she sounds like a horrible person. Which I shouldn’t say, since she was your mother after all.”

“It’s my turn to say don’t be. I have no illusions as to who my mother was.” I pause. Did she have any good qualities? It’s been so long since she’s been gone, I’m not sure if any I might remember are fact or wishful thinking. “I know Cian and Aidan hate her. Da and probably Nora too—though she’s never spoken a bad word about her despite what Kathleen tried to do to her.”

Teagan cocks her head. “You mentioned your brothers, but not yourself. Did you hate her as well?”

“I was young when she died. The most I remember about her is that she was always sad. More than once I heard her crying. I think she was exceptionally cruel to Aidan. I don’t have any proof. Just a gut feeling.” My brother’s never spoken about it, but I’ve caught glimpses of sharp pain whenever someone talks about her. “Truthfully, I feel sorry for her. Married to a man who not only didn’t love her but also did nothing to hide his extra-marital affair. That has to do something to a woman.”

Teagan lays her hand on my arm. “I’m sorry you didn’t have a relationship with her. I’m not sure who I would have turned out to be if I hadn’t had my mādar. She was my best

friend up until the day she died. We did everything together. My favorite memories are of us hiking through the Hyrcanian Forest during my breaks from school when I was a kid.”

“I’m not familiar with that place. It’s not in Ireland is it?”

“Iran. It’s where my mādar was born and raised.”

That explains where her dark hair and eyes come from. “What brought you to Dublin, then, if you don’t mind me asking?”

Teagan smiles. “We’re well past the point of holding secrets, don’t you think? I doubt you tell just anyone about your mother.”

I chuckle. “You’re right, I don’t.”

“Thought so. As far as why she moved us to Dublin, I don’t know.” She takes a sip of her drink. “I was barely two years old when we came here. By the time I got old enough to ask questions, it never really mattered. I didn’t think of Iran as home, merely a place we would go to on vacation every break. Of course, now that she’s gone, I do often wonder what it was about Ireland—about Dublin—that made her choose it.”

I reach across and palm Teagan’s cheek. “Well, I for one am glad she did.”

She covers my hand with hers and leans into my touch. “I am, too.”

Someone pounds on the door and we break apart. She darts a nervous glance in its direction. I set my food container on the table and go to answer it. Aidan stands on the other side. His gaze travels over my shoulder, and I sidestep to block his view.

“What do you want?”

He arches an eyebrow. “We’ve been trying to reach you for hours, but you’re not answering your phone. I volunteered to come make sure you weren’t dead. Answer your fucking phone next time.”

Shit. I turned the ringer off before I laid down after Teagan patched me up and forgot to turn it back on. “Sorry I made you come all this way for nothing.”

“I’m not sure it was all for nothing.” Aidan jerks his chin up. “Dinner date, huh? Does Imogen know you’re making the moves on her best friend?”

I bristle at him talking about Teagan that way. “I’m not ‘making the moves’ on her.”

He makes a non-committal sound. “If you say so. Since I know you’re not dead somewhere I’ll let you get back to your non-date. But turn your damn phone back on.”

“Got it.”

Aidan leaves and I go back to the couch where Teagan sits with a concerned expression.

“Everything okay?”

I nod. “Yeah. With what’s going on with the organization lately, I should have made sure I turned my ringer back on. Aidan was checking in.”

“That’s nice that you have such a close family.”

“Sometimes I wish we weren’t quite as close.” I laugh with a bit of self-deprecation. “Being the youngest in our family comes with its challenges.”

Teagan sets her empty container on the table, swivels to face me, and folds her leg up on the cushion. She leans her

elbow on the back of the couch and props her head on it. “What kind of challenges?”

I mirror her position so we're eye-to-eye. “Cian's the oldest. Since birth he's been groomed to take over the organization after Da's done. He was born into the role. Aidan is, what I guess you'd consider, the spare. Although, it's not a title he has any interest in. He'd rather spend his time on his artistic endeavors. Then there's me.”

“What about you?” Teagan asks gently.

“My interests have never really aligned with the rest of my family's. I've never told them this, nor will I ever, but I hate being part of our organization. I don't want to worry about the various dangers that come with it. Not just for myself, but for those I care about, present or future. It's exhausting waiting around for our enemies to decide they want to take everything away from us.” I try to gauge what she's thinking but there's no discerning hint to her thoughts. “I got high marks in school. In fact, they were some of the highest. I've always had an aptitude for numbers. The stock exchange fascinates me. No one in my family cares about it. I just feel like other than being related, we don't have anything in common.”

Teagan squeezes my knee. “That must be hard for you. Not only feeling like that, but also keeping it secret.”

“I know I shouldn't complain. What person would if they belonged to the most powerful family in the country? If they had all this money at their fingertips? If Caitlín hadn't come up with the bright idea of us opening this casino, I'm not sure where I would be right now or what I'd be doing. This place gives me a purpose.”

There's a brief silence. “My mādar pushed me into computers. She said that they were the best way for me to get

somewhere in life, because I should rely on my brains and not my looks. Like I was some shallow person who would try to do the bare minimum, because I knew people—men—would take up my slack. My entire life, every one I've ever met has remarked on them as though there's nothing more to me than that. As though that's the only thing that defines me. At first, I'd been hurt by her words, but then I realized she'd done me a favor."

"I'm sure she knew how absolutely brilliant you are."

Teagan's smile is small. "I sometimes wonder if she didn't project her life onto me somehow. My mādar was one of the most beautiful women I've ever met. Absolutely gorgeous. She used that to her advantage, too. I witnessed it more than once as I got older. Sometimes it bothered me. A lot."

Her hand is still on my knee and I take it and thread my fingers through hers, rubbing my thumb along hers. "She sounds like a wonderful mother."

"She was. The best."

"That's kind of how I feel about Nora. She's been a better mother figure to us than Kathleen ever was. There are times when I think all three of us boys had wished she was our real mother. Which makes me feel guilty."

Teagan gently squeezes my hand. "It's a terrible burden for us to carry so much guilt about our parents."

It really is. There are a lot of burdens that rest unnecessarily on my shoulders. Maybe I should let some of it go. "Thank you for an enjoyable day. I hate to go, but I should probably head to my office and get some work done."

"Of course." She stands and I follow.

Slowly, I lean close and brush a brief kiss across her lips.
“I’ll talk to you later?”

Teagan nods. “That would be lovely.”

Each step I take is like I have lead in my shoes. I’m reluctant to leave. All I want to do is spend the rest of the night with her talking. Getting to know one another. But duty, as always, calls. I pause at the door and glance back.

“Have a good night and call if you need anything at all.”

She smiles. “Thank you.”

I close the door softly behind me and take in a deep breath. Even out here, the scent of blackberries follows me.

CHAPTER 19



TEAGAN

MY FINGERS COVER MY LIPS LONG AFTER FINN WALKS OUT THE door. I want to savor that last, sweet kiss. It had been brief and only a whisper of a touch, but it had held the hint of more. I'm terrified to explore this thing between us, but also filled with a giddy excitement. There's that fluttery sensation in my stomach of a first-time crush.

I glance at the clock. It's still early, so I call Imogen. She's made more than one comment about Finn and me. I'm not sure she's one hundred percent serious though. Will it be weird for her if something does happen with Finn and me? Or worse, what if it doesn't?

"You okay?" she asks the second she answers.

"I'm fine. Good, actually." I curl up on the couch in the same place where Finn sat. It's still warm. "Your brother just left."

Might as well get it out in the open.

"Oh," Imogen draws out the word in a sing-song tone. "And?"

“We watched a movie and had dinner together.” It wasn’t *only* that.

“And?” she repeats, because no one knows me better than her and when I’m hiding something.

I huff. “Fine, and we kissed. Nothing more.”

She squeals so loudly in my ear I have to pull the phone away from it. “I *knew* it. You guys are totally into each other.”

“It was just a kiss, Genny.” It was more than that.

“A kiss is something. Especially since I’m pretty sure you’re the one who told me repeatedly that you had sworn off men.”

It’s really annoying when she’s right. “You’re not...you know? Weirder out or anything by it?”

There’s a lengthening pause that makes my stomach drop. If she is, then whatever is starting with Finn and me will have to stop. Imogen—and our friendship—is more important to me than any guy. Maybe I want her to say it’s okay more than I realize.

“I think if I’d grown up with Finn, then maybe it might be weird. But even though we share the same father, I only met all of them a few months ago. Yes, they’re my brothers, but they don’t *feel* like my brothers. Not really. Not yet, anyway. Maybe never, although I hope that’s not the case.”

The tension flows out of me as relief hits. “That makes me feel better. Not about them not feeling like your brothers, but that you’re okay with it if whatever between Finn and me goes anywhere.”

“Just don’t tell me when you two bang. I’m not sure I can handle knowing *that much* about my best friend and my

brother.”

She almost makes me spit. Instead, I cough and sputter. “I absolutely will not tell you if, or when, that ever happens. You know everything there is to know about me, but I’m not sure you need to know that.”

“Good.” I can almost hear her nod. “I’m really happy for you, T. I was worried that fucknut had broken your spirit. God, I can’t wait until Finn finds him.”

“I didn’t know he was looking for him.” Sure, he said if he found Ben, he’d take care of him, but to actually go searching him out? I had no idea.

“The one thing I’ve learned since becoming a part of the Donnellys is that they don’t tend to wait until things happen. They’re proactive and take care of shit before it becomes a bigger problem. That shitty ex of yours is a problem.” Imogen’s disgust is clear. “My brothers protect the people they care about. Which means Finn is going to do what he can to make sure you not only feel safe, but that you *are* safe.”

I never want to see Ben again, but can my conscience take knowing that someone is purposefully looking for him with the intent to hurt him? Maybe even get rid of him?

“He hit you and threatened to kill you, Teagan,” Imogen says as though she can read my mind. “What if you haven’t been the first woman he’s abused? Or the last? If he’s treated you like this, who’s to say he won’t keep doing it? What happens if he *does* find you? I’m not normally the type of person who wishes violence on people, but in this case I’ll make an exception.”

What if she’s right? I don’t doubt what Ben will do if he finds me. Why am I feeling bad for that bastard? Do I wish

him dead? No. But will I mourn him if, or when, he's gone? Another no.

"I'm sure I'd feel the same if I were in your position."

"You definitely would," Imogen says succinctly. "What are your plans for the rest of the night?"

"I was probably going to crawl into my bed early and read. Why?" It's the only thing *to do* unless I want to watch more TV. This is going to be the longest week ever if I can't leave.

"Because Liam is out and I'm bored. And now that you're back in town I've realized how much I missed you. I want to make up the time we lost since you moved away. The few sporadic visits I got weren't enough."

No, they weren't. "What were you thinking? You know Finn asked me not to leave the casino."

"I'll come to you. We can either spend more of Liam's money at the tables or we can sit at the bar and judge all the rich old men." Imogen laughs. "If neither of those sound good, then you can give me a tour of the swanky place you're staying in. I'll bring the wine."

After spending all these months apart, I've missed her as well. So much. "I approve of any of those three options."

"Excellent. I'll see you in less than an hour."

"Can't wait."

As soon as the call ends, I head for the shower. If Imogen and I go down to the casino, will Finn be around? Even though he only just left, the thought of seeing him again makes me fluttery. Man, I have it bad.

I take a little longer to get ready than I normally would. Mostly because the selection of clothes I brought with me

aren't really up to *Anamacha Caille* standards. Although it's not like anyone is going to kick me out. But I want to look somewhat nice. I settle on a pair of black leggings and my favorite yellow sweater. The color goes well with my skin tone.

Just as I leave the bathroom, there's a knock on the door of the suite. I hurry across the room to open it.

"Damn, look at you." Imogen strides past me with a bottle while her gaze tracks a path from my head to my toes. She whistles and wags her eyebrows. "Trying to impress a certain someone I see."

My cheeks heat like they always do when someone ever says something the least bit suggestive to me. It's not that I'm embarrassed, but my body decides to act in some stupid way. Taking her teasing in stride, I drop into a curtsy.

"I dress to impress."

Imogen nods. "That you do my beautiful friend. Finn's not going to want to leave your side the whole night if we find ourselves downstairs. And since you're all dressed up, I'm going to assume that's where we're headed?"

I wince. "You don't mind do you? I know you brought the wine."

She recoils slightly. "Of course not. It will still be here when we get back. Or we'll save it for another night."

That's a relief. "I'm not sure I'm up for gambling tonight though. Sitting at the bar sounds like a good plan."

"You're speaking my language." Imogen sets the bottle in the kitchenette and when she returns, she loops her arm around mine. "Let's go have some fun."

We walk to the lift and my eyes lock on Finn's door as though I might be able to see through the wood or willing him to step out. But the bell rings and the doors slide open and then close us inside.

“Let me tell you about this newest job I just got.” Imogen breaks the silence during our ride down to the main level. “I got to hack into the American FBI's system.”

My eyes goggle. “What? Jesus, Genny are you insane?”

The lift jerks to a halt and we exit.

She poo-poops and waves me off. “Don't worry. I was in and out with no one even knowing I'd been there. It's not as though I added a virus as a good-bye gift. I just needed to get some information about one of their cases and the two agents involved. Let me tell you, they are some shady bastards.”

I close my eyes and rub my forehead. “I'm most certainly going to need a drink after that revelation.”

Imogen sticks her tongue out at me. “You know, you could be doing all the cool stuff I get to do if you want. We could be like co-workers. It's not as though you don't have the skills. Plus, it would be the perfect cure for your boredom. It has to be mind-numbing sitting in that suite by yourself all day, no matter how pretty the place is.”

“You have this really annoying habit of talking me into entirely poor life choices.” I glare at her.

She barks out a laugh and several heads turn to stare before returning to what they were doing. “I'm going to take that as a yes.”

“It's an I'll think about it.” Which is, fine, a yes. But I'm going to draw it out a bit longer, because she can't always get what she wants right away all the time.

Imogen eyeballs me. We both know I'll cave soon. The idea of doing what Imogen does *is* a bit thrilling. I can at least admit that much. We continue walking toward the bar and I let my gaze wander. We pass behind one of the tables and I happen to glance over at the dealer. Then I do a double take. *Did I see what I think I saw?*

"Yoo-hoo." A hand waves in front of my face.

I blink and Imogen comes into focus. "Sorry, did you say something?"

"Yeah. I asked if you saw Finn anywhere. That's who you were looking for wasn't it?" She flashes a cheeky grin.

I take another quick glance over my shoulder at the dealer, but he's got a deck of cards in one hand and he's laying down new cards in front of the players with the other. Maybe I'm mistaken. I lean into her to speak softly in her ear.

"Don't look, but I could have sworn that dealer back there pocketed a chip. Maybe two." I can't be certain of either. "I don't want to accuse anyone of something though."

"We need to tell Finn. If it's an honest mistake, then no harm, no foul. But if he has someone stealing from him..." She pauses. "Loyalty is the one thing they require of the men not only in their organization but in their employ."

I hesitate. "What if I'm wrong, though?"

"It's better to err on the side of caution."

Still, after learning what I have about how Finn's organization deals with things, I'm worried about making things worse for someone. Finally, I nod shallowly. *Please be wrong.*

CHAPTER 20



FINN

I'D ALMOST BEEN HOPING TEAGAN MIGHT DECIDE TO COME down to the casino, but security mentioned that Imogen showed up a short while ago without Liam. I suspect the two of them will remain in the suite. Which is why I'm surprised when they appear in my line of sight and approach me. Neither are smiling when they stop in front of me. My gaze lands on Imogen.

"I didn't expect to see you here."

"Liam wasn't home so I thought I'm come hang out with Teagan for the night. We opted to head to the bar so we can sit and judge everyone."

My lips quirk. "Of course you did. Why don't I escort you?"

"Actually," Imogen glances around. "We wanted to talk to you for a minute. In private."

My brow furrows and look from her to Teagan and back. "Everything okay?"

"We're not sure."

I tilt my head to the side. “Follow me.”

The three of us weave around tables until we reach a secluded corner toward the back of the casino floor. I pivot to face them. “What’s going on?”

Imogen glances over at Teagan who turns my way. “We were walking around down here and I think I saw one of the dealers pocket a chip. Maybe two. I’m not absolutely certain though. I could be wrong. If I am, I apologize to him and you.”

My body goes rigid. “Who? Which table?”

“I can show you. It was near the other side, not far from the entrance leading to the lift.” I try to gesture inconspicuously in that direction.

“Show me, please.” I let Teagan lead and I place my hand on her lower back. Imogen tags along.

Slowly, we make our way across the floor. Several people follow us with their gaze. I catch the eye of Ronan who heads security and signal him over. He says something to the rest of the team through his mouthpiece and comes abreast of us as Teagan stops just to the right of a table and tips her chin up a fraction toward the dealer in question. I don’t take my eyes off her for a second just for confirmation. She doesn’t call back her response. Merely stares back.

I take a step away from them until I’m next to Mason, who glances over at me. His eyes widen slightly and he attempts a smile, but he looks away guiltily. When his gaze lands on the guard nearby, he swallows. The people at the nearby tables shift their attention to us.

“Mr. Donnelly,” he says in a shaky voice. “Is everything all right?”

Ronan moves to stand just behind and to the side of him while I turn to the men seated at the table and paste on my most conciliatory smile. “Gentlemen. I apologize, but I need to call a halt to your game in play. If you would, please collect your remaining chips. I’ll double the amount they’re worth as an apology for the inconvenience.”

Although they mumble under the breath, they all pick up their winnings and walk away. Most likely to head to another table. Once they’re out of earshot, I turn to Mason.

“Come with me.”

“What’s this about, sir?” His eyes dart around as though he’s searching for an escape.

“Don’t make me repeat myself.”

For the second time, he swallows, albeit harder and finally moves. We pass Imogen and Teagan.

“Stay down here, please,” I say to both of them, but I’m looking at Teagan. “I’ll come get you in a bit.”

She nods and with Ronan taking up the rear, I head for the lift. The silent ride up to my office is only interrupted by the harsh breathing of Mason. I unlock my office door and take a seat behind my desk. Ronan closes it behind him and leans against the nearby wall with his arms folded over his chest. Mason remains standing, twitching.

“Empty your pockets.”

He jerks. “Sir?”

Instead of answering, I reach into the top desk drawer and set my gun on the surface, keeping the grip within my palm and my finger along the outside edge of the trigger. With noticeably shaking hands, Mason does as I commanded.

“They threatened to kill my wife and kids,” he says, his voice trembling with something between remorse and fear, as he pulls a single chip out of each pocket and sets them on top of my desk. He takes a quick step back, as though wanting to put as much distance between me and him.

“Who did?”

“The Moroccans. They followed me home one night after a shift and forced their way inside. They”—his voice cracks—“they hurt Freya. One of them went upstairs and brought down one of Evie’s dolls from the room where she slept. He was within feet of my baby girl.”

While a part of me sympathizes with him, he should have come to us with this. We would have protected his family. “These chips are worthless outside of this building. You’d have to cash them in. Except, as a dealer, you can’t.”

I lean back and wait. Is he going to give up his partner? The fact we have two traitors within our ranks is not only troubling, but it pisses me off. Why Mason did it is understandable—even if unforgivable. But for someone else to betray us? We can’t let either stand.

“It’s not his fault.” He shakes his head. “They threatened us both.”

Not good enough. “Give me a name.”

The silence lengthens until finally I get what I want.

My gaze shoots over to Ronan. “Have him escorted up here as well.”

He nods and uses his comm system to relay the command. Without taking my eyes off Mason, I bring out my phone. Da answers.

“I need you, Aidan, and Cian here at the casino. Now. We have a problem.”

He doesn't hesitate. “I'll let them know.”

I set the phone on the desk and palm the weapon again. Mason's gaze shifts to it and back up to my face before he straightens and lifts his chin.

“If you're going to kill me sir, will you please make sure that my family is safe? I know I have no right to ask after betraying the organization like this, but I'm asking anyway.”

His punishment isn't up for me to decide. As the head of the syndicate, it's Da's. While he takes our council, ultimately it comes down to his decision.

“Sir,” Ronan says when he returns. “No one can find Samuel. I had my team check the security feeds and right after we left the floor to come up here, the time stamp shows him exiting the casino out the back.”

That's unfortunate. If he hadn't run, he might have—although doubtful—shown some leniency. After this? He's a dead man, I'm sure of it. I shift my attention to Mason.

“Where will we find him?”

I get an address.

“And if he's not there?” Knowing we'll be looking for him, I doubt he'll stay there longer than it takes to pack some shit and make himself scarce.

“He has a mother in Galway, I believe.”

Limerick is closer. It might be a job for Uncle Conor. As the silence lengthens, my anger at this entire situation grows. I'd much rather be downstairs where Teagan is than up here dealing with this fuckery.

“What about the fire at the docks? Did you give that information to the Moroccans as well?”

His brows draw together. “What fire? I don’t know anything about that, sir.”

I study him for several minutes. His surprise appears to be genuine. If he didn’t, then was it Samuel? Or are there even more traitors in our ranks? Since there’s nothing more to be said until Da gets here, I sit back in my chair and wait with my gun resting on my knee. I don’t offer Mason a seat. He doesn’t deserve to get comfortable after this.

After an indeterminable wait, there’s a sharp rap on the door. Ronan turns and opens it. Da strides in. In this moment, he’s not our loving Da. He’s Carrick Donnelly, head of the Irish syndicate and the most powerful man in Dublin. The man even the Gardaí don’t cross. Yet, here stands someone who did and judging by Da’s fierce expression, payment will most likely be made in blood when he discovers what Mason has done.

He meet Da’s eyes and flinches. Moments later Cian and Aidan arrive. They take in the room and the heavy tension as well, I suspect. They both have a seat while Ronan closes us inside and remains guarding the exit. Da stays standing.

I launch into why they’re all here. “It was brought to my attention that Mason here had pocketed chips this evening. He and Samuel—who is currently missing since being outed—have been working together to exchange them for cash. Cash they’ve, in turn, handed over to the Moroccans. Apparently, they abused his wife and threatened to kill her and their children if he didn’t comply. It’s the reason why I haven’t been able to find where the missing money is coming from in the books. It’s never been in the books.”

Cian and Aidan both curse. Da's face turns bright red and he whips his head in Mason's direction. To his credit, he meets Da's gaze head-on.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Donnelly. I needed to protect my family."

Da switches his gaze to me. "What are we doing to find the other traitor?"

"I have an address. If he's not there, we might need to reach out to Uncle Conor. Samuel's mother is in Galway and he's closer."

Da turns to Cian. "Send some men to the traitor's house. If they're unable to locate him, then reach out to Conor with the information. Ask him to put someone at the mother's house and wait to see if he shows up. If, or when, he does, have him detained until we can get there."

"Yes, sir."

Then it's Aidan who Da's attention shifts to. "Gather a couple men and take this one to the warehouse until I decide his punishment. For the moment treat him as we would anyone who betrayed us, but don't kill him. Not yet anyway."

Aidan nods and exits the office with his phone already in hand. In less than five minutes he returns with two of our men from downstairs. They flank Mason and with only a short glance at us, they escort him out with Aidan in the lead and Ronan in the rear. It's for this exact situation that, while rare, we restrict access to the back stairwell. We certainly can't be seen either in the lift or on the main floor removing men from the premises who may soon turn up dead. Although it's been a while since we've had to use it.

It leaves Da, Cian, and me.

“I never would have expected Mason to betray us,” Cian notes.

“A man will do a lot of things in order to protect his family,” Da says. “Still, loyalty is the backbone of our organization. It’s our oath. If an example isn’t made of those who betray us, even within our own ranks, it demonstrates weakness. This role doesn’t come with easy decisions.”

I don’t envy Cian his legacy or the responsibilities he’ll have to carry.

“He should have come to us.” Although it’s too late for that.

Da runs a hand down his face with a heavy sigh. “Christ.”

“At least we have one problem solved,” Cian says. “If the Moroccans are using our own men against us, it’s time to end this once and for all.”

I couldn’t agree more.

CHAPTER 21



TEAGAN

FOR THE PAST HOUR I’VE CAST GLANCES IN THE DIRECTION OF the passageway leading to the lift, waiting for any sign of Finn. Imogen had pointed out her Da and two other brothers when they’d headed that way forever ago and none of them have returned either.

“What do you think is going on up there?” I haven’t taken my eyes off the other side of the room.

“I don’t have a clue,” Imogen answers. “Although I doubt anyone is being murdered. Too messy to clean up.”

I whip my head in her direction, expecting her sarcastic smile—dark humor has always been her go to in uncomfortable situations—but her lips are downturned at the corners. She actually appears worried. Guilt nearly swallows me whole. Did I do the right thing?

She lays a warm hand over mine and stares at me intently. “Whatever happens, it’s not your fault. People make bad decisions and when they’re caught they have to realize there are consequences to their actions. Whether or not you said

anything, eventually, Finn would have discovered the theft. It was only a matter of time.”

I flip my palm up and squeeze her fingers, grateful for her and how well she knows me. “I know you’re right, but it doesn’t make it any easier.”

“No, it doesn’t, but it’s still not up to you to shoulder the blame.” Her gaze drifts to something behind me. “There’s Finn. He looks like he might need some company. Why don’t you go ahead? I’ll call Liam to come get me when he’s finished with his business.”

I hesitate. “Are you sure? I feel like I’ve ruined our mini girl’s night.”

“You didn’t ruin anything. Besides, it isn’t like we can’t have another one tomorrow or the day after.”

True. I’m here—not just at the casino, but in Dublin—for the foreseeable future. It’s going to take some getting used to. I circle the table and give her a huge hug. “Thank you. For everything.”

“That’s what best friends are for.” Imogen hugs me even tighter. “Now go. And don’t forget, I don’t want to know when you bang my brother.”

I snort and twist my fingers against my lips to seal them. She gives me a little nudge and I take a couple small, slow steps until I lengthen my stride and walk confidently toward Finn. I’m only a short distance away when he spots me. A noticeable change comes over him. It’s like having a front row seat to all the tension completely leave his body. His rigid shoulders drop and he loosens the tightness around his mouth and eyes. I come to a stop in front of him.

“Hi.” It’s whisper soft.

“Hi,” Finn replies just as quietly.

“Are you okay?”

His lips curl the tiniest bit, but doesn't reach completion.
“I will be.”

“Do you want to come up to the suite and I'll make us some tea?”

He glances around. “Where's Imogen? I thought you two were having some girl time.”

“She was ready to go. Liam is coming to pick her up.” It's not the complete truth. “So, would you like that tea?”

“I'd love some.”

A compulsion has me threading my fingers through his and pressing my arm against his as we walk hand-in-hand to the lift. Warmth spreads through my whole right side from the contact. His woody scent engulfs me and I breathe it in a little deeper.

We step out of the lift and into the suite.

“If you want to sit, I'll make that tea.” I loosen my hold on him and release his hand. Except I want to call it back. It's been a long time since I've done something as simple as hold a guy's hand. Ben always complained I made his palm clammy.

Don't think about him. Tonight it's just you and Finn.

I head to the kitchenette while he sits on the sofa and within minutes, I have the electric kettle full and heating. “Do you have a flavor preference?”

“I'll have whatever you're having.”

Easy enough. I grab my favorite flavor and get everything set up. The whistle on the kettle blows and I pour each of us a

cup and bring them into the living area. Finn takes his from me and I sit beside him.

“Do you want to talk about it?” Maybe it would assuage some of the guilt I can’t stop clasping onto.

“Sorry, I can’t discuss organization business outside the family. I appreciate the offer, though.”

“I understand.” That answers my question anyway. If it was nothing, wouldn’t he say so?

“Thank you for accepting it so easily.”

“Have women not in the past?”

Finn gives me a half-smile. “Generally speaking, no.”

I merely nod and sip my tea. “I’m sorry you’re having to deal with this kind of stuff. I know you said you don’t care for it.”

“This is the life I was born into.”

“Have you ever thought about leaving?” Is it even possible? How does the mafia even work?

“No,” Finn responds in an instant. “You can’t truly leave. Da gives us far more leeway than our Grand-da did. If he was still alive and someone even considered leaving the organization, the only way they’d do so is through death. Colm Donnelly was a brutal and hated man. We all feared him. His temper was legendary and he didn’t hesitate to...take care of someone who disobeyed him in any way.”

My god. “He sounds terrible.”

Finn raises his cup in a salute. “May the bastard rot in hell.”

I can't even imagine how horrible he must have been if his own family curses him and is glad he's dead. It makes me thankful Imogen's Da isn't like that. "Is that why you're still single? Because you don't want to bring someone into the potential dangers of your life?"

Some form of madness makes me ask.

Finn reaches over and toys with a lock of my hair. He's not touching my skin yet a tingle spreads through me. He raises his eyes to meet mine. There's a fire burning deep within the depth that makes my breath catch and nearly scorches me alive.

"There's danger everywhere," he points out. "I guess it's more because I hadn't found a woman who is unimpressed with my family name or our money, or more accurately, I hadn't found one who sees *me*."

I blink at the usage of past tense. Is that a slip of the tongue or does that mean he's found her? Am I reading way too much into it? Wealth means nothing. I know plenty of wealthy people. I care about honesty. Integrity. Kindness. Someone who builds me up instead of tearing me down.

Can I imagine Finn being that person?

Yes.

"What do you see when you look at me?" I study his face.

He drops the strands of hair he'd still been rubbing between his fingers and carefully takes my cup from my hand and sets it and his on the coffee table. Then reaches up and caresses my cheek. I lean into his touch.

"I see a woman who possesses more strength and determination than she realizes. A fierce and independent woman, but one with a tender heart. I see a loyal friend.

Mostly though, I see someone that I could end up caring about.”

My eyes burn with unshed tears. For far too long I’ve seen myself as a coward. Someone who’s always scared. Someone who lets life happen to her instead of living what should be her best life. I cradle Finn’s jaw in my palm and run my thumb up and down the shallow divot in the outer corner of his mouth.

“I see a man who carries a heavy weight on his shoulders. But he bears it because of how much he loves his family.” I stare more intently, my eyes scanning his face, memorizing each feature and seeing beyond the surface. “I see a man who’s surrounded by people, but keeps a part of himself hidden. I also see loneliness behind the laughter. Most of all, I see a protector. A guardian.”

I see someone I could fall hopelessly in love with.

Bolstered by the courage I’d been lacking only a few short hours ago, I rise up onto my knees and palm both sides of Finn’s head. For another few seconds I stare down at him. He doesn’t move an inch. He doesn’t even blink. He merely waits for me to take the lead. To set the tone for what I’m ready to give and take.

Slowly I bend and lightly brush my lips across his. My hair falls around us like a curtain closing off the outside world. His earthy scent and my fruity one combine to create the perfect blend. Finn’s hands find my hips and his grip around them firms. I love the strength that’s evident in the way he holds me.

I keep my kisses light. Soft. But my hands glide down his neck and across his shoulders where they continue along the sloped lines of his thick upper arms. Even through the thickness of his suit jacket, the power in them is evident. Yet, I

have no fear that Finn would use that strength and power against me.

With a final kiss, I draw away. Carefully, I put a foot on the floor and stand. He tips his head back and waits for my next move. There's no pressure. No nudge. If I called a halt to this again after only a couple kisses, he'd accept it. Which is the biggest reason why I hold out my hand.

There's no hesitation in Finn when he lays his in mine and rises to tower over me. Instead of being overwhelmed by it, I step closer and lay my head against his chest. His heart beats a steady rhythm in my ear. We stand there for another minute before I step back, tugging him along with me and guide us toward the bedroom. Tonight I'm going to do something for myself. Take back some of the control I'd given up. Embrace that fierceness I used to have.

CHAPTER 22



FINN

WALKING INTO THE BEDROOM WITH TEAGAN IS THE LAST thing I would have suspected I'd end up doing tonight. Especially after earlier. Has something happened in the last few hours that made her change her mind about us? I won't complain, but I also plan on letting her lead in case she changes her mind. She should never feel like she can't put a halt to things.

It's hard to come to terms with the fact that we have traitors within our organization. Have we gotten too soft? No one would have dared betray Grand-da back when he was alive. Times are different I suppose. Carrick Donnelly is nothing like Colm Donnelly had been. While not cruel like his Da, it doesn't mean Carrick's any less ruthless when he needs to be.

Except this isn't the time to be thinking about business. Instead, all my focus and attention should be on this beautiful woman who has put her trust in me. I don't want to do anything that might cause her to regret doing so.

The fragrant fruit scent of her has permeated the bedroom. There's not a single trace of my cologne left. Not that I mind.

She comes to a stop not far from the bed and turns to me.

“You know, I've only ever seen you in a suit,” she remarks, almost off-handedly as she runs her fingers along my shoulders. “Imogen pointed out your Da and brothers when they arrived tonight and none of them wore one. I admit to being curious why you do. Not that I don't think it's hot.”

That faint shade of pink colors her cheeks again as her eyes meet mine. One side of my mouth curls. Her flushed face is what's hot.

“I noticed a long time ago that in here”—I twirl my finger in the air—“men respect other men in suits. We have a few younger members who tend to wear a slightly more relaxed attire. Dress slacks and a sweater or a plain shirt and blazer without a tie. Still expensive, but far more casual than the old-school members who wear their perfectly tailored suits. They don't have nearly the commanding presence as their older counterparts. Maybe it's intentional on their part. I've never asked. But it's obvious how much differently they're treated.”

“And since you own this place, it's important that you look the part,” Teagan notes with accuracy.

“Exactly.” I rarely even take my suit jacket off in my office in case someone shows up. Everything is always about appearances.

She stares up at me intently. “You don't have to look or play any part with me. I always want to see the genuine Finn Donnelly. The Finn you don't show to just anyone.”

When was the last time I'd been the true me with a woman? Have I ever? Aoife might have been the closest, but

even with her, I never gave her everything of myself.

“What about you?” I grip Teagan’s hips and slowly guide her into the cradle of my thighs. “Will I get to see the true Teagan? The one I’d take a guess only Imogen sees?”

She lays her palms on my chest and smooths out the non-existent wrinkles. “I think I’ve lost that part of myself over the last few months. The real me. I’m really trying to find my way back to her. I’ve missed who I used to be.”

“I bet she’s only more amazing than this version of you.”

Teagan chuckles and lifts her gaze to meet mine. “I’d like to think so.”

“While we all question her taste in men, she has impeccable taste in friends.”

Pure laughter spills from her perfect, plump lips. “That she does.”

Unable to resist any longer, I palm her cheeks and her laughter fades. Either I bend or she rises up on her toes, but in the next second we’re kissing. It’s not a frenzied move, but rather a long, slow tease. I lap at Teagan’s sweetness and savor her flavor. The fabric of my jacket glides over my shoulders and down my arms as she pushes it off me.

She hesitates as though unsure what to do with it until I take it from her and toss it off to the side. I don’t need to keep up appearances in here. Not with her. With far too agonizing slowness, she plucks at each button of my shirt, exposing a fraction of my skin at a time. The cool air feels good against the heat being this close to Teagan brings. She tugs the shirttails out from beneath my waistband, and in seconds it joins my jacket on the floor.

Her gaze shifts to the white bandage wrapped around my upper arm and her fingers hover over it. “How is your wound doing?”

It aches like a fucker. “If I tell you it still hurts, will you kiss it and make it feel better?”

She rolls her eyes. “It must not be bothering you too bad if you can joke about it.”

“Nothing but a flesh wound.” I don’t want her worrying.

“Would you actually tell me if it hurt?” Teagan narrows her gaze.

“Not a chance.” I shake my head. “A man doesn’t want the woman he’s trying to woo to think he’s a baby whining about something like a cold.”

“Wooing me, huh?”

I cock my head. “Is it working?”

“Maybe.” A soft touch ghosts over the barbell in my right nipple. “You don’t strike me as a man who would get his nipples pierced.”

I chuckle. “Call it the mishaps of youth as well as being the unlucky loser of a bet against my brothers.”

“Not that you’re ancient, but it’s been a few years since you’ve been a youth. Why not just take them out?”

“I don’t know, I’ve sort of gotten used to them.” The added sensation of having them played with during sex is also a perk. If the nipples surprise Teagan, then she’s in for a bigger shock soon. I can hardly wait.

She lightly tugs on one and sure enough it sends a spike of pleasure straight to my cock. “They’re a lot sexier than I

expected them to be.”

“No piercings for you then, I take it?” I tease.

She shakes her head. “I’m a chicken when it comes to pain. I don’t even have my ears pierced.”

“You’re not a chicken for not wanting to experience pain. Maybe that just makes you smarter than the rest of us.”

“Ha. Maybe.”

Teagan flicks both barbells again in obvious fascination. She reaches for my belt next, but I lay my hands over hers. “I think fair play is in order here, don’t you?”

She lowers her hands and quirks her lips almost like a dare. I reach for the hem of her sweater whose color reminds me of sunshine and tug it upward and over her head. Her hair tumbles into messy waves around her shoulders. I brush back the wild strands that spilled over her forehead. Hard nipples spear the thin fabric of her bra begging for attention, and the shadow of areola is visible. Reaching behind her, I expertly release the hooks and Teagan slips the straps down in shoulders, her eyes never leaving mine. The scrap of fabric drops to the floor. Only then do I drop my gaze. My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. I can’t wait to taste them.

“It looks like we’re even,” she says in a husky tone.

“So it does.”

When she reaches for my belt again, I let her. There’s the sound of metal against metal and the tension gives. It releases farther when Teagan slips the button free of its hole. The zipper is undone next and her gaze drops to where she pushes my pants down freeing my aching cock. I press my lips tightly together as her eyes widen and slowly rise to meet mine.

A slow smile curls her lips. “Another mishap of your youth, I take it? Or maybe you didn’t learn your lesson about not betting against your brothers the last time?”

I bark out a laugh and palm my cock, rubbing my thumb over the silver ring in its tip. “I can’t blame either of those things for this decision. This was all me.”

Teagan’s head rock up and down. “I see.”

Her words are bland, but there’s certainly curiosity in those deep chocolatey eyes of hers. “Not to be indelicate in our current situation, but I haven’t had any complaints.”

She snorts and slowly reaches out. “I’m sure you haven’t.”

Her hand pauses just before she touches the piercing. It’s only for a brief second and then she’s tracing the entry point, which sends a shudder of pure pleasure coursing through me. Patience has never been my strong suit, but I practice every ounce of it I can while Teagan explores. I recite multiplication tables in my head and run through the stock prices of all my investments just so I don’t come.

When I’m not sure I can take it any longer, she drops her arm, giving me a moment of relief. It only lasts long enough for her to get to her knees and take me in her mouth. Fuck. Nothing has ever felt as good as Teagan’s tongue flicking out to latch onto the ring and give it a gentle tug. I clench my fists for a measure of control. She takes me deep and adds her palm to increase the sensations.

I let her continue for a few minutes, but then reach down and with hands under her arms, I pull her to her feet. Teagan pouts.

“I wasn’t done.”

“Later. I need to taste you first.” With far less patience as she showed, I remove her pants—taking her panties with—palm her ass and lift.

She wraps her legs around my waist and I lay her on the bed, following her down. I claim her lips with mine and have no plans on stopping until Teagan screams my name.

CHAPTER 23



TEAGAN

HOLY SHIT, FINN'S COCK IS PIERCED.

My pussy clenches at the thought of it rubbing along all the rights spots inside. I run my fingers through his hair as he rains kisses down my body, pausing and paying homage to my breasts first. He laves his tongue around my nipple and gently nips it with his teeth before tugging it just to the point of pain. Then he soothes them with soft and sweet kisses, lapping at them with his tongue.

Beneath my fingertips, his hair is the slightest bit coarse. It's long enough for me to grasp onto and anchor myself. I want to feel every touch. Every kiss. And not forget a single one. Although I'm not sure I'd be able to even if I tried. No one has treated me with this gentleness in a long, long time. I soak it all up and hoard the sensations away as though nothing will feel like it again.

The bristles of the scruff along his jaw abrades the skin under my breasts. A tremor runs through me, hardening my nipples even more. They ache but in a good way. As though sensing how much, Finn takes each one in his mouth for a bit

longer before finally moving down. His facial hair tickles my belly. I squirm and giggle, unable to help myself.

He lifts his gaze to meet mine and that sexy smile curls his lips, both dimples prominently displayed. I wait for the unease to hit, but only pleasure fills me. I love those small of furrows. They make him appear even more playful. Without breaking eye contact, Finn scoots down until he's directly over my core. He kisses my inner thigh. First the right, then the left. Each time avoiding my throbbing center that is dripping with wetness and waiting for his touch.

“Please,” I beg in a needy whimper.

He tongues my flesh, nibbling only along the length of my leg he can reach and ruthlessly taunting me. “Have you been a good poppet?”

I nod frantically, trusting my pelvis upward, trying to reach closer to his mouth. “Yes.”

A calloused fingertip grazes my swollen clit. I cry out, but that simple touch isn't enough. “Don't be cruel. Touch me.”

“Poor poppet. Where do you want me to touch you?” Finn glides his thumb along my inner knee, nowhere close to where that bastards knows I'm practically begging him to reach.

A growl rumbles up my throat. He only laughs. Frustrated, I yank his hair and clutch his head tightly, pushing his face to where I am desperate for his touch. As though sensing how on the edge I am, he finally gives me what I want. Lips and tongue and teeth, Finn feasts on me. There isn't a single inch of heated flesh he leaves untouched. From my back hole to my clit, he devours me.

My hold on him tightens as I rise to the pinnacle. His face has to be soaked with as much wetness he's drawing from me.

But he doesn't stop. I clench down on the finger that slowly pushes its way inside me.

“Yes. Oh god, I need more.” It's a plea.

One he answers as I stretch around two fingers. Or maybe it's three. I'm too delirious with pleasure to know or care. It's still not enough and won't be until Finn fills me with his thick cock. Still, I'm close. Hovering on the brink of release. He doesn't waste any time coaxing it from me. Blunt teeth latch hard onto my clit and pinch the sensitive flesh between them. The bite of pain along with the tightness of his thrusting fingers pushes me over the edge.

My back arches off the bed and I let loose a scream. There's movement over me and the faint sound of foil tearing, but it's hard to focus on anything but the wash of sensations rushing through me. My chest heaves with every breath I take. Slowly, I open my eyes and find Finn above me.

I reach up and caress his cheek. He leans into my touch and then glides his hands up my arms, gently loosening my hold on him, and laces his fingers through mine. Our eyes meet and lock and slowly, he lines his cock up at my entrance and far too gently pushes inside. With careful strokes, he stretches my inner walls to accommodate him. My wetness eases his way. The ring at the tip of his cock scrapes along the sensitive flesh and I gasp at the sensation. It's like nothing I've ever felt before.

Every move is amplified with more pleasure than I might be able to handle. It's too much and yet not enough all at the same time. Needing more, I tilt my pelvis, and Finn slides another inch in. He freezes and nips my skin. My whole body shudders.

“Impatient little poppet,” he growls against the side of my throat.

“Unnnh.” It’s not even a word, only a sound.

There are no thoughts. Only pleasure. Intense, consuming pleasure. I’m burning up with it. Sweat-dampened hair sticks to my forehead and along the back of my neck. I’m trapped with Finn in a bubble of mindless ecstasy. Finally he moves, rolling his hips and rocking his pelvis against mine. His piercing hits a spot inside me that makes my toes curl. I lock my feet behind the small of his back and arch into each of his thrusts urging him on.

I don’t want gentle. I want him to take. To lose control. “Fuck me. Hard. Please.”

Finn lifts up on his forearms, our fingers still intertwined, and stares into my eyes. There’s a feral glow in the deep blue depths of his. His lips form a snarl and he unleashes the beast he’d been holding back. With punishing thrusts, he goes deeper filling me full of his cock. Skin slaps against skin echoing loudly around us. The musky scent of sex surrounds me and I breathe it in. Filling my lungs with it. Beneath it is the earthy woody fragrance that I’ll forever associate with Finn. With tonight.

He’s almost vicious with his need. My fingers leave his hair and I grip his shoulders. I clutch at him and dig my nails into his flesh, anchoring him to me. I don’t even want this to end. He rocks into me with a force that pushes me higher up the bed. I don’t care. I want this. Need this.

It’s a reminder that I can make a man lose himself inside me. That I can be this close to another human. With Finn. It’s as though we’re one being. Two halves making a whole. As though he’s the missing piece of me. The one I’ve been

searching for but haven't been able to find until this exact moment. Tears fill my eyes. Feelings of completeness overwhelm me.

It's almost too much.

I scream out my pleasure as my release hits. Finn throws his head back, and the muscles along his neck grow taut. He comes with a shudder that transfers into my body, a rolling wave of pleasure that runs from my head to my toes. He collapses half on top of me. I run my hands up and down his sweat-slicked back. My fingers play along the ridges of the muscles that flex and writhe while I try to calm my racing heart.

Finn's breathing slows and he rolls to the side bringing me with him. We're still connected intimately and I'm not sure I'll be ready for when we have to separate. I lay my cheek on his chest and draw random designs over his pec. His arms tighten around me keeping me secure and protected. A shiver skates down my back and he throws the blankets over us to keep the warmth in. He's a furnace beneath me and I snuggle deeper into it.

"That was..." my voice trails off, unable to find the words adequate enough to describe what just happened.

Finn chuckles and the vibration rumbles through me. "Yeah, it certainly was."

We lie there basking in the afterglow of the best sex I've had in my life. I pick my head up, cross my arms on top of him, and lay my chin on my folded hands to stare down at him. He brushes my hair off my forehead and tucks the stray strands behind my ear.

"You're stunning. You know that, right?"

We've just been closer than two people can get and yet those few simple words bring a flush to my face. A woman can never hear from the man she's with that he's attracted to her too often.

"It's always nice to hear. And thank you. You're good for my ego."

"It's true and it has nothing to do with your ego. You should be told every day how beautiful you are. Inside and out." Finn palms my jaw and I lean into his touch.

"So where does this leave us?"

"Where do you want it to?" he asks.

I pause. Where *do* I want it to leave us? I hadn't lied when I said that when I'm with someone, I'm all in. Do I want to be all in with Finn? My heart gives a resounding 'yes'.

CHAPTER 24



FINN

FROM SOMEWHERE IN THE PILE OF CLOTHES ON THE FLOOR, MY cellphone rings. I drag my gaze from a sleeping Teagan and carefully roll out of the bed, trying not to disturb her. Quickly rifling through everything, I grab the device and walk out of the bedroom. A quick glance toward the windows tells me it's still the middle of the night.

“Finn Donnelly.”

“I have something for you,” the rough, gravelly voice on the other end replies.

“What is it?” I pause in the middle of pacing the living area.

“Pretty sure I found our friend, but I need another day to confirm.”

Impatience thrums inside me. “Where?”

“A hostel on the north side of the city. Near St. Mary’s Chapel of Ease,” my informant replies.

Fuck. That’s far too close to Teagan’s flat.

“I want guaranteed confirmation tomorrow.”

The man coughs deep from his lungs. “You’ll have it.”

I end the call, head over to the bar to set my phone down, and pour myself a drink. My glass is half empty when Teagan steps out of the bedroom with only a sheet wrapped around her. She crosses the distance and leans against the counter.

“Is everything okay?” she asks.

Indecision wars within me, but I don’t want to lie or keep secrets from her. I saw what they almost did to Aidan and Sorcha. “My man believes he’s found your ex.”

A flash of fear appears in Teagan’s eyes and she straightens. “Ben? Where?”

I tug on the length of the sheet until I can wrap my arms around her. She trembles in my embrace and I lay my chin on the crown of her head, tightening my hold on her. “I told you I’d take care of it. He’s not going to hurt you.”

“It just scares the shit out of me that he managed to follow me all the way here. What kind of psychopath does that?”

“The kind who likes to control women through fear. It’s the only way he can feel powerful, because in all other ways he’s nothing more than a weak bastard.”

Teagan sighs heavily. “What happens if it’s not him?”

“Then my men will keep looking until he’s found.”

She lifts her chin to stare up at me. “What if you don’t? Find him, I mean? Am I just expected to put my entire life on hold out of fear? I don’t want to live that way.”

“That’s not going to happen.” It’s a vow.

“How can you be so sure? I know you like to think that you’re untouchable, but crazy people do crazy things.”

I cradle Teagan’s jaw between my palms. “I swear to you I will find him.”

She holds my stare until finally she gives a small nod. “I trust you.”

I kiss her forehead and wrap my arms around her again. Hers encircle my waist and we remain that way for several minutes until I draw back.

“How about a drink? Something to help you relax?”

Teagan rises up and brushes a kiss over my lips. “I can think of much better ways you can help me relax.”

“You’re absolutely right.”

I guide her back into the bedroom and by the time I’m finished with her, she’s so relaxed she can barely move.



THE SCENT OF BLACKBERRIES WAKES ME. I OPEN MY EYES. MY nose is buried in dark brown hair splayed out over the pillow. Faint snores come from the woman in my arms. Our limbs are tangled together and Teagan’s soft breath ghosts along my chest. I lost track of how many orgasms she had. But at least she’s slept soundly since we came back to bed.

I lift my head and glance toward the windows. Even through the tint, it’s noticeably well into the day. The sun is actually shining. Who knows how long it will last though. I’m not ready to separate myself from Teagan. She feels too good—too right—in my arms. In this bed. She’s the first woman I’ve spent an entire night with in it.

She shifts and arches her back in a small stretch. A moan escapes her. Slowly, she tips her chin up and smiles.

“Good morning,” she says without a hint of embarrassment. If I expected her to be shy in the light of day, I’d have been mistaken.

“Morning. Or afternoon, rather. How’d you sleep?”

“I’m not sure much sleeping went on last night.”

Pride swells at the satisfaction in her tone. “Maybe we can take a nap together after lunch.” I waggle my eyebrows and Teagan chuckles.

“Why does that sound like a euphemism for something else and no actual napping will be involved?”

I blink, trying to appear innocent. “I’m not sure what you’re trying to say.”

She just rolls her eyes and shakes her head. “You fool no one sir.”

“Sir, is it? I kind of like the sound of that.”

Teagan pokes the center of my chest. “Don’t get any ideas.”

I drop a quick kiss on her nose. “How about we take a shower and get cleaned up? I’ll order us breakfast—or lunch as the case may be—and we can have a nice meal. Get some of your strength back.”

“I’m not opposed to either of those suggestions.”

“Excellent.” I roll out of the bed and she follows, but at a slower pace.

Before long the water is the perfect temperature. “Let me know if it’s too hot.”

“If it doesn’t turn my skin pink then it’s not hot enough,” she says.

“A woman after my own heart.” I step under the spray and wet my hair.

I slick it back and face her. “You’re staring again.”

“Yes, I am. I like looking at you.”

To my shock, it’s my cheeks that heat this time. I know I’m relatively attractive, but it’s not something I put much stock in. But it does make me want to preen a little that Teagan likes what she sees. “You’re good for my ego.”

“I doubt you need me to stroke your ego.”

I tug her to me, keeping my back to the water so it doesn’t hit her face. “Maybe I need you to stroke something else instead?”

“Something like this?” Her hand skates across my thigh until she reaches my cock that’s been no less than semi-hard since last night.

Teagan grips my length with the right amount of pressure and I growl low in my throat with how good it feels. She strokes up and down, squeezing at the base, and dragging her hand toward the tip, milking my release from me. I’m tempted to take control, but she curls her hand around the back of my neck and pulls me down for a kiss. Her tongue slicks over mine and mimics the push and pull of what she’s doing to my cock.

It doesn’t take much before I’m coming like it’s my first time. Ropes of viscous white splash onto Teagan’s stomach like I’m marking her as mine. I want her to smell like me—like us—to anyone who tries to get close to her. I’ve never had this feral possessiveness for anyone before her.

With a heaving chest, I press my forehead to hers while I try to catch my breath. “I swear you’ll be the death of me.”

Her breath huffs across my face. “Yeah, but what a way to go.”

“I can certainly think of worse ways.” I lift my head. “As much as I would like to continue, we should probably get cleaned up and get both of us fed. I also have a couple things I need to take care of before this evening.”

Teagan exaggerates a pout and I nip at the plump bottom lip. Once we’re clean and dressed I follow her out to the living room and gesture toward the couch. “Have a seat and I’ll make us something to eat.”

She widens her eyes. “You can cook?”

I laugh lightly. “I wouldn’t go that far, but I can put enough together that I won’t poison us and we won’t starve.”

“You’re not instilling a lot of faith in me.” Teagan swivels and props her elbow on the back of the sofa and rests her cheek against her fist.

“Didn’t you tell me you trust me?” The minute I ask the question I regret it. I hadn’t planned on bringing up the reminder of the call last night.

She must be thinking the same thing, because her expression shutters and then she blinks and it clears. “I do trust you.”

I smile to try and bring back the light mood. “One poison-free meal coming right up.”

The fridge is stocked with enough things that I manage to put together a meal of mashed potatoes and a couple slices of corned beef. Enough to satisfy us until dinner. The whole time

I could feel Teagan's gaze following me. I take two plates into the other room and hand one to her.

"Nora gave me her special recipe for the potatoes. They're one of my favorites."

"I'm sure they're delicious." She picks up a forkful and tastes. I wait impatiently for the verdict. She glances over and nods. "These are really good."

"Glad I exceeded your low expectations of my culinary skills." I dig into my own food.

We eat in silence until Teagan sets her fork down. "Maybe we can watch another movie later. If you have some free time, that is. I don't want to keep you from work. I know you have things to do."

"If I can get away, I'd love to." I have to take care of, especially in light of discovering traitors.

Once we finish eating and clean up, I check my phone. I'm surprised neither Cian or Da have called.

"Thank you for lunch." She leans against the counter.

"You're welcome." I move in front of her and kiss her forehead. "I'll call you later. After I take care of some things."

Teagan looks up at me and nods. "Okay."

I have to drag myself away and out the door. This is the first time I've had to balance work with a relationship. It pisses me off that she has to stay hidden to keep her safe. Although, after today, that shouldn't be an issue. Because I plan on taking care of this ex of hers.

Permanently.

CHAPTER 25



TEAGAN

I COLLAPSE IN A HEAP ON THE SOFA. LAST NIGHT HAD BEEN incredible. Same with this morning. I'd forgotten how it felt to feel sexy. Beautiful. Wanted. I hadn't expected to trust someone again as much as I trust Finn. And while I do trust him to find Ben, I'm also tired of hiding. Of letting my fear rule. Of feeling helpless. That's not the kind of woman Finn deserves. It's not the kind of woman I want to be. Pushing myself upright, I head into the bedroom and find my phone.

Imogen answers. "Everything okay?"

"Do you think Liam can teach me how to use a gun?" I probably should ask Finn, but I hesitate for a couple reasons. Mostly because he has family business he has to take care of. But also because something tells me he might say no. Whether because he thinks it's too dangerous or because he wants to be the one to protect me.

There's a long pause on Imogen's end. "I can ask him. But, Teag, are you sure this is something you want to do?"

"I'm positive." I sit on the edge of the bed. "As much as I appreciate the fact I've had a safe place to stay, and as

beautiful as it is, it's also starting to feel like a prison. The walls are slowly closing in. I know it could be dangerous to leave, but I'm not sure how much longer I can remain here."

Not after last night.

Finn would also try to talk me into staying here. As much as I've loved having him nearby, last night made me realize I don't want to be the type of person who lets other people solve her problems for her.

"I'm sorry you're stuck in there. I'd be going stir-crazy as well. Let me talk to Liam and I'll call you right back."

"Thank you."

"Give me a few." Imogen ends the call and I set the phone next to me.

I glance around the room that still smells of sex. Last night had been amazing. One of the best nights of my life. And I want more of them. A lot more. I also want to walk through Stephens Green holding Finn's hand. I want to go to our favorite restaurant and eat our favorite meal. I want to go to a football match and cheer on the Bohemian F.C. from the stands.

Most of all, I don't want to be scared anymore.

Finn said a man like Ben lords control over women. I'm done with letting Ben control me. My phone rings and I snatch it up. Imogen's number is displayed.

"And?" My impatience is evident.

"We can be there in thirty minutes."

"I'll be waiting." I end the call and sit there for a minute.

Straightening my shoulders, I grab my runners from the wardrobe and put them on. Then I head back into the living area and instead of sitting, I make my way to the bar in the kitchenette and pour myself a small drink. I finish it in one swallow.

Am I really doing this? I have to.

Not wanting to take the risk of running into Finn and explain where I'm going, I pace the length of the suite to give myself something to do. I have no idea how many laps I do before my phone rings again.

"We're downstairs," Imogen says.

"I'm on my way." I grab my phone and key card and make it to the lift without incident.

Seconds later I'm out on the casino floor and can make out Imogen, Liam, and one of Finn's security team. They all turn at my approach.

"Miss Shah," the security guard—Lee, I believe—says. "Mr. Donnelly asked that you not venture outside."

"She's not a prisoner," Imogen grinds out, but I hold up my hand. I can handle it.

"I understand what Mr. Donnelly has probably explained to you, and I appreciate you following his directive, but I'm leaving for a little while. I'll be back in a few hours. And unless you have plans to physically restrain me, I'll ask you to please step aside."

He hesitates for so long I brace myself for a fight. I highly doubt Liam will allow anyone to put their hands on me. Lee's gaze bounces between Imogen, Liam, and me until finally, he moves out of the way. "I'm going to have to notify Mr. Donnelly."

I expect nothing less. His loyalty is to Finn after all. “I understand.”

“Are we leaving or not?” Liam grumbles.

Imogen elbows him in the side and he doesn’t even grunt.

“Yes, we’re leaving.” Before I lose my nerve.

Liam pivots and leads the way. Imogen snags my arm and we leave together. The sun has disappeared and the gray sky appears more dismal than usual. But the air smells fresh and clean and also a bit like rain. I cast several glances around, but there are far fewer cars parked at the curbs than there had been when Finn and I arrived a few days ago. Nothing jumps out at me as suspicious. It’s just a regular day in Dublin.

We come to a stop next to a black town car and driver who opens the back door. To my surprise, Liam steps to the side and holds a hand out for Imogen. She takes it and he helps her in. It’s my turn next and while he doesn’t offer his hand, he waits until I’m sitting on the other side of Imogen before he gets in and the driver closes the door. I’m not sure why I’m shocked by his gentlemanly behavior. I guess because of how hard he always is. Maybe there is more to Liam than he presents to everyone. Everyone other than Imogen, I suspect.

The driver makes his way down the city streets and away from the casino. Imogen turns to me.

“Did something happen to bring on this sudden change?”

Since she’s already said she doesn’t want to know about Finn and me being together, I come up with another reason. “I just couldn’t take staying inside another day.”

She eyeballs me and finally nods, because she’s knows what I’m saying is true. I’d told them a week. Granted, I’m only on day four, but enough is enough.

I redirect the conversation. “Where are we going anyway?”

“Liam has a place we can go for you to practice where no one can hear. Some warehouse at the shipping yard.”

Considering he owns over half the shipping companies in Dublin, that makes sense. It isn't long before we arrive at the docks. We stop at a security booth and then the gate opens for us to drive through. The town car stops in front of a large building. He exits the vehicle and lets us out. We trail Liam who leads us to the entrance and stands there with his face angled upward toward where a camera in the corner above the door points down.

The sound of locks is loud and the metal door swings open on well-oiled and noiseless hinges. A scarred mountain of a man wearing a suit stands just inside. Judging by the size of him, I'm surprised the seams at the shoulders don't split. He's massive.

The three of us step past him and we enclosed in darkness for a second before a light flares to life brightening the entryway we're standing in. The large man nods at Liam and then walks down a hallway. We follow him until we reach another door. I can't help but glance around. It's deathly quiet in here. A few wall sconces give off light, but it's an eerie yellow instead of the bright sunshine yellow that's my favorite color.

From my pocket, my phone rings. I startle at the noise and reach for it. Everyone's staring at me. I wince.

“Sorry.”

Still, I answer it. “Hello?”

“Why did I have to hear from Lee that you left the casino?” Finn's question is filled with disappointment.

I flinch at it and turn away from three pairs of eyes to try and give myself the illusion of privacy. “I’m sorry. It was a spur-of-the moment decision.”

“You still could have let me know. There was no need to call Liam. If you needed to leave that badly, I would have taken you where ever you wanted to go. I may not have liked it, but I would have taken you.” More hurt colors his tone.

Guilt floods me and I sigh. “You’re right. I should have told you.”

“Where are you?”

“Um,” I hesitate, not wanting him to know.

He blows out a harsh breath. “Call me when you’re about to leave so I know you’re on your way back. You *are* coming back, aren’t you?”

Was I? The whole point of me learning to shoot was so I felt somewhat safe returning home. At least it was a pretty illusion that I might be able to protect myself if I need to. But I’m also not sure I’m ready to be that far away from Finn.

“Teagan?”

“At least for tonight.”

The lengthening silence indicates he’s not happy. “Call me when you’re finished doing whatever it is you’re doing with Liam and Imogen. Please?”

“I will.” I glance back. “I’m sorry, but I have to go.”

I’m not sure who ends the call first, him or me, but either way, Finn’s gone. I turn back to face everyone and pocket my phone. “I’m ready.”

The large scarred man pushes opens the interior door and steps back. Liam strides past him, then Imogen. I skate by his intimidating presence and the door shuts behind me. I jump at the dull sound. In front of me, spread across a waist-high table, are guns of different sizes as well as rectangular shaped bars, each one holding a stack of bullets. I swallow and wipe my sweaty palms on my thighs.

Liam picks up a gun and slams one of the bars into the bottom of the grip. Imogen moves to the side and behind me as he hands me the weapon with it pointed away from both of us.

“Let’s see what you can do.”

I stare at it. What the hell am I doing?

CHAPTER 26



FINN

I TRY TO SOOTHE AWAY THE HURT AND DISAPPOINTMENT THAT Teagan left the casino. Not just with Liam, of all people, but especially after last night. For someone who said they trusted me, she sure isn't showing it. I'll have to deal with my feelings regarding that later. In the meantime, I have a grubby bastard to take care of.

Before he finds her.

The interior of the pub is dimly lit, and the stench of beer is mixed with the sour scent of vomit. Ratty booths line the wall and tables sit tightly packed together with barely any room to move around. A few raggedy-looking blokes sit with a pint in front of them, and the single television mounted on the wall displays a staticky picture of replays from the most recent football match at Dalymount Park.

In the back corner sits the man I'm here to meet. I weave my way to the shadowy alcove and take a seat across from him. A pockmarked face is half hidden beneath a tattered gray tweed flat cap. His eyes are barely visible. The fingers

threaded together on the table top are tar-stained and the stale scent of cigarettes emanates from him.

“Did you get confirmation?” I’m on edge to take this guy out.

Billy shifts around and he clenches his hands tighter. “He didn’t come back after he left early this morning. I’ve had a guy sitting outside all day, but nothing.”

Goddamn it. “Where did he go when he left?”

“I don’t know. He got on a bus and I followed him, but I never saw him get off. It was packed with people heading to work so it was hard to keep track of where he stood. All I know is by the time the crowd had thinned enough that I could see everyone, he was gone.”

“Which bus?”

Billy pauses. “The number nine, I believe.”

“Do you think he knew you were following him?”

“Maybe.” He shrugs. “Could be how he ditched me.”

Which means he could be anywhere in the city. “You promised you’d have confirmation.”

“I know, boss, and I’m sorry.”

“Keep your guy there and let me know the second he gets back,” I bite out. “In the meantime, make sure your network is still looking for him.”

He nods. “Yes, sir.”

I get up from the table and walk out the door without a backward glance. Fuck. We’re back to square one.

Maybe Imogen can help. From some of the things we’ve all heard she’s done for our cousin Paddy, she can hack into

almost anything. I reach my SUV and glance up. There's a flash of black, and then chaos. A barrage of bullets fly, hitting all around me. Tires squeal. A searing pain shoots across my face as I dive behind the vehicle.

Screams fill the air and people run for cover. I yank out the gun from a holster beneath my jacket and peek around the front end of my SUV. I sweep my gaze back and forth, but there's nothing there. Rapid footsteps and raised voices that echo around me. Warm liquid runs down the side of my neck. I swipe it away with my hand and hiss at the sting that follows.

Carefully, I stand but stay hunched over and protected behind my vehicle. I jerk upright for a quick glance, but the street is devoid of any cars. Rising fully, I glance up and down the length of the street, but other than the cars parked along the curb, there's nothing. No movement other than a few people who rouse from their hiding spots. I put my gun away, get in the SUV, and call Da. Shards of glass cover the passenger seat in the front and the back. I'm sure a few bullets are stuck in the exterior paneling as well. I drive away from the curb just as he answers.

“Someone just tried to take me out.”

“Where?”

“Outside of Grogan's Pub. I was meeting one of my informants about something and was about to leave when a vehicle drove by and opened fire.” I grab the rearview mirror and yank it downward. A long trail of blood runs from just above my ear to down my neck. My shirt collar is soaked in dark red. “Bullet grazed me. I'm heading out to the estate. Not sure if I'll need stitches or it's just a bleeder.”

“I'll call Dr. McGowan and have him meet you out here.” Da pauses. “Be careful.”

“Yes, sir.”

I toss the phone in the console between the seats and make my way through the city and onto the road leading toward the manor. As carefully as possible, I shrug out of my jacket and rip the buttons off my shirt to remove that as well. I bunch it up and press it to the side of my head to try and stop the blood that keeps flowing. A little over twenty minutes later, I come to a stop at the large iron gate blocking the drive. It opens in seconds and I make my way down the narrow lane, my head swimming.

It takes forever to get there—or at least feels like it—but I finally come to a stop in front of the house. The doctor’s vehicle is parked behind Aidan’s. I make it up to the front door which opens before my hand curls around the knob. Da’s arm comes around me and he helps me inside.

“Nora, bring Dr. McGowan to my office. Now.”

Everything fades in and out. Sounds reach my ear and my head pounds with throbbing pain. I open my eyes and a man in a jacket bends over me.

“Almost finished, Mr. Donnelly.”

I close my eyes again. Finished with what?



THERE’S A POUNDING INSIDE MY SKULL. I OPEN MY EYES which takes more effort than it should. Where the hell am I? I turn my head slowly and wince. Da’s office comes into focus and with it the memories. The drive-by shooting outside Grogan’s. The sting of pain. The blood. Although the ride out here is a little foggy.

“You’re awake.”

I turn toward Da’s voice. He’s sitting in a chair he’s dragged near the couch I’m lying on. Gingerly, I sit myself up and groan with the effort.

“How long have I been out?”

“An hour, maybe.”

I glance down. “Sorry for all the blood.”

He huffs. “It’ll clean. How’re you feeling?”

I’d chuckle, but it hurts too much. “Like I got shot.” Christ, even the bullet grazing my arm didn’t hurt as much as this.

“You’re lucky you didn’t pass out before you got here. Doc said you lost a lot of blood.”

“I’m glad I didn’t.” Try explaining that to the Gardaí.

Da stands and gently palms the uninjured side of my head. “Why don’t you go get some rest? Nora is making you some soup for later.”

“I can’t stay.” Carefully I get to my feet. “I have to get back to the casino.”

I’m not leaving Teagan there alone.

“Finn, the casino will survive without you for a night.”

“It’s not that.” I hadn’t planned on mentioning her yet. Not until there was something more between us. “Imogen’s friend Teagan is staying in the suite. I don’t want her by herself.”

Da’s nod is knowing. “Is this the woman that’s been keeping you distracted?”

There's no denying my focus hasn't been where it should, ever since Teagan came into the picture. "Yes."

He studies me. "I take it things are serious with you two?"

Are they? Before she left with Liam and Imogen I might have said yes. Now I'm not sure. "I want them to be."

"If that's the case, then maybe you should bring her out here and introduce us. I'm sure the rest of the family would like to get to know her." He raises an eyebrow in expectation.

"Fine. I'll call her with an invitation."

"I'll let Nora know to expect one more for dinner." Dropping that proclamation he leaves me standing in his office while he goes off to talk to her.

Great. There are times when I love how close we are as a family, but I'm not sure this is one of them. I take a seat back on the couch and reach for my phone.

"Hello?" Teagan answers, her tone pitched with a frantic note.

"Hey, it's me."

"Are you okay? Imogen got a call from one of your brothers."

Christ. "Yeah, I'm fine. Just a little banged up."

"What happened?"

No lies, remember? Except I'm not sure the truth is better. "Someone shot at me."

"Oh my god. Where are you?" She mumbles something indecipherable that's not directed at me.

"I'm out at the estate."

“Imogen and Liam are going to drive me there.”

Relief flows through me, so I don't argue. I want her here. Not just because Da wants an introduction, but because I need to reassure myself that she's fine. That we're both fine. “I'll be here.”

“We'll be there soon.” Teagan ends the call.

I lean back and blow out a breath. At least Da will be happy. Me too. I'll just rest my eyes until she arrives.

CHAPTER 27



TEAGAN

IMOGEN'S HAND IS WARM IN MINE. SHE SQUEEZES GENTLY.

“He’s going to be fine.”

I nod, because she’s expecting it, but inside I’m petrified. What if he isn’t fine, though? The last words between us were tense and, while not angry, certainly filled with disappointment. My stomach is in knots recalling this latest phone call. Finn had sounded so tired. Far more fatigued than I’ve heard him be. Even after his other bullet wound. Is this really what his life is like? Getting shot at all the time?

Thankfully Liam keeps his thoughts and opinions to himself, although I sense some irritation. Probably at being inconvenienced with having to take me to Finn. I’m not sure how I’d react if he were to be his usual cranky self. The drive out to the Donnelly estate takes far too long. At least compared to the one and only other time I drove out here with Imogen when she confronted Nora about her parentage.

Finally the driver pulls up to the iron gate leading into the property. He rolls down his window, and after a brief conversation, it opens and he drives forward. I can’t help but

take in the beauty of the trees the lane cuts through. They tower over us providing a canopy of green. The narrow driving path curves slightly one way and then the other until around the next bend, the sprawling manor house appears.

Sunlight glints off all the windows across the front. More greenery weaves its way up the sides of the house, climbing toward the roof and threaded through the spaces between each window. Multiple cars line the circle drive. Finn's SUV brings up the rear. Liam's driver parks behind it and I'm already out of the town car before he can open the back door.

I rap at the door several times. There's only a brief wait and then a crack appears between the double doors that quickly widens. An older version of Finn stands in the bright entryway. They have the same dark hair, although his pedar's is threaded with silver, and vibrant blue eyes. Age lines radiate from around Finn's Da's and across his forehead, but Carrick Donnelly is still an attractive man with broad shoulders and tapered waist. His gaze shifts over my shoulder and then his eyes meet mine again.

"You must be Imogen's friend, and the woman who has my son distracted." Even his voice is similar to Finn's with its whiskey gruffness.

I flush at his statement, but don't deny it. "Teagan Shah, sir."

Imogen and Liam reach us. Finn's Da makes a noise and reaches out to shake my hand. "None of that sir stuff. Call me Carrick."

"Yes, si—Carrick." I place my palm in his.

He releases me and his face lights up. In two steps he's got his arms wrapped around Imogen. "It's always so good to see

you.”

She hugs him back. “Nice to see you too Carrick.”

“Liam.” Her Da’s greeting is far less welcome the time.

“Donnelly.”

The tension between the two of them is thick enough to choke a person. God, how does Imogen deal with the obvious animosity between them? I don’t envy her. Thankfully, Finn’s Da doesn’t let it fester for long before he turns his gaze back to me.

“Please, come in. I’ll get Finn for you.”

He backs inside and I move to follow, but pause and glance over at Imogen. “You don’t have to stay if it’s uncomfortable for you. I’ll be okay.”

She latches onto Liam. “We’ll stay for a few minutes.”

His jaw tightens, but he doesn’t argue. I nod my thanks and follow Carrick inside. The three of us stand in the entryway while Finn’s Da goes down a hallway. He isn’t gone more than a few seconds when an older woman walks in from another room. Her eyes spark and she smiles broadly. This must be Imogen’s biological mother. Despite being an obvious Donnelly, there are still noticeably similar features between the two women.

She rushes over for a hug. “Imogen, dear, I didn’t realize you were coming.”

“Neither did we.” Imogen releases her and half-pivots in my direction. “Nora, this is my best friend, Teagan. Teagan, this is Nora.”

Before I can even say hello, warm arms are wrapped around me and she squeezes me tightly. “It’s so lovely to meet

you. Imogen can't say enough good things about you."

"Thank you, Nora. It's nice to meet you as well."

She loosens her hold on me and gives Liam a soft and surprisingly genuine-appearing smile. "Hello, Liam."

"Nora." His voice is maybe a bit kinder and he nods with slightly less hostility than he gave Carrick.

I guess it's just Imogen's Da and brothers he doesn't like. Footsteps approach from the direction Finn's Da went and then Finn's there. His face is pale and a bandage covers the side of his head that matched the one on his bare arm that's evident since he's shirtless. The second his gaze lands on me, I rush forward and into his waiting arms.

Tears fill my eyes as he whispers indistinguishable words in my ear and strokes my hair. He's not as warm as he usually is, but at least he's standing on his own two feet. I draw back and scan his entire upper body, carefully brushing my fingertips along his hairline where dried blood still clings.

"I was so worried," I whisper.

Finn palms the back of my neck and rests his forehead gently against mine. "It's just a scratch."

That makes me chuckle. "The same kind of scratch that's on your arm that you refuse to admit probably hurts like a bitch?"

"If I say yes, will you kiss it and make it better?" he echoes the same question he asked me the last time.

"If you say yes, it means I won't smack you for putting yourself in danger again."

Finn smiles. "The next time you scold me, will you wear a short, sexy skirt and white shirt with librarian glasses and a

bun, so I can live out my primary school boy fantasy?”

Behind me, Imogen clears her throat. Red-hot heat burns my cheeks and I turn to face her and Liam. I’d completely forgotten them. Finn tugs me closer to his side.

“You’re clearly feeling better,” Imogen quips with a sly smirk.

“I have this beautiful woman in my arms. Of course I feel better.”

She rolls her eyes.

“Now that the reunion is over, we can leave,” Liam states.

Imogen elbows him in the side with a hiss and a glare, but he just stares down at her with an arched brow.

“Actually,” Finn interrupts. “Da invited Teagan to stay for dinner. I’m sure Nora wouldn’t mind if the two of you joined.”

I could reach up and kiss him, because it’s more than obvious how hard that had been for him to say. But at least it’s a small olive branch extended in Liam’s direction. The question is, will he take it? For Imogen’s sake, I really wish there weren’t so many bad feelings between everyone.

Liam doesn’t answer at first, but the silently pleading look from Imogen has him sighing. “Fine. But don’t expect us to hang around after.”

My guess is the warning is more for Imogen’s sake than anyone else’s, since she dips her chin in agreement. It’s a small step, I guess.

“Great. If you two don’t mind, I need to go get cleaned up and dressed.” He glances down at me. “Come with?”

“Of course.”

Imogen laces her fingers with Liam’s. “We’ll go find Carrick and Nora and most likely head out to the back portico. Take your time.”

Finn takes my hand and leads me away from the entryway and down a hallway that opens up into a large living space. “This is the wing where Aidan, Cian, and I live. Although, it’s Aidan and Sorcha’s more than anyone’s now. And Aisling.”

“Aisling?”

“Sorcha’s baby sister. They’ve made Cian’s old room into hers.” He points toward a second hallway that branches off the large room. “Aidan and Sorcha live in Aidan’s room down there. And this is my section of the wing.”

Finn leads me down a third hallway and into a massive bedroom. It’s bigger than my sitting room in my flat. I gape at everything. It’s almost as expensive-looking as the suite back at the casino. Lush blues and earthy greens cover the whole room. It’s like being surrounded by the ocean. The only thing missing is the sand and sun. It’s absolutely beautiful.

“Have a seat if you want.” He points to a large velvet tufted chair in a rich hue of peacock blue.

I drop into and stare as Finn kicks his shoes off to the side and strips out of his pants. His toned ass is the perfect peach shape and makes me want to take a bite out of it. He glances over his shoulder and all I do is set my elbow on the armrest, prop my jaw on my fist, and take in the gorgeous view. I even waggle my eyebrows. He bursts into laughter and then groans.

“Don’t make me laugh.” Yet he still chuckles lightly.

Instantly I’m contrite. “I’m so sorry.”

Finn walks over to me and I keep my gaze above his waist as he stops in front of me. He thumbs my chin, bends, and kisses me softly. “I’ll take any pain if it makes you smile and look at me like that.”

I soften at how weirdly sweet the sentiment is. Having him naked and this close is doing something to me. “You should probably get dressed.”

He straightens and winks at me. “Only because if we make Liam wait too long there might be bloodshed.”

My gaze follows him as he walks to the other side of the room and turns the light on in a connecting door that illuminates the bathroom. The water from the sink runs and then shuts off. Finn steps back out with a wet washcloth and stands in front of a mirror wiping away the dried blood.

I stand and close the distance between us. His gaze meets mine in the reflection and I take the cloth from him and gently take over. As I wipe away all the evidence of violence, I can feel his eyes on me. I dart a quick glance and meet his gaze head on and then go back to my task so I can’t see his expression.

“Liam and Imogen took me some place for me to shoot a gun.”

Finn goes rigid. “Why?”

I swallow and shrug. “At the time, I thought it was a good idea. I was feeling on edge and also tired of letting Ben win. It felt like something that gave me a sense of control.”

There’s a lengthy pause. “And now?”

My eyes meet his again briefly. “I hated it. The gun felt awkward in my hands and they shook the whole time. With my luck I’d end up shooting myself.”

“I wish you would have just told me.”

“Would you have agreed to take me somewhere so I could try?” I raise my eyebrows.

“Probably not.”

I go back to cleaning Finn’s blood. “That’s why I didn’t tell you.”

He cradles my jaw until I lift my head. “How about this? Next time, please talk to me and I promise that I’ll listen if you explain why you feel like you need to do something I might not agree with.”

“All right.” I nod shallowly.

Once I finish wiping away all the remnants, Finn grabs clothes from his closet—surprisingly not a suit—and gets dressed. He reaches for my hand. “Ready to go join everyone for the most tense and uncomfortable family dinner ever?”

I snort. “I can’t wait.”

CHAPTER 28



FINN

DESPITE THE STILL POUNDING HEADACHE, I FEEL REMARKABLY better with Teagan here. We walk out of my room and toward the common space I've shared with my brothers since we built this wing a decade ago. No sooner do we step into it than Aisling comes skipping in from the direction of her room. She see us and comes rushing over.

“Hi, I'm Aisling. Who are you?” She stares up the woman at my side.

Teagan squats down loosening her hold on me and sets her hands on her knees. “Well, hello. I'm Teagan. It's very nice to meet you.”

“Are you Uncle Finn's girlfriend?”

Teagan glances up at me with lips pressed tightly together like she's trying not to laugh. She turns back to Aisling. “Yes, I suppose I am.”

“Cool.” With that, the little girl takes off, heading wherever she'd been intending to go before stopping.

Teagan stands with a short burst of laughter. “She seems like fun.”

I take her hand again and thread my fingers through hers. “You have no idea. It’s been an adjustment for all of us having a six-year old and twin almost-thirteen-year old boys in the house. Da and Nora love it, though. Aidan and I do too, of course, but in a different way.”

“The boys are Aisling’s brothers?” Teagan asks.

I nod. “Kellen and Carson. They’re also Sorcha’s younger brothers. When Aidan married her, the four of them came as a package deal.”

“A ready-made family.”

“They’re great kids. The boys are big gamers so the three of us hang out on occasion when I’m here.” We walk through the family room, but it’s empty. I suspect with the nice weather, everyone is outside.

“I’m not sure why the fact you’re a gamer doesn’t surprise me.” Teagan shoulder bumps me.

“Why? Do I have nerd written all over me?”

She pinches my arm, but it’s hardly anything. “No. It just seems like something you’d enjoy considering how much you said you enjoyed the Exchange. I picture you as extremely strategic and focused, which I imagine are two skill sets you employ with your video games.”

“I suppose that’s better than my girlfriend thinking I’m a giant nerd.”

Teagan smirks. “You caught that, huh?”

I pretend to think about it. “I like it. A lot.”

“Me, too.”

I guide her into the dining room and through the windows a group of people congregated outside are visible. “Guess we found everyone.”

We head out the door and several heads turn in our direction. Da, Nora, Aidan, Sorcha, and Imogen are all seated around the table with glasses of various drinks in front of them. Liam remains standing but he’s directly behind Imogen who’s holding onto his hand just below her shoulder and leaning against him. Kellen, Carson, and Aisling run around the backyard. Or rather, she’s chasing them and they’re running away.

Da stands and walks toward us. “Glad you’re able to join us.”

He sweeps his arms out and I pull out the chair next to Imogen for Teagan. Once she’s seated, I move next to her. Da returns to his place beside Nora. I glance at Aidan. He and Teagan haven’t been officially introduced yet.

“Aidan, Sorcha, this is Teagan.” I place my arm along the back of her chair.

“It’s lovely to meet you,” she tells the both of them.

“You as well.” Sorcha’s smile is welcoming.

From what Aidan has said, she’s felt a bit out of place with the women of the family as its newest member. I’ll be sure to arrange for Teagan and her to get to know each other better.

“I have dinner in the oven and it should be ready in about forty minutes,” Nora says. “I hope you all enjoy beef pasties.”

Aidan groans in obvious delight and leans back slightly to rub his stomach. “You know they’re my favorite.”

She quirks her lips. “I didn’t make them just for you.”

He over-exaggerates a wink. “It’s okay. I won’t tell anyone you love me the most.”

Nora shakes her head and Da snorts. I observe Teagan, curious what her thoughts are about our weirdly dysfunctional family. Liam is the only one not relaxed. Then again, he always looks like he’s got a stick up his arse.

“How’s the fairy forest coming along, Sorcha?” Imogen asks.

My sister-in-law’s face lights up. Her artwork is the thing she loves to talk about the most. Aidan brags on her more than anything, too. Rightfully so. I’ve never met anyone with as much artistic talent as Sorcha has. Aidan’s a close second. Aisling also, considering she’s only six.

“It’s going really well. Aidan is helping me, and, of course Aisling is making her contribution.”

“Fairy forest?” Teagan inquires.

Aidan slings his arm around Sorcha. “My wife is an artistic genius. She’s creating a mural for Aisling’s room that will cover the entire wall and ceiling with trees, fairies, and twinkle lights. It’s pretty magical.”

Sorcha’s cheeks turn bright red and she playful smacks at him. “I’m not a *genius*.”

“I beg to differ,” my brother tells her.

“I’d love to see it when you’ve finished,” Teagan adds. “I don’t have artistic talent, but I can certainly appreciate someone else’s.”

The fact that she thinks she’ll still be around by the time Sorcha completes the work gives me a huge sense of

satisfaction.

“Cian’s going to be disappointed we didn’t invite him to this little impromptu family get together,” Aidan snarks, his gaze on Liam who bristles and glares.

Da sighs heavily and Nora flinches. It’s Imogen that gives him the evil eye, though. “We only stayed because Finn asked nicely. But we’re more than willing to walk out the door if you’re going to intentionally push buttons that don’t need to be pushed.”

An awkward silence fills the space. The animosity between Cian and Liam is a touchy subject. Aidan—who should have known better—shrinks a bit and appears properly chastised.

“I apologize, Imogen.”

She shakes her head. “I’m not the one you owe the apology.”

My brother winces, but he brought it on himself. He clears his throat. “Apologies, Liam.”

Christ, I bet that hurt.

Liam’s glare doesn’t lessen, and his nod is succinct and shallow. Not actually forgiveness, but it’s the best Aidan’s going to get. A high-pitched squeal breaks the tension as Aisling comes barreling up the incline with her brothers hot on her heels.

“Uncle Liam, save me,” she cries out and collides with his legs, shaking her arms above her head and wiggling her fingers frantically.

A flash of terror crosses his face. He shoots a panicked glance at Imogen but hauls Aisling up into his arms since she’s nearly climbing up him already anyway. She curls her legs

around his waist and clutches his shoulders. The boys come to an abrupt halt a couple feet away and stare up at the hardened man holding their sister. The little shit glances down at her brothers from Liam's considerable height and sticks out her tongue.

The stand-off is almost comical.

“Cheater,” Kellen scolds her.

“I'm not a cheater,” she snaps back. “You were being mean, and Uncle Liam is gonna yell at you if you don't stop.”

“Okay, everyone. How about we all get along?” Da says and considering it's all the adults he's glancing at, the sentiment pertains to us more than the kids.

“Come on, let's go,” Kellen grabs Carson's arm and the two of them take off running back down the slight hill and around the small copse of trees to the left of the lawn.

Aisling—still in Liam's grasp—busses his cheek with a kiss. “Thanks, Uncle Liam.”

She wiggles, and he sets her down quickly. He even takes a half-step away from her like she's diseased and contagious. Sorcha tugs her hand and pulls her over to whisper something in her ear. Aisling's shoulders drop, and she climbs into her sister's lap and sits there.

Nora stands. “I better go check on the food.”

“I'll help,” Da says and with a hand on her lower back, he guides her into the house.

“When are Caitlín and Roarke leaving for New York, again?” That should be a neutral enough topic.

“Early next week, I think. He's busy dealing with that *thing* at the moment,” Aidan says pointedly. “They wanted to

get there far enough before the wedding to have time to visit family and take care of any last minute wedding details.”

As our head enforcer, he’s no doubt currently occupied with the traitor from last night. But considering we’re also still at war with the Moroccans, it’s not the ideal time for Roarke to be leaving. Aunt Moira has been working hard on Caitlín’s wedding for months though. It would break both their hearts if they had to cancel.

“How are things coming with the art gallery?” Imogen directs the question to Sorcha.

“Slowly, but I don’t want to rush anything. We’ve got some contractors lined up to get quotes on a few renovations and upgrades we want to make. It’s going to be beautiful when it’s all said and done.”

“You’re opening an art gallery?” Teagan asks.

Sorcha nods and glances at Aidan with a soft smile. “One of these days. It’s been a dream of mine since uni, so Aidan bought this cute little building just on the edge of the city center in the perfect spot. It’s tucked in between a bookstore and the second-best bakery in Dublin, after Mannings.”

“I’ve trained you well,” Imogen grins.

“Please let me know when you open the doors. I have a few former colleagues who are huge art collectors. I’ll happily send them your way,” Teagan offers.

“Oh goodness, thank you so much,” Sorcha exclaims. “It may be a while, but I’ll ring you when it’s complete.”

The dining room door opens and Nora sticks her head out. “All right everyone, supper is ready.”

Aisling jumps off Sorcha's lap and races inside while we all get to our feet.

"I'll go find the boys," Aidan tells her and kisses his wife on the cheek.

Everyone heads into the house with Imogen and Liam trailing behind. I clasp Teagan's hand and lean in close. "Are we at all like you expected?"

She laughs. "Not even remotely like it. I'm not sure what I expected, but it definitely wasn't this. I love how close you all are. Or at least seem to be. The kids are adorable, by the way."

"They're a handful. I don't envy Sorcha and Aidan at all."

"Do you not want children, then?"

I glance over at her, trying to gauge her tone, but like her expression, it's bland. I can't get a read on where she stands on children. "I don't *not* want them."

She nudges me with her elbow, but she smiles. "That's not really an answer."

We walk through the dining room, but before we get any closer to the kitchen, I tug Teagan to the side and let Imogen and Liam pass so it's just the two of us.

"I guess it's one of those things where if it happens, I'll be happy, but if it doesn't happen, I'll also be okay with that. Finding the perfect woman for me is really what I've always wanted. Anything beyond that is a bonus." I pause. "What about you?"

She twists her lips side-to-side. "I'm not sure. I love the idea of having a big family since I'm an only child. But I also

love the independence and freedom that comes with not having the kind of responsibility required to be a parent.”

“There is something to be said about freedom.”

The door swings open and Aidan walks through. He pauses for a second when his gaze lands on us, but then he keeps coming. Kellen and Carson trail him.

“Didn’t mean to interrupt,” my brother says.

“You didn’t. We were just about to head in.” I place my hand on Teagan’s lower back.

The five of us make our way to the kitchen where everyone is getting their food. We get in the back of the line, and the only thing I can do while we stand here is picture a sweet little girl with her mom’s chocolate brown eyes and dark hair.

CHAPTER 29



TEAGAN

FINN'S DA AND NORA WALK US TO THE DOOR. THE SUN'S gone down and the moon is cresting the sky. It shines an eerie white light down between the branches, which sway in the light breeze, sending shadows scurrying across the front lawn. Imogen and Liam left a while ago and Aidan and Sorcha sent the boys upstairs to their room and then disappeared into their wing of the house with Aisling.

"Thank you for a lovely dinner, Nora." Once I'd gotten over being nervous around Finn's family, I'd had an incredible time. I'm envious of Imogen having all these people caring about her.

She hugs me tight. "You're welcome. It was wonderful getting to know one of Imogen's dearest friends. Please come back anytime."

"I will." I turn to Finn's Da, who is far more down to earth than I imagined the head of the Irish mafia to be. "It was a pleasure meeting you both."

"The pleasure was all ours." With a smile, Carrick puts his arm around Nora and brings her close to his side. His gaze

shoots to Finn and his expression shifts to one more serious. “I need you to come to my office tomorrow.”

Finn nods. “Yes, sir.”

He places his hand on my lower back and guides me out to his SUV. He opens the door and helps me in. Then he gets behind the wheel and slowly heads down the drive and onto the lane leading out of the estate. I glance over at him.

“I hope I didn’t do anything to offend your Da.”

Finn’s gaze darts to me and a wrinkle appears between his eyes. “Why would you think that? Because of him wanting to see me tomorrow? I can promise it had nothing to do with the two of us.”

“You’re sure?” I’m annoyed that I sound so needy, but I really want his parents to like me.

“Absolutely.”

The complete certainty in his tone makes me feel better.

“So aside from that single worry, you made it through an entire evening with most of my family intact,” he jokes with a cheeky grin.

I laugh. “It was touch and go at first. I’m not surprised that Imogen and Liam don’t spend time together out here. The whole night, there was an underlying bit of tension.” I hate that for her.

Finn sighs. “She and Nessa have it the worst. They’re both caught between family and the person they love. I admit to not being very good at forgetting about the past and trying to cultivate a less hostile relationship with Liam. At least for Imogen’s sake. It’s not fair that she and Nessa are stuck in the middle.”

No, it isn't. She's told me more than once how guilty she feels if she spends time her family without Liam. They weren't terrible to him today—at least not after that first snarky comment by Finn's brother—but they certainly weren't welcoming. Other than Nora anyway. Of course, considering how closed off he is and the fact he tried to take down their entire organization not that long ago, he isn't making it easy on them.

"I've also been less friendly than I could be. Holding grudges is not one of my better qualities. If Imogen can forgive him for kidnapping her, then I should be able to as well." She's always been a more forgiving person than I am. "And inviting them to stay for dinner was nice of you."

"I suppose if someone is going to reluctantly extend an olive branch, it's going to have to be me." Finn huffs. "Cian definitely won't do it. Not unless Nessa forces the issue. And Aidan's too focused on his new family to put any effort into it."

I reach across and lay my hand over his. "It's not easy being the bigger person, but somebody has to be. It's hard on Imogen, so for you to make the effort tonight...it goes a long way. I'm sure she appreciated it."

Finn turns his palm up and laces his fingers through mine. "You're a good friend to her. I'm glad Imogen has you in her life."

"I'm the lucky one. She bulldozed her way into my life and hasn't let me go. I've always had a hard time keeping friends." I shrug a little self-deprecatingly. "I have hundreds of acquaintances. People I know through various work organizations. But true friends are few and far between."

Imogen is the only one who's stuck around through all the good and bad."

He brings our connected hands up to his mouth and brushes a kiss over my knuckles. "I don't have any plans on going anywhere any time soon."

My heart does a little flip-flop. I was doomed from the moment I met Finn. He's everything I always hoped for in a partner. The thought is absolutely terrifying. But I'm done with letting fear rule me. Wherever this thing between us goes, I'll let it happen.

"Me either."

We turn down the street for the casino and park in a family spot. Before I can step out of the vehicle, Finn is already there with an outstretched hand. I take it in mine and let him help me out. Neither of us attempt to release the other. Tonight is going to be the last night I stay here, though. I'll ask about hiring a bodyguard or something, but as beautiful as the suite is, it doesn't feel like home. I prepare myself for a debate.

The guard manning the front door opens it for us and we step inside. It's filled with people. Finn and I make it to the lift and up to the top floor.

"Would you like to come in for a drink, or do you have work to get done?" Other than the bookkeeping, I'm not sure what else his job entails.

"Let me check on a couple things, and then I'll be over. Give me about thirty minutes." We pause outside the suite door and he kisses me, then heads for his office.

I let myself in and drop my purse on the side table. After the day I've had, a drink is calling me. At the bar, I pour myself a gin and tonic and collapse onto the couch with a huge

sigh. I toe off my shoes and curl my feet beneath me while I sip my drink.

The silence should be a blessing. Between how loud firing a gun was and so many voices talking at the same time for the last few hours, I should appreciate the silence. It never bothered me before. I often enjoyed the quiet. The stillness. Not so much anymore. Now it's stifling. Claustrophobic. Suffocating. Maybe because it was always so quiet before Ben erupted. Before the shit storm hit.

"Grrrr." I slam my hand down on the cushion. "Fuck him."

The fear I've been holding onto for months is slowing bleeding out of me. In its place is a slow burning rage that's soon going to become a wildfire of pure hate. It's nearly reached its fever pitch. I can feel it sizzling through my veins gaining strength.

I toss back the rest of the drink and glance at the clock. Maybe a quick shower will help release some of the tension. I should have time before Finn gets back. I make my way to the bathroom, stripping my clothes off on the way, and chucking them on the floor to pick up later. Imogen always got on me about my messy habits when we roomed together. It ended up become a running joke with us.

Once I've got my hair tied up in a messy bun, I step under the steaming hot spray and close my eyes. I stand there, letting the water wash over me and lightly massage my neck and back. I'm thankful for the strong water pressure, because it's not like this at my flat. After I'm reasonably less tense than I'd been when I got in here, I shut off the water, wrap a towel around me, and head back into the bedroom to get dressed.

Twenty minutes after Finn left, I'm on the sofa with another drink in hand. I've got music playing from my phone and I'm far more relaxed than I was not so long ago. There's a beep from the door and the lock disengages. In walks Finn. I drink in the sight of him. He's taken off his suit jacket and tie and the top three buttons of his shirt are undone giving me only a tease of his muscled chest.

"I hope you don't mind that I let myself in." He crosses the room, stands over me so I have to bend my neck, and kisses me.

"Of course not. You're welcome to come and go anytime you want."

Finn circles around and sits next to me. He reaches for my hand and tugs me onto his lap. "You were too far away."

I laugh and lay my arm around his shoulders. "Is that what it was?"

He winks. "You taste like gin."

"And you taste like sin."

"I do, huh? And what exactly does sin taste like?" Finn nuzzles the side of my neck.

"Like hot toffee pudding."

He lifts his head and chuckles. "I taste like hot toffee pudding?"

"No," I draw out the word. "You taste like sin and *sin* tastes like hot toffee pudding. Two different things."

Finn snorts. "That makes no sense. How much have you had to drink while I was gone?"

“Just this one.” I raise my glass up in front of his face.
“And another one.”

“Uh huh.”

“I take it you got all your work done?”

He covers my hand with his and brings my glass up to his lips. They touch the same spot where the faint imprint of my lipgloss shows, and our eyes meet while he drinks from the same place I did. Why is that so damn hot?

“I did,” Finn finally answers.

“What exactly is it you *do* anyway? I mean besides the accounting? What does owning and running a casino actually involve?” I’ve been curious about it from the first night I stayed here and we had dinner together.

His stare intensifies. “Do you know that you might be the first person who’s actually asked me that. After Caitlín broached the idea with Da, he basically handed everything over to me and let me run it how I wanted. Aside from a few questions, he’s never been a part of the business. Same with Cian and Aidan.”

“It sounds like he really trusts you. I’ll guess the casino brings in *a lot* of money for your organization.”

Finn blinks and recoils slightly. “I’ve never actually thought of it like that. I always got the impression that he gave me the position of overseeing it because it kept me occupied while he and Cian did all the hard stuff.”

He sits there, almost stunned. As though he’s seeing things for the first time. I soothe my hand over his chest. “So, are you going to show me what it takes to be in charge of such an important part of your family’s organization?”

Both dimples appear. “It’s not that exciting, but I’m happy to do so.”

Finn taps my thigh and I hop off his lap so he can stand. Together we leave the suite and head across the hall to his office. He opens the door and sweeps his hand forward. “After you.”

CHAPTER 30



FINN

I'M PRETTY SURE I'M DONE FOR.

No one has seen me like Teagan has. Or made me see myself the way she does. All this time, and I never even would have thought that Da actually trusted me. But this casino is a huge bulk of our income. Between membership fees, the constant flow of alcohol, and the money lost in high-stakes games, *Anamacha Caillte* makes up nearly fifty percent of our entire wealth. And it's only been in business for six years. All under my reign.

Teagan's blackberry scent sweeps over me as she step into my office. She glances around and I study her. What does she see? For once, I'm proud of all I've done with this place. I move behind my desk and fire up the computer.

"This is pretty much where I control everything." I key in my password and open a few windows.

She circles around to stand next to me, her gaze intent on the screen.

“We have a high-tech security system that Imogen worked with us on. I can keep an eye on the entire casino floor from here. We have a central security station on the floor below us along with a team who monitors things. But I like to be aware of what goes on as well.” I point to one of the feeds displayed. “See that guy there? He gets VIP treatment. I make sure that he never has to ask for anything. We anticipate his need, because he is one of our highest ‘sponsors’ if you will. Whenever he’s here I always make sure I go and personally speak with him. Schmooze a little. Stroke his ego.”

“You’re an ambassador.” Teagan chuckles.

“I suppose I am.” I point at another feed. “These two are brothers. Habitual gamblers and habitual bad losers. More than once I’ve had security escort them out. They’ve always gone more or less without incident so I let them come back. As soon as Liam opens his casino, I’m going to figure out how to entice them to join, so they can be his problem instead of mine.”

Teagan nudges me with her elbow. “Sneaky. I like it.”

“I thought you might.” My gaze drifts back to the computer. I lean in, stare, and jerk upright. “Fuck.”

I slam my hand under my desk sounding the silent alarm, run over to the bookcase, press a hidden button, and it springs open.

“What’s going on?” Teagan asks.

From inside, I grab a rifle as well as several magazines and shove them in my pockets. I spin and rush over to her. I palm the back of her neck and press my forehead to hers. “Lock the door. Don’t let anyone in but me. No one, Teagan. There’s a gun in the top drawer. Use it if you have to.”

I kiss her quickly and race out to the staircase, praying she does what I say. My feet pound with each step and the sound echoes through the cavernous space. My harsh breathing joins it. I reach the bottom of the stairs and shove the door open. It's fucking chaos. Gunfire spits. People yell. Smoke is everywhere. I shade my eyes and cough as I make my way toward the casino floor.

An armed man appears in front of me and I fire my weapon. He collapses to the ground. Another appears as the smoke slowly dissipates. I fire a few more rounds and he joins the first man.

"Finn, down," a harsh voice commands.

I drop as a gun goes off and I snap my head sideways to find a third man lying close by. Blood slowly pools around his head. I whip around and stand. Declan jogs over, a weapon in his hand.

"You okay? What the fuck is going on?" he barks.

"It's the goddamn Moroccans."

Yelps of pain fill the air along with the continuous *rat-tat-tat-tat* of weapons firing. Not having time for conversation or to wonder why Declan is here, we scurry forward. My head swivels side-to-side as I scan the place. Bodies lie scattered around. Some unmoving, while others moan in pain. A bullet flies by my head, narrowly missing me, and splinters the wall behind. I fire back and then Declan and I flip one of the tables to give me some type of protection. We duck behind it and when more bullets hit it and splinter the wood, I flinch.

"You are all alone, Mr. Donnelly," a harshly accented voice calls from the other side of the casino floor. "And when your men come, we will take each of you out one by one."

There are more of us than there are of you. I will take great pleasure in killing you. All of you will pay in blood for our brothers you took.”

“Good luck with that.” I shouldn’t antagonize them, but fuck if I’m dying tonight. Teagan needs me. It’s killing me that she’s upstairs without protection. I swore I’d keep her safe.

Declan glances over at me and nods. He springs up and opens fire while I lean around the side of the table and do the same. Until the smoke clears more, we’re shooting blindly at only voices. My gaze darts to the hallway and there’s a flash of a weapon before Lee steps into view. Behind him is the fully armed security team.

I jerk my chin and he repeats the gesture. He and his men spill out from their spot like a swarm of ants scattering around the outer walls firing back at the shadows that are slowly becoming visible through the wisps of smoke. Rounds of gunfire come from the enemies. There’s no way to tell if anyone is hit. Lee and one of his men station themselves behind the table next to ours.

“More back up should be coming.” We had a silent alarm installed a few years ago that sends a signal out to our soldiers as well as a flashing indicator of where the signal is coming from.

“Did you see how many men they had?” Declan asks.

“No.” I shake my head. “The smoke’s too thick. You?”

“A few. I’d been in the middle of a game when they rushed the casino floor and started shooting. It was madness. People stampeding toward the exit, knocking others over. I made my way toward the lift to try and find you.”

“I saw it on the security feeds. Christ.” I slam my elbow into the bottom of the table. “Teagan’s upstairs.”

Declan’s eyes widen. “What?”

“She’s been staying in the suite.” I open my mouth to say more, but the ceiling sprinklers open up and rain sprays down everywhere. “What the fuck?”

I glance around the side of the table again as the water clears out the smoke completely. More bodies lie scattered around. I swipe my hair out of my eyes and water spills off my nose. Everything is soaked. My phone dings. I grab it quickly. It’s a text from Da. I stab out a reply and then shove it back in my pocket.

Tired of this standoff, I glance over at Lee and gesture with two fingers. He acknowledges and whispers to the man at his side who relays the message through his mouthpiece. I turn to Declan while I remove my magazine and replace it with a full one.

“We’re moving forward at the count of three. We need to push the Moroccans toward the entrance and box them in. Our men should be arriving shortly.”

He swings his head and bangs it on the table behind. “If I get shot again, I’m going to be pissed.”

“Hey, at least this time I won’t be the one shooting you.”

Declan huffs. “Alright, let’s do this.”

I lift my arm to shoulder height and raise a finger. Then the second one. With only a brief pause, the third goes up. All of us jump to our feet and open fire. I don’t focus on what anyone else is doing. My eyes stay trained ahead and ready to lock onto any moving target. Someone hollers out in Farsi and

then they return fire. I dodge behind a table, wait for a second, and then I'm on the move again.

Figures retreat and then fall. In my periphery, there's movement on both sides. I quickly glance in each direction. All of our men are tightening formation and flanking the enemies, pushing them back. My ears are ringing. I squeeze the trigger again, but I'm empty.

I remove the magazine, grab another from my pocket, and ram it in place.

“Put down your weapons!”

Fuck, is that Gardaí?

Bright lights blind me and I'm knocked to the ground. My gun slides across the floor. Rough hands jerk my arms behind my back and restrain them. I turn my head to the side. Declan is also being restrained by two Gardaí. They yank me to my feet.

Half my men are held at gunpoint by the authorities, while the other half's arms—along with the few remaining Moroccans—are tied behind their back. Da pushes through the melee, Cian and Aidan right behind him.

“Find Teagan.” She's the only thing I care about. “She's in my office. Make sure she's okay.”

Da gestures for my brothers to head toward the lift. “We'll take care of her. I'll put a call into our solicitor.”

I nod and then I'm dragged outside and placed in the back of a car. Even as it drives away, I don't take my eyes off the casino, willing Teagan to appear so I know she's all right.

CHAPTER 31



TEAGAN

THE SECOND FINN RUSHES OUT OF THE ROOM, I RUN OVER AND lock the door. I collapse against it with a rough sigh and hurry back to the desk. What had he seen on the security feed that I hadn't?

Oh god.

I slap my hands over my mouth to hold back the scream. Armed men are shooting. People scatter like cockroaches under a bright light.

All I can do is stare in silence. More men collapse. There's no sign of Finn anywhere. Didn't he say there was a way to see more than one angle? To be able to see the entire casino floor? I grab the chair and then my fingers fly across the keyboard. Imogen was always the best at this kind of thing, and my hacker muscles haven't been flexed in over five years. I've been on the other end trying to keep hackers out.

Finally, I get four quadrants to pop up and give me a better look at what's going on. Holy shit. There's Declan. What do I do? What do I do? Praying Finn doesn't hate me, I switch windows away from the feed and key in more code. God, I

wish I had a second computer, but mine's in the suite and I'm not leaving this office. It takes a few minutes—or maybe it's hours, but finally, I'm in the Gardaí's system. I send a widespread message across their email servers that there's an armed attack on the casino. The second I hit return, I go back to the security footage.

Where's Finn? I scan all the quadrants until I spot him and Declan behind a table lying on its side. They're firing through the smoke that still fills the air. It's got to be hard for them to see. What if they hit one of their own men?

I have to do something to help besides just sit here and wait while Finn could be killed.

I locate the schematics of the the building and my finger runs across the screen searching for...anything. Maybe I can create some sort of distraction or disruption. Suddenly, there's someone pounding at the door and I yelp.

"I know you're in there, Teagan," a raised, but muffled, voice comes from the other side.

My stomach lurches and nausea churns.

"Open this door before I break it down and maybe I'll go easy on you."

How did Ben find me here? Only able to focus on one thing at a time, I ignore his threats and the creepy knocking he's doing and go back to what I'd been trying to do. Find something to help Finn. My hands shake over the keys and sweat slicks my palms. I open and close my fists with several deep breaths to ease the cramping.

Finally, I find it. How much good it will do, I have no idea, but at least I tried.

“Open the door now, Teagan.” Ben’s voice is no longer muffled, but instead loud and raging. He pounds even harder.

Pay attention to what you’re doing. Don’t look at the door. Concentrate. I get into the casino’s sprinkler system and hit it. I glance at the security feeds and in less than a second, the sprinklers open and spray everywhere. Relief hits.

There’s a massive thud at the door. And another. Like Ben’s throwing himself against it or kicking it. I jump up from the chair and my entire body trembles. There’s a sharp crack, and the wood splinters. Another crash and it flies open and bangs against the wall.

My breathing gets rapid and I’m on the verge of hyperventilating. He strolls in like he doesn’t have a care in the world.

“You’ve made me very unhappy, Teagan.”

I’m more scared of the casual tone than the words themselves. Casual always equalled pain. Suffering. Terror.

“What are you doing here? How did you find me?” My voice trembles and I curse the fact Ben can probably hear the fear in it.

His grin is pure evil. The dimples I loved at first only remind me of the pits of hell and the face of a demon. “Funny thing. Did you know I have distant relatives that live here? I’m sure I told you that when we first got together. It was one of the things you and I had in common, remember? Having family emigrate to Dublin. While you spent summers with your mother in Iran, I spent a few of them here. Until my parents refused to allow me to come anymore. Something about staying away from that side of the family.”

I shake my head. Maybe he told me that once, but it was so long ago I can't remember. He comes a little closer,. As though he's confident he has me right where he wants me. And he does. He's a predator toying with its prey. The one thing standing between me and the door. If I want to escape, I have to make it past him first.

A memory sparks. Can I actually do it, though?

"I had no idea what they were talking about until I got older," he continues. "It would seem that my father broke off all contact with an uncle on his mother's side. Said they were dangerous, and he wanted nothing to do with them. Me, on the other hand, I found it fascinating. I love the thought of being feared by people. It turns me on."

Decision made, I yank open the top drawer of Finn's desk, grab the gun, and point it at him. "Don't come any closer."

My hand shakes and the weapon wobbles in my grip. I grab it with my other hand to steady it. Still, my arms bob with the weight. Ben pauses his advance. His grin only grown my terrifying.

"Well, would you look at that." He cocks his head. "Do you really think you can shoot me?"

I step back, farther away from his encroachment. "I will if I have to."

He just laughs. "Your little boyfriend down there is dead. Or soon will be. My great-uncle's men will make sure of it."

What?

"I see you haven't quite figured it out yet, have you?" Ben takes another step closer.

“I said stop.” I back up a pace and scurry to the left as he rounds the desk. It puts me nearer to the door.

“When you ran off, I knew the one place you’d come was back here.” Step. “So I rang up my great-uncle for a favor. He has connections, you see. It didn’t take them long to find you. Especially considering the company you’re keeping. Tsk, tsk, Teagan. Fraternizing with criminals. Don’t worry. My great-uncle’s men down there will take care of the bastard you’re fucking for me.”

None of this makes sense. “Your family is Moroccan?”

Ben takes two quick steps forward like a dance and I jump backwards. He laughs. God, my arms ache, but I can’t lower my guard.

“They’re half-family, technically.”

I glance over my shoulder, gauging the distance between me and the door. It’s a mistake, because he leaps the narrowed distance between us and grabs my hands. He jerks my arms up and away and the gun goes off. Plaster from the ceiling rains down, but I refuse to let go.

“I’m going to kill you, you little bitch.” Spittle hits my face.

We wrestle for control. It has to be adrenaline giving me strength, because I manage to keep hold. Ben throws me to the ground. I cry out in pain when I hit, and I barely have time to catch my breath before he’s rolling me onto my back and straddling me. The punch comes before I can block it. Pain radiates through my face, and blood fills my mouth.

Not again. White-hot rage blinds me and I slam the gun I’ve still managed to keep hold of against the side of Ben’s head. He tumbles off me and I try to scramble to my feet. He

recovers quickly and slams me back to the ground, trapping the gun between us. I kick and scream trying to get away. The weapon goes off and my whole body jerks. We both freeze as I wait for the pain.

But it doesn't come. I stare up at Ben. His eyes are wide and his mouth opens and closes, but he doesn't actually speak. A warm wetness spreads across my skin. Frantic, I push him off me with every ounce of strength I have. He falls to the side and onto his back. A dark red stain mars the front of his shirt. His hands cover where it spreads.

Vomit rises in my throat. I fling the gun off to the side, unable to stand touching it any longer, and scramble backwards away from him. Pounding footsteps approach, but I can't take my eyes off Ben and the pool of blood forming beneath him. Someone says my name, but I don't move. Then he's no longer in front of me. Instead, I stare into the face of Aidan.

"It's okay. You're okay." He reaches out carefully and places his hand on my shoulder.

Pain clutches at my chest. I'm having a hard time breathing. My face throbs and the taste of blood is still strong in my mouth and down my throat.

"Teagan. Look at me."

My panicked gaze meets Aidan's and he takes a slow, deep breath in.

"Breathe with me. In and out. Easy." His chest rises and falls and mine follows suit. "Good. Again. In and out."

Finally, I get it under control and return to my normal breathing. I grab his arms. "Finn."

"He's fine. I swear." Aidan wraps his arms around me.

“Da and I are going to take you to the estate, all right?” he asks. “Cian will take care of...things here.”

All I can do is nod. He helps me to my feet and keeps between me and the body on the floor. Finn’s Da meets us just outside the door. Aidan transfers me into Carrick’s hands and with eyes blinded by tears, he escorts me down the back stairs and into the waiting vehicle behind the casino. He sits with me in the backseat while I tremble. Time passes slowly, but at last, Aidan gets behind the wheel and we leave madness and death behind.

CHAPTER 32



FINN

THIS ISN'T THE FIRST TIME I'VE BEEN ARRESTED. DA HAS enough men in his pockets that I'm not too concerned. My biggest worry is Teagan. I'd been allowed to make a call and Cian assured me Aidan and Da were taking care of her and were driving her out to the estate to stay.

“Get out there as soon as you're released. She's going to need you after what happened up in your office.”

That's all he would tell me so I've been sitting in this cell for hours waiting to be released and trying not to freak out over why she would need me. What the fuck happened up there?

“Donnelly.” One of the Gardaí approaches the cell with a set of keys and unlocks it. The same one who tried to start shit with me.

I walk through it, wink as I pass him, and head for the desk to pick up my things. Aidan's waiting for me outside. It's not even dusk yet. The moon isn't visible, but it gives off a faint light from behind the clouds. A cool breeze skates across the back of my neck and through the thin layer of my shirt. As

soon as we're in the car and on the road, I fire off my questions.

“What the fuck happened with Teagan? Is she okay? Cian sounded worried.”

He glances over at me before turning his attention back to the road. “Physically, she's fine. Imogen, Sorcha, and Nessa are with her at the moment. Mentally? I'm not sure. She kind of just keeps getting this blank stare.”

“If you don't tell me exactly what happened, I swear to god as soon as we get out of this car, I'll beat the shit out of you.” My fists clench as I try to rein in my anger.

“The door to your office had been kicked in and there was a dead, or nearly dead, guy on the floor when we got there. You'll have to ask Cian, since he's the one who handled it. I was busy keeping Teagan from having a panic attack. Considering your gun was near her, I'm going to assume she's the one who shot him.”

“Who was it?” I snap.

Aidan raises and lowers his shoulder. “No idea. Dark brown hair. Clean shaven. Posh clothes. I'd guess maybe somewhere in his early thirties.”

Christ. “That sounds like her abusive ex. How the fuck did he happen to show up at the same time the Moroccans did? And at the casino?”

“I don't know. You're going to have to get any more information from her. We did find our missing thievery accomplice though.”

“Where?”

“On the footpath outside the casino. Shot in the back of the head. Along with Ennis.” Aidan glances over.

“Fuck,” I bite out. “So he’s how the Moroccans made it through the front doors?”

He nods. “Most likely. I’m going to have Lee check the security footage from the outside cameras. Maybe Imogen, too. They had to have blocked the signal somehow. Or disrupted it in some way, because the security team said they never saw anything on their feed.”

I slam back into the seat and punch the dashboard. Whatever happened, Teagan needed me and I wasn’t there. It takes far too long, but finally we pass through the gated entrance and stop in front of the manor. Aidan hasn’t even put the car in park when I’m jumping out and running inside. Our wing is the first place I go.

Teagan sits on the sofa with Imogen on one side of her and Nessa on the other. They’re both holding her hand and she’s resting her head on Imogen’s shoulder with her eyes closed, and one side of her face battered, bruised, and swollen. The rest of it is a pale stark contrast. Sorcha sits on the floor at her feet, as though they’re cocooning her within their small safety net.

Imogen turns in my direction first. Relief flashes across her face and she murmurs something to Teagan who jerks her head up and opens her eyes. Tears fill them and she harshly whimpers my name. We both move at the same time and then she’s in my arms. I hold her tight and let her cry. She clutches my shirt, and it’s soon soaked with her tears. Imogen helps Sorcha off the floor. My sister and Nessa leave the room with a sad smile and Sorcha heads down the hallway that leads to her and Aidan’s bedroom.

I do nothing but stand there, whispering words of comfort until finally Teagan's cries slow. She draws back first and swipes the wetness away from her eyes and face. I palm her cheeks—being careful of her injury—and bend down until we're face to face. A stray droplet hangs on her lower lashes and I wipe it away with my thumb.

"I'm sorry I wasn't there." I'm not sure I'll ever forgive myself.

She sobs a little, but shakes her head. "You needed to be downstairs to stop those men."

I lay my forehead against hers. "I should have protected you."

Teagan cradles my head. "You did what you had to do."

I breathe her in for another minute and then tuck her under my arm. I may never let her go. "Come on."

Together, we walk to my room. I help her undress—someone else got her into pajamas at some point—and lay her down on the bed. A few strands of hair have escaped the long plait and I brush them off her forehead.

"Will you be okay for five minutes while I wash?"

Teagan nods. Not wanting to waste any time, I hurry into the bathroom—stripping my shirt off on the way—and wet a cloth. Once I'm as clean as I'm going to get without a shower, I yank off my pants and then climb in beside her. She scoots close and rests her head on my chest.

"Do you want to talk about what happened?" I ask quietly. Gently.

Teagan stiffens a little and shakes her head. "Not yet. Please."

“Okay.” My arms tighten around her and I rest my chin on her crown. “I’m here whenever you’re ready.”

She snuggles closer until finally the tension leaves her body and soft snores ghost hot air across my flesh. I close my eyes intent on getting some sleep, if I can. I must have fallen asleep, because jerky movements wake me. A bit groggy, I slowly open my eyes, and Teagan bolts upright, gasping for air. Sunlight spills across the bed.

I jackknife up and cradle the back of her head. There’s pure fear in her expression. “It’s okay, Poppet. It’s just a nightmare. You’re safe. Breathe.”

She tucks her chin and slowly breathes in and out until it returns to normal. One long exhale later and she lies back down and rolls to her side to face me. I do the same and patiently wait for whatever she does next. Whether it’s to talk or attempt to go back to sleep. Teagan brushes her fingers up and down the middle of my chest. Her gaze follows each movement.

“I shot him,” her voice cracks. “Killed him. I didn’t mean to.”

“Of course you didn’t.” I lay my hand over hers and press her palm hard against my chest. “You were defending yourself against someone who hurt you.”

Teagan swallows hard and sniffs. In the shadows, her bruise is even more discolored. I smother the rage that he was able to even touch her.

“He was going to kill me. I had to protect myself.” She’s almost pleading for me to believe her.

“Look at me, poppet,” I firm my tone.

She lifts her eyes to meet mine.

“You don’t have to justify yourself to me or anyone else. No one is judging you. Least of all me.” I sweep Teagan’s hair over her shoulder and run my hand down her arm. “Certainly no one in the family. Besides, he was a dead man either way. It was just a matter of when.”

“You were going to kill him regardless, weren’t you? After you found him, I mean?” Her voice drops to a whisper.

“Yes.” I don’t even hesitate.

Teagan nods shallowly and drops her gaze back to my chest. “I thought as much.”

I let the silence settle a moment longer. “Do you know how he found out where you were?”

She laughs bitterly. “Apparently, he’s some distant relative to those men. Or one of the men anyway. Used to come to Dublin to visit when he was just a kid. He said he knew I’d run back here, so he called them and asked for help locating me.”

Christ. No wonder he found her far too easily. Considering they almost took me out the other day, it’s obvious the Moroccans have been following us. Monitoring our movements. They had to have seen Teagan and I arriving. Or maybe her leaving with Imogen and Liam. By bringing her here, I put her in danger. I’m such an idiot.

“You probably would have been safer at your flat. I’m so sorry, poppet.”

She jerks her gaze up to mine. “No, it’s not your fault. If Ben had these connections, he would have found me anyway. All he had to do was follow Imogen. She’d already been to my place once. If I’d stayed there, she would have come to visit another time. They just as easily could have tracked her there.”

I gently run my finger along the bruises marring her skin. “I’d never been so scared in my life when Aidan told me what happened. I thought I’d lost you.”

“And I thought I’d lost you, too. All I could think about was how could I help you.”

A smile curls my lips. “Were you the one who contacted the Gardaí? While I was being held, they told me someone sent them an anonymous email.”

Teagan sucks in her bottom lip. “Yes. I hacked into their system and sent it through there. I didn’t know what else to do.”

Another thought occurs to me. “Were you responsible for the sprinklers as well?”

Her cheeks turn pink. “It was such a dumb idea, but it was the only thing I could think to do to cause a distraction. Plus, I thought it would help alleviate the smoke.”

I tip up her chin and kiss her. “It was bloody fucking brilliant is what that was. If you hadn’t cleared the smoke out, we wouldn’t have been able to see well enough to fight like we did. You, little poppet, are a genius.”

Teagan’s face turns an even brighter hue. “Honestly, it was nothing but pure damn luck. I’d forgotten half of the things Imogen had taught me when we were in uni about hacking. I had no idea what I was doing.”

“I promise I won’t tell anyone.” I grin. “We’ll just let everyone think you saved the day with your amazing skills. Because you did.”

Finally, a small smile graces her lips. “Maybe there is something to be said about bending the law a little. If I hadn’t

been so terrified, I might have gotten a small rush from being able to tap into the Gardaí's system."

I laugh and kiss her again. "I think you'll fit right in with our family."

She slowly turns serious. Intent. "Yeah. Maybe I will."

EPILOGUE



TEAGAN

CHILDREN FROM THE AGE OF FOUR TO THIRTEEN RUN PAST US screaming and laughing. They chase each other down the hill behind the manor and disappear into the trees. Autumn has arrived, and today's the first day we've had in two weeks where it hasn't rained. I sit back in the chair and tug my sweater a little tighter around me while my gaze wanders and takes in all of Finn's family. Everyone is here. It's been three months since that night at the casino. Three months of occasional nightmares and a lot of damn therapy. More than anything, though, it's been filled with family. Laughter. Love.

Nessa and Cian are a short distance from where I sit talking to his cousin Nathan and his wife Lucia. She's carrying an adorable redheaded toddler on her hip and admiring Nessa's engagement ring. Imogen and Liam were on their way over when they stopped for a second to say hi to Aidan and Sorcha as well as Caitlín and Roarke who just got back from an extended honeymoon.

"I brought you dessert." Finn bends and gives me a kiss.

"Mmmm. *Now* you taste like sticky toffee pudding."

He sits next to me with two small bowls and places one of them in front of me. “You were right, too. It does taste like sin.”

“Told you.” I dip my spoon in the gooey cake and toffee sauce and take a huge bite. My eyes meet Finn’s heated ones as I slowly draw the utensil out of from between my lips. His gaze drops and I lick the corners of my mouth to make sure I didn’t leave any behind.

“I think you and I are going to have to use that mouth of yours in another way later.” The pitch of his voice drops an octave.

“Gross.” Imogen collapses in the chair on the other side of me with a cheeky grin. “I thought I told you I didn’t want to hear about any of your sex-capades with each other.”

My whole face bursts into flames. Especially as Liam takes a seat next to her. Oh god, how much did he hear? Judging by the tiny curl of his lips, I’d guess more than enough. It’s incredible what a difference the last few months have made in him.

“So I shouldn’t tell you about the time with this swing—”

I screech and slam my hand over his mouth. Imogen cackles like a mad woman. Even Liam cracks an actual smile. Behind my hand, Finn laughs as well and then licks my palm.

“Ewww.” I jerk my arm away and grab the napkin, but I’m chuckling. “If you’re not careful, mister, there won’t be any more sex-capades for you to gloat over.”

“Oh, shit,” Imogen says. “You better watch yourself, Finn. This woman can hold a grudge like no one’s business. If you’re not careful, she may never have sex with you again.”

He jerks his head in my direction and widens his eyes. I stare him down, trying to keep my amusement at his appalled expression at bay, but I can't do it. I burst out laughing.

“Can I have everyone's attention, please?” Carrick clacks a spoon against his glass and then sets the utensil on the nearest table to him.

Conversation dies down. Nora comes to stand next to him and he wraps a hand around her waist pulling her close. She lays her head on his shoulder for a second. Then they both look at us all again.

“I never thought a man could be as lucky as I am. I've been blessed with four amazing children who couldn't make me more proud. Each one of you has brought so much joy to my life. More than I could have ever imagined. You've brought grandchildren, as well as incredible partners into our family. People you love and who love you in return. Nessa, Sorcha, Teagan.” Carrick raises his glass to each of us and then smirks when his gaze shifts slightly to my right. He raises his glass a fourth time. “Even you Liam. But don't get too cocky about it.”

We all laugh and Imogen shoulder bumps Liam who gives her a genuine half smile. I'm not sure I'll ever get used to that, but he's become a bit less hard and cold. I'm happy for him and Imogen.

“But beyond all that,” Carrick continues. “I have this beautiful woman at my side. A woman I've loved for half my life. And who, finally, after all these years and countless proposals, has finally agreed to marry me and make me the happiest man alive.”

A chorus of “holy shit”, “oh my god,” and “it's about damn time” follow the announcement. Finn stands and pulls

me to my feet and we join the entire Donnelly clan and extended family who circle around Carrick and Nora offering their congratulations.

Imogen hugs Nora. “Congratulations...mam.”

Tears spill down Nora’s cheeks. Emotion hits me hard. I’m pretty sure this is the first time Imogen has called her anything close to mother. She’s always been Nora.

“Thank you...daughter.”

Imogen reaches for Carrick next, whose eyes glisten with tears as well. “You too, Da.”

A lump forms in my throat. I hug them both and offer my congratulations before stepping aside for Finn. He hugs his Da hard and claps him on the back.

“I’m so happy for you guys.”

Carrick palms the back of Finn’s neck and kisses his son’s forehead. “I love you, Finn.”

“I love you too, Da.”

Finn pulls Nora in for a hug and whispers something in her ear. More tears fill her eyes and she palms his cheek. He gives her a soft smile and moves away so the rest of the family can offer their well wishes. Soon, all the children join us and the excitement starts anew when they hear the news. Aidan disappears inside and comes back with five bottles of champagne.

Glasses get filled and passed around. We spend the next hour celebrating until the sun reaches the horizon and the temperatures drop. Everyone cleans up so Nora doesn’t have to and then all the guests slowly depart. Finn walks me out to his SUV and we head back to the city and my flat where he

spends almost all of his nights anymore. The casino needed to be completely remodeled after all the destruction, but it should be back open and operational within the month.

In the meantime, Finn's been investing more of their money in the Exchange to increase their earnings while the casino's closed. He finds a place to park on the street and we head inside. I set my keys and bag on the table and kick off my shoes. I glance over my shoulder on the way to the kitchen. "Do you want something to drink?"

Finn doesn't let me get far. He snags my hand and tugs me back to him. I tumble against his chest and brace my palms against it.

"I want you," he says staring down at me with an expression that makes my pulse race.

"You have me." He does, too. All of me. My heart and my soul.

He sweeps my hair over my shoulder and caresses my cheek with his thumb sending tingles rushing through me. Finn's eyes dart side to side as he scans my face. "Da was right, you know."

"About what?"

"About having partners we love."

My breath catches. Finn cradles my jaw between his two palms and his eyes lock with mine.

"You're the best thing to ever happen to me, Teagan Shah. You make me be a better man. And I love you."

Happy tears threaten to fall. "I love you, too. So much."

He lowers his head and kisses me hard. Shockwaves run through me, like they do every time his lips touch mine. But

what started out as just a kiss becomes more. Clothes quickly come off and are tossed to the floor as Finn walks me backward down the hallway toward my bedroom. Ever since he's been staying over, the zen has come back into it. It's become my sanctuary again. Finn's too, if the way he worships my body every night is any indication.

Our kisses grow more heated. More frantic. More intense. But along with all of that they're filled with love that shines so bright it's almost blinding. His tongue lashes against mine. A hard surface meets my back and the air is pushed from my lungs, but Finn fills them again.

"I need you." My fingers clutch desperately at his back and my nails dig into his flesh.

He grips my hip and slides his hand down toward my knee to pull my leg up. He hooks it over his arm so I'm splayed wide open for him. He rocks his cock against me and it notches along the track of my pussy. The ring at the end rubs me in all the right places, and wetness spills from me, coating his entire length.

Not once has he stopped kissing me. I rub my breasts against his chest. The bars in his nipples abrade my skin and a shiver races down my spine. Finally, Finn breaks the kiss.

"What do you need, poppet?" he murmurs against my lips.

"I need you to fuck me. Please."

He rolls his pelvis and slides back and forth along my slickness. With each push and pull, the ball of his piercing butts up against my clit. I press myself harder into him, needing more friction.

"Say it again," Finn commands.

"Fuck me."

“Again. Louder.”

“Fuck me.” The scream is ripped from my throat.

“I’ll always give you what you want,” he says as he lines his cock up at my entrance and thrusts deep and hard.

I throw my head back and cry out with so much pleasure. Oh my god, why does it feel different? So fucking better? When Finn thrusts again and his ring scrapes my inner walls, it hits me. He’s completely bare. For a second I panic that we forgot protection, but then he penetrates me deeper and grinds against my clit. Every other thought flies out of my head as all I can do is feel the overwhelming pleasure.

He keeps up the brutal pace that soon becomes too much. Every nerve in my body fires and sends their signal straight to the center of me where it builds and builds until it has nothing to do but explode. Bright lights flash behind my eyes and my whole body shudders. My knee weakens and I nearly collapse, but Finn holds me tight. He thrusts a second time. Then again. On the fourth one he goes completely rigid and erupts inside and fills me up.

His head drops to my shoulder and his harsh breath is loud in my ear. He slowly releases my leg and I let it fall to the floor so I’m standing on two feet. His cock remains inside me, pulsing. Throbbing.

“I love you,” Finn whispers.

“I love you, too.”

He slips out of me and his come leaks down my inner thighs, coating them. “Fuck, I’m sorry, Teagan. I should have asked.”

I palm his cheek. “It’s okay. I just got my shot not long ago. And I trust you.”

Finn kisses me. “Why don’t we go get cleaned up?”

We take a quick shower together. Or at least we try. But one thing led to another and we got dirty again. Finally, we manage to wash up and then climb into bed.

“Thank you for loving me,” I whisper against his chest once we’ve settled in together.

He tips my chin up so I meet his gaze. “You don’t ever have to thank me for that. Just keep loving me back.”

I smile up at him. “I promise.”

When I escaped to Dublin only a few months ago, I never would imagined I’d end up here. With Imogen’s brother. In love. But as I close my eyes and smile, my heart knows there’s no place else I’d rather be than here with Finn.



Thank you for reading **FINN**. I hope you enjoyed it. Be sure to sign up for my [newsletter](#) to stay up-to-date on what’s coming next!

Also be sure to check out the special holiday anthology called *Ice Cold Kisses* where you’ll get to catch up with the Donnelly clan and attend a wedding!

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Desire

Redemption

Protect

Betrayal

Mistletoe

Absolution

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Other Books

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SEALs in Love

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The Bratva's Enforcer (co-written with Rachel Everly)

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LK Shaw is the bestselling author of sexy, sinful suspense. She resides in South Carolina. She is a dog mom and self proclaimed chocolate lover, world traveler, and perpetual procrastinator. An avid reader since childhood, she became hooked on historical romance novels in high school. She now reads, and loves, all romance sub-genres. Her books feature sexy, protective heroes and the strong women they love.

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