



# The Devil's Price (Sins of the O'Rourke Empire #3)

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**Category:** Action&Adventure

**Description:** I was trained to fight for justice.

To bring criminals like Finn O'Rourke to their knees.

But nothing prepared me for him.

Sin wrapped in a tailored suit.

Power woven into every word.

A man so dangerous, he should have been my ruin.

Instead, I became his obsession. His addiction.

One touch and the lines blurred.

One night and I was lost.

Now, I carry the secret that could destroy everything.

Before I can run, they take me.

A pawn in a brutal war.

A prize for men with no mercy.

But they don't realize the devil himself is coming.

And Finn O'Rourke doesn't just play to win—he plays to destroy.

**Total Pages (Source):** 32

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SIOBHAN

" M s. Gallagher, get to the point." I stare into the bloodshot eyes of Mr. Patrick Quinn, counsel for the defense. His posture over the long, narrow deposition table is menacing, intimidating. He steeples his fingers on either side of his case files, the recorder between us flashing a red light indicating it's capturing everything. The recordings—along with copies of all files and evidence—will be shared after this meeting, and I can't wait to get away from him.

"Mr. Quinn, I assure you there's no need to be fussy. Have a whinge on your own time and don't consume the court's time with it." Judge Brendan Callahan nods at me as I swallow hard. The warmth in his eyes when he looks at me is no mistake. He's been my mentor now for a few years as I finished my law degree and obtained this position as DPP. "Deputy Public Prosecutor Gallagher, you may continue."

My eyes flick over the files in front of me, evidence for the first public murder trial I've ever tried on my own as a prosecutor. Mick O'Connor, former head of his own organization and now allied to one of the most infamous criminal syndicates in the country—the O'Rourkes—sits across the table from me next to his lawyer accused of aggravated murder. It's my job to prove he's done it, and all the evidence I have here is lining up to do just that.

"Your Honor, the prosecution seeks to prove Mr. O'Connor is guilty of aggravated murder based on the set of evidence in our discovery file. We will show he falsified his alibi, stole a registered weapon, planned to hunt the victim, Aiden Hughes, down,

and finally, on the night of April 20th around the time of eleven thirty at night, shot the victim in cold blood." My heart is pounding so hard I feel it pulsing in my neck.

I know what I'm up against and who I'm fighting. The men who sit across from me are thieving, lying sacks of shit, just like the ones who killed my cousin Trevor. They'll do nasty, downright evil things to get what they want and protect their own. I'm not naive to the danger I'm putting myself in by taking on this case, but how can I turn a blind eye? This man deserves to go to prison, even if the victim was another man just like him. He was caught red-handed.

"Very well, Ms. Gallagher, you may rest." Judge Callahan, as I've trained myself to always refer to him despite our friendship, nods at me, and I let my trembling knees finally rest. Slowly lowering myself back to the squeaking leather armchair, I fidget with the hem of my suit jacket.

Mick O'Connor stares at me with dark, forlorn eyes. If I look at him too long, I'm tempted to believe his claims of innocence. I've only spoken to him once, taking the interviews local Garda officials sent me as they came, but he seems like a genuine man. Still, evidence doesn't lie. It's empirical, like gravity and inertia—proven, undoubtable.

"Mr. Quinn, do you have anything to add?" The judge turns his gaze toward the defendant and his lawyer, and I prepare myself for more hostility, more vitriol. They're monsters and heathens, looking for any way to weasel into the light and bring their lies with them, hoping we're foolish enough to believe what they say at face value.

Quinn still stands over the table, but he straightens and stuffs his tie back into the front of his bulky suit jacket. His rotund abdomen protrudes, causing the buttons to strain across the front. He's got beady eyes, dark with sin, and a balding head which he roughly combs wisps of hair over in an attempt to vainly hold on to some

semblance of youth or virility. I'm sickened by his posture, so cocky and arrogant.

"Your Honor, with all due respect, this is a waste of the court's time. We have a solid alibi and the word of a dozen men that Mr. O'Connor was at the family pub the night of the murder for hours before and after. Witnesses place him there the entire time." The lawyer glances at me with an angry glare. "The prosecution is off base. We're wasting your time and ours and keeping an upstanding member of this community away from his loving wife and children. He's just become a grandfather too."

"As if being a grandfather precludes him from the ability to murder," I say, shooting out of my chair.

"Objection, your honor," Quinn snips, and I glare at him.

"You're talking about one of the most notorious crime bosses in history sitting next to you. If he's not guilty of this crime, he's guilty of a thousand others. I will prove?—"

The gavel cracks loudly on the sounding block, and I jolt. I don't like angering Judge Callahan, but I'm having a hard time controlling my temper—and my fear. It seems to be coming out as a nasty lash of angry words, but my insides are trembling.

"Ms. Gallagher, allow Mr. Quinn the respect to speak his terms, please." I look at him and nod.

"Apologies, Your Honor." I sit back down, gripping both arms of the chair to keep myself anchored in place as I'm forced to listen to the tart continue.

"Mr. Quinn," the judge says.

"As I was saying, Your Honor, Mr. O'Connor is innocent. I request remand of custody to myself. His entire family lives here. He's not a flight risk. And I honestly

request a dismissal of all charges. He's an innocent man." Quinn will never get his request, and my smirk only makes him angrier, but he's spoken his piece and the judge will decide now.

We all turn our attention to the judge's bench while Mr. Quinn takes his seat. Judge Callahan is a fair man. I've known him for many years, even before he became my mentor in this business. He's seen the evidence and we've spoken directly about it. I know he won't let Mick walk.

"Considering all the testimony we've heard today, Mr. Quinn, I'm inclined to side with the prosecution on this. Mr. O'Connor is hereby remanded to the custody of the governor of prisons at Cloverhill. He will remain in remand as the trial proceeds." After removing his glasses, the judge continues. "Barristers, I will expect both of you to be on your best behavior. No more outbursts like that. This is a courtroom, not a boxing ring." He eyes me specifically, and I wince internally. "Proceeding is set for one week from today, eight a.m."

His gavel releases us from deposition and I sigh. I still feel their eyes boring into me, but the pressure is off for now. I have a week to prepare witnesses and my opening and closing arguments, and I have a month's worth of paperwork to catch up on.

I begin collecting all my papers, stuffing them in my briefcase as Mr. Quinn and his posse usher Mr. O'Connor out of the deposition room. The judge stays at his bench while I finish packing up, but as I pick up my case, prepared to leave, he clears his throat. I know I'm about to get a lecture for my outburst, but I feel justified. That man is obtuse. Still, I turn slowly to meet his gaze.

"Siobhan, do you know what you're getting yourself into?" Brendan's eyes search me with concern. The age and wisdom he holds speak to me without words. As a family friend, a personal friend, I can see he's worried.

"I don't know," I breathe out with a sigh. "It's just... Trevor, and... I couldn't turn it away." I shrug a shoulder as I answer. When the case came across my desk, I snatched it up. The chance to put a few of these sick bastards away was the entire reason I got into law. I want to take down the entire criminal underworld, even if I have to do it one case at a time.

"Your father would be so proud of you." He smiles but his eyes are sad. "You should hire a security team, though. These men are maniacs. No telling what they'll do if you cross them. I heard Ronan O'Rourke runs a very dodgy crew, shot up the entire docks last year. So many men were killed and not a trace of evidence to pin it on them. It's how they work, you know?"

I shudder to think about Mick's allies getting involved in this. His family has been on a decline for a while, but everyone's heard of his alignment with the O'Rourkes via an arranged marriage.

"Thank you for your concern, Judge Callahan. If I feel concerned, I'll speak with Detective Kearney." I smile but inside, I'm feeling nauseous. He's right. They're scary, but I can't appear scared or they'll eat me alive.

"Alright, well go on. Have a good afternoon, then." He dismisses me, but I'd feel safer staying here. I know at any turn, these animals might strike. I just don't think I'll be prepared.

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FINN

Leaning against the brick exterior of the courthouse in the shadowy alley, I wait for the deposition to be over. Ronan arranged for me to meet with Mick before being hauled off again, said he'd delay the transport van a few minutes. When Mr. Quinn and Mick exit the side of the building, we have only a few moments to connect. I can't risk being caught talking to them so publicly.

Mick's eyes brighten when he sees me rushing toward him. The lawyer seems angry, like normal, but Mick juts his chin up in confidence and pride. He'll never let on how much this is fucking with him.

"Finn," he grunts, reaching for me though his hands are cuffed.

I clasp both of them in my hands and squeeze. "How you doing? I guess they didn't drop the charges?"

Mick's accused of murdering one of our own. Aiden was the chief's right-hand man, and now he's dead, shot dead in a home outside the city. No one could believe what happened until we saw his cold, dead body with our own eyes. Mick had nothing to do with it. We just can't prove it, and our guys on the inside were scared off for some reason.

"You know... Justice has a process." Mick shrugs his shoulders, but I can see the concern deep in his eyes. I've seen it in his daughter's eyes every day for weeks now

as this thing has unfolded.

"I'm not lettin' them take you, Mick. We'll get you out of this." I squeeze his hands harder and hear the transport van turn into the alley. The engine rumbles and echoes off the walls, and I should be running, but I feel obligated to reassure him.

"Their evidence is weak." Quinn grunts as he lights a cigarette with a match. He swears that matches are better for that sort of thing, disdains lighters. I think he's afraid we'll sabotage his lighter and blow his face off. Piss-poor excuse for a lawyer. Ro should fire him and get someone else.

"It'll be fine." Mick nods solemnly, and his eyes rise to look at the approaching van. "Best be on with ya. They'll be a might fickle."

I wish I didn't have to go, because leaving one of our own to the wolves feels a lot like deserting him, but I'm no good to him if I get him or Mr. Quinn in more trouble. Besides, there are at least a dozen things they could charge me with too.

"We're gonna stop this," I repeat as I back away, ducking behind a dumpster before the driver of the van can see me clearly enough to pick me out in a lineup.

I watch as Mick climbs into the van and Quinn shouts something at the guards. When Quinn waddles off, the guards climb back into the van and shut the door. It shuttles off down the narrow alleyway and back into the sunlight at the other end, and my eyes trace its movements. Mick is in remand now, no hope of busting him out anymore at all. We have to let the process take its course, and that means moving on to step two of my plan.

I've watched Siobhan Gallagher for the past year, stalking every case she's taken on. They've never assigned her a murder case like this one. She's green. I know she's capable—they know it too or they wouldn't have assigned it to her—but I'm going to



snake my way into her life and put a stop to this. I have to. It was my chief's orders.

So I wait casually, still hiding behind the dumpster, until the DPP appears at the side door. She's wearing a steel-grey suit with a bright red silk shirt beneath. The black pointy-toed heels she wears give her a few inches of height, but she's still short. Sexy as fuck, too, with a high, tight ass and tits that scream to be ogled. I admire her for a moment before snapping back to my task.

"Ms. Gallagher, can I have a word?" My shout seems to startle her. She clutches her briefcase to her chest, arms hugged around it tightly, and flicks her eyes around to see where I am.

I stroll out from behind the dumpster and rake a hand through my dark hair. My approach has to be simple and cautious. If I make things worse for Mick by pushing her or scaring her, he'll end up in the clink faster than we can bat an eye. My aim is to get close to her and hopefully gain insight into the case, and if not, at least perhaps change her perception of Mick O'Connor.

"Uh, yes..." She seems flustered, skin going pale, hands trembling.

"Relax," I tell her, "I'm not gonna bite." The toothy grin I offer seems to calm her a little. If she's done her homework, she knows who I am, but I don't let that stop me from being forward. "You're a beautiful woman, Siobhan... May I call you that?"

Her cheeks warm, lips flushing darker. She nods, but she says nothing to me. She's still hugging that damn briefcase to her chest, hiding her assets, but it's okay. If I come on too strong, she'll be startled away. As it is, I'm surprised she hasn't started screaming "rape" yet. She's wound tighter than a piano string on the daily.

"Siobhan, my name is?—"

"I know who you are," she squeaks. Her eyes scan the length of my body. I chose this suit because I feel like I'm less intimidating when I wear it. It's more casual, soft grey, light blue shirt.

I slide my hands into my pockets and relax my shoulders as I smile at her. She's a quick study and terrified of me. This will be like taking candy from a baby if I play my cards right.

"Well good, then I hope my reputation precedes me." Now my smile isn't winning me any favors, but I'm not giving up. This woman is the one about to put my friend in prison for the rest of his life. I have to go through her to get to the truth, and I'm not stopping unless someone puts a bullet in my head.

"What do you want, Mr. O'Rourke?" She's gaining confidence now. Her hand grips the handle of her case and she lowers it to her side. The silky fabric of her blouse parts just enough to see the curve of her tits, and it makes my cock jump. Damn, I'd love to undress her right here and take a long, languid look at her body.

"I just thought maybe you'd entertain me for dinner. A woman as beautiful as yourself deserves to be treated." My eyes glance up at the camera mounted on the side of the building overhead. I have to stay where I'm at or I'll be spotted, and if that happens, it will spoil the case for Mick. The courts will see me speaking with prosecution and crack down on him harder.

"I can't. Sorry." Siobhan turns on a heel and starts walking, and I watch her ass for a few strides, staying firmly planted where I'm at to stay out of the camera's line of sight.

"It wasn't a request..." I say after her.

She stops and twirls around with a glare on her face, sexy as fuck. "You're a wise

man, Mr. O'Rourke. You can't charm me with your good looks. I have to refuse on a matter of principle, the same principle that keeps you there and me here." Her eyes rise to the camera knowingly, and I know if we were children, she'd be wagging her tongue at me in a taunting manner. Fantastically cheeky bitch. I love it.

"Then you'll understand when my car picks you up tomorrow night at seven." I wink at her and say, "Matter of principle."

"Uh," she grunts in a squeaky, high pitch. The fury in her body comes out as a stomp of her foot. "And if I refuse..."

"Don't do that," I tell her, shaking my head. My men won't hesitate to slit her throat and make it look like suicide, but I don't want it to come to that. The courts would just assign another DPP to the case, and who knows which one we'd get? She'll be easy to control. We may not be so lucky with the second-round pick.

"You think I'm good-looking?" I ask her, chuckling, and she stomps her foot again and reels around, storming off.

I click my tongue and watch that tight ass sway. This really will be like taking candy from a baby.

A really fucking hot baby with a body of a goddess. I might just be the lucky one in this. My job won't just be easy. It'll be pleasurable. And Mick will go free.

Win-win.

### SIOBHAN

The wine sluices into my glass, swirling around with its cranberry color, sending wafts of pungent, tart, fruity flavors into the air. I watch the vortex of the liquid spin around while I pour the glass and listen to the sound of my bath filling with water. After the long day I've had, I need this respite, a hot soak, a glass of wine, some soft music to relieve my mind from stress and fear.

Finn O'Rourke surprised me this afternoon. Never in a million years could I have imagined that one of the O'Rourke men would approach me for the reason he did. I know his game—to draw me out, perhaps seduce me into his confidence so he can manipulate me and get me to cough up information or drop the charges. Or maybe he wants nothing more than to lure me into his web and end me.

Regardless, the fire he started in my belly still aches hours later. Any other man, any other circumstance, and I'd have been puddling my panties with lust. He's gorgeous, thick, dark hair, well-kept beard, and those strangely yellow eyes—the eyes of a wolf—have the power to dismantle my conscious thought and control me.

I carry my glass of wine toward the bedroom, bottle in my other hand, leaving my shoes by the door and my stress behind me. It's flattering a bit to think a man that devilishly attractive is drawn to me, so for a moment I let just that much settle over my mind. I think I'm not a horribly ugly woman. I have a nice figure, and I try to follow fashion, but I intimidate men, I've been told. Even the guys I went to school with or currently work with seem off-put by how determined I am.

A powerful man like the sort Finn is may very well be the type I need. A guy who's confident and self-assured, not easily intimidated by someone else. That's the type of man I imagine Finn O'Rourke is, or all the O'Rourke men, for that matter. They, like so many other criminals who savagely commit crime and get off Scot-free, are all the same. All pillars. All dangerous.

I set my cup and bottle next to the bath and shut off the tap. Then I strip down to nothing and take a few towels from the rack, draping one over the side of the bath and setting one on the back of the toilet. I leave my phone on the stand next to the tub where my wine rests, drawing a layer of condensation, and then I sink into the steam and bubbles.

The water scorches my skin, but I adore it. The sting is a painful reminder that I'm alive and that because I'm alive, I have a sworn duty to uphold. I didn't move to Dublin, so far from my family home, to waste my life on flings and men. My aim is to sink the entire underworld, even if I have to do that one man at a time, one court case after another.

Taking the towel from the side of the bath, I roll it up and place it behind my neck, then lie back and use it as a pillow. The bubbles float up over my body, covering my chest, allowing me to sink into the warm depths to drown my tension. I reach for the glass of wine and hold it in hand as I shut my eyes to close out the light.

My thoughts go again to the clandestine meeting in the alleyway beside the courthouse earlier. Finn is so smooth, thinks he's going to manhandle me into going to dinner with him, and for what purpose? I've been chasing these bastards for months now. There is no way I can compromise all the hard work I've put into nailing them with the severe conflict of interest it would be to be seen out in public with one. Besides the obvious fact that he's not that into me. I know he has his ulterior motive.

The wine floods my senses as I sip it and let it roll down my throat. It's tempting. I

enjoy it too much, one of my weaknesses. So I down the glass and set it aside to refill when I begin to feel the swirl in my head. Then I let myself completely unfurl in the bath, stretching my toes all the way out to reach the far end.

The only reason I even got into law to begin with was because of Trevor. Poor bloke was such a kind heart, so gullible, so likeable too. He wanted so much out of life but got dealt a shitty hand by his own father who dragged him into the criminal lifestyle, a grifter with no conscience. And Trevor was in the wrong place at the wrong time and had a tangle with one of the crime syndicates. He never could extricate himself from it either, which led to his being murdered in cold blood, much like Aiden Hughes, whose murder I intend to solve.

Trevor was the catalyst. Judge Callahan became my guiding light. And now that I've achieved the job of deputy public prosecutor, I am aligned with my purpose, which I won't let escape me. Not for anything.

My phone buzzes, and I groan and roll my eyes. I brought it in here as more of a means to check the time, assuming this late hour would offer me the luxury of silence and solitude. People don't usually ring you this late, though there are reasons they do if it does happen.

I reach my dripping hand up and run it over the towel behind my head, the bottom of which is soggy from the water. The top is slowly drawing damp as moisture sucks up into it, so my fingers aren't entirely dry when I swipe the screen of my phone and turn on speaker mode.

"Gallagher here, what can I do for you?" It's a roll of the dice who it may be, but I'm not surprised to hear the warm, buttery tenor of Detective Liam Kearney vibrate out of the speaker.

"Sib, it's Liam. Do you have a minute?" When Liam calls me, it's usually serious.

We've worked on a few cases together before, nothing so serious as murder, though, so if he's calling at this hour, it has to be important.

"Yeah, of course. What do you have for me?" Liam is the lead investigating detective Garda on the case, in charge of presenting all new evidence to me for submission to the court.

So far, he's brought me a witness who claims to have seen Mick O'Connor shoot the victim, a bloody fingerprint on the victim's face—only a partial match—and a recording of the suspect allegedly threatening the victim to "cut off his head and feed it to the sharks in the Irish Sea." If he offers me more, I'll take it. The case is weak, but not impossible to argue.

"We have the gun." Liam's words send ice through my veins. The murder weapon has eluded us for months as we dug into this thing, attempting to search out every single detail or clue we could find.

"Where? How?" Garda went over that house more than twenty times, tore out carpet, heating registers, floorboards. They even searched the O'Connor property and all seven outbuildings, uncovering a cache of stolen arms and linked it all to a trade we had no idea was even happening. There's no way a gun just magics its own way to the surface. "Did someone call in a tip?"

I sit up straighter in the bath, and the towel sags down into the water behind me, but this news is shocking to me. I'm on edge instantly, not sure how to take the discovery, and just in time for the trial to start. I know how these syndicates work. If one of them had intel that we need to put O'Connor down, they wouldn't hesitate to anonymously turn him over and let him sink.

"It was wrapped in a bloody T-shirt with the victim's blood, tossed into a garbage bag, and we think it was left in a dumpster but fell out by accident. This is the break

we've needed. It was found less than a block from the house on the ground in an alleyway. Sib, don't you see? This is our smoking gun. Ballistics report matches the striations in the rounds recovered from the vic's body. We got our man."

My mind reels as Liam speaks. I'm overcome by wonder and concern all at once. I don't know how to feel about this. Why did no one turn this in sooner? It's been months.

"Do we have prints?" I ask as my eyes turn to the glass of wine. Perhaps I need another to take this new edge off. I should be elated, but my gut tells me to be guarded. I've never felt like this before.

"No prints, unfortunately. The weather degraded DNA. We barely had a match to the blood. But the ballistics don't lie. It's our murder weapon." Liam clears his throat and starts rambling about "socking it to the murderous assholes" while I fill a glass and down it.

Then I sink back into the heat and shove the soggy towel back behind my head. This is all too much, even though it's good for my case. It may not be the "smoking gun" Liam thinks it will be since there is no DNA evidence, or even fingerprints, tying Mick O'Connor to the weapon itself, but it will help. Judges and juries can be quite persuaded by simple things. I may be able to knock them for six, or maybe not.

When I hear the name "O'Rourke", my ears perk up. I listen to what he says more carefully now, as I know the O'Rourkes are allies with the O'Connors and it's Ronan O'Rourke, their chief, who's footing the bill for Mick's defense.

"Stay away from them, Sib. They're vipers. You'll put the whole case at risk." Liam's cautioning tone sounds more demanding and bossy than fatherly. He's not at all like the judge.



"I had one approach me, ask me to dinner..." I've been toying with the idea of going anyway, even after rejecting the offer. If I can work an angle to get undercover with the O'Rourke clan and weasel my way in, I could bust this case and maybe several others wide open.

"No, Sib. Are you insane? They're killers..." Now he sounds concerned. I picture his lips turning downward into a frown. Liam's handsome, caring too, but he's committed. Another dimension and I'd have probably thrown myself at the hulking god of a man, but I won't be a wrecking ball in someone else's life.

"Not insane at all. Think about the dirt we could gather if someone gets on the inside." I smile as a fuller idea begins to materialize in my mind. Going undercover with Liam's help to get Finn O'Rourke to give up information may just work.

"I forbid it. You aren't trained for that sort of thing. They'll eat you alive." Liam is chastising me now, talking down to me. But he isn't my boss, my king, or my god. And he sure as hell isn't going to tell me what to do.

"I have to run, Liam. I'm in the bath having a soak." And the wine is swirling nicely in my head now, helping me dream up all sorts of imaginations about nailing Mick O'Connor to the wall, along with hundreds of others, once I get the intel. "Bye, then."

I press the End Call button with a dripping finger and close my eyes again, ignoring the sudden buzz of my phone as Liam tries to call me back. I may never have gotten this idea if that man hadn't approached me in the alleyway. Now that I have it, I'm like a dog with a bone, and even Detective Garda Liam Kearney can't stop me.

FINN

I sit in a wingback leather chair in Ronan's office nursing a pre-dinner drink. His curiosity about Mick's trial has fueled our entire conversation thus far, and I've been here for nearly an hour waiting for his chef to finish dinner. Isla and Declan, my brother and his wife, are set to arrive any minute.

"But you've set up the meeting with the solicitor for next week?" Ronan watches me carefully. He put this all on my shoulders to test me, make sure I'm loyal and trustworthy. As the family strategist, I'm used to taking the lead on things, making sure our plans and pathways forward move us in the right direction. This is no different other than the slight hiccup of the law being involved.

"Yes, Quinn is tight-lipped with me, something about privilege and need-to-know basis. You can fix that up for us when you see him. He's an eejit." The solicitor won't speak with me directly. He shares information with Mick and Ronan, no one else.

"It sounds like it..." He takes a long sip of his whiskey, downing the rest of the contents before setting the empty tumbler on the table between us. "The prosecutor hasn't shown her hand, then?"

"Mick knows what they have against him. Quinn says it's weak. That's all I get from them. She's feisty, though." I smirk at him and think of my plan to wine and dine her into my inner circle where I'll be feasting on everything she knows about this case and perhaps even swaying her mind.

"What's that look about?" he asks me with a grin.

"I'll be taking Ms. Gallagher to dinner tomorrow. I'm working some angles and hoping they pay off. She'll be eating out of my hand and she'll see the light. Mick is innocent, and I'll do anything I have to do to make sure she sees it and drops those charges." After finishing my drink, I set the glass next to Ronan's empty one.

"Anything?" he says, and I hear the question. He means am I willing to kill her and yes, I am.

"Anything," I say with a pointed stare. "If it gets to the point of the trial where there's no turning back and we haven't secured a not-guilty from all of this, I'll kill her. The judge will have no choice but to declare a mistrial." I don't relish the idea of having such a stunning creature's blood on my hands, but I will do what's necessary to keep Mick safe. My father would've called that The Devil's Price.

"Ro?" we hear, and both of us turn to see Maeve in the doorway. She's holding their brand-new baby, Xander, who's about three months old and full of fire just like his father. He's fussy, as normal.

"Yes?" Ronan says, standing to welcome his wife to the room.

"Dinner is on. Let's go eat. Isla and Declan just arrived." Her eyes flick to meet mine. "Hi, Finn, it's so good to see you."

Maeve is just as beautiful as the mysterious prosecutor I desperately want to bed. Her dark hair and imploring eyes shift back to her husband where I see a flick of knowing desire pass between them. One day, I'll be so lucky...

"Baby Xander," I coo, walking toward them. I pinch his cheeks and smile at him, and he starts to cry harder. The fire in his veins will steel him for what's to come in his

life. Heir to the O'Rourke name, this child is more precious than them all.

Ronan ushers us to the dining room where we all have a seat. Isla is absolutely bursting with energy, bustling people around as she serves up dinner. Declan has his hands full with this farm-girl turned Mafia bride. She doesn't know how to let the staff take care of things, and now with her only weeks away from giving birth, she's nesting, making it even more challenging for my older brother to make her sit down.

"Thank you," I offer as she plops a heaping spoon of potato mash on my plate as she passes by me with the dish. Her swollen belly makes the perfect perch for the dish, arm wrapped around it. I see the way Declan adores her with his eyes too. Again... I would be so lucky...

"Have you spoken with my da?" she asks me, spooning more potato mash onto Maeve's plate, then Ronan's. Her eyes flick up to see me every few seconds, and the concentration and worry etched there pain me.

"Briefly today. He sends his love. He's waiting on his grandson's arrival." I wink at Declan, the months-old topic of discussion giving his forehead a pinch. He wants a boy. Isla swears it's a girl.

"Granddaughter," she corrects, and she switches to the bowl of green beans. Declan helps himself to a portion of round cutlets and passes the plate to Ronan, maneuvering so that Isla will have less work. He's sneaky like that.

"Is he good? I mean, in good spirits? Is he healthy?" For a woman who nearly lost her father forever after being kidnapped by one of our sworn enemies, she's substantially calm. No other woman alive would be so strong and put together.

"He's down, Isla, but it's to be expected. If he gets off on the murder charge, he still has to face some hefty accusations with what they found in his barns." I wince as her

eyes flash almost to black. She never knew her father was a mob boss her entire life until the circumstances of her arranged marriage to Declan revealed it. She's a tough cookie and part of this family now. And she's one of the reasons we are fighting so hard to get Mick out of this situation.

He's blood now.

"Dear," she sighs as she sets the bowl down after her pass around the table with green beans. She rubs her belly and perches next to her husband, and the conversation around the table turns to a lighter discussion. Maeve baby talks with Xander and Isla tears up at the idea of the babies being the best of friends, but I'm inside my head now with all the scheming and planning.

I will make sure Isla's father comes home. He's part of this family and he deserves for us to fight for him just as if he were my brother. Ronan seems agreeable to my idea of seducing the truth and some justice for Mick out of Ms. Siobhan Gallagher, and so I will pour all my efforts into that. But it doesn't mean I'm going to neglect other avenues.

Somewhere, there is a witness who saw it all. Mick knows the man and has told us as much. But he's been hiding so well, we can't find him despite turning over every rock in this God-forsaken city. It's my plan B. Find that witness and make him come forward.

In the meantime, I'm sticking with plan A, and I'm hoping to skim a little off the top just for myself, if Siobhan Gallagher is the sort to put out.

### SIOBHAN

The sparkly gold material of this slim-fitting dress hugs my curves, making me itch as I fix the diamond drop necklace from evidence lock-up around my neck. Liam, still vehemently opposed to the idea of my going to dinner with an O'Rourke, holds the small listening device in hand as he watches me, eyes trailing over my body.

"This is a horrible idea, Sib." He's not fooling anyone by playing nonchalant. He's not just concerned about my well-being. He's jealous. The flash of envy in his eyes that drink me in gives him away like a bad cough during cold season.

"It's perfectly safe. You send Garda in all the time to do stuff like this." The long chain of the drop necklace dangles across my cleavage, the diamond perching on the inner curve of my right breast. I fluff my hair and glance at the small wire, no bigger than a pencil. The recorder, transmitter, and antenna are all compact enough to be neatly tucked away in something I could wear in my hair or taped to my chest.

"You're not trained for this," he says stiffly, and I see his eyes raking my bare flesh. The V in this neckline exposes far more skin than I'm used to showing around colleagues, but I'm not a shy woman, and I'm not a pushover. This is my choice, not Liam's.

"I'll be fine. Now, where do we put that?" Tipping my head at the listening device, I finally meet Liam's gaze as he tears it away from my tits to place it on my face.

"I could get in trouble for this. Make sure those diamonds get back to me tomorrow. It's a cold case, but if they go missing, they'll be noticed." As he speaks, Liam slides the thin strap of my dress to the side. It's impossible to wear a bra in this thing, and almost my entire left breast is exposed as he slides the strap down my arm.

I reach up to cup it, keeping my nipple covered while he uses some sort of athletic tape to adhere the wire to my skin. As if he's done it a million times, he works deftly and in seconds replaces the strap to hide the wire. Then he turns to his computer on the desk behind him. The Garda station is empty this evening, except for a few higher-ups who are working late at the other end of the building. Everyone else is out on patrol or home with their families.

"Say something," he orders as his hands work on the keyboard, bringing up review screens on the monitor in front of him. He lowers himself to his seat to continue working while I test the device.

"Test... one, two, three... Test." Nerves tighten the muscles in my belly. My hands shake slightly, but I hide that from him by folding them together. This could be the best thing to ever happen for me when it comes to my career. Getting close to an inside man will grant me the opportunity to learn first-hand about the inner workings of the Irish Mob. I could gain enough clarity and evidence to take them all down from the inside. Dublin would never be the same.

"You're alive." Liam looks up at me with a frown on his face. "I can't believe you're doing this."

"I'm not marrying the man," I say, swatting at him. "You'll see. I'll be able to get a lot of good information from this. Even if it doesn't provide a clear path to victory in this present case, I'll hopefully get enough to go after the O'Rourkes."

Every time I say the name O'Rourke, I taste bile in my mouth. I owe this to Trevor. If

not for him, maybe I wouldn't be taking this risk, but he was cut short before he even got a chance. I need to do this.

"I just don't like it." There those eyes are on my tits again. The man needs to get his head out of the gutter.

"I'll bring the wire back tomorrow with the diamonds." Reaching for the small black clutch with my wallet and a small revolver tucked away—one Liam doesn't know I have—I turn to go. I know he's not going to actively sit there while I dine with O'Rourke, but the software will be transmitting and recording the entire event.

"Be careful, Sib." Those are the last words I hear as I breeze out of the Garda station into the cool night air. The cab I hired to drive me across town awaits me, engine on, thick exhaust puffing from the tail pipe. It's a bit chilly, so I hustle my steps and climb in. The driver reeks of cigar smoke, but I'm pleased he doesn't speak to me the entire drive.

At the restaurant, I slink out of the cab and toss a few extra dollars to the cabby, who grunts in appreciation before zipping off down the street. I focus on the bright lights of the restaurant marquee. The place looks fancy for sure. When Finn called my office this afternoon to tell me he'd send the driver to pick me up and to remind me to be ready, I told him I'd hail a cab and meet him. I had no idea we were talking Michelin-stars.

I can see through the large panes of glass along the front of the building that everyone inside is wearing black tie apparel and feel thankful I listened to my younger sister, Clara, who insisted I wear something high-fashion. She was right. I owe her big time.

Inside, I wait by the *maître d'* stand for the dapper man in a black suit to appear. He smiles at me politely and glances down at his list on the podium in front of himself.



"Ms. Gallagher?" he asks, and then his eyes meet mine again with curiosity.

"Yes, thank you. I'm meeting?—"

"Mr. O'Rourke is ready for you. Right this way." He nods and takes off, not even offering me his elbow. I didn't know what to expect when I walked in, but it wasn't this. Finn isn't even by the front to greet me and walk me back. As we weave through tables in the busy dining area, I feel exposed. Suddenly, the part of me that doesn't usually feel vulnerable begins to feel modest and insecure.

Men's eyes drink me in. Women look at me with disdain—jealous over the way their partners are staring, or over the way I look. I'm not sure. I keep my eyes turned downward and will away the heat flushing my cheeks, and soon, the man leads me to a dark corner of the restaurant shrouded in thick velvet curtains. I glance at the larger dining area at large and realize this is too private. O'Rourke could kill me and no one would even see. I'm so thankful for the wire Liam insisted I wear.

"Ms. Gallagher..." the host says, pulling the curtain aside.

Finn sits in the circular booth with a menu in hand poring over the contents. I'm taken with how gorgeous he is. His hair has been slicked back, his beard trimmed. He wears an expensive suit, diamond cufflinks on the sleeves of his shirt. It makes my heart flutter a bit, and my eyes lock on the glass of wine, clearly poured for me. I may need that.

"Thank you," I say softly to the *maître d'*. He nods as I slip into the booth, and Finn folds the menu shut, setting it to the side.

"You look stunning," he says, but unlike Liam, who couldn't get enough of the eye candy, Finn's eyes stay on my face. Somehow, this is even more personal, even more intimidating.

"Thank you," I mumble. Is that the only thing I can say tonight? I feel butterflies zipping around my belly and making me feel anxious. So I sip the wine, and he chuckles warmly.

"No need to be nervous, Siobhan. Contrary to what you may think of me, I don't bite." Finn scoots closer, so close our knees are touching under the table. It doesn't make me uncomfortable initially, but the longer he stares at me, the more I begin to feel uneasy, and not for the reason I thought might happen. I'm uneasy because I like it. I drink another gulp of wine in response to that.

"Not nervous at all," I tell him, then immediately regret saying that as I set the wine glass back on the table and my hand shakes a little, sloshing the wine.

Finn doesn't notice, or if he does, he's gentleman enough not to say anything about it. His fingers reach up and brush a few strands of my dark hair off my shoulder, tucking it behind my back. Then his hand lingers on my bare skin, rubbing his knuckles up and down on my arm.

"I'm so glad you decided to join me. We have so much to talk about, so much time to get to know one another." He's smooth, so very charming. His touch makes me warm inside, or maybe it's the wine already. I've not eaten today, too busy working and preparing for tonight to think of it.

"Yes, well, as I told you, this is a professional meeting." My eyes flick to the wine again. I shouldn't, but I can't stop myself. I finish the glass and avoid looking at him and his judging eyes. This was a mistake and Liam was right. I'm too attracted to him to be here alone. It doesn't even matter that men like him killed my cousin. Alone with him, I'm just a woman and he's just a really fucking hot man.

Finn scoots closer still and smiles at me warmly. "I ordered dinner for us. I hope you don't mind." At this rate, I think we won't even make it to dinner before I get up and

walk out. So far, I can't even remember why I'm here. He's magnetic as his hand reaches out and takes the wine from the ice bucket to fill my glass again.

"No, that's okay," I tell him, watching his every move. This glass is fuller than the last one. I should pace myself, but my nerves keep me drinking. It's probably just a nervous habit and I could sip the water instead, but I reach for the wine and gulp it.

"So you want to keep this professional, but I can't help but feel so drawn to you. You're a beautiful woman, Siobhan, and you're powerful. How can I ignore those things?" His hand rests on my thigh as he turns toward me. His other arm stretches across the back of the booth seat around me and tickles my far shoulder. He's so close, I am consumed by his cologne.

"Finn, you know nothing could ever really happen between us. The city's DPP and a criminal?" I resist rolling my eyes, but it's there—the way I'm internally scolding myself for something my body clearly wants. We haven't even eaten, haven't even talked, really, but the gravitational pull of his charm has my panties melting. And the way his thumb gently strokes the top of my thigh makes me wish his hand were a few inches closer to my core.

I reach for the wine again and down it all. This isn't going well. If I can't separate my obvious need for sexual release from the fact that this dinner is supposed to be about cornering a dangerous criminal and his organization, it's all going to hell. Liam will kill me.

"I respect that." He starts to pull away, and I swallow hard. It's what I want, right? For him to stop trying to charm me, for him to just cough up the dirt? So why do I take his hand and grip his wrist, keeping it on my lap?

He grins, and I feel the fingers on my left shoulder edging the strap of my dress across my skin. The first swirl of alcohol hits me. The back of my neck aches. My

cheeks burn. I can feel the sweat on my palm between our hands and know this is wrong, the way my heart is beating so hard. I refused his invitation because I know this is so wrong.

"So fucking sexy, Siobhan." Finn leans in closer, fingers still playing with the dress strap.

"Finn," I breathe in protest, but his hand slides from my thigh around to my hip. As he pulls me toward himself, burying his face in my chest, his fingers tug the strap off my shoulder and it falls.

I gasp and reach for it, but it's too late. My tit is exposed and so is the wire. Finn's teeth scrape the inside of my breast and he pauses, eyes wide open, locked on the black recording device taped to my creamy flesh.

My heart literally stops.

I'm a dead woman.

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*Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 12:26 am*

6

FINN

My eyes rest on the small black listening device taped discreetly to Siobhan's chest. I feel the way her heart hammers against her ribcage beneath my lips, which are pressed to the curve of her tit. I figured as much. I just thought she'd have been smarter about it.

With one long, languid lick up the inside of her tit, I pull away, leaving the dress strap to fall. She scrambles, pulling it back up, pushing her hair away from her face, then fanning herself. And here I thought she was palpating over me when all the while, she was just scared of being found out.

My hand slides up her side, over the curve of her tit and into the dress. I pinch the wire hard and pull it off her skin, then reach out and drop it into her water glass for proper burial at sea.

"Now, now." I tsk. "And I thought we had something going on there for a moment."

Siobhan scooches backward, putting space between us until her ass almost hangs off the edge of the booth cushion. Her face blanches, beads of sweat appearing on her upper lip. In this secret corner of the restaurant, I could wrap my hands around her gorgeous neck and end her, but that's not what I want to do. Not by any stretch of the imagination. Not yet, anyway.

"Finn, I just..." She's flustered, pressing the back of her hand to her forehead, fanning

herself. Maybe I have had somewhat of an effect on her after all, but she'll never admit it.

I retreat from her, backing around the table to my position behind my charger plate. I suck in a deep breath and study the way she moves, like a mouse squirming under a cat's paw. She came here with a wire on, which means she wasn't exactly here to play nice or let me get into her pants. It's out on the table now. At least I know where I stand.

And kudos to her for playing the game. I can't begrudge her a little covert reconnaissance. After all, that's why I'm really here, to find out what she knows and help her see the light of day.

"I can't say I'm not disappointed, Siobhan." I look up as the waiter brings our food past the curtain. She continues to squirm, now dabbing her forehead with her white cloth napkin as the waiter sets our plates on the chargers.

"How does everything look?" he asks, and I flick my hand at him, dismissing him. A brief scowl flits across his face before he ducks out of our private booth and we're alone again.

"We cannot work together if we don't have trust." I take my napkin and snap it. The crack of the fabric makes her jump. She sits as if paralyzed by fear, unmoving, unspeaking. I, however, dive into the food, devouring one delicious bite after another. Every few seconds, I glance at her. Her head hangs in shame, but she hasn't left yet.

Siobhan's plan to spy on me is thwarted. There's probably some person behind a computer screen wondering where her signal went, and all she can do is sit there fidgeting with her fingers in her lap. I keep eating, unbothered by any of it. I've been in this game long enough to know how to wait out the pause—when you both figure out that your plan isn't going quite the way you thought and you'll have to change

course.

Siobhan's eyes rise to meet mine and she blinks a few times. "I should go."

"No, stay." I shake my head and point my fork at her food. "It's paid for and it's delicious. Don't let that ruin our night."

Her neck constricts. I watch her swallow hard. She's still flustered, and her forehead draws together in the center, eyes narrowed. "You're not angry?"

I chuckle, and it lasts long enough to make her crack a smile. "Do you think I'm just an animal? That I'd pour myself onto you that thickly the instant we're alone for no reason?"

A knowing passes over her eyes. Her shoulders relax. "You knew I'd be wired and you were checking for it?"

"Saw the bulge in the fabric above your nipple. Most women don't have two nipples on one tit." I wink at her and take another bite, speaking with my mouth full as I say, "Though it was sexy the way your nipples pebbled just at the sight of me."

The pallor of fear washes away under the blush of embarrassment, and she picks up her fork to have a bite of food. A slight moan winds its way up her throat as the morsel tantalizes her tastebuds, and I smile at that sound, wishing it were my tongue between her thighs creating the symphony.

"Good, eh?"

"God, yes..." Siobhan continues eating, hungrily devouring bite after bite, slurping down more wine than I could fill my bathtub with as we chat.

"I'm sure you can't speak directly about the case, but I do have questions. And I know you're not here to fuck me—the wire made that obvious. So can we just get on with this?" I wipe my mouth and wash my food down with a few drinks of my own wine while Siobhan—using more manners than I've been so far—thoughtfully chews and swallows before responding.

"You're right. To talk about the case directly would be unethical, and honestly, I don't think you'll like what I have to say, anyway." Her long, slender arm reaches for the bottle of wine, which I'm positive isn't a good idea, but I don't stop her.

"It's bad for him, huh?" I already know she's going to tell me she'll throw the book at him. I've looked into her. Cousin killed by an unnamed suspect thought to be connected to one of Dublin's main crime syndicates. She's in this for personal reasons and out for blood.

"No, I'm afraid not." Her words are full of compassion, her weakness. She knows the pain of losing someone, and thus she knows what Brennan, Rebecca, and Isla will go through if Mick is locked up.

"So why are you here?" I ask her. If she's not here to discuss Mick, and probably won't open up if I wanted her to, it means she's here to get close to me. She probably wants to try to get dirt on my family, which won't happen. Or maybe she really does just want to fuck me.

Siobhan sighs and shrugs a shoulder. "I have a job to do, Finn. And it probably isn't in your best interests to be seen with me, either. Your type... well, they're not kind to rats." Her eyes nervously study my face, scanning for any tell. I have none. I'm trained to handle these situations, but she's not.

"Well, how about we put that all aside for the evening? No pressure to do our jobs, no other reason to be here than a man and a very attractive woman having dinner." Her



lips curl into a smile and she nods. "And whatever happens, happens. And tomorrow, we can regroup and see how we might go about doing our jobs a different way." I'm no fool. She won't stop hunting us, but if I can find a way to get to her weakness and exploit it in my favor, I will.

"I'd like that," she says as she drops her napkin on the table. She takes another long swig of her wine, and I notice the glassy appearance of her eyes. "And I liked what was happening, you know... earlier."

The half-lidded way she looks at me is erotic. She's tempting me to come back to her, and I don't even try to resist the bait. I slide around the booth and hook my fingers in the flesh at her hip, pulling her into my body.

"You mean this?"

Siobhan nods, biting her lip. She's intoxicated but still in control. "I wasn't just flustered because of the wire." I can't tell if this is the alcohol talking or some sort of scheme she's cooked up in her head. Could it be that she thinks fucking me will get me to lower my guard? Or is she really that attracted to me too?

"And if I did something like this" —I inch the side of her golden dress up her thigh until my fingers can caress the heat of her flesh— "would that be okay?" I'd take her right here at this table if she let me, but something tells me she has the good sense—even when drunk—to resist that.

"Mmm, yes," she purrs, and her hand rests on my bicep, manicured fingers wrapping around its girth to pull my hand closer.

"You're drunk, Ms. Gallagher. How do I know you're genuine?" My head descends to her chest where I continue where I left off, nipping her skin and pressing soft kisses to her cleavage. That diamond is perfect between them, a crown jewel hidden in a

secret valley waiting to be searched out.

"I guess you have to trust me." Her words are slurred now, head arched back with tiny gasps emitting from her throat as I suck and nip at her skin.

When I lift my head, she brings her lips to meet mine in a scorching kiss that I don't expect. For such a serious woman, she seems to be coming undone. Her hand pulls at my arm, guiding me closer to her core, and I let my fingers slide up her inner thigh to find moisture, sticky and pungent, and a lot of it. She's not just putting on a game. This woman wants me bad.

"You know if we do this, there's no going back. You can't erase this from your reputation." My words of caution make her tense in my arms. The way she tugs at me slows, the passion of her kiss fading, and then the hand that was just pulling me closer presses to my shoulder.

"I, uh... I should go." Siobhan snatches the clutch from the bench between us and slips out of the booth. "Thank you for dinner. I had a lovely time." Her eyes flick to the wire, still submerged in the water, and she dangles two fingers into the glass to pluck it out.

"You don't have to leave," I tell her, but she turns and scurries away. I stand and take out my wallet, leaving a couple of hundred-dollar bills on the table before casually following her.

When I step outside, she's on her phone, probably calling a taxi. She's so gorgeous under the streetlamp, just a shapely silhouette with erect nipples pressing through the thin fabric of that form-fitting gown. My dick is rock hard, but I won't force her. It would be counterintuitive. I need her to want me so much she'll do anything for me. Including dropping the charges against my friend.

"Let me drive you," I tell her, knowing my driver is on standby just around the corner. I reach into my pocket and send a text.

"Uh, no. I can't do that. I will wait for my cab." Siobhan shoves her phone into her clutch which hangs from her shoulder, then she crosses her arms under her tits which only accentuates the cleavage.

"It's no problem, really. I can be a gentleman." I stand a few strides away, not wanting to enter her personal space or make her feel intimidated. But God, do I want her.

"Please, no. I will be fine." She's stubborn, probably thinks I'll just put the moves on her and she won't be able to resist. Or maybe she's still scared I'll hurt her.

"Have it your way," I say, turning to walk up the street where the car waits. I step into the shadows, but I keep my eye on her. I won't let her stand here wearing that many diamonds and wait alone. Who knows what lowlife is out here looking for an opportunity to take advantage of some naive drunken woman who has zero sense about things like this?

Pausing around the corner of the building, I stand watching. Several minutes go by, and I text my driver again that it will be only a few minutes. Just as I feared, two men walk out of the shadows from the opposite direction and stroll right up to her. They're dressed in dark clothing, hoodies obscuring their faces. I don't know what they want, but they won't get it on my watch.

One of them grabs her clutch, and I leap from the darkness, drawing my gun. Siobhan struggles against them, pushing and hitting, and one of them grabs her around the waist. As I race forward, gun pointed, she makes eye contact with me.

"Finn!" Her screech of need sends my heart racing.

One of the men looks up and drops her clutch, running off into the darkness from where he came, and the other earns a hard knock to the head from the butt of my weapon. He winces and drops to his knees, letting go of her, and she wraps her arms around me and whimpers.

"Let's get you out of here," I bark. The man slumps forward, out cold, and I holster my weapon before scooping her up into my arms.

"My God!" she whines, burying her face into my neck as I carry her into the darkness toward my waiting car.

The driver rushes out to open the door for us so I can easily set her inside. There's no telling who those guys were—if they were just run of the mill thugs looking for a score or something more sinister—but I'm glad I was there.

The streets aren't a safe place for the deputy public prosecutor, especially not when she's dressed like this.

### SIOBHAN

My hands fumble with the key to my penthouse. I'm wasted and terrified. "I just can't..." I slur, looking up at Finn's face through blurry eyes. He seems to understand, taking the keys from my fingers to unlock my door.

I asked him to come up, too scared to walk myself to my own fucking apartment door after what just happened. I told him to go, waved him off like I knew what I was doing, but clearly, I have no clue what I'm doing and those men... they could have...

"I got it," he says. Finn's calm strength is comforting. He unlocks the door and opens it for me, follows me in as I wobble and sway. Inside the safety of my apartment, I feel better, but I don't want him to leave yet. He kept those men from doing the unspeakable things they may have done after I rejected his kindness. I owe him at least a cup of coffee.

"Want something to drink? Coffee? Beer?" I drop my clutch on the glass top table of my dining room. It's dark, the only light coming from the small floor lamp on the far opposite side of the room near the windows overlooking St. Stephen's Green and the city center. This time of day, it's nothing but twinkling lights, but during daytime, it's a fabulous view. For now, I'm in darkness, seeing only Finn's silhouette as he locks the door behind himself.

"No, thank you."

"Well, you just saved me, so I owe you something." Finn is a dangerous man, there's no doubt about that. But I feel safe with him here—much safer than on the street with those thugs. And any personal vendetta I have isn't against him as a man, but more so the lifestyle he lives, the organizations as a whole. I can separate that for one evening to thank a man who saved my honor.

"I have something else in mind," he murmurs, and it makes goosebumps rise on my arms. I kick off my heels and press a hand to the cool glass, leaning on it. I still feel the moisture between my thighs that he elicited just by undressing me with his eyes. His touch was electric too, and my body already feels it with him seemingly miles away.

"What's that?" I ask, expecting him to come right over and undress me, but he passes by me entirely. When he walks around the bar and the lights come on, I strain at the brightness. "What are you doing?"

Finn searches my cupboards and takes out a glass, fills it with water, and then returns to my side, taking me by the hand to the living room where we sit on my white leather sofa. "Here," he says, putting the water in my hands. He curls some hair around my ear and watches me, nodding in a gesture intended to tell me to drink.

I sip, unsure of what to even feel. I'm ready to spread my legs and sit on this man's face and he's acting like a gentleman. Because of those men, maybe? Why else would he not come at me again? We're alone here. He has no reason to hold back. We were both massively turned on and ready to go at it only twenty minutes ago, and now this?

"What are you doing?" My suspicion has to be answered. Even in my drunken state, I can see something is going on inside his head.

"You need to get a security team. After that, you have to see that you're not safe.

You're a DPP, woman. The creatures are going to crawl out of the darkness to come after you now that you're trying this high-profile case."

I narrow my eyes at him and drink more, then set the glass to the side. "Is that what you've done, then?" He pauses a beat and shakes his head like he doesn't know what I'm insinuating. "You hired those men to come at me so you could rush in and play the hero? Get me to invite you up here and then what? You'll kill me now?"

The words spill out of my mouth and I don't try to stop them. He's got his wheels turning now. I'm not stupid, just drunk. And for some strange reason, very calm now. No longer anxious at all. I suppose that is the alcohol.

"I'm not that sort of man, Siobhan." Finn rises as if to leave, and I snag his hand.

"Stay..." The words hang in the air as an open invitation, and I don't hide the meaning.

"Think what you want about men like me, but don't lump me into the rest of the group. I'd never do that to you or any other woman. O'Rourkes live by a code." He pulls his hand from my grasp and continues to walk toward the door, and I shoot to my feet and snip at him.

"Are you all gay or something? A beautiful woman, available and ready to be your sex pet, and you just walk away?" My chest is heaving as I spit out the words. "Don't think you'll get a lick of information from me at all. You're a monster, plain and simple. Just like them all. It's all you'll ever be."

Finn stops and turns back to me, but the anger or darkness I hope to see in his eyes isn't there. He's amused at my drunken railing and he chuckles.

"A woman with a mouth like that has got to be absolute raging fire in the sack, no?"

He quirks up one eyebrow, and now I'm fuming mad at him. I pick up the glass of water and launch it at him, but it misses, smashing against the dining room wall and shattering. The water runs down the wall slowly, puddling by the broken glass.

"Wouldn't you like to know!" Turning, I stomp off toward my bedroom, and before I even get out of the living room, Finn is there, gripping my wrist so hard I think he'll break my arm. He twists it up behind my back and pushes me against the wall where his hot breath dances across my cheek from behind. I turn my head and let the cold plaster chill my hot cheek, and he bites my earlobe.

"Actually, I would." His growl makes a shiver of arousal crawl down my spine to my core. It pools there, furthering the warmth that's already been pulsing through me. His attitude, the way he commands my attention is so attractive, I can't help but melt in his presence.

"Screw you."

"Is that an invitation?" he asks me as he grabs a handful of my ass and grinds his hard dick into the back of my thigh. I'm shocked to feel how turned on he is by me. "Because I'll take it if it is."

Before I even know what's happening, he has me turned around, still pinned to the wall, and my dress is folded down around my waist, bare chest exposed to his greedy eyes, which devour me. I'm shocked and embarrassed, but my body is on fire for him, pussy pulsing and aching to be touched.

"Finn, what are you doing?" I manage to ask as he kneels down, taking my dress and panties with him, and his hot breath fans across my wet center as his face closes in on my shaven mound. I'm not thinking straight, clearly. I'm making a mistake. This is completely out of character for me.



“I was thinking of collecting on that offer from the club minus the audience.” He growls before he roughly pushes his tongue between my folds, lapping at my arousal and causing me to moan loudly.

“Finn...” I warn, but it comes out as a moan as he adds a finger to the mix, thrusting it inside me as he devours me whole with his mouth. His stubble scrapes on my thighs as his tongue invades me. I am shuddering, bracing myself on this wall because I know I’m going to fall over if I don’t.

“You taste just as sweet as I knew you would, Siobhan.” His thumb strokes my clit as he speaks, and I tangle my fingers in his hair as the room spins around us. “You know, I’m absolutely a horrible monster just like you say I am. And men like me are really good at doing very bad things to women who taunt them. Maybe you’ll be more careful next time.” He adds a second finger, then a third, and I’m grunting, barely hanging on to the breath in my lungs. “Or are you going to keep running that pretty mouth of yours?”

“Oh, fuck me, Finn. Just fuck me already!” I’m lost in the pleasure he’s giving me, and I don’t care who he is or what he does when he’s not here with me. All I know is that Finn O’Rourke has the tongue of a god and I want him to use it all over me.

With a wicked grin, he adds a fourth finger, his pinky, twisting and pushing hard against my entrance. “Is that what you want, Siobhan? You sure? Because I can be very bad in ways you’ve never imagined.”

My God, he’s going to put his whole fucking fist into me, and I fucking want it. “Yes...” I gasp, and I use his shoulders for support as I lean forward over him. His mouth returns to suck my clit as he slides his thumb in and I feel like I’m being torn in two. My core is ready to burst, my coil poised to snap.

“Oh, shit... Oh, holy mother,” I grunt. Every twist of his hand pushes it deeper until

his fist sinks into me. My body shudders and loses control. It's thick and huge, stretching me, filling me. I gasp and grunt, barely able to put words into the atmosphere, but I'm going to break open.

"Oh, fuck, I'm gonna..."

"That's right, baby. Come for me, Siobhan. Let me hear you scream."

And scream I do, my body racking with an orgasm so powerful it steals my breath.

I see stars, my vision blurring from the intensity of my orgasm. My body is convulsing, writhing in pleasure as waves of ecstasy wash over me. An overwhelming rush of intense pleasure floods my body, causing me to jolt and contort, my face twisted. My mouth is dry, my breath stolen by the force of my orgasm. My lips part in a silent scream as I taste the salty sweat on my lips. My muscles contract and relax, aching with the intensity of my release. His hand is still inside me, pumping and thrusting, sending shockwaves of pleasure through my body.

I feel like I'm floating, suspended in a haze of blissful oblivion.

Finally, as my climax subsides, I slump against the wall, gasping for air. My heart races, thudding in my ears as my body trembles with post-orgasmic shudders. A satisfied grin spreads across Finn's face as he pulls his hand away, his fingers glistening with my juices. He stands up, adjusting his pants to conceal the obvious bulge that strains against his trousers.

"Was that what you wanted?" he asks, a smirk playing on his lips.

I can only manage a nod, too spent to form words. My body is still tingling, sensitive in places I didn't know existed.

“Good,” he says, caressing my cheek gently. “Because there’s more where that came from, and you’re going to need your strength.” Finn vanishes, and all I can do is lean against the wall. I hear water running, then I see him across the room sweeping up the glass. When he returns, he has a new glass of water and his hands are clean. The bulge in his pants is so obvious, and he hasn’t just left me standing here naked for no reason.

He stands in front of me for a moment as I gather myself. I’m still drunk, but the alcohol is beginning to fade. I keep my eyes on him as I walk to the bedroom, backing down the hallway into my sanctuary where I hope to God he finishes what he’s started.

He stalks me, leaving the bedroom door open, his shoes beside it. He sets the glass on the nightstand as I hover near the foot of the bed feeling awkward with my own moisture running down my thighs.

When he takes his pants off, his cock springs up. He’s huge—not nearly as thick as his fist, but huge. My eyes lock on it hungrily. I want him.

“Get on the bed.” It’s a command, and my toes curl at the authoritative edge in his voice. I do as he says, climbing up onto the bed, my back against the headboard and my knees bent.

Finn joins me on the bed, his body towering over mine. He grips my ankles, spreading them apart and sliding his fingers between my folds. “Look at me,” he growls, and I obey. His eyes are dark pools of lust and desire as he spreads my thighs and uses his firm grip to force me into a lying position.

“I’m going to fuck you so hard you won’t be able to walk straight tomorrow.”

As he speaks, he rubs his massive erection against my still-sensitive clit, making me

whimper again. He positions himself at my entrance, his tip teasingly brushing against my wet folds. My breath hitches in anticipation, my body aching for him to fill me up.

“Siobhan—”

“Sib,” I hiss, “call me Sib.” My hands reach for him and pull him down harder, but he resists plunging into me. The teasing is torture. I want more.

“Sib,” he corrects himself, leaning down to kiss me roughly. His tongue invades my mouth, his cock still teasing my entrance. “Beg me for it.” I moan into his mouth, unable to form coherent words as the need for him overwhelms me.

“I said beg me,” he growls, his grip on my thighs tightening. “Tell me you want my cock inside you.”

“Oh, God!” I cry out, my cheeks flushing with embarrassment, but the need for him too great to care. “I want it.”

“Say the words.” He’s dipping in now only an inch at a time, but I feel him pressing there, eager to take me.

“I want it. Your dick in me.”

“Say cock. Say you want my cock inside your goddamn pussy, woman.” His grip tightens, almost hurting me. It’s like he has a script in his head that if I don’t follow it, he can’t come or something. The edge to his tone frightens me, but I manage to whimper out an answer he’s pleased with.

“I want your fucking cock inside my body now.”

With a growl of approval, he slams his entire length into me in one swift, hard thrust. It nearly shatters me with the force. He's thick and long, hitting my back wall, and even after being fisted, he doesn't disappoint.

"Oh, fuck yes!" I cry out, gripping the sheets as he starts to move, hips rocking in a primal rhythm. It's like he's both punishing me and worshiping me at the same time. His eyes are locked on mine, his jaw clenched and veins popping out of his neck. His face is a mask of concentration.

He thrusts into me like he's trying to split me in half—and I don't care. I want more of him. Harder, faster, deeper. I wrap my legs around his waist, urging him on as the cold air from the open window teases my overheated skin.

"Finn," I moan, my climax building again. "Fuck me!"

"Sib," he grunts, and it sends me over the edge again. My second orgasm is even more intense than the first, my muscles clenching around him as I cry out his name.

It's like falling from the highest peak of a mountain, the rush of adrenaline and release of pent-up energy overwhelming and all-consuming. Every muscle in my body tightens and coils around him, grasping for more as I cry out his name like a prayer to the gods. It's a moment of pure pleasure and surrender, a symphony of sensations that leaves me breathless and exhilarated.

Finn doesn't stop, though. He keeps pounding into me, his own climax building. His breaths are ragged, his eyes wild as he stares down at me. "I'm gonna..." He growls, and that's all the warning I get before he explodes inside me, his hot seed filling me up. His shaft pulses with release, his hips pumping slower and slower.

When his lips claim a kiss from mine, I don't resist him. He's fire and ice, the devil and my savior, and I'm so lost in the way I feel, I can't decide which I want more. To

be saved or to be possessed by this man every day.

His phone rings somewhere across the room, and I suck in a breath and blow it out. The scent of his cologne mingled with the smell of sex gives a heady feeling.

"I have to go." Finn pulls out, leaving his sex puddling on the comforter under me. I roll to my side and watch him dress, wishing the lights were on so I could see what I imagine is a perfectly sculpted body.

"You can't stay?" I ask softly.

"Business... but maybe another night." When he's dressed, he comes over and kisses my forehead. "That was incredible."

The low rumble vibrates me. I reach for him. "Stay..." My drunken stupor is lifting, so I'm not sure why I'm still doing this. I'm insane. He's a fucking mobster and I'm the deputy prosecutor.

"Rest. You need to think about this before you say anything else." He's gentle with me, more so than I ever imagined a man like him could be, and then he's gone, and I'm finding myself fading into sleep.

What the actual fuck have I done?

FINN

I 've been to court a few times before, but never as someone here to observe the proceedings. I was always the guy at the table with a sleazy lawyer paid by my father to get me out of the hot water I got myself into. Today, I'm here to listen and retain information, then use that to get what I want out of the prosecutor. I'm also here to watch the beautiful Ms. Gallagher who hasn't spoken to me since the night I saved her from those bastards on the street.

She sits at her table poring over her files while we wait for the judge. After opening arguments, which both lawyers handled well, the judge granted a short recess, and now we'll begin hearing testimony. I'm tense, wishing this were over and I could get back to my normal job, but Mick has been our ally less than a year, and ensuring he remains free to continue fully integrating his operations to ours is essential.

"All rise for the Honorable Judge Callahan." The court official speaks from his position near the door to the judge's chambers, and everyone in this courtroom takes notice. We all stand in a rush of squeaking seats and moaning of wood.

The judge strolls in, his silky black robe billowing in the breeze his movements create. He has a scowl on his face that looks permanently glued there and a very bad comb-over as evidence to his vain attempt to stay youthful. It's comical, but not anything I haven't seen on most men his age and economical class. He's the center of attention here in this courtroom, and he's proud as a peacock of it.

"You may be seated," he grunts as he lowers himself into his chair. The herd of men and women in this room lower into their places. I'm no exception.

Brennan sits next to me, Isla to her left. Rebecca isn't here today, too emotional to come watch her father be grilled like a slab of meat over something he hasn't done. Mick looks back over his shoulder at us and presses two fingers to his lips and points them at his wife. Brennan is shaking.

I squeeze her hand as Siobhan calls her name. "Your Honor, I'd like to call Mrs. Brennan O'Connor to the stand."

Brennan rises, and I notice Isla rubbing her belly nervously. She glances at me through the gap created as her mother stands, and I move my knees to the side to let Brennan squeeze out the end of the row.

She takes the stand, placing her hand on a closed Bible to be sworn in. The whole courtroom stares at her eagerly, the first witness to the prosecution, subpoenaed against her will in an attempt to force her to tattle on her husband. It's dirty, but it's how this game is played.

Siobhan takes a piece of paper from her briefcase and holds it in her hands, as if it's a script for what she wants to say. Her eyes continue to scan it as she walks around the prosecutor's table and strolls up to where Brennan has taken her seat in the witness box. The jury of twelve hand-selected men and women fix their eyes on her as she begins her questioning.

"Mrs. O'Connor, thank you for joining us today. I understand this must be challenging for you, but I just have a few questions." I wish I could see the beautiful prosecutor's face to read it, but her back is to me and likely will be for much of the proceedings.



Brennan says nothing. She looks terrified, hugging her purse to her belly, staring at Mick with a blank expression and pale features.

"Mrs. O'Connor, is it true you wrote in your sworn statement that your husband, the defendant, Mick O'Connor, was at the pub with his friends and family the night of the murder, April twentieth?" A stab at Mick's alibi. We knew that was coming.

"Yes, that's true." Brennan was coached to give one-word answers and keep it short. I hope she does the right thing.

"And is it true that you don't actually know where he was?" Siobhan lowers the paper and stares at Brennan, who shrugs.

"Yes, that's true."

"Mrs. O'Connor, what sort of man is your husband?" Siobhan pauses and looks at the jury for a moment before continuing. "Is he angry or abusive? Does he have outbursts of temper?"

"Objection, your honor, irrelevant." Mick's solicitor stands and shakes his head.

"Grounds for cause, your honor. I aim to prove Mick O'Connor is a violent man, and who better to prove that than the person who knows him best?" Siobhan's eyes zero in on the solicitor's face, and she catches a glimpse of me. I watch her swallow hard and turn back to the judge.

"I'll allow it. Please continue." The judge seems relaxed. Maybe it's because he already knows what he'd decide in this matter, but thankfully, it's not up to him. A jury gets to decide Mick's fate. "Mrs. O'Connor, please answer the question.

"My husband is a good man," Brennan offers, but she looks sad now, eyes searching

her husband's face.

"Mrs. O'Connor, did you know your husband had a secret business running out of the barns on your property?" She stares at Brennan, who does a very lovely job of feigning ignorance.

Brennan glances at the judge with eyes wide and eyebrows raised in a fake expression of shock. "Well, no, ma'am. We're farmers." Just as we coached, Mick's wife is doing a fantastic job.

"Is it true that your husband, Mick, was involved in several altercations over the years, four of which resulted in charges being pressed against him for domestic violence?" Siobhan is going for the jugular now, and Brennan says nothing. "And is it true he spent thirty days in jail for one of those incidents?"

Brennan's eyes bounce back and forth between Mick's and the prosecutors. We had no idea this was going to be brought up. No one prepared her for how to answer this. We focused on coaching her how to avoid the topics of Mick's businesses.

"Mrs. O'Connor, answer the question." The judge nudges her, and she clears her throat.

"Yes." Brennan is terrified. I can see it on her face.

"Mrs. O'Connor, is it true that one of those incidents was something that sent you to the hospital?" There it is. The guillotine has dropped. Siobhan went there fast too.

Brennan's head drops and she covers her mouth, stifling a sob, but Siobhan says, "No further questions, your honor." It's a cheap trick designed to shock the jury—who are speaking in hushed whispers right now—into thinking Mick is abusive. It won't stand.

Mr. Quinn stands now, poised to undo everything Siobhan just did. He rounds the table and walks straight up to Brennan, offering her a tissue from his pocket. It's like he orchestrated this knowing how the jury would look at her. It's pity, and it tugs their heart strings, especially because it comes from Mick's solicitor.

"Here you go, Mrs. O'Connor, I'm sorry counsel has dragged you through this. Do you need a moment?"

That's it, Quinn, play to their sympathies. Brennan is a helpless wife forced to turn on her husband, and the jury is eating out of your hand now. Just a few cards left to play now, and we'll see the shock on Siobhan's face, and I wish I could see it too. The same expression she had when I dropped to my knees and devoured her.

"No, that's okay." Brennan dabs her eyes and sniffles and Quinn goes on.

"Mrs. O'Connor, for clarification, please tell the court why you were hospitalized that night." He hovers, the ever-doting solicitor who wants the jury to eat out of his palm.

Brennan sniffles and begins. "We had someone break into our barn and mess with the animals. It was during the day when Mick was in the lower pasture. I rushed out with a shovel to chase them off, a young man with no sense, really. And when Mick came running, he—" She stopped short and looked embarrassed. "Well, he ran me over entirely. I hit my head quite hard, but he caught the bastard trying to steal one of our horses."

The courtroom erupts into gasps and hushed whispers again, and I chuckle. I remember that story Isla told us a few months back. She was utterly shocked to find out her father was chief of his own crime syndicate and never connected things together. Stories like that one are what bloodthirsty solicitors go after when they're scrambling for real evidence. Emotional manipulation is what it is.

"So it was an accident that happened when someone broke into your barn?" Quinn eyes the jury and turns back to face Mick as he speaks to Brennan. "And tell me about the other times your husband, the defendant, Mick O'Connor, was charged with assault."

"Well, all of them were times when someone came onto our property, Mr. Quinn. Mick was just protectin' our land." Brennan is brilliant, and Mick sits tall and proud. Of course, there's proof for all of this.

"Your Honor, I'd like to enter into evidence these documents from court history proving Mr. Quinn's actions were in self-defense of his own property and do not reflect the nature of his personality whatsoever." Quinn picks up a stack of papers from his table and walks them to the judge's bench. Siobhan glares at him and can't even object. This is going swimmingly.

After a few moments, Judge Callahan looks up at Quinn and nods, and Quinn says, "No further questions, Your Honor."

Pews squeak and chairs squeal as folks readjust the way they're sitting. When the judge instructs Siobhan to call her next witness, she turns to meet my gaze and there's a fire there, a hunger for truth, or maybe for me, I'm not sure. Ronan, seated behind me, taps my shoulder.

"How's it going?" he asks in a whisper. I know he's referring to the plan I have to sway Ms. Gallagher's opinion of Mick and help him become a free man again.

"Good. I have her right where I want her," I throw over my shoulder in an equally hushed tone.

"You'd better," Ro says, and as he does, Siobhan calls his name.

"Your Honor, I'd like to call Ronan O'Rourke, chief of the O'Rourke Clan."

The room stills and goes silent. I'm not sure what she's going to ask him, but now I know why he's here.

### SIOBHAN

Liam's chastising isn't helping my already sullen mood. After Brennan O'Connor made me look like a fool in cross examination, I made it worse by calling Ronan O'Rourke. The subject of planted evidence came up and the judge declared a recess immediately. Now all I want is to relax and unwind after a hard day, and my friend the detective Garda thinks I'm game for a bickering match.

"I told you, there was nothing I could do." It's been five days since I left the sealed envelope with diamonds and the drowned wire on Liam's desk while he was out investigating something. He's tried to call me several times, and each time, I let it go to voicemail. Honestly, I'm surprised he hasn't just shown up at my penthouse and demanded I pay him back for the damaged property.

"So, what happened then? I got nothing on the recording." He sounds more upset that he doesn't know what we talked about than whether his precious wire is destroyed, almost like he's jealous of my being alone with O'Rourke and not him.

"You're married, Liam, get a life, " I think, but I don't say it. Instead I say, "I'll pay you back when I have some extra cash on hand, but it'll be a while. O'Rourke expected the wire. He just ripped it right off my chest and dropped it in the glass."

"I told you that man was a lunatic. I told you not to go." His serious control issue bothers me enough that I want to hang up, but I know he'll just show up to my place and lay into me. Besides, I know I crossed a line with Finn, fucking him like that. No

good DPP with any sense in her head would do that, and I spread my legs like I was serving up a feast. It just felt so damn good.

"He's not a lunatic, but you are right. He's dangerous." I huff out a sigh as I juggle my briefcase and jacket in one hand to find my keys in my pocket with the other, nearly dropping them as I switch my phone from one shoulder to the other. "Listen, I have an in with the O'Rourkes, okay? We're just inches away from busting the crime world wide open. Can't you just celebrate with me for one second?"

The door swings open to darkness, and I reach for the switch to flip on the lights but they don't come on. Just what I need, a power outage. It seems to have only started, though, since I rode the elevator up here. At least my frozens won't start to thaw.

"Look, my power is off, Liam. I have to go. I'll call you tomorrow." Pressing the End Call button, I drop my keys, purse, and phone on the stand by the door, then set my jacket and purse on a kitchen chair as I pass through the dining room.

I have some candles and a match in the drawer next to the sink, kept there in case of a bad storm or something like this happening. I saw some construction down the street, which makes me think this might be related. Until I stand in front of the microwave, where the bright blue light indicating the late hour glows in the darkness.

I'm instantly aware that I'm not alone in this darkness. I can feel a presence here with me, someone breathing across the room. I stand still, thinking of where my knife block is positioned, behind me on the marble island next to the range top. I could make a move, lunge for it, but I don't know where they are or who they are. My blood runs cold at the thought of those two men from the street being in here, stalking me, hunting me like a sick game of cat and mouse.

My entire body bristles, hair standing at attention on my arms. Goosebumps rise as I search with my peripheral vision, straining against blackness I know all too well.

There is only the light from the microwave here, the only windows in my penthouse on the far side of the building obscured by a half wall that divides the living area from the hallway to my ensuite.

"Who's there?" I say harshly, remembering the open door, left cracked when I realized the lights were out. My heart is pounding so hard I can hear the blood whirring past my eardrums, but above it, I faintly make out a voice.

"It's me, Siobhan, Judge Callahan."

The tension coiling every muscle in my body, preparing me to fight or flee, relaxes and I heave out a sigh. "What the hell are you thinking?" I hiss, but the goosebumps don't go away as instantly as they came. "You scared the feck out of me."

He speaks softly, as if afraid to be here, or no, concealing his identity. He knows how bad this would look for him if someone saw him in my apartment during a trial. We'd look like we were colluding against Mick O'Rourke, like we were setting him up. It would be grounds for an immediate mistrial, so why is he here?

"I only have a moment, Siobhan, but this is important."

I turn toward the sound of his voice. He's close, but not near enough to touch me. That's a good thing, because while I do recognize his voice, I'm still on the edge of freaking out. How the actual fuck did he get in here?

"What is it? You know you shouldn't be here. This could cause a mistrial." Now my fear is slowly being replaced by annoyance. He could've just called me into his chambers for this. I don't understand what's with all the secrecy.

"I received a threat and I want to make sure you're taking care of yourself. Have you hired a security team yet?" I scowl, thankful he can't see my face.



"No, I haven't. I'm not afraid of them, Brendan." Leaning on the cool island countertop, I suck in a breath to help flush more of the tension out of my chest. "I have it under control. I'm not losing my nerve. We'll get the bastard."

"Good, good... Well, you should know we've got a little help from the local Garda. The new evidence you've submitted in the ballistics report is verified. And it appears the mud on the carpet they scraped up from the scene of the crime matches the mud from the O'Connor farm. It was him."

I want to plug my ears and make nonsense sounds to block out what I'm hearing. A judge openly declaring the guilt of a man still on trial is a massive ethics violation. I can't hear this. If people found out that a case I'm actively trying is presided over by a judge who has a bias and I knew about it, I'd be destroyed.

"You should leave, Brendan. This shouldn't be happening." My calm, even tone helps me feel grounded though I feel totally out of control now. The shock of someone in my home has me rattled. This building has extra security protocols. I have no clue how he got in, let alone how he got in without anyone seeing him.

"I'll go. I just wanted to make sure you're okay." I feel his hand on mine on the island and I don't pull away. Brendan is a good man, a kind man. He's been like a father to me for years now, though my father back home isn't dead. Just distant.

"Thank you for checking on me, but you should go. We can't let anyone stop us from putting these bastards behind bars. I don't want to risk this case being thrown out on a technicality." Pulling my hand out from under his, I pat his hand and try to relax my shoulders.

"You're right... Well, then, have a good evening." Judge Callahan starts to move toward the door, and I reach into the drawer behind me to retrieve a slender stick candle and a match. I light it, and before I see which way he went, he's gone.

The door still stands ajar, so I glance both ways down the hallway, then shut and lock it. The glow is enough for me to find my way to my bedroom and search for the power box tucked behind a row of hanging suits in my closet. The breakers have mostly been flipped, but the one for the kitchen is on. I could've flipped the light switch at any time, but I didn't know it.

With the lights on I feel safer, though I may sleep with them on all night after that. I snuff the candle and set it on my nightstand as I start to strip out of my suit.

The day has worn on me. I feel like pouring a glass of wine but decide against it as I change into a T-shirt and loose shorts to sleep in. I'll want my wits about me if something like that happens again, and drinking isn't the best idea when I'm scared, anyway. It only makes the nightmares worse.

I slip into a night robe and slink out to the kitchen where I heat up some leftover pasta from two nights ago. The microwave whines and hums as it warms my dinner, and I hear the bell ring seconds after the appliance chimes announcing the food is warm.

For a second I glower at the door, thinking it's Liam who's come to berate me about his stupid damaged listening device. But fear still lingers in the air around me, choking out my better judgment. I pull the food from the microwave and stir it with a fork, ignoring the bell. Whoever it is this time of night can't want anything good, but I tiptoe to the door and use the peep hole to peek out.

In the hallway outside my penthouse, Finn O'Rourke stands with a dozen pink roses in hand, looking up the hall with curiosity etched on his face. He wears a dark Polo, dark leather jacket, and dark jeans, a man of the night come to surprise me for what? Romance?

I think about not opening, just leaving him standing there with those roses wondering what I'm doing. But just knowing he's here makes me feel a tinge safer. I got the

shock of my life just now, and my hands are still shaking. The only reason I'm eating this food is to comfort myself. I could use the presence of someone I trust. Not that I trust Finn implicitly, but I trust him to be who he is—a mobster with ethics, at the very least.

"What?" I grump as I swing the door open. The dish in my hand is hot, steam rising from the sauce-covered noodles. I plunge a fork in and shove a bite in my mouth and he grins.

"Brought you these?"

A king's gift makes room for him ... Something my father used to say, and now I'm learning what it means.

"Come in," I grunt and turn my back on him. There could be worse ways to spend my evening. If I didn't just fuck my case by speaking to the judge about it directly, this will surely put it in the shitter.

10

FINN

The annoyed look on Siobhan's face only makes me chuckle. I follow her into the apartment and lock up behind myself. Yes, I came here to get laid, but more importantly, I came with more information for her, and a warning. This is getting a whole hell of a lot more dangerous now, and I can't even tell her why it is. Ronan's intel is never wrong, though, so I'm doing the right thing by warning her. Besides, if she gets taken out, we have to start over with a new DPP.

"Well, that's a lovely greeting." The apartment smells like a man's cologne, making me wonder who she's had up to visit. It's not a scent I ever use, nor would I. Smells like an old man, or just one who bathes in the shit instead of a light spritz.

"I haven't had the best day. What do you want, Finn?" Siobhan parades her happy ass into the living room, and I lay the flowers on the glass dining table as I pass. Her short shorts are baggy, barely covering the curve of her ass, so that's where my eyes focus as she walks. The feel of that ass in my hands when we fucked last time comes to mind, making my cock start to swell just thinking of burying my dick in her again.

"I have a bit of news, maybe a warning." She rounds the couch as I speak, and I follow her. But as she plops down, I remain standing, watching her devour that bowl of pasta as if her life depended on it. She looks rattled, skin a bit pasty and pale, hands trembling slightly. I don't think I've had this effect on a woman in years, but maybe my surprise visit startled her. Or maybe there's another reason for her to be so shaken.

"Well, don't just stand there, feckin' say something." She glowers at me, shoves another bite of food in her maw, and chews loudly as I study her. I wonder what's bothering her, but maybe I already know. Maybe they've already gotten to her and I'm too late.

"We have another player in the game." My eyes sweep around this room though I don't know what I'm searching for. Something just feels different now. "The Doyle Syndicate sent those two men to attack you. I'm not sure what they were aiming at doing, but that's who it was." Ronan called me yesterday to give me this update. He thinks somehow the DoYLES have a stake in this game, that they sent men to rough her up and scare her into fighting harder to put Mick away.

It makes sense that they want her to be scared, and Mick would never hire a hit on a DPP while he's on trial. He's not that stupid. So the DoYLES insisting that Mick be prosecuted, going as far as to frighten the prosecutor—well, it leads me to think they're behind this setup.

"It was O'Connor's men, Finn." Siobhan doesn't look impressed as she speaks. "My friend Detective Kearney already looked into it." She rolls her eyes like I'm stupid, but I know what Ro told me and he's never wrong. He knows this city better than anyone, has ears to the ground in so many places it's not funny. So who is lying to this detective? Or is he lying to Siobhan?

"Alright, well I just wanted to let you know you're not safe. O'Connors or DoYLES, they're coming for you." I don't know why I even care, anyway. She's a good fuck, and she's the target I need to manipulate to get what I want, but outside of that, if she got her pretty little throat slit, I shouldn't even pay any attention. But I care. Dammit, it goads me.

"I can handle myself," she says dryly, but her breath catches, and she clears her throat. The food is gone, but she clings to the bowl like it's a weapon. Something

really has frightened her tonight. No wine means she's trying to stay alert. No weapon out means she's trying to prove to herself that she's not scared. But she's closed off—sitting with her body guarded, curled around that bowl.

"You okay?" I ask, and she glares at me.

"I have a fucking mobster in my house. Am I supposed to be okay?" Her tongue bites, but her eyes are soft. I'm confused by her behavior, but my gut tells me I'm probably not actually getting what I came here for.

"I was tryin' to be nice, woman. I don't have to be here warning you. I don't have to pay any attention to you. We could break down that fucking prison and take Mick out if we wanted, but we're trying to do this the right way because Aiden deserves justice and to break things down would only make Mick look guiltier." I run a hand through my hair and stomp off toward the door, and she lurches off the couch and throws the bowl at me. This time, though it slams into the same wall as the shattered glass I cleaned up, it doesn't break. She has a real fucking problem with that.

"Good, leave!" she screeches, and I whip around.

"What's your problem, cunt? I came here to be nice to you." I expect to see her angry, raging mad and desperate for me to get out of her apartment, but she's trembling, arms curled around her middle pushing her tits out in front. She looks small and frightened, and my instinct is to run to her and make her not feel that way.

"Leave," she squeaks, but I can't now. Not when I've seen this.

"Sib, what's wrong?" I take a step toward her and she tenses. "Did someone hurt you?" My eyes sweep the place again. I know something feels off. "Are they here still?" I ask in a whisper, and she runs to me, throwing her arms around me as tears leak out.

I pull her in, smoothing her dark hair down her back. I clasp her head to my shoulder, her middle against my chest, and hold her as she shakes. "Hey, what happened?"

"It was... Well, I can't say who it was, but they got in. He was in my fucking house when I got home. This place is secure." She pulls away and stares at me, but her hands rest on my biceps. My chest is pounding now too, adrenaline pumping to ready me for fighting, but I tell it to calm down.

"Who got in, Sib? Who was it?" I grab her by the arms and shake her gently, but she turns away.

"It wasn't someone dangerous, that's all I can say." Her lip squirms between her teeth and I shake my head. She's protecting someone.

"And you're frightened because...?" The only thing I can think is that this person is threatening her, and she is too afraid to tell me, maybe for fear they will harm her if she does.

"Because if this person can get into my apartment, anyone can." Siobhan's eyes turn to take me in, and I see the terror. I know all too well that feeling, hiding under my parents' bed, staring at the feet passing by as the men who broke into our home to harm my family search our things. It's normal in my world, but not in hers.

"Hey, I'm here... Shh." I pull her in again, and she relaxes into my arms. She's a fighter, body rigid with tension and ready to run if need be, but she lets me hold her. This is fucked up. I hate seeing her so terrified, and I'm supposed to be ready to slit her throat or something if she doesn't play by our rules. What the hell will I tell Ronan? That I'm falling in love with the prosecutor? I can't let this happen, but it's happening all the same and I don't want to stop it.

"Please don't leave. Not tonight. Please stay with me," Siobhan begs, and I have no

intention of leaving.

"I'll stay," I tell her, and I pull her head away and bring her lips to meet mine softly. Then I pull back so our eyes meet. She tastes like pasta sauce, sweet and tangy, and I want more of it.

"Thank you," she says, her voice so timid I wonder if she even approves of the words. This can't be good for Mick's case either—her being seen with a criminal associated with the man she's accusing of murder. If the judge throws the case because she's fucking me, I'll have to go back to the drawing board on how best to get Mick off the hook while still preserving the case so they can find Aiden's real killer.

Siobhan studies my eyes from only inches away, blinking rapidly. "Why do you care? Why are you here, Finn?" Her hands linger on my arms, sliding slowly up to my shoulders where her hands hook around my neck and play with the hair at the nape of my neck.

"Why does anyone do anything?" She's so close I can smell the lingering scent of her shampoo, something with coconut or shea butter. It's faint, but it's a good smell.

"No, I'm asking why you are." Her fingernails scrape the back of my neck, and even I question my motive. I'm supposed to be buttering her up, coaxing her into my web to force vulnerability and demand she do things my way. At this point, she could just recuse herself and be done with it and there would be no way for me to blackmail her. I'm not doing anything at all except getting my kicks.

"I'm here..." I start, but I have no words. This woman makes me want to be honest. "I'm here because you asked me to stay." It's all I can muster because the truth is, I'm here because she does something to me. She's got me by the balls.

"And?" she asks, licking her lower lip.



"And I want to bed you, maybe more than that. Maybe I'm a foolish man caught in the Black Widow's web, ready to be bled dry, but I want to be here because I want to be here." I pull her against my mouth in a crushing kiss she doesn't resist.

The kiss is searing, binding our lips together as our bodies begin to move toward the couch. Her hands are on my belt now, working to free me from the prison of my clothing while I shove her shorts down to mid-thigh and find her core dripping. My rock-hard cock is pulsing, skin so taut it feels like it will split open if I swell any more. I need to be inside her to ease the burning.

"Christ, woman. You're aching for it," I mutter against her ear before I peel her shirt off and reach around back to unclasp her bra. Her breasts spill free, full and heavy with small, dark nipples that peak under my scrutiny. She's breathing heavily now, biting her lip as if she's trying to keep quiet, and I can't help but smirk at the delicious paradox of it all.

"You want me to fuck you, Siobhan?" The look she gives me is pure fire and lust. I drink in and absorb the hooded gaze she gives me. This woman is intoxicating and she has my heart pounding.

"Yes," she breathes out on a shuddery exhale, and I smile as I push her back against the couch. She's managed to get my pants undone, but I have to unsheathe myself. I tear off my shirt, tossing it, then yank my pants down and kick them off with my shoes. She watches me as she shimmies her shorts and panties the rest of the way down before I kneel between her knees.

"Say it again, louder this time," I grunt into her pussy as I lick hungrily at her folds. She tastes like heaven and damnation, salty and oh, so sweet.

"Finn!" She gasps my name as her head tilts back, and I grin. She claws at my shoulders, her nails tearing into my flesh under the force of it all.

"Finn, please," she begs.

"Please what? Do you want me to fuck you? Do you want me to fuck this tight little pussy until you scream my name, Sib?"

"Yes, please," she whimpers, lifting herself up toward my face as I grab her hips and pull her in harder against my mouth. She tastes even better than I imagined.

"Say it again," I growl, nipping her pussy in warning. "Say it."

"I want you to fuck me, Finn. Please!" Her eyes are glassy with arousal as I push two fingers into her core and stroke the bundle of nerves that makes her jolt and twitch. Her grip on my shoulders intensifies, and I suck her clit like a straw, drinking up her juices.

Siobhan shatters around my digits, screaming into the couch as her juices flood my face. Her face is flushed and her expression is one of pure pleasure mixed with a hint of pain. Her body is covered in a sheen of sweat, her hair clinging to her forehead. Her body is writhing and jerking, knuckles turning white with the force of her grip. Her pussy pulses and I love it, the way she loses control around me.

I lick up every drop of her moisture, watching her features contort in pleasure before I straighten on my knees and sheath myself in one startlingly long movement that draws a gasp from her lips.

"God, you feel wonderful," I growl, biting the column of her neck as I start to move, long, slow strokes at first that increase in fervor until we find a cadence that pleases us both. "You like being my fuck toy?" I manage to grunt out as her pussy tightens around me, but she doesn't answer me with words. Instead, she wraps her legs around my waist and pulls me close, forcing me to go deeper and harder until the couch creaks under our combined weight.

My hand comes down hard on her outer thigh and she gasps, clenching hard around me as she does. “Feck,” she grunts, and her nails dig into my ass to pull me deeper.

She's all slick heat and fire below me as her nails leave angry red marks on my back, but fuck if it doesn't feel good when she orgasms again. It's all I can do not to lose my mind along with her as white-hot pleasure courses through me like lightning when she clenches around my cock hard enough to push me right to the edge.

She convulses and jerks, falling backward to the sofa, and I feel every twitch of her pussy wrapped around my shaft. Her tits bounce, arms limp at her sides, and her eyes roll back as guttural grunts of ecstasy escape her lips. My mouth waters at the sight of her writhing and convulsing. Her hips buck against mine, and I can taste the anticipation and arousal on my tongue.

When she stills, I unsheathe myself and grab her by the arm, turning her over. She's limp and pliable, yielding to my movements. So I help her stand, forcing her to kneel on the sofa cushion and bend over the back of it. I spread her, peering down at her ass while I stroke myself. I'm close.

My thumb presses against her tight entrance, watching the muscles contract against my pressure. She's slick enough that I don't need lube as I line my cock up to her thick ring of muscles and push in, causing her to gasp out in pain mingled with pleasure.

“Shite, it's hot,” I grunt as I push into her ass.

Her hands are braced on the cushions as I start to drive in and out of her, her ass jiggling with my motion and clenching around me in time with her moans. My engorged cock pistons in and out of her tight channel, each thrust becoming more aggressive than the last. She whimpers a moan, writhing and arching her back but forcing her hips backward into me. It's hot, erotic, and I can't get enough, even when

I slap her ass harder than ever.

"Jaysus, fuck," I growl, my lust building. My hand finds her clit, rubbing it faster and harder until Siobhan is coming around my cock once more. The added tightening is all it takes, and I erupt deep inside her, emptying myself with a growl.

My cock pulses as she continues to twitch, and when I pull out, she collapses on the sofa, curled into a ball on her side. Her breathing matches mine, heavy and labored, and I stand there for a moment watching her recover, admiring her perfect, silken skin.

I head for her bathroom, wash my dick and my hands. It goes limp as I stroll back to find my clothing, which she has in her hands. She's perched on the edge of the couch with a serious expression.

"I need that," I tell her, but she hugs my clothes to her chest.

"Stay with me. I don't feel safe. I want you here."

"Yeah, okay," I tell her as I sit next to her.

Siobhan drops my clothes and curls into me as I put an arm around her. She buries her face in my chest and we lie back on the sofa so I can hold her. My heart is still racing. So is hers, but my breathing is almost back to normal. It was incredible, but even more so is this moment.

"It was the judge," she whispers, but I catch it. She's confessing who came here to me, the person in her apartment when she got home.

"What did he want?" My wheels are already turning. What the hell would a criminal judge be doing visiting the home of the prosecutor of one of his trials? Is he looking

for a mistrial? No... he's in on it somehow. I just know it.

"We're friends. He was here to warn me. Do you think I should get security?" Her question hangs in the air while I stay lost in thought for a moment and decide yes, she should.

My arm tightens around her. "I'll help you with that."

"This can't get out, Finn. No one can know this... this thing between us is happening." Siobhan looks up at me, and I kiss her forehead.

"No way in hell I'll tell a soul." Except Ronan... Because if the judge is in on it somehow, we have a new problem to deal with. Larger forces are trying to bury Mick, and that means they'll come for us next.

### SIOBHAN

I stand behind my table as Mick O'Connor rises and smooths his tie against his chest as he walks toward the witness stand. The court official swears him in, but I'm shaking. The man is intimidating. He's run his entire empire for years without anyone in this city suspecting a thing, perhaps because he typically runs a clean game. Not one murder or theft has been reported out of his family until now. He usually sticks to guns and drugs.

As he sits, I approach him. It's been weeks since this trial has started and I'm down to only a few witnesses left. Ronan O'Rourke's testimony as one of Mick's most trusted allies was very damning. O'Rourke painted O'Connor as nothing but a model citizen, the way this entire city views him, but I have evidence that says otherwise.

Today, Mick must bail himself out of hot water because I have a bomb that's about to explode and he won't like it one bit. I take my sworn statement, written by the only person in the world who can reveal the lie Mick's been telling, and I stand in front of him.

"Good afternoon, Mr. O'Connor, how are you doing?" The paper flutters in the breeze I make moving into place, and Mick stares at it.

"Good," he says coldly. He looks tired, haggard even. Most defendants do at this point, months into their trial and holding. He's probably not eating well, not sleeping right. He misses his family and he's desperate to do anything. By now, some of them

crack, but he's a practiced liar like the rest of his allies.

"Very well." I sigh and glance at the judge, still feeling chills from his impromptu visit last week. "Well, I have a few questions for you, if you don't mind." My insides quiver like jelly. It's going to get wild in here in only a few minutes, and I can't say I'd like to be his wife when this news comes out.

"Get on with it," Quinn says from his place behind his table, and Judge Callahan eyes him angrily but says nothing.

"Mr. O'Connor," I start, "did you murder Aiden Hughes in cold blood on the night of April twentieth?"

"I did not." His cold, calculated stare isn't directed at me, but I don't turn to see who he's staring at.

"Mr. O'Connor, let me remind you that you're under oath."

"I did not kill that man." Now his eyes are focused on me.

"And were you at the residence, three twenty-three Portsmouth Road that night?" I have a footprint that matches his boot, soaked in mud from his farm to prove he was, but I know he'll lie anyway.

"I was not, nor have I ever been on that premises." Mick's eyes are black as coal, dangerously studying my face.

"Mr. O'Connor, were you at the pub known only as 'The Pub' by locals, located on Drury Lane, the night of April twentieth as you claim you were in your sworn written statement?" Excitement zings up my spine as he stares me dead in the eye and lies yet again.

"I was, and I have several family members as witnesses to prove it." He is a loathsome soul, deserving of the pits of hell, and my jury is about to hear why. They lean forward on their chairs waiting as I walk to the judge and hand him a letter sworn to me by my very reluctant witness.

"Your Honor, I'd like to submit into evidence this letter, notarized and sworn by a witness who'd like to remain silent for now." A witness who Liam found for me, though I did speak to her myself. "And a videotape will follow shortly." I turn to Mick and smirk at him as I walk back to stand in front of him. He looks pale now, the color draining from his skin.

"Let me ask you again, Mr. O'Connor, were you at The Pub on the night in question?" I stare him down, ready to pounce as he says nothing. There's nothing he can say, so I continue before he tries lying his way out of this. "Do you know a woman by the name of Miriam Flaherty?"

"I do not," he chokes out, but his posture is wilting.

"You probably know her better as the name 'Candy Star,' a hooker from the red-light district. Do you know Ms. Candy Star, Mr. O'Connor?"

"Objection, Your Honor, she states facts not in evidence." The objection from Quinn is weak. I will have a videotape produced by Ms. Star in less than two hours on my desk and he'll have no grounds for defense then.

"Overruled, Mr. Quinn. Mr. O'Connor, you'll answer the question." Judge Callahan narrows his eyes as if waiting for Mick to answer, curiosity, intrigue in his gaze.

"I've met Ms. Star once." Gasps erupt in the courtroom, but I hold my gaze on the defendant. I don't want to miss this at all.



"Is it true that on the night of April twentieth you were at Ms. Star's apartment having sex with her, and that she produced a pornographic video tape of this event?" More gasps erupt, and I hear sobbing, presumably Mick's wife or daughter. I can imagine how it's hurting her, but her husband is a murderer. There are bound to be more harsh truths come out about him.

Mick rubs his forehead, then massages the bridge of his nose a few seconds before letting his shoulders completely droop. "Brennan, you have to understand... Please..." He reaches toward the back of the courtroom as I hear people rushing about. I turn to see Mick's wife rushing out of the room sobbing and then hear the gavel banging on the sounding block. I've hit my mark.

"Answer the question, Mr. O'Connor," I repeat as I walk back to my table.

"Yeah, okay? I fucked her!" Mick is standing now, and Judge Callahan is banging mercilessly on the gavel.

"Order in this court!" he shouts and glares at the people who are jabbering like gossiping schoolgirls.

"Your Honor, I request a recess," Quinn demands. "We have to check out the new alibi." I sit happily behind my table knowing the gold I've dug up. Ms. Star's apartment is less than two blocks from the defendant's home. It gives him plenty of time to have screwed the whore, been to the scene to murder the man, and back home before anyone was the wiser. And I couldn't have done it without Liam.

The judge, happy to grant the request for recess, clears the courtroom for the day. I gather my things and look around for Finn, but he's not here today. It's all well and good because being around him makes me feel and think things I shouldn't. Being in his arms again last week made it very clear to me that I've crossed yet another line. I'm catching feelings for him and it's dangerous territory. Maybe he realizes it too,

and that's why he's not here.

With my things in hand, I walk out the front of the courthouse, set to hail a cab. I check the time on my phone. It's early today. Maybe Finn will be free for dinner and we can do something besides have sex for once. Or maybe I'll dine alone and turn in to some reruns of my favorite old-time cop shows.

It's a nice day, though I'm feeling a bit more tired than normal. I wait on the sidewalk, watching Quinn and a few of the deceased's family leave in their cars, when I hear squealing tires and my head jerks around. There is a car speeding up the road at racing speeds, swerving erratically and jerking back and forth.

My natural instinct is to back away from the curb where I wait, but when shots ring out, there's no time. I fall to my knees and cover my ears, dropping everything and skinning my knees. So many shots ring out as I plaster myself to the cement and curl into a ball. People are screaming and running. I hear a few of the bullets hit their mark in the sides of parked cars, or ricocheting off the courthouse steps, but I stay there in a trembling ball.

When the shooting is over, strong hands jerk me upward and arms wrap around me. I have my eyes clamped shut, unintelligible noises coming out of my mouth, and all I can think is thank God Finn is here. But it doesn't smell like him, and it doesn't feel like his arms.

Prying my eyes open, I hear, "Shh, it's okay." My vision is a bit blurry from adrenaline, but I see Liam hovering over me, guiding me like he's herding a sheep to his car. "Get in... We need to get you out of here." He opens the door to his cruiser and pushes me in, then collects my things from the sidewalk.

I press a hand to the glass, feeling tears welling up and flowing freely. What the hell just happened? And where was Finn when I needed him?

FINN

Ronan and I flip through the images I took of Siobhan's court files when she was sleeping. I can't say I feel guilty for snooping in her briefcase while she slept the other night because I don't. This is war and my friend is on trial for a murder case that could put him away for life. I need to know what the prosecution has against him, and looking through her things was the only way. She was never going to give it up freely.

"It looks like they have a witness set to testify that she saw Mick kill Aiden in cold blood," Ronan says, eyes squinting at the small print on the computer screen. I did the best I could with the limited time, but based on what I make of the blurry image, I think he's right.

"Sarah Duncan..." I say the name absently and scrub both hands over my face. I trust Mick implicitly when he says he did not kill Aiden. As a member of our family both by word and by blood now—bound in marriage by his daughter to my brother—Mick would never double-cross us. Aiden was Ronan's right-hand man.

"Yes, well we need to find Ms. Duncan and find out who paid her off, because there's no way Mick actually did this." Ronan shuts the laptop and leans back on the leather sofa behind him. His wife, Maeve, brings in a tray of teacups, a kettle, some sugar cubes and a scone each on two plates, and sets it down on the table.

"Thank you, dear," he says, and she smiles politely.

"Any updates?" Maeve isn't here to snoop. She genuinely cares. We got news earlier that Mick's daughter is at the doctor surgery. Her labor has started, and the whole family is eagerly expecting word from my brother Declan.

"Nothing about Isla, no." After the shock in court today, finding out her father was a cheating scoundrel, Isla's spent a lot of time with her mother. It's no wonder the stress of this put her into labor. I sigh and nod at the plate. "Thank you for the tea, though."

"Let me know if you hear anything." Maeve backs out of the room, and I turn back to the tea Ronan is doctoring, but my gut isn't going to settle enough to have tea and scones. Our man is fighting for his life, and now Siobhan has just proven that he wasn't where we all said he was that night. We paid that whore good money to keep her mouth shut, but someone got to her. They had to have. Likely, the same people who got to this Duncan lady.

"Find her and find out who is pushing her to talk." Ronan's steely gaze focuses on me, and I nod at him as my phone chimes. It's a text message, so I pull it out to read who it's from.

"Feck," I grunt as I read Siobhan's message preview on my phone screen.

Siobhan 4:12 PM: I was shot at.

Anger surges through me and I press my eyes closed, furious with myself for not going to court today. I should have, but retrieving these images stored on our server for safekeeping and going over them with Ronan was more important than whatever the defense had to pluck out of Mick's testimony. The damage was done by Siobhan's questioning today, anyway.

"What is it?" Ronan sips his tea, and I open my phone and type in a few key words, bringing up some instant news.

"Drive by shooting at the courthouse today after trial. No one is injured, but they suspect Mick's men. Damn fools." This time, I don't put it past them to have done it. I stand up, pocketing my phone as Ronan opens his and begins to search. If it was Mick's men, he'll have words for them. We can't afford fuckups right now, and that's what this is. "I gotta go."

"Back to the pretty prosecutor?" he asks, and I get the feeling he realizes there's something more going on there.

"Duty calls, Boss." I wink at him and head out. Moments like this can make or break a scheme, but they also make or break a relationship. Siobhan was just shot at and I wasn't there. Probably a good thing, honestly, because I'd have seen for sure if it was Mick's men, and we'd have a war within our family.

As it is, I'm worried about her backing out of this case. I know I can put the pressure on her and get her to drop some of those charges for me. What I can't do is start over with a new prosecutor, especially not her boss, the beast of a man who almost put me away before.

When I get to Siobhan's penthouse, all I can think about is that witness who says they saw Mick kill Aiden. I have to find them and put an end to that before she calls them as a witness. I notice a cop car parked out front, so I don't go in instantly. I park outside and wait a while. A man with sleek blond hair and a trim mustache walks out and climbs in, then drives off, and I know the coast is clear.

Siobhan opens the door and hiccups. She's slightly drunk and looking like a mess. Her hair is mussed, mascara lining her cheeks. She throws her arms around me before I'm even fully inside and clings to me.

I scoop her up in my arms and carry her to the couch where I sit, placing her on my lap. I want to ask her about the cop, but judging by how she's acting, so happy to see

me, nothing is going on between them. He probably brought her home out of an abundance of caution, which I'm thankful for. I told her I'd be the security she needs, but I failed.

"My God, it was awful," she slurs, and the way she drapes herself over my chest, I know she's had more to drink than is healthy.

"I've been there... Tell me about it." I want to know how much she's seen, but I also want to make sure she's doing okay. She's alive, so my biggest concern is moot.

"I was just waiting for a cab and this big sedan came out of nowhere blasting everyone. Liam put me in his car and drove me home, but I had to give a sworn statement. They think it was O'Connor. Why would he do this?" She's still shaking despite the wine in her system. I see the bottle on the table next to empty stemware.

"How much have you had to drink?" I press a hand to her forehead and she pushes it away.

"I'm a grown adult, Finn. I don't need a father." Siobhan reaches for the bottle and I snatch it away from her.

"Slow down. You are safe now. I'm here." I set the bottle out of her reach and pin her to my lap with strong arms around her waist. "I'm sorry you had to go through that."

I wish I could calm her, but I'm not here just to help her be grounded. I have to remember my greater purpose. We have to stop Mick from being imprisoned for something he didn't do, and we need to find Aiden's real killer.

Siobhan seems annoyed by my comment and leans down to kiss me. The kiss is sloppy, drunk—she's throwing herself at me. I'm not a man to discourage sexual advances from a beautiful woman like her, but there are more important things than

just fucking. I have to ask her about this witness she plans to call this week. I have to know how she found out about them.

Still, I humor her for a while, kissing, grabbing her tit a few times. She has her hand in my pants, gripping my dick, when I pull away. She's obviously had a lot to drink, and if I fuck her first, she'll start sobering up. Maybe asking her about this while she's drunk is the best way to go about it.

"Sib," I say, protesting her strokes. I wrap my hand around her wrist and pull her hand out of my pants. "Sib, I need to ask you about your star witness."

"What? No," she pants, claiming my mouth again. Her hand weaves through my hair, and my dick throbs for attention, but Ro would kill me for not taking advantage of this situation.

I sink further into the couch as she turns and straddles me, peeling open the front of her shirt to reveal her perfect, round tits. I want to dive in. My cock screams to slide through her cleavage, but she keeps kissing and I have to push her away.

"Sib, please. I need to know how you found the star witness. Sarah Duncan... Where did you meet her?"

Siobhan's chest heaves, tits pushing out into my face with each breath, and she glares at me groggily. She's way too drunk to fuck, anyway. She'll pass out before this is even started. I need answers, so I grab her chin and force her to look into my eyes.

"Tell me, please. I have to save my friend." I only hope she understands I only mean the best. I want the truth as much as she does, even if it was Mick. Ro will kill him if it was, but I don't think it was.

"You fecking bastard," she snarls, jerking away from me.

"You came here to push me for information? I was just shot at!" Siobhan jerks to her feet, swaying, and walks over to the door with her shirt still open. "Get out," she slurs before I'm even all the way standing. My dick is still throbbing, and now I feel like a fool.

"Siobhan, please. We both want the truth." I walk over to her and try to stand close, but she backs against the wall. "The other night, you said we could do this, just to keep it quiet. That no one could find out about us."

"Get out," she repeats, but this time even more slurred. I don't know if she even knows what she's doing.

"Fine, but I'm sending someone to watch your apartment." I brush a bit of moisture off her lip from our kissing and she blinks her eyes slowly. She can't even stand straight. Her tits are so perfect, I don't want to leave her exposed like this, so I step into the hallway, taking my lumps, and shoot a message to my right-hand man, Noah, to sit on the building as I walk toward the elevator.

I have to go find Sarah Duncan now, because she may be the only way to stop Siobhan from sentencing Mick to exile. I very well may have just ended any hope I had with Siobhan.



### SIOBHAN

It's a hot one today. Liam's light blue dress shirt has sweat rings under the armpits, not bad ones, but enough to draw the sympathy of jurors who all sit fanning themselves. The windows are open, air conditioning already shut off for the summer, but even Judge Callahan has beads of sweat on his forehead as I pace in front of the witness box.

"Detective Kearney, can you please explain what you found in the home on Portsmouth Road?" Liam's testimony is hitting hard already. The Garda uncovered so many clues, namely very important evidence to show a murder had taken place, but it was Liam who brought me the damning footprint and the gun. Most recently, he offered a single droplet of DNA from a square of carpet cut up next to the victim, missed in the original search and brushed off as the victim's blood.

"Well," he starts, loosening his tie as he wipes a tissue across his forehead, "I went to the home on the evening of August fourth as I wrote in my sworn statement. I had a hunch that we missed something big, so I went back. It's when I found the footprint logged in evidence, made by the boot of the defendant. We checked the dirt sample from the footprint that matches the defendant's boots taken from him at booking, and it is a one hundred percent match to the mud collected from the O'Connor farm."

The jury is entranced today, eating out of my hand, and I know they're itching for more juicy tidbits. After the failures I've had with witnesses, today is my chance to shine. I know Solicitor Quinn's scheme, to try to discount my proof, but how can he

stand against a detective Garda in uniform?

"So the boots you took from the defendant have mud on them that match the mud at his home, and the mud on the carpet at the scene of the crime?" I ask, and Liam nods.

"Yes, that's right."

"And the square of carpet you cut from the home, which has the defendant's blood on it?" I say as in a question, but there's no need to follow that up, really. Still, Liam gives more of an explanation.

"Yes, well, I had a feeling about it. It was farther away from the other blood pattern, didn't seem to come from the same angle of trajectory. I cut it out to have the lab test it, and we struck gold." Liam reaches for a glass of ice water resting on the bench in front of him and sips from it while I walk back to my spot behind my table to sit down.

"No further questions, Your Honor." I nod at him as I sit, and he turns to Mr. Quinn, who's already on his feet.

"Detective Garda Kearney, do you mind telling me who ordered you to return to the house on the day of August fourth to look through the house again?" Quinn buttons his coat and slicks his tie down. His balding head shines with perspiration as he waddles toward Liam. It's comical, but no one laughs, one of those unwritten rules of Callahan's courtroom everyone's afraid to break.

"Well, sir, no one told me. I knew Ms. Gallagher needed to really seal this case up and with the trial coming so quickly, I figured another look wouldn't hurt." Liam sets the glass back on the bench and folds his hands in his lap as he relaxes back into his seat. He looks practiced.

"And this is how many murder trials you've been a part of?" Quinn asks, narrowing his eyes. The jurors look from the solicitor to Liam, who is casual and cool as a cucumber.

"Fourteen murder cases in my career, sir." Liam is smug now, too confident, but for good reason. He's good at his job.

"And in those fourteen cases, how many times have you entered a murder scene after the court has reached deposition phase?" Quinn is a dog with a bone. I don't know what he's getting at, but I don't like it. I'm uneasy, and I see Judge Callahan appearing annoyed with the line of questioning.

"Only once other than this time, sir, at the direction of my chief." The courtroom just got a thousand degrees hotter as Liam glances at me. He also wonders what Quinn is up to, which only makes my anxious belly feel tighter.

"And who was with you in that home on the day of August fourth when you re-entered the scene of the crime?" Quinn stands staring at the jurors, not Liam, waiting for the response.

"I was alone, Mr. Quinn." Liam's tone is cold now, and I'm starting to get the picture.

"So is it conceivable that a detective Garda like yourself could enter a murder scene, mysteriously find evidence overlooked by dozens of Garda and crime scene scientists, days after the scene has been processed?" Quinn's question is rhetorical. He's making a point, accusing Liam of planting the evidence.

"What is your insinuation?" Liam asks, and the judge clears his throat. Witnesses aren't supposed to ask questions. Only representation and prosecution can do that.

"Is it conceivable that you could find evidence after everyone else has combed the

scene, Detective Garda Kearney?" Quinn turns to look him in the eye, and Liam narrows his eyes at the solicitor.

"Apparently it is, since it happened."

"And is it possible that the evidence wasn't found by investigators because it wasn't there at the time to be found? That perhaps you planted it?" Quinn is pushing, and the courtroom erupts. Jurors talk in hushed tones. Viewers rustle around, and Judge Callahan slams his gavel down just as I rise to object. But Quinn beats me to it. "No further questions, Your Honor."

I'm frustrated, but I'm not going to let that get me down today. I'm on a roll and I know my secret weapon is here to take the stand. I look over my shoulder at her pale face, soft sandy blonde hair pulled back. She's nervous and well should be. We've had a security detail on her for weeks now making sure Mick's men don't go after her.

"Your Honor, I would like to call Sarah Duncan to the stand, please." I hold her gaze as she stands, handing her purse to the man seated next to her. She swallows hard as she weaves past the row of people into the aisle and up toward the swinging half door that separates us. I nod at her and open it, and she walks to the stand and lets the official swear her in.

When she's seated, I approach her, not really sure what to expect. We tried to prep her for testimony but she threw up several times out of nerves, sort of the way I'm feeling right now too. Exhaustion and stress is my excuse, but she still looks green too.

"Ms. Duncan, thank you for taking time to come in today. We appreciate your sacrifice." I smile at her and she offers a stiff nod, but her eyes keep flicking over to look at Mick.

The way she sits is even awkward, like her back is too straight, a metal rod jammed

in her shirt or something. And now she won't make eye contact. I don't know what's going on except fear. I can feel it ooze off her in buckets.

"Ms. Duncan, can you please tell me what you saw on the night of April twentieth of this year?" I figure I'll cut to the chase and skip the trivial questions. The jurors just need to hear what she has to say before she snaps and can't talk. I once heard of a witness going catatonic on the stand and having to be dragged out in a wheelchair.

"Well," she says, wringing her hands, "that night, I..." Her eyes flick up again, but there's no one home there. Her expression is dark, and her eyes are shifty. "I saw..." She stumbles for words and tears well up in her eyes.

"It's okay. Go on," I coach, careful not to feed her any of the sworn testimony she promised to communicate today. I can't. It'd be a breach of ethics.

"I can't do this," she breathes out before bursting into tears. Her cheeks stream with salty moisture, her shoulders racked with sobs as she covers her face. "They made me say it. They had a gun and they told me if I didn't say it, they'd kill me." Sarah is reduced to a blubbing mess.

I look up at Judge Callahan, who is rubbing his forehead, and then I look at Mick and Mr. Quinn, who both look shocked to see what's happening. It's obvious I'm not getting my sworn testimony out of her anymore, but I don't understand what this is about someone and a gun and forcing her to say things.

"Ms. Duncan, can you tell me who had a gun and what they made you say?" I'm prying a little, though I shouldn't be. It feels like badgering a witness and I feel horribly guilty for pushing her.

"Some man in a dark suit with dark glasses." She sucks in a breath and looks around the courtroom, but her eyes land on mine. "He made me say that I saw that man

killing the other one. I didn't see it. I heard a gunshot, but I didn't see anything. Please, don't let them kill my family." Sarah stands up, seeming desperate, and the courtroom bursts into loud chatter and the sound of movement.

Callahan bangs on his gavel repeatedly, but no one hushes down. I'm as confused and overwhelmed as anyone else, and as I turn to look at the crowd gathered to watch what's going on, I see Liam walking out the door. What the hell just happened?

14

FINN

Siobhan isn't home when I arrive with flowers so I wait by her door, hoping to make up for being so asinine the other day. Bringing up the case when she was drunk after having been shot at, made me feel subhuman in ways other things in my life that I do regularly never have. I've used my pocket knife to gut a man but never felt so cold.

She walks toward her door from the elevators with her key in hand, staring at me. It's a cold expression. I can't read her. She's had a hard day in court again. I know because I heard the testimony too. Her eyes tell the whole story I already know. Her star witness recanted and now she's going on nothing.

"Finn," she says coolly, and I step in between her and the door with the flowers extended.

"I'm sorry," I tell her, acutely aware that at some point this thing between us has gone from both of us working each other to gain an edge to our having some sort of spark. I can't imagine Ronan being happy with my dating the prosecutor, but I won't deny having feelings for her.

Siobhan stares at me as she takes the flowers and I step aside to let her open the door. When she doesn't shut it in my face, I know she's inviting me in. I follow her, shutting the door behind myself, and watch as she sets everything down on the table and turns to me.

"What do you want?" Her arms cross under her tits and push them upward, and I don't waste a single second before showing her what I want.

My hands are on her face, cupping her cheeks as my mouth closes in on hers, taking her by surprise. She grunts and struggles for a second, pushing me away, but she eventually relaxes into the kiss and lets me pull her into my arms.

"I mean it. I am a total asshole. I shouldn't have pressed you for shit with the case. I'm sorry. I want to start over, Sib." Using her shortened name softens her. I feel her relax in my arms and she pouts.

"Finn, I don't think this is a good idea. Someone is going to find out. I could lose everything." Her head is shaking, but I'm ignoring that.

"Then I'll take care of you. Don't push me away, Sib. I want you, more than I want anything else. Even if you throw Mick in the fucking slammer, I want you." The epiphany came the day I learned she'd been shot at, and I squandered my chance to tell her that day. Today, I'm not going to waste my chance.

"You're a criminal, a manipulator, Finn. I can't?—"

"Stop it," I chide gently. "You know I'm more than that. If I were just a criminal out to push you to do my bidding, why would I show up after you were shot to comfort you?"

"Did you, though? Or did you come for information?"

Her words sting because she's partly right, but I did come for her. I hated that she'd been through that. I hate the men who did that to her. And I will hunt them down and find out who it was.



"I can't lie. I want Mick free, but I know we'll be able to do that together." I reach up and brush some hair off her face with my pinky and she turns away. "You want the truth, right?"

Siobhan's eyes snap back to mine. "Of course. I'm not working with any agenda except to find the truth."

"Then trust me when I say I'm falling head over heels for you, and I am here for you." I have no clue how I'm going to reconcile this with my chief, but the only thing I can think about right now is making sure this woman understands I've had a change of heart.

My lips close on hers as we back toward the living room. Her body doesn't resist me as I begin undoing her shirt and slide it, along with her jacket, down her arms.

"What are you doing?" she asks, but there's no real fight in her voice.

"I'm taking us both to paradise," I groan against her heated skin as my lips trace a path along her collarbone. Her hands find their way into my hair, her fingernails digging in as I work my way lower.

I groan into her skin. "You taste so damn good," I mumble against her breast before I tease her nipple with my tongue, roughly suckling it into my mouth. Her chest rises and falls in pants as she mewls in pleasure. Her scent, arousal and sweet vanilla, clouds my senses, and all I can think about is how much I want her beneath me, above me, around me.

"Tell me no," I breathe against her ear, my manhood throbbing against her core. "Tell me to stop and mean it, Siobhan." My hands jerk at her slacks, tearing them off her as she gasps.

“Finn, what are you doing?” She snickers and giggles, but I’m serious. I need a fix now.

“Tell me no, now.” My dick is out before she can blink. I stroke it as I back her against the back of the sofa. Her pupils dilate when she glances down at my cock.

“Do you want me to stop?” I growl into her ear, nipping her lobe.

Her breath hitches in a gasp before she whispers, "Yes... stop," as I’ve instructed. I grin against her skin before sliding her thong panties to the side and roughly shoving a finger into her core. She’s sopping for me, whimpering as I thrust my digits into her body.

"Wait, Finn," she breathes out, but all I can do is groan in response as I enter her wet heat inch by delicious inch. Our eyes lock, and I know this is real. This desired-filled lust has been there all along. “I said wait,” she whimpers again.

“God, I love it when you resist me,” I tell her, stroking myself harder. “You want me to fuck you?” She is exquisite, the way her hot walls milk me.

“No, please, don’t fuck me,” she pleads, but her tone gives her away. Such a bad little girl she is, resisting me. I force her hard against the sofa, and she grunts as our lips crash into one other. Her pussy is pulsing around my finger and I can’t wait to be inside her.

“Finn, I mean it... stop,” she says with a whine that sounds an awful lot like a moan. She doesn't mean it. She wants me, and I want her.

“Oh, really?” I grin against her skin as I withdraw my pinky from her. “You sure? Because you feel like you want me just as much as I want you.” Her cheeks flush and she can’t look at me. Her embarrassment is adorable and intoxicating. “Siobhan?”

Her eyes dart from mine to the floor and back again, the deviousness in them making my cock twitch even more if that's possible. I spin her around, bending her over the couch and guiding my dick to her entrance in one fluid movement. She whimpers but doesn't protest, and I slide in inch by glorious inch.

"Oh, shit... Oh, fuck," she grunts, clawing at the couch, but I force her head down again and begin thrusting.

It's good, too good. I'm going to lose it so quickly as I watch her ass pucker with every pulse of her pussy on my cock.

"Fuck, Siobhan, you're so tight," I groan. "You feel so good around me."

"Finn," she moans into the couch. "Oh, God... I'm gonna come."

I reach around her to pluck at her clit, rubbing in rhythm with my thrusts until she's screaming my name as she orgasms around me. Her body is slick with sweat, her back arched and her head bowed as she grasps the couch cushions with white-knuckled fists. My hand moves in a blur as I rub her clit in time with my thrusts, watching the pleasure contort her face and her body's convulsions.

Her moans and cries of pleasure fill the room, mixed with the sound of skin slapping against skin and our ragged breathing. The wet squelching of our bodies joining echoes in my ears.

As she begins to come down from her orgasm, sated and limp, I continue to pound into her, relentless in my pursuit of my own release. Her tightness around me, her sweat-slicked skin against mine—it all combines into a perfect storm of sensation, a tempest that makes my control snap, and I groan her name as I climax deep inside her, emptying myself into her body.

We stay like that for a moment, panting and sweaty, our bodies still joined. Finally, I slide out of her and help her to stand, turning her around to face me. Her hair is a complete mess, her face flushed and eyes glazed over with satisfaction.

"Fuck... that was..." I trail off, unable to find the words to describe it. In all my years of conquests and one-night stands, nothing compares to this moment with Siobhan.

"Finn," she breathes again, and I hear the hesitancy in her words.

I press a single finger to her lips and look her in the eye as with my other hand I tuck my dick away and zip up. "Shh, don't say it. We're good together, and you know it. There's something here, Sib."

Her eyes blink rapidly, tongue flicking over her lower lip as her chest heaves for air. "Then stay," she whispers, words that tug the deepest heart strings I have, but I can't.

If I'm going to make this work, me and her, then I have to find a different way to get Mick out of this hot water. She was my trump card until I caught feelings and I can't let my job slip off. My sworn duty to help my family is something I won't neglect even for a woman. And since I can't force her hand without hurting her, I have to do it a different way.

I buckle my belt and press a kiss to her cheek. "Tomorrow... Tonight, I have something to do. Something important." Something I can't tell her about or she'll be forced to turn me in, and that would ruin everything.

"Fine," she grunts. I can tell she's frustrated, but I have to go. I did what I came here to do and now I have to move on to the next thing. "But you owe me a night of conversation and cuddling. Sex is great, but have you ever connected emotionally?" She smirks at me, and I chuckle.

"I promise. It's a deal." Backing away, I steal one more kiss before letting myself out. I'm not sure if she's going to end up getting cold feet anyway, but I know how to convince her that we are good for each other if she does.

Outside, I turn toward my car as my eyes sweep the street, and I notice something I shouldn't be seeing. Halfway down the block on the right hand side sits a car I recognize all too well. It belongs to Shaman Doyle, one of the two men I know were involved in that attack at the restaurant the night Siobhan and I had dinner, and I'm not going to let them sit here and stake out her house. I walk right up and tap on the window.

It comes down slowly, allowing a puff of smoke from the interior to roll out toward me. I stoop to peer into the vehicle to see another man in the passenger seat whom I don't recognize.

"What're you boys up to today?" I ask, knowing full well they've camped on Siobhan's apartment because they have some stake in this trial. If they think they're going to get one past me, they've got another thing coming.

"Mind yer business, O'Rourke. Stay in your own lane." The window starts to go up and I reach for my weapon, resting it on the edge of the glass to prevent it from shutting.

"I'd say this is my business as much as it is yours." My threat doesn't go unnoticed. The door slowly opens and the man climbs out. He's taller than me, broader in the chest, and his glare is directed only at me.

My weapon in hand, I look up at him, unintimidated by his looming form, and he takes a swing, but I dodge it. I'm not going to just gun him down. That would start a war, but I don't shy away from using my weapon to crack his skull. Unfortunately, I don't see the other one coming up behind me. He knees me in the back of the legs

then brings his elbow down on top of my head when I start to crumple.

The beating is hard and fast, a few blows to the face, one to the gut, and the two of them have me overpowered. The bigger one, Shaman, grabs me by the hair and holds my face up while he punches me in the nose repeatedly, and the second man kicks me in the back and thighs over and over.

My salvation comes when one of the two shouts, "Cops!" and both of them climb in the car. My gun skitters across the pavement, dropped by whichever one of them took it from my hand in the fray. I crumple to the street holding my gut and roll to the side after their car is gone. From where I lie, I watch the same cruiser pull up here that I saw the other day. The lanky cop climbs out of his car, oblivious to my presence, and struts into the building. I know he's here to see her, and I can't go up and eavesdrop.

Time is running out. I have to get to the courthouse and do my job or I can kiss a relationship with Siobhan goodbye. Ronan will see to that. I also need to figure out how to connect the Doyles to this whole thing. Maybe Sarah Duncan will be of some help with that.

### SIOBHAN

A stupid grin stretches over my face as I watch Finn walk out. I shouldn't be getting attached, but how can I not? He's strong and assertive, sexy as hell, knows what he wants. I'm lost in the sea of endless emotions and people pulling me in every direction, but when I'm with him, every cell in my body screams to be closer, to feel the pull of how he makes me feel. It's a good feeling even though I know it's wrong.

I know what kind of man Finn O'Rourke is—a killer, a criminal. Slipping my panties back on, I take my clothes and walk toward the bedroom to draw a bath and think of how twisted it is—that I made it my life's mission to hunt men like him, and now I'm falling in love with one. Shame washes over me, but I can't help the guilty pleasure I feel when I think of him.

I stop the drain and turn on the water then slip out of my clothing, tossing my soiled clothes into the hamper and donning my silky house robe. Then I head out to the kitchen and reach for a bottle of wine and a glass, but even as I pour it, my stomach sours. I've been feeling a bit nauseated lately, extra tired too. Finn and I have been having unprotected sex, which is the last thing I should be doing with him, but dammit if the pleasure isn't so good that in the middle of it all, I can't stop to put a condom on him.

So I leave the glass of wine and grab a glass of water instead. My body still pulses with the pleasure of orgasm as I pad back into the bedroom, ready to have a long, hot soak and think about how I'm going to proceed with this case, but I hear the bell and

stop. It hasn't been long. I wonder if Finn has forgotten something, so I shut off the tap, set my water down, and rush to the door to swing it open. Only to find Liam there with his phone pressed to his ear.

"Gotta go," he snips and flashes me a smile as I step back, inviting him in.

"I was just about to have a bath, Kearney. What's going on?" I've gotten more comfortable with him lately, especially after that day where someone drove past the courthouse and shot up the steps.

I don't like to admit that I cried on a married man's shoulder as he held me and I got wine drunk, but I was scared and he was here. In that aspect, he was good to me, and I feel I owe him something.

"I'm here to check on you, Sib. I worry about you, you know?" His eyes sweep my apartment as he speaks, like he's looking for something or someone. Maybe he suspects I'm still seeing Finn. Maybe that's why he's come to check on me.

I shut the door and walk deeper into the apartment, following him. "Wine?"

"For my bath," I say, crossing my arms over my belly. "Have it. I'm feeling off." I'm not lying, either. My stomach has been roiling now and I just want a soak to help calm it. Water therapy is something I do to calm my nerves, not just relax my tense muscles.

He picks up the glass and downs it, then pours another from the bottle I left sitting on the table. Then he nods at the living room area, and I follow him reluctantly. The bath calls my name, but when Liam stops by, he usually has some sort of update for me.

"Sorry how that all went down, you know... The evidence thing. I knew it was risky, but..." His voice trails off, and he sips the glass again. I rub the back of my neck and



stand next to the sofa as he stares out the picture window overlooking Dublin. Light is fading now as afternoon begins to turn to evening. I know I should get to the chemist to buy a pregnancy test, but it's looking doubtful now that a visitor has popped in.

"You said you were checking on me. I'm fine, okay? You don't have to hover like I'm your little sister." Feeling a bit annoyed, I find myself rubbing the back of my neck again. Liam's eyes shift to take me in. He downs his second glass of wine and walks toward me, setting the empty stemware on the table next to the remote.

"Here, let me," he offers, and before I can protest, he's standing behind me, firm hands kneading the muscles in my shoulders. It feels amazing, but I'm tense again now. "I get knots like these ones too, Sib."

My chest constricts and I press my eyes closed, wondering what in God's creation he's doing touching me. We don't have the sort of relationship where we do this for one another, but maybe I've led him on by what happened after the shooting. Maybe he thinks I'm more comfortable with him. I've seen the way he undresses me with his eyes, but he's got a wife.

"Liam," I protest, turning and pulling away from him. My eyes snap open and he is there with a smoldering expression. No way it's the wine this fast, so he has to have come with something on his mind and it's not something he's going to get.

"Siobhan, I think we should talk." His hand reaches for my hip, pulling me closer, against his body. His hands are firm and hard, not supple and inviting the way Finn's are. And he pulls at my robe too, trying to bare my chest to his eyes that greedily rake over my face and form.

It all happens so fast, I don't think. Liam's mouth closes on mine, forcing his tongue between my lips, hand reaching under my robe to find my flesh and grip it, and I push

him away instantly. My hand flies without hesitation, clipping his cheek and chin, and he steps back, covering his reddened skin as I flounder for the ties to the robe and lash it shut again.

"Mother of Christ! Liam, what the hell is wrong with you?" The robe ties are thin and slippery, tangling around my hands, but I manage a hard knot as I back away. "What were you thinking? You have a wife at home."

I'm standing in the middle of my living room staring at him as he holds his cheek. His eyes are dark and harsh, not at all the eyes of the man I've come to call my friend. I can only see his reflection in the television, but he looks more like the monster most people believe Finn is than the detective Garda who puts men like that away.

I'm shaking now, afraid he's going to do something worse than just kiss and grope me. I've never had a reason to be afraid of Liam, though he annoys me a lot. But now, alone in my home knowing Finn won't be magically appearing again, I'm shaking.

"Siobhan, you've been seen with that O'Rourke asshole. If you don't knock it off, it's gonna come back to bite you." His voice comes out as a snarl, a threat even. When he turns to look up at me, I see the clear red fingerprints I've left and I don't even feel guilty.

"So you've come to molest me, have you? And you think that will somehow woo me away from seeing Finn to what? You don't own me, Kearney. You're a married man and you have no right coming into my home and doing that. Now get out." I don't know whether he's going to listen to me or not, but I point at the door and he shakes his head.

He looks at me as if he wants to say something more. There's anger in his eyes now, maybe from being rejected, or maybe something else, but he glares at me and turns toward the door. When he gets there, he turns over his shoulder with the door

standing open and says, "People are watching."

When he leaves, I rush to the door and throw every lock and deadbolt, then stand trembling as I think of what to do next. He's right. If people are watching and I'm seen out with Finn, it will ruin my career, but it doesn't have to. I don't have to let this destroy me.

Again my stomach tosses, but I scurry into my bedroom, this time going for my dirty clothes in the hamper. I go for my phone, still in the pocket of my slacks which I tossed there when I started my bath. I pull it out and dial my supervisor's number, and he picks up on the second ring.

"Director of Public Prosecutions, who's this?" Boyd's voice is stern as always, and I lean into his value for the letter of the law.

"Yes, hello, Prosecutor McVeigh, it's DPP Gallagher and I have something to discuss with you." My heart is hammering. I think I may throw up while still on this call, but I manage to swallow the bile and suck in a breath to calm my nerves.

"Yes, hello, Gallagher. How goes the case?" I hear the noise of the train in the background. He's on his commute home, so I've caught him at a decent time. I know his office lines are recorded for evidentiary purposes, but his cell is usually untapped.

"Mr. McVeigh, if I can speak with you frankly." I'm never so forward with him. He's my boss, but this isn't something to mince words about. I'm talking about my entire future in law.

"Yes, of course." The train conductor makes an announcement so loud I fear McVeigh won't hear me, so I wait until he's done saying what stops the train will make before I proceed. It gives me a few seconds to collect my thoughts.

"Sir, I need to make a formal announcement to you that I'm involved with Finn O'Rourke." I pause for a moment and hear only silence. "Sir, are you there?"

"I'm here," he says, sounding stiffer than normal.

"Sir, I had an opportunity so I took it. I'm working undercover. The man is wrapped around my finger and I'm hoping to gain inside knowledge about his family and the way his organization works so we can take him down. I should've told you sooner, but I wasn't sure it would pay off. Now I think it will." My words are rushed out, but I speak clearly without stuttering or stumbling over the facts. Just as I finish, the conductor makes another announcement, and McVeigh is forced to wait to respond.

The waiting is torture. It could go either way, but my hope is he will understand because he knows me. It's my one driving factor, to find the man responsible for Trevor's death and make him pay, and then take down the underworld systematically by myself. He's known that since I took this job or maybe even longer.

"Well, Siobhan, it's not often our prosecutors get involved in the nitty gritty, but you have a set larger than most of us. If you think you can produce accurate facts and bring forth the truth, then I applaud you. Make sure you keep a diary of your notes. Contact me the minute you have anything, and for Christ's sake, be careful. Those men are monsters. They can do anything. You really don't know."

I breathe a sigh of relief at his words and rush out, "Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

"Oh, and Siobhan, I really mean that. Take care of yourself. This is a scary game you're entering." Boyd's warning is heeded. I'm nodding even though he can't see me.

"Yes, sir. I will. Thank you, sir." I hang up and sit on the edge of my bed.

Liam's threats that someone is watching, that people will find out, they scare me. I

don't want to be seen as the prosecutor who may be dirty. I want a reputation beyond reproach. But I also want Finn, and that seems to be tearing me down the middle, along with a nagging fear that continues to grow every time I find myself getting queasy.

For now, my cover is safe. McVeigh believes I'm sleuthing so if Liam blows my cover, I'll have that to fall back on. And if not, at least I have that reassurance. Things just got a whole lot trickier.

16

FINN

"T here, hold that," Noah says as he slides the knife into the window frame. My right-hand man is a genius at old buildings like this with the woodwork still intact, just painted shut. It's probably lead paint, stuck the frame to the window for years now and maybe not even locked. Noah's knife tears through the layers as we work behind the bushes next to the courthouse.

"Shh," I breathe, reminding him that we have to be quiet. The courthouse is closed now, the last of the staff having gone only moments ago. The sun is dipping on the horizon, but it's still light enough that anyone who walks past may see us. I know there's security too, patrolling the interior, cameras in every corridor and along the exterior, but here, we're hidden.

"Feck's sake," Noah grunts as the tip of his knife snaps off. I reach into my pocket and pull out my pocket knife and hand it to him, and he nods at me as he folds his shut and takes mine. "Had that since I was a kid," he says absentmindedly as he works. The window is almost busted free.

"Hurry up, will ye?" I glance over my shoulder. No one could really see us unless they focused hard, but it's not altogether inconceivable that they may look. The courthouse is hosting one of the most infamous cases in history right now. I'm surprised they don't have a Garda stationed at each corner watching.

"Got it," he announces, and he folds the knife shut and hands it back. "Just gotta..."

He pushes upward on the frame, and the dry squeak and scratch of wood against wood greets my ears. He's done it. We're in.

"Christ Almighty," I say in celebration. The window slides open with ease and both of us look around to make sure we've not been spotted. Then Noah hooks his fingers together in a stirrup and boosts me up as I plant a foot in his hands and push upward. In seconds, we're both inside the chambers of Judge Brendan Callahan.

We shut the window for now, keeping our cover, and both of us don blue surgeon's gloves to ensure we leave no trace of evidence.

"What are we lookin' fer, exactly?" Noah eyes a filing cabinet while I begin rifling through the drawers of the judge's desk.

"Anything... Proof this guy isn't who he says he is. Or maybe some sort of evidence that we've missed. There has to be something here." I don't know where they keep the evidence during trials, here or at the Garda station downtown. All I know is we have to find a different way to prove to Siobhan and this world that Mick is innocent. Only she can drop the charges.

"I got this, then," Noah says, pulling open the first drawer of the filing cabinet.

"We don't want a mistrial, so be careful. And make sure you put everything back as you found it." My mind wanders to the flash drive in my pocket, a deep fake made by Ronan's men to try to throw people off Mick's scent. If need be, I'll plant evidence to undo this horrible frame job, but I'm hoping we don't have to.

My hands set to work, opening one drawer after another. I find a stack of canceled checks all made out to the judge, all from various sources. I'm not sure what they mean, so I organize them on the desk and snap pictures, then stack them and put them back. I find a ring of keys that go to God only knows what and think of taking them,

but the instant we open the door to the judge's chambers, we'd be seen on closed-circuit TV. We can't do anything except search this room. Siobhan says the judge is her friend, but why would he show up in her home unannounced and scare the life out of her?

"Oh, wow, I think I got something." I look up at Noah whose eyes are poring over the stapled together files from the second drawer of the filing cabinet. He seems glued to the documents, and I sit down in the judge's chair and watch him.

"What is it?"

"Old case files," he responds as his hands dip back into the filing cabinet to pull more out. There's a heap of them, a stack as tall as his forearm, which he carries over to the desk. I lean back and let him step up and set them down. My body screams at me from the blows I got earlier. I have bruises down both my front and my back.

"What are they?" I ask, wincing as I lean forward again.

"Callahan has overseen fourteen trials in organized crime related cases. Fourteen," he repeats for emphasis. His hands hold one of the files stapled, so I pick up the next one on the stack and read the top page, a rundown of how the case ended. It looks to be the judge's personal notes.

"Fecking hell," I sigh. This judge is as dirty as a snake slithering in the sand. "He's gone soft." I can't believe what I'm seeing. It appears the judge has weaseled his way into being the only one to oversee organized crime cases and every one I look at involves Cormac Doyle's men. Every one of them received a not-guilty verdict from the judge himself, bypassing any jury trials.

"Fecking hell is right," Noah says, meeting my stern gaze. "This judge is right dirty. He's working with the Doyles. I'd bet my mother's life on it."



"Me too." I run a hand down my face and pull out my phone again, handing it to him. "Pictures of everything. We can't miss a detail if we're going to get Mick off." Noah takes my phone and begins snapping pictures of every page.

So Judge Callahan is dirty. That's not really news to me. Any man is able to be bought for the right price. It's just a shame that Siobhan looks up to him so much and she's about to find her mentor is nothing but a criminal himself. I wonder how much the Doyles have to pay him to do their bidding or what threats they put over his life because that's the best way to own a man. Grab him by the balls.

Turning my attention to one drawer I can't get open, I take my knife back out to pick the lock. I work at it while Noah continues snapping pictures, and finally when he's almost halfway done with the stack, I manage to get the drawer open. When something is secured like this, it means there's something of value to secure.

And I find the jackpot. There's a hidden laptop in here, which I pull out and turn on. The screen comes to life, flashing its glow and casting my shadow on the wall behind me. We have to be careful now. Daylight is almost gone, and the light in this room will most certainly draw attention, but if he's got this laptop locked away, there's a good chance there's something on here he doesn't want anyone to see.

I'm set to put my flash drive to the test with the algorithm Ronan's man programmed to break passcodes, but the judge is a naïve man, thinking his desk lock would secure his secret. The laptop isn't even password protected, a mistake many older people make these days.

I start by using the file search feature to search for anything related to the Doyles because as dumb as this man is, I feel like it will be the fastest, but it turns nothing up. So I open his browser and begin looking at his history. Suddenly, it all begins to make sense.

The judge has visited a website for a bank that deals in cryptocurrency daily for the past month. He's even dumb enough to have his laptop save his passwords, and as I peruse his bank accounts I see payments in large sums coming in with very few cashouts. The man is loaded, filthy rich from payoffs, and I bet if I take these routing numbers back to Ronan's tech man, we'll find that these payouts come from the Doyles. Together with the canceled checks and the case files Noah is currently capturing on camera, it's easy to see Callahan is filthy.

"We've got enough." I hold out my hand for my phone and he gives it back. A few more clicks of the camera shutter and I've captured all the information off his computer too. I'm done looking.

Mick might not be able to walk free with this information, but it proves the judge isn't giving him a fair trial. It also proves that the Doyles have some stake in this game. I'd think it was just a coincidence if they hadn't attacked Siobhan outside that restaurant and parked on her apartment today. But it's too obvious now.

"So, what are they doing?" Noah asks me as he organizes the files and carries them back to the file cabinet. "What do the Doyles have to gain from framing Mick?"

"I'm not sure," I tell him. I slide the judge's computer back into his drawer and shut it. I can't lock it again, but if he knows someone was in here, he'll get scared at least, maybe walk a tighter line. I could try blackmailing him into letting Mick go free, but that may backfire. If he knows I know he's dirty, he'll tell the Doyles I know. It would start a war we don't want to fight.

It's better to take this information to Siobhan and let her fight it out with the director of public prosecutions. She'll have better luck getting the man thrown out.

"So, what do we do?" Noah shuts the cabinet as I stand up and walk toward the window.

"We get this information to Ronan and to the right people. Siobhan can help take down the judge, but it's up to us to find out how the Doyles connect to this. Mick is innocent, we both know that." I turn to him and sigh. "We have only a few weeks left to prove that."

"Let's go, then. No time to waste."

Noah and I slip out of the courthouse and shut the window. I don't bother calling ahead. We just drive directly to Siobhan's house. I would send her the files by text, but I don't know who may be watching her phone or monitoring her calls. I'd rather show her in person too. It's likely to come as a huge shock she won't be ready for.

But when I knock a few times and she doesn't answer, I figure she's gone to sleep already. I gave it to her pretty good and she was tired from her long day. I'll have to come back tomorrow and show her everything.

We're closer to freeing Mick than ever, and finally, it seems like things are materializing for us.

### SIOBHAN

I sit on the bench in the hallway just outside the courtroom as one by one people file in to sit in the benches and watch today's proceedings. I'm feeling sick to my stomach, body heavy with exhaustion. After Liam's obnoxious visit last night, I barely slept. I ended up downing the rest of the wine to knock myself out, and I'm sure that's the reason for my nausea.

My head throbs, vision blurry as I read the notes I've made. I don't have any witnesses left now, no one to come back and help fight my case for me. When Sarah Duncan recanted, she was taken in for questioning and vanished. No one has seen her since and it terrifies me. If what she said was correct, I may have set her up for death all by simply pressing her to tell the truth.

Pressing a hand to my chest, I swallow down bile that wants to rise. I'll have to sit through the defense's witnesses one by one, and if questions arise, something to counter their statements or evidence, I can fight that, but I fear I haven't done my job to convince the jury that Mick O'Connor murdered that man.

My body is tense, so I fold my things up and shove them in my briefcase before deciding on a walk to clear my head. I head toward the elevators, thinking some fresh air before heading in will be nice, but on my way, I see a face I should welcome. Instead, it makes me stiffen.

Finn walks off the elevators and locks his eyes on me immediately. His eyebrows rise

in recognition, but given what Liam said, I turn and feel even sicker. There's no way away from him, no way to make this interaction more private. I dart toward the ladies' room and duck inside, praying he doesn't follow me, but he does.

A woman washing her hands looks up and gasps, muttering curses at us as she scurries out. Finn locks the door behind us and pulls me into his arms, kissing me hard and stealing my breath.

I shut my eyes and allow his arms to be comfort for a moment, but this isn't right. I push him away and straighten my jacket.

"This is a risk, you dumb asshole. What are you doing?" I can't stop the grin from curling my lips upward, and he braces himself on the wall behind me.

"I had to see you," he admits. "I came back to your place after my job, but you were sleeping."

I wasn't, but I don't tell him. I hailed a cab to a pharmacy to buy a pregnancy test, but I didn't have the nerve to take it. It's there on my counter waiting on me, and I am too scared to do it. What if I really am pregnant with his baby? What will that say about me?

"Yes, well, this is going to get me in hot water." I think of McVeigh and how he told me to document everything. I can't very well tell the court I fucked a criminal in the bathroom of the courthouse during trial for one of his family members. My heart is hammering against my ribcage.

"I just had to tell you something." His lips steal kisses from mine again, and I love it. I want nothing more than to fade away into paradise with this man and his magic fingers, but I have a case to try. I have a life to live, a life that shouldn't include him, but my brain scrambles furiously to try to make it work somehow. To make it so that

this deputy public prosecutor can have her fairy tale happily ever after moment with Finn O'Rourke.

"Go on." I glance at my watch. "I have to be in court in a few minutes."

"Sib, the judge..." Finn's eyes are stormy. I can tell he's wrestling with something. "Callahan is dirty, Sib. I have proof of it. He's taken payoffs by the Doyle Syndicate, canceled checks, crypto, you name it. And I have the verdicts of every case tried against them too. He's thrown them all. He's on their payroll."

I don't believe what I'm hearing. My pulse spikes again, adrenaline surging through my chest. What Finn is suggesting is preposterous. Brendan would never take payoffs or let guilty men go free. He's a good man, a righteous man.

"You're wrong," I say, but I feel my lip quivering, my stomach rolling.

"I'm not, Sib. I know it's got to be hard to hear this, but he's done and dusted. I have proof. I'd take it to McVeigh on my own, but they'd ask me how I got it and..." Finn's eyes search mine, and shame floods me. I've sucked this man's cock and swallowed him down and he's looking me in the eyes to say he committed a crime in order to find evidence that my mentor is dirty.

"I have to go," I blurt out, walking past him. The lock prohibits me, so I reach up to flick it, and Finn catches my hand.

"I'm not lying about this. I would never lie. I'm having Ronan's tech guys print images I took of files in the judge's chambers and?—"

"No, stop it." Reaching up, I cover one ear and put a finger in the other, my briefcase dangling from my hand, pinching my skin. "Stop. I can't hear this." Finn is confessing to breaking and entering, and I can't hear this or I'll be forced to prosecute him too,

even if it is to uncover a dirty judge.

He holds his hands up and unlocks the door, backing away in surrender as I rush out. My head is spinning, tears welling up in my eyes as I start to dry heave. I need to get away from him, far away. I need time to process and think, but I have to be in court. The only place I know he won't approach me is in the courtroom behind my table, so I dart through the double doors just as Judge Callahan is being announced, and I lose the battle with my breakfast.

Vomit rises, spilling out of my mouth all over the aisle in the courtroom. Brendan stands behind his bench staring at me as all eyes turn to take me in. I'm a mess, sobbing and throwing up, and the gavel smacks as people start whispering.

A woman nearby passes me a tissue I use to mop up my mouth, and Callahan says, "It appears Deputy Public Prosecutor Gallagher is feeling ill today. We'll recess until tomorrow."

I stand there for a second staring at my breakfast on the floor before I realize if I don't get out of here, Finn will come looking again. I dart back into the hallway and he's not there, so I make a beeline for the stairs and hustle down, still reeling over his news.

There's no way Brendan is dirty, no way. I can't believe that. If I believe that, then my entire view of the justice system of this country is skewed. How could he mentor me to be the most honest, ethical, upstanding prosecutor—to take down the criminal underworld with dignity, and then be dirty too? It doesn't make sense.

I hail the first cab and slide the driver a fifty to get me home fast. The only place I'll feel safe is tucked away in my penthouse with the doors locked. I don't even know why I'm running, or what I'm running from. Is it Finn? Am I scared of him? Or am I scared he's right, that my whole professional life is a scam?

And how could he have seen it all along when I saw nothing? Yes, the judge was in my home without my permission, but he's a powerful man. Right? He has his ways because of his stature, not because someone criminal is behind him pulling strings.

I can't think straight until I'm inside my apartment with the doors locked. I set my briefcase down, only just realizing I've gotten vomit on it too. After wiping it off, I take off my shoes and go to pour myself a drink when I remember the pregnancy test. I didn't just vomit because breakfast was off or I was stressed.

My tender boobs, my extra fatigue, sickness... They all add up to something. And my period is late too. I already know what it means and I'm living in denial. I can pour a glass of wine but it won't remove the truth. It will only numb me from feeling it.

I walk into the bathroom and pull out the test. The plastic white wand is light but my heart is heavy. I hear banging on my door, Finn's voice calling my name, but I ignore it as I hike up my skirt and pull down my panties. I squat over the toilet, holding the wand in the stream of my urine.

It says to wait three full minutes, but the test processes almost instantly. Before I'm even done pissing I see two pink lines. I'm fucking pregnant. I'm having a Mafia baby. I'm dirty, stained, soiled. There's no going back. This isn't just undercover work now. I'm joined to them forever and there's nothing I can do about it.

Tears come hot and fast, and I slump down onto the toilet with my panties around my ankles listening to Finn O'Rourke—my baby's father—banging on my door. What have I done?



18

FINN

It's dark, so dark the night seems to absorb even the light from my headlights. I drive along the winding country road into the hills that roll south of Dublin. County Wicklow is almost a ninety-minute drive from the city, a beautiful place with rolling lush green hills. Perfect for hiding away when you don't want to be found. Perfect for a man like Sean McCarty who doesn't have anything to live for if the Doyles find him.

The road I need evades me. It's tough to find the turn off and I don't notice it until I've gone too far. A driveway is my turnaround spot, though I have to wait on a passing car to back out and head the right direction again. Strange, I've been on this long, winding road by myself all evening, so to find another car going my way is sobering. I'm not alone out here as I thought, and neither is Mr. McCarty. I wonder if he knows that.

When I get back on track and find the small cottage nestled deep in a wooded lot, I shut off my lights and let my eyes adjust to the darkness before creeping forward. I can't spook him. If he senses me coming, he'll shoot first and ask questions later. Or he'll run, which in this pitch black will be just as bad. I can't lose him. He's seen with his own eyes that Mick is innocent. Sean McCarty saw the man who murdered Aiden Hughes.

Parked more than a soccer pitch away from the place, I slip out of the car quietly, dousing the dome light. I pull my weapon as I creep up on the old structure that leans

on its foundation. This place is off grid. I can hear the generator running through the woods somewhere, churning out electricity for the house. Lights glow in the windows, and I see a tall, stout man walking around.

I'm alone, no backup with me in case he pitches a fit, but I hope knowing he has the O'Rourke family on his side will persuade him to do what he's been too fearful to do thus far. I can force him, but if Siobhan or that dirty judge either finds out he has a gun to his head, they'll cry coercion and throw his testimony out—or worse. They'll come after me.

I know she doesn't believe me about the judge. She proved that four days ago when she threw up all over the courtroom and then ran out. She hasn't spoken to me since. I can't get near her. That cop friend of hers is always around, and I know if he sees me and we're alone, I don't stand a chance. He'll either gun me down or he'll arrest me on trumped up charges, though God knows there are lots of things he could throw at me that would stick.

The cabin is isolated. I know this man could murder me in cold blood and no one would find me if my GPS in my car weren't tracking my movement. But I tiptoe up through the brush to the back door, taking my chances. He's a boxer, fights in a ring near the scene of the murder. Ronan's sources says this man was coming out of the club and heard the shots and ran to help Aiden, only to see the killer aim his gun right at him. If he'll testify to that, Mick can go free.

My hand on the knob makes it squeak so I stop and listen. There's noise inside, a radio or television playing. No chance the man heard me, but I have to be careful as I stretch out my hand and try again. As I pull the door open, it creaks a bit, but peeking into the kitchen space, I see him. He stands with his back to me, a bowl of minute noodles in hand as he stares at a television airing a local footie match. It's a rerun. The Rovers are losing. But he's absorbed in it enough that I'm able to walk right in and put the gun to his back without his even hearing.

"Move and I'll have ye dead before yer even to the door," I whisper, and he stands straighter, dropping his bowl. His hands rise in surrender and he sucks in a deep breath.

The man's biceps are bigger than my thighs. No doubt he'd best me in a fist fight. He's a trained athlete, but he's not baring his fists. He's scared.

"Please, don't kill me. I have a wife and a child on the way." He's trembling too, probably ready to piss himself. Not at all the sort of hardened criminals I deal with on a daily basis. I nudge him forward with the nose of my gun and he stumbles a few steps.

"I'm not here to kill you, Sean." I lower my weapon but keep it in my hand as he slowly turns to face me.

"I din't seen nothin'. Please..." He's shaking his head, scared. A man his size has little to fear on most days, but I know why he's running scared. I've got it on good authority now why everything is lining up. The man who killed Aiden was a Doyle, and this man in front of me knows that. He's the only one who can put the pieces together. It's why Callahan has been paid off.

"You saw something and I need to know what you saw. I'm not here to kill you. I'm here to get answers. The men who want to kill you are out there," I say, pointing my gun out the back door.

"I swear, Mister. I din't see nothin'. I just want to live." He's sweating, pale like a sheet. I've caught him off guard, but that's not what he's scared of. They'll kill him if they find him because he's a loose string.

"I need to know what you know." I stalk toward him, but even as I do I hear the crunch of tires on gravel over the roar of the television set. "Feck!" I grunt, spinning

around to see headlights pouring in the back door. "They followed me. Get down," I order as gunfire erupts. He drops to the floor blubbering like an eejit as I open fire and cover us.

"Oh feck, oh feck!" His whines are a sign of weakness I don't have in me. Whoever is out there wants him dead, and I have to fight to stay alive and keep him alive too. Mick's life depends on it.

More gunshots pepper the decaying structure as I reach into my boot and pull out my spare gun. I drop it on the ground and kick it over to him, grunting, "If you want to live, fight with me. Else they'll kill us both."

Sean lifts his head and takes the gun. He's smart enough to know I'm not his enemy here. The moment the shooters pause, he rolls across the floor and takes cover behind an old beat-up couch. I take the chance to join him, breathing hard.

A black SUV barrels through the front of the cottage, blocking any escape. The car blows tires and shots continue to fly our way. I take a moment under the kitchen counter to assess the situation. We're trapped. Going out the backdoor is suicide with who knows how many gunmen outside. And now our only exit is blocked by flames and twisted metal.

"We've got company," Sean hisses from where he's huddled under the breakfast nook table, trying to make himself as small a target as possible. I curse under my breath, heart pounding in my ears loudly. The only way out is through them, and we both know it. The question is do we go out fighting or willingly let them put bullets in our backs?

"Sean," I whisper hoarsely, "we've got one shot at this. You with me?"

He glances back at me, eyes filled with terror but a spark of determination in them

too. "Aye, I'm with ye," he says, gripping his gun tightly in his shaking hand. He has no choice but to trust me.

"On the count of three, we're going to make a run for it. You take the left, I'll take the right. Shoot at anything that moves, understood?"

His eyes are wide. Fear runs down his face in great drops of sweat, but he nods at me as I start the count.

"One... two." At the count of three, we both spring to our feet, guns blazing.

I dive to the right, Sean to the left, and we start plowing through the maze of shattered wood and glass, making our way toward the backdoor. The kitchen door explodes in a hail of bullets as we reach it, but I manage to get my body in front of Sean's just as another volley of fire slams into the house. Laying down cover fire, we dart into the darkness where the Doyles no longer have the advantage. I see my car in the distance but it's on fire, torched by them so we have no escape.

"Into the woods," I hiss, and Sean leads the charge now. I have to rely on him, as I know nothing about this property.

Trees whip my face as I stumble after him, bullets whizzing past us like angry hornets.

Sean stumbles over a root and goes down, crashing to the ground with a crunch. I do the same thing to buy us some time, turning and emptying my clip into our pursuers. My heart pounds out of my chest as I eject the clip and reach for another that isn't there. "Run!" I yell at Sean who is clambering to his feet again. He hesitates, eyes filled with fear and indecision. "Go! Fecking run!"

Together, we run along a footpath into the darkness. The noise grows more faint

behind us and I hear his labored breathing. He slows, turning toward a bunch of brambles, and grunts, “This way.” I follow him with uncertainty, but as he kneels behind the brambles, for now, we’re camouflaged and safe, but they’re going to come looking.

“The feck were those people?” Sean pants, wedged between two trees as we catch our breath. His breathing is raspy, gurgled even. I use my phone as a flashlight to shine on his face briefly and notice blood coming from his mouth. He’s been shot.

“Mother of God,” I growl as I dial Ronan’s number. He’s our only shot of getting out of this alive—if we can survive ninety minutes for him to drive here.

### SIOBHAN

I haven't spoken to Finn in days. Even Liam seems quiet lately. We've had a few days of hearing testimony from Mr. Quinn's witnesses, but on my side of this case, it's been quiet. It was my choice to hold Finn at arm's length, refusing calls and ignoring the bell when he came to see me. I have no clue what to tell him about the baby. I don't know what I want right now.

He hasn't been to court, hasn't stopped me on the street or sidewalk. I feel like he's getting the point that I need space but this morning, I woke up to a message from him, something urgent I know I need to speak with Judge Callahan about, and if Finn is right and my mentor is dirty, this news won't shock him at all.

My hands tremble as I smooth the front of my navy skirt, standing outside the judge's chambers. We're set to resume testimony in an hour and hear final arguments after that later this week, but Finn's call changes everything. I'm not even sure how to process what's happening. If Mr. Quinn calls a witness who isn't on the list, we'll be forced to recess and vet the new witness.

I suck in a deep breath and with a racing heart I knock on the door. Brendan knows I'm coming. I left a message saying it was urgent that I speak with him, and he told me to come right down. Now I'm not sure whether I'm insane or just afraid. How can my mentor be dirty? I have to know for myself, but the only way to know is to expose myself, let him know I know the truth or at least suspect something. And how dangerous will this get for me then?

"Come in," he calls from the other side of the door. When I walk in he's wearing his robe but it's not zipped. His white button-down shirt is open at the top, tie draped around his shoulders loosely. He looks up over the rim of his glasses and smiles.

"Siobhan, come in," he says kindly, taking off his glasses and gesturing with them to the chair opposite his desk. It's hard to believe Finn has been in here. I know he's a criminal, but it takes guts to break into a courthouse to the judge's chambers and snoop through files. I glance at the file cabinet and sink into the hard leather chair nervously. "What brings you in?"

Callahan folds his glasses and lays them on the desk before folding his fingers together and resting them on a docket in front of himself. He seems calm and put together, like always. Not a care in the world—nothing is wrong. It's his nature, his personality. He is a father, a brother, an uncle, a kind, warm man no one would suspect. Sure, he's not guilty of murder, but if he's dirty, he's guilty of turning a blind eye, looking the other way.

"Sir, I have something to discuss that I feel is very important to this case and I'm not sure Mr. Quinn needs to be here for this, but if I'm crossing lines, please let me know." Pressing my lips into a firm line, I swallow hard. This room is intimidating now. Bookshelves with books of law stand like badges of honor, judging me for what I'm doing, for who I am—the mother of a future criminal, the lover of a present criminal, a person who doubts the only man she ever truly trusted.

"This is fine, dear. What's the matter?" He opens his hands in a welcoming gesture then folds them together again. I try to relax. This isn't some hardened criminal. He's my mentor, a friend.

"Sir, new evidence has come to light, something that may throw my entire case. A witness has come forward to say they have seen the murder of Aiden Hughes and it wasn't Mick O'Connor." My eyes search his features now, watching for any sign that



something is amiss. He's shifting in his seat, eyes tensing but face remaining relaxed. His poker face is good.

"How reliable is this witness? Do we know anything about him?" He stares at me like I'm the one lying, but the way he sits back, presses a finger to his cheek while his thumb props his chin up, I can see how he's instantly fighting internally. He's nervous now.

"Very reliable, sir. He's been hiding in a cabin south of Dublin. Four nights ago, there was a gunfight at his very cabin. They injured him trying to kill him to keep him from testifying. We know the real killer wasn't an O'Connor at all." I hold back what I really know because I don't want to give away too much. I even cut out Liam from this equation. He would only tell me I'm a fool.

"I see..." I've never seen him speechless. He sits staring at me, narrowing his eyes, and asks, "What do you intend to do about this?"

A chill sweeps through me, down to my bones, stirring the morning sickness I've been having. It's been mild, but heightened emotions have made it worse. I have to think about my unborn baby, whom I've decided is not an option. I can't just throw away a life, even if it comes at a cost to me. Even if it inconveniences me. And with the shift in this case, I feel terrified now. My life has always been at risk, but I have a child to think of now too.

"Well, sir, the only thing I can do is the right thing. I have to examine the evidence and move in the right direction. If this witness is credible, I have to drop the charges against Mick O'Connor and go after the man responsible." My insides feel like melting wax under his heated gaze. He's not happy with me and my morals, but I can't put an innocent man in prison for murder, no matter how many other things he's done wrong. It's not right.

"Ms. Gallagher, let me remind you that you are a servant of this court and that you have a duty to uphold." He sits straighter, taking on the tone of my mentor now. The friendly Brendan Callahan is gone, and I'm staring at the Honorable Judge Brendan Callahan with authority behind his name.

"But sir, Mick O'Connor?—"

"Will continue to be tried and found guilty." There is a menace in his expression I've never seen before, something intense that pushes me to the edge and makes my body course with adrenaline. He's terrifying in his full authority and I'm not sure how to feel about this.

"He may be innocent," I tell him, but I hear Finn's words ring in my ear. I've listened to that voicemail so many times now. Finn insists that Mick isn't getting a fair trial, and I'm inclined to agree with him.

"Siobhan, you've been seen pandering to a criminal. You should be careful what you're spewing out around here. People may think you're dirty." His eyes narrow on me, dark, ominous. I stand slowly and nod, already fearing for my life.

"Yes, sir," I say. "Thank you, sir."

"Be careful out there." He smiles again, but it's dark, sinister.

Message received loud and clear. The man I thought was the most upright and noble of them all is dirty. They got to him at some point, and I've been a fool for thinking anything in this world is as it should be.

Before I'm even out of the courthouse, I send Finn a message.

Siobhan 8:12 AM: I think I need that security detail you offered. NOW.

20

FINN

O ur new star witness, Sean McCarty, the only one who can clear Mick's name, lies in the spare bedroom at Ronan's house. Ro insisted I bring him there to have Maeve stitch him up. The bullet wound is only a graze of his esophagus. The man is lucky as hell. A centimeter to the right and he'd have been dead.

I walk toward the room where he rests. Maeve is checking on him, Ronan ready to question the man about everything he's seen and what happened following the incident. I know Sean is scared shitless, and he should be. If he's telling the truth and the DoYLES are behind Aiden's death, they won't stop until he's dead. They've gone to all these lengths to frame Mick for it. They won't hesitate to murder anyone who taints their story, including Sean or Siobhan.

Maeve walks out of the room as I approach the door. She smiles softly at me and sighs. I know she hates this side of the business, how Ronan has her on hand to doctor anyone who gets injured in the course of our work, but we're all thankful we have one of the top surgeons in the city here with us. It beats seeing a veterinarian.

"He's tired," she says softly.

"Did he talk to Ro?" I glance into the room and see Sean laid up on the bed, neck bandaged and eyes closed. Ronan stands over him, scowling with his arms crossed. I can see the tension on his face. We can't just march this guy into the courthouse and declare the truth. The DoYLES would have him killed instantly. Cops would want to

question him, and the dirty men on the Doyle's payroll who work in the justice system or at the Garda station would take him out.

"He's weak, but he did tell Ronan he saw it all." Maeve touches my arm and dips her head as she walks away. My phone buzzes and I pull it out to check it as I walk in, and I see it's a text from Siobhan. She's supposed to be in court right now, but the message seems urgent. She's requesting some security after days of not speaking to me.

"How is he?" I ask Ronan, and my oldest brother looks at me with anger in his eyes.

After hiding in those woods for ninety minutes, praying to God in heaven that those fools wouldn't find us, Ronan and a horde of our men stormed the place and chased them off. Luckily for us, no one lost their life on our side, but there were a few Doyle's down. They didn't bother to clean the mess. Our primary objective was to get McCarty back here to safety.

"He's alive and he's talking." He walks around the foot of the bed, grabs me by the elbow, and walks me out of the room. "Is she on our side now?" he asks, referring to Siobhan.

"Yeah, I think so." My gut tells me if she's asking for security that something has happened to help reveal the truth to her. She hates that I exposed that crooked judge for who he really is, but sometimes the truth hurts. "She's asking me to find her security. I think she's ready to play hardball."

"Not a moment too soon." Ro pulls the door shut after we leave the room and glares up the hallway into the darkness. "Don't mess this up, Finn. If Mick goes down, we'll all go down, one by one." His eyes are hardened steel.

I know what I have to do. I've known from the beginning and it's working out in ways

I never foresaw. Mick will walk. I'll make sure of that. And one way or another, Siobhan will be mine. I won't let her slip away.

"I'm gonna run."

"Finish this now. Get Mick out of there and let's put the real man behind bars. I have a feeling a war is brewing. We'll need everyone to fight this when it blows." His statement adds pressure to me, but I'm aware of how truthful it is. When the Doyles find out we have a man who can put their asset behind bars, they'll come looking for trouble. And something tells me that now that Ronan knows who killed Aiden, he may strike first anyway.

I grab Noah and Patrick, two of my best men, and head toward Siobhan's house. I'm well aware that the Doyles have had someone tailing me, though I'm not sure for how long. It's the only way they'd have known where Sean was, and I led them right to him. We were lucky to make it out with barely a scratch, but I can't be too careful now.

"Noah, you drive," I tell him as we climb in the car. I sit in back where I can message Siobhan to let her know we're coming, and Patrick joins Noah up front. They'll be her personal bodyguards until this is all over, which will allow me to continue to work on things elsewhere while being assured she's safe. Her safety, above all else, is my main priority. I need her to damn well realize it.

My phone buzzes with an incoming call just as Noah pulls away from the curb. I see that it's her, and I send up a silent prayer of thanks before answering. "Siobhán."

"Finn," she says between ragged breaths. "I need help..."

"I know, baby. I'm on the way. Tell me what happened." She sounds frantic and scared. I picture her pulling her hair, twirling it around a finger. She's not cut out for

this shit and she went at it with both barrels blazing. McVeigh should've known better than to give her this case.

Siobhan starts by telling me she confronted the judge about dropping charges for Mick, and before she can finish, Noah makes the car swerve. I hear gunshots, and I duck as the back windscreen is shattered.

“What the feck?” I gasp, dropping the phone. I instinctively reach for my gun holstered on my hip, and Noah's evasive maneuvers buy us a few minutes' time.

“Patrick, you have a gun?” I shout, and he nods, reaching for the glove box. “Shoot back, we have a tail!”

The tires scream as Noah swerves the car to avoid a trash bin. My heart hammers in my chest, the sound of it almost drowned out by the roaring engine. The black SUV stays on our tail, relentless as ever. I don't take my eyes off the rearview mirror, watching the headlights grow bigger with each second.

“Don't let them close, Noah!” I shout, bracing myself.

He doesn't answer. He doesn't need to. He's doing everything he can. His hands are a blur on the wheel, eyes sharp.

The street up ahead is clear, but we're running out of options. I look to my right. Patrick pulls his gun from the holster, his knuckles tight around the grip. He's ready.

"Ready to return fire, Finn?" Patrick growls, as if he's been waiting for this.

I don't need to respond. I've already got mine drawn. I slap the butt of my gun against the seat to steady myself.

“Take the next turn, Noah. Hard left.”

He doesn't hesitate. The tires screech as we make the sharp turn, cutting across two lanes of traffic. A quick look in the side mirror confirms what I already know. The SUV follows, like a shadow.

The headlights flicker on the damp road behind us, and I raise my gun out the window. A single shot rings out. The SUV swerves, its front tires skidding for a second before the driver regains control. We're gaining ground, but not enough.

“Get us into the next alley. Quick!”

Noah's eyes dart to me for a fraction of a second, just long enough for me to catch a glimpse of his jaw clenching. He slams the wheel left again, taking us down a narrow alley, the brick walls closing in on both sides.

The sound of the SUV's engine rumbles behind us. I glance back just in time to see headlights flash before they disappear behind a corner.

“Are they still on us?” I shout to Patrick, who's got his own eyes glued to the rearview.

“They're close!” Patrick yells back as a blast of gunfire hits the rear door.

I feel the car lurch, my body pressed against the seat. “We're hit!” I yell. The adrenaline is thick in the air, suffocating. My hands tighten around the grip of my gun.

“Focus on driving, Noah!” I bark.

He's already ahead of me, taking a sharp right into another alley. We zigzag through

the streets like a rat in a maze. The SUV's headlights remain in pursuit, cutting through the misty night air like a predator hunting its prey.

"Patrick, cover us!" I shout as I press my head against the seat, trying to stay low. Patrick fires back, shots ringing out, but they seem to do little more than push the SUV back temporarily. We need more time.

Noah swerves right again, narrowly missing a dumpster. We keep our speed, but the SUV doesn't fall behind. It matches every move, staying glued to our bumper.

I can see it now—the gap is closing. We need to lose them. There's no other choice.

"Take the next left, Noah. Hard left!" I yell again.

He obeys instantly, tires screeching as the car slides into a wider road. The SUV barrels after us. This is our last shot. My eyes scan the street ahead.

"There!" I shout, pointing. A construction site, wide open with concrete barriers on both sides, a narrow exit at the far end. If we can just make it...

We squeeze through, heading straight for the opening. The SUV doesn't make it. It slams into the barriers, throwing a ball of flames into the air in an explosive impact. I watch the mushroom cloud rise and heave out an angry sigh.

We make it to the end, the dirt road kicking up around us. We're free, for now, but I know there will be more of them coming. Siobhan knows it too. That's why she finally asked me for security, and not a moment too soon. The DoYLES aren't going to back down without a fight. They'll do anything to keep their secret from coming out.



### SIOBHAN

My nails are chewed to the quick, my hair frazzled. When Finn knocks, I nearly jump out of my skin expecting Liam or Brendan to show up, and I'm so relieved to see him, I don't even care that I throw my arms around him while two more hulking men with guns and sweat dripping from their foreheads watch.

"Oh, my God, I'm so scared." I'm whimpering like a fucking baby, but after learning Judge Callahan is as dirty as Finn says he is, I don't even know which way is up. Two months ago, I'd have told anyone Judge Callahan was the good guy and Finn O'Rourke was the bad guy, but today those tables have turned. I trust Finn with my life.

"Shh, hey, I'm here," Finn says as his arms envelop me. He walks me backward through my dark kitchen to the living room. I can't let go of him. I've been shaking all day since testimony was over. I had no rebuttals, no objections to Quinn's questioning or witnesses. Callahan seemed to know I felt off. He recessed for the day an hour early, and I swear someone was following the cab I took home. I should've had Liam bring me, but after the way he put the moves on me, I don't know where to turn now.

Which leaves me with Finn.

"He didn't just turn a blind eye to the new witness, Finn. He ordered me to continue trying the case against Mick O'Connor. He told me he would declare the man guilty." I think I may throw up just remembering the interaction this morning. "It means he's

probably tampered with the jury too."

I told McVeigh everything, but I don't know how anyone can stop this now. If they go against Callahan, they'll be going against the men controlling him. It will get messy fast, and I don't want any part of that.

"Hold the fort," Finn says, looking back at his men. They stand by the door stoically, arms crossed over their chests, guns in hand. If I didn't know better, I'd think they were a bit worked up too, like something happened to scare them. But my focus right now is on keeping my head on straight and making sure Finn knows how bad this all just got.

He takes my hand and leads me into my bedroom where he shuts the door and turns to me, cupping both cheeks. "Are you okay? Did he threaten you?"

I shake my head and blink back tears. "No threats, just what I said. He told me to continue the case as is because Mick O'Connor would be found guilty. Finn, he didn't do it, did he?"

My eyes search his and I can see the truth in them. I cling to him again, gripping his hands and bringing them to my lips. Tears come and I can't stop them this time.

"Sib, baby, I've got this." He frees himself from my grip and hugs me so I'm tucked into his chest. I feel safe here where I never thought I would. Liam wasn't wrong with his original warnings that O'Rourke men are dangerous. I should never have taken this case on. I'm not ready for this level of evil.

"Hey, it's okay..." Finn kisses my cheek, then kisses away some tears. "My men are the best in this business. They're not going to let anything happen to you. Okay?"

"He's dirty..." I sob and tuck my head into the crook of his neck. He smells musky

and raw. I can tell my earlier assumption of something having happened is correct, but I can't fathom asking what more could have gone wrong.

Instead I raise my lips and kiss him, a desperate, hungry kiss. The kind that screams for someone to reciprocate. I need to feel safer, closer to him. I need to be one with him and feel the raw power of his arms around me. Everything is spinning out of control—the case, the baby, my life. I need to feel anchored and grounded, and I can't think of a better way than to shock my nervous system into reality.

"Right now?" he asks, and a storm brews behind his eyes.

"Shut up and kiss me," I whimper, claiming his lips again.

Finn turns us toward the bed and walks me in that direction. His hands make quick work of my clothing, pulling it off one piece at a time as I undo his belt and pants. I can't get enough. His hands are all over me, everywhere at once, and the feeling of him against me, the safety he provides is what my shaking body needs.

"Damn it, Siobhan," he growls into my neck as I feel his teeth sink into my skin. I have his pants undone, his shirt untucked, and he pushes my hands away, tearing his shirt off by himself. I help him inch my panties down my thighs and over my hips, then pull back just far enough to let him peel his own pants and boxers off, and then we topple to the bed.

Muscles ripple where I touch, the heat from his skin like a drug. My body thirsts for this, for him, and right now, I have no cares about what will happen after. I can't think beyond the next touch, the next moan. His lips are back on mine, feverish and desperate as he settles between my thighs and buries his length in me.

"God, Sib," he groans against my neck, "I need you."

I arch my hips upward, begging for more. Finn delivers, thrusting further until every inch of him is seated inside me. He's long and thick, and I bite my lip to not scream. After the hiatus we've both had the past week, it hurts so good. My body remembers this sensation, remembers him, and instantly melts around him like butter as I wrap my legs around his waist.

"That's it," he pants into my ear.

"Your grip on me, baby." His hand moves down to cup my ass and his other hand tangles in my hair, pulling me into a deep kiss I never want to end.

Finn's hips grind into mine in a rhythm that lights every nerve ending on fire. Heat pools between my thighs and my body tenses up as the orgasm builds. I can feel it, taunting me from afar. Heat drills through me like I've been electrocuted as he buries himself even further inside me, all the way to the hilt, and that's all it takes for me to break apart under him. "God," Finn groans, and then sucking a path of kisses down my neck, he whispers in my ear, "I love you."

I clutch at him, my heart in my throat. Did he just say what I think he did?

"Finn..." I start, but his lips hush my protests.

Finn quickens his pace, rocking into me with a ferocity I desperately need. I thought he'd be tender, gentle, but no, there's something wild in his eyes tonight. He's possessing me, and I am allowing myself to be consumed by him—fully and completely.

"Finn!" I grunt his name, clawing at his back and arching my hips.

"God, yeah," he mutters into the space between us. "Come for me, Siobhan."

My entire body shudders beneath him. Heat floods me, and stars dance behind my eyes. I writhe and gasp. Air fills my lungs, but my head spins as I twitch and jolt. I don't know how long it takes to catch my breath, or for him to slow down, but when my vision clears, Finn's still inside me, panting just as hard as I am. His eyes are locked with mine, and I can see the same wild thing in them that's racing through me.

"I love you too," I breathe, my heart pounding in my chest. His thrusts are slower now but with purpose. I can't look away from his gaze, and he doesn't try to either.

"I will have you every single day for the rest of my life." His voice is hoarse, his hand cupping the back of my head as he kisses me deeply, his lips melding with mine. "Let me take care of you."

"Yes," I pant. "Please," I beg.

He smiles against my lips and continues the torturous pace until he catches me by surprise and flips us over. Now I'm on top, my body pressing his into the mattress as he plunges deeper inside me.

"God, I love you so much," I moan, clutching at his biceps as he thrusts into me again and again.

Finn's hands are everywhere, his fingers splayed across my backside as he whispers dirty things in my ear.

"Scream for me, baby. Scream my name," he demands, and I do.

"Finn! Oh, feck, Finn!" I cry out as another orgasm grips me, my body tense like a bowstring before it snaps. I can't stop the convulsions that double me over, and I bite his shoulder to muffle more cries. My name slips from his lips in a grunt a moment later as his own climax overtakes him. His heat floods me deliciously and moistens

the friction between us.

We both breathe heavily, chests heaving as we lay entangled in each other's arms. I still don't know what I'm going to tell him about the baby or how I'll manage to handle this relationship and keep my reputation. But I do know that he's what I want. When it felt like my world was caving in, he was the one I called.

I just have to survive this court case and we can work out the details later.

FINN

Court is in session again, and though Siobhan hasn't moved a muscle other than to scribble some notes on her notepad now and then, my attention is focused on her. After a long discussion in the middle of the night, we both decided it's safer for now if I have men completely not associated with any crime syndicate to watch over her. I don't want to risk seeming impropriety in this case any more than she does, especially knowing Callahan is crooked.

If he gets another prosecutor in here, it will be a death sentence for Mick's freedom. So I've hired a few men I know are the best in the business, two army ranger wings with top marks. It wasn't hard to convince them to watch over a DPP, and my offer of three thousand pounds a day each helped out, I'm sure.

"Mr. O'Hare, what I'm asking is..." Mr. Quinn is on a rabbit trail and Siobhan isn't stopping him. The witness owns the restaurant down the street where Mick was supposedly seen that night before shooting Aiden. We all know Mick was banging his whore in an upstairs apartment a block to the east, and Quinn is trying to prove that he never went to the restaurant. It's a shame in this old part of town, there aren't many cameras or we'd have put these charges to bed a long time ago.

A juror coughs and Siobhan looks up. I notice the way she's sitting is different from normal. Ever since I told her Callahan is dirty, she's withdrawn, like she's not even fighting the case anymore. I know she's scared of what will happen to her, but I need her to fight harder, to prove Mick's innocence. We spoke about this the other night

when I was at her apartment, but when she sits in this room, she becomes a timid mouse afraid to charge the elephant.

"And do you think it's possible that you've just mistaken him for someone else?" Quinn stands in front of the witness box, staring the man down. The witness seems collected, practiced. I wonder who paid him to say these things. It's probably the same men who paid Sarah Duncan to say what she said.

We've been putting out fires since the start of it all. She won't cough up the names or descriptions of the men who paid her off, and Ronan demanded that we hide her away now—probably at his wife's behest. I told him to let Duncan sit and wait and when the Doyles come looking, we'd have them. But that didn't exactly work when we went for Sean McCarty. They came out fighting and we nearly lost him.

"Your Honor, objection." Siobhan, frustrated now, stands and objects to the line of questioning. "We're tired of this. He's badgering the witness. Can we move on?" She plants a hand on her hip and sighs. I watch the curve of her ass and smirk as I remember the things I've done to her in secret. The court case isn't ever going to go the way I want it to—I've given up on that idea and moved on to a new way.

"Sustained. Mr. Quinn, please move along." Callahan raises his eyebrows at the solicitor and the man throws his hands up.

"No further questions for this witness, Your Honor." Quinn glares at Siobhan briefly, then his eyes meet mine before he sits down. The objection wasn't without merit. He was beating a dead horse with a stick.

"Your Honor, I move for a ten-minute recess." Siobhan, still standing, presses her fingertips into the wood grain of the table in front of her and Callahan taps his gavel.

"Ten minutes recess. Court will adjourn at the top of the hour." We wait for him to



rise and walk out, and then a flurry of sounds and movement erupts around me as folks take to the restroom and hallway.

I wait a second, hoping to have a quick conversation with Siobhan, but she dashes into the hall right away, leaving her things on her table. With the court officials out of the room, the judge in his chambers, and Siobhan out in the hall, I approach Mick instead.

He sits next to Quinn with his head hanging. Things have been harder on him since the news of his true alibi came out. Not only have Rebecca and Brennan not returned to view one single day, but it's given the prosecution a stronger case. He had a much greater opportunity to commit the crime given the fact that he was actually in the vicinity. I wonder if that's why the DoYLES chose him. They knew where he was that night...

"Mick," I say, standing behind the half wall dividing me from him. My hands rest on the wall gripping it, and Mick turns around to take one. He grabs it with both of his and presses it to his forehead as if I'm his savior.

"Finn, I'm desperate." His eyes are sunken in, deep wrinkles in his forehead and crow's feet that weren't there a few weeks ago. "Where's my family? How is Isla?"

"Isla is good. The baby is good too, Mick. I haven't seen Brennan. My job is to get you out, not coddle your wife." I'm firmly on his side, but I also understand how she feels. Finding out your husband is whoring around the way she did couldn't have been easy on her.

"You have to go to her. Please, tell her I love her. Please tell her?—"

"You can tell her yourself," I interrupt. Lowering myself into the chair behind me, I let him keep holding my hand. Quinn turns to face me too as I begin speaking again.

"I have new evidence. The man who watched the actual murder is alive. He's at Ro's house. He's willing to testify that a Doyle was the one with the weapon that killed Aiden."

Tears come to Mick's eyes but he shakes his head. "It's too late. The judge will never allow us to add another witness to the list."

I've thought of this too, how late in the trial it is. There doesn't seem to be a good way to incorporate Sean's testimony now, but if they got the man who did this and arrested him, Sean would be able to testify against that man. I just have to stop this nonsense case against Mick and it doesn't seem possible.

"Mick's right, Mr. O'Rourke." Quinn grunts out his response, and I scowl at him. "Callahan isn't so easy to work with on a normal day, but something crawled up his ass. He's not working with us at all."

So the dirty judge wants to play hardball? I'll just have to get to Siobhan and have her call the new witness, and maybe they'll have to do something then. If the judge thinks it's a way to make this case a knockout, then he'll let her do it.

"I'll find a way, guys. Mick, don't lose hope." I pat his hand as I stand and walk toward the hallway where I saw Siobhan disappear. We have about five minutes left in the recess, so I have only a few minutes to find her and communicate what I need.

When I walk into the hall, I see her leaving the toilets. That Garda friend of hers is here too, standing down the hallway watching things. I walk up to her but as I do, she backs away, giving me a discouraging look. Her back is to the detective Garda and I can tell she's not trying to anger me. She's afraid. Her eyes are twitching, narrowed.

"Sib," I whisper.

"Not now, Finn," she hisses. Her eyes flick back at the Garda at the end of the hallway watching us. His ominous stare tells me he knows something is going on. He's the one who put the wire on her that night before our dinner at that restaurant. I would bet my fortune on it.

His smug expression holds firm as he locks eyes with me and Siobhan walks past me back into the courtroom. This man really has a problem with me, and I'm about to take that stick shoved up his ass and twist it a little. I won't let him come between me and her, though I do respect her not wanting to make waves right now. He's just doing his job, but he's totally off base and I intend to make him see the light.

Glancing over my shoulder at Siobhan, who disappears into the courtroom, followed by the two men I know are her security team, I turn back toward our Garda friend. But he's gone, vanished in the time it took me to watch Sib return to the relative safety of the courtroom.

I jog to the end of the hallway and turn the corner. He's not there. So I duck into the men's room and he's not in there either. It's empty. Like a ghost in the darkness, he's gone, dissolved into thin air. He knows I won't fuck around with him. He's probably encountered other men like me, probably even seen me coming and going from her place. Maybe he's the reason she's scared to be seen with me, or maybe it's the threat to her career.

Straightening my tie, I know I'm not going to get anywhere today, at least not in this courthouse. Siobhan is safe with her guards, and I have more work to do. She'll never convince the judge to drop the charges, and if I'm right and he's really as dirty as I think, he'll sooner kill her or let the DoYLES do it to cause a mistrial. Then he'd pay off someone or blackmail them into pinning it on Mick.

The only way to stop this train now is to get ahead of it and change the course. I have to show the world Mick is innocent, even if I have to take Sean McCarty to the

Leinster House and bring news media out for him to tell his side of the story on national news. It would surely get the court's attention and McVeigh would pause the proceedings and make sure to hear McCarty's full testimony before the jury was allowed to decide.

It could be the only way—assuming McVeigh isn't dirty too.

### SIOBHAN

"Who's the muscle?" Liam asks me as I approach the bathrooms. He's been here all afternoon as we've been hearing testimony. He has a job to do but he's unnaturally fascinated with this case for some reason. Maybe because it's my first murder trial, or maybe because he's the lead detective Garda on this case.

I glance over my shoulder at Kyle and Erick, both hired hands that Finn insists I have with me at all times. I'm not fighting him. I can't have his buddies following me, but these muscle heads stick out like sore thumbs. Still, I feel safer with them around me. Whoever is out to get me will have two brick walls to go through before they can reach me.

"I took Callahan's advice and hired security. Can't be too safe," I tell him, but I don't pause to talk to him. I walk right into the bathroom and lean over the sink, splashing cold water on my face. I don't have to use the toilet, but I may throw up. Morning sickness makes my stomach my worst enemy. I haven't eaten breakfast in more than a week. If I do, it ends up all over me or whatever I'm around. As it stands, I throw up bile at least daily now. Finn has to sense something, unless he's so distracted with the case that he, too, can't see past his nose.

"Feeling okay?" a woman asks. I don't know how she's connected to all of this but I've seen her in the courtroom. Maybe she's just a reporter, but it's not in my best interests to buddy up to anyone.

"I'm good, thanks. Just feeling ill still." Most of these people who've been at court daily have seen me throw up a few times. It's not cold and flu season but it doesn't mean people don't get sick.

"I have a mint," she offers, digging into her purse, and I thank her as I take it.

I stick the mint in my pocket and unspool a bit of scratchy brown paper towel to dry my face. The bathroom empties. It's just me staring at my reflection. I can't believe I'm a puppet on a string, sitting back and watching Callahan screw this case and Mick O'Connor. He may well be guilty as hell, but he's not getting a fair trial, not if the judge over the proceedings can't hear all the testimony fairly.

And Finn... bless his heart. Every time I see him, I want to run into his arms, bury my face in his chest, and hide from the harsh truth that the world isn't what it seems. He says he has a verified eyewitness, one who was nearly killed by the Doyle syndicate because he saw the murder. But there's no way to get him on the stand now. I've gone to McVeigh, told him everything I know. His only answer is to stick it out, to wait and see how things develop. I don't know why he doesn't just pull the plug now.

Glancing at my watch, I see I've only got five minutes left. I toss the paper towel and head back into the hallway. Liam is there still, watching me. He scowls at me as I exit the ladies' room and cuts me off so I can't walk freely.

"I'm sorry, Siobhan, about the other day." He's not sorry. That expression on his face is ravenous. If I were alone with him right now, he'd try it again. I've seen that same look on his face for months now. He's a predator. I feel sorry for his wife.

"I can't do this, Liam." I want to turn away but he grabs my wrist and holds me there. I glance around, wondering what people might be thinking as they watch him handle me. "Let go of me," I hiss quietly.

"I told you that people are watching, and I was trying my best to be a good friend and protect you, Siobhan." His voice is low, threatening.

"Liam, you're hurting me," I whimper. Why would he be this way with me? I don't understand if he's trying to protect me, why he'd threaten me.

"Look at me," he snarls, and I stop trying to pull away from him and meet his gaze. "I'm telling you to just back off. Get O'Rourke out of your life. Do what you're supposed to be doing—do your job." His eyes darken and narrow, and I feel a shudder of fear. "And finish this case before something bad happens. Please."

There's a sense of urgency in his tone. I see the way he looks at me, almost fearful but too intimidating for me to connect with any real depth of emotion. Liam knows something I don't know and he's worried about me. He loosens my wrist, and I rub it for a second before turning away. If he's in on this or knows something about the case, does that mean he's dirty too?

I walk back toward the courtroom feeling a bit flustered. I was previously overwhelmed by what's happening and how to handle it all, but now I'm scared again. If Liam knows something is going on, it means someone somewhere is watching me. Someone who is pulling strings I can't even see.

Finn walks up to me, but I have to dismiss him. Everything in me wants to jump into his arms and run away to never deal with this again, but I can't do that. Mick may not be innocent, but the more things that happen, the more I realize maybe he really didn't kill Aiden Hughes. Maybe I'm a pawn in a game I don't want to be playing and if I concede, a man will be wrongly convicted.

"Sib," Finn says, but I look away, knowing Liam is watching. I fix my eyes on the guards behind him, leaning against the courtroom doors.

"Not now, Finn," I hiss at him and keep walking. If I tuck into his chest I may never come out again. I may never find the courage to fight these men whose lives I've made it my goal to destroy. I'm so confused by it all, numbed by it. If this case doesn't even involve getting to the root of who killed my cousin and I'm running scared, how will I find his killer and take them down? Especially if men like Callahan surround me and hedge me in on all sides.

One of my bodyguards nods at me and I walk past them. I hear them following. They sit in the first bench behind me. They can't join me at my table. Even if they could, I wouldn't feel any safer. When Callahan looks at me, I feel the devil staring at me. But the price he's asking me to pay is far too high for someone like me.

Put a man into prison who may well be innocent of the charges? How can I do that and still live with myself? Yes, Mick O'Connor has done wretched things and probably things worthy of jailtime, but I'm being more and more convinced on the daily that he has nothing to do with Aiden's murder.

The gavel bangs and everyone rises as the judge takes his position again. I can't even look at him now. That interaction with Liam has me shaken. He knows something and I need to know how he knows. I want to know how Callahan got into my penthouse. Why he was there really? And who were the men pulling strings to make all of this happen? Finn says it's the Doyles, but I don't see the ties to them in any of this.

"Mr. Quinn, call your next witness, please." Callahan's voice sounds far away, like he's in a tomb, echoing off the walls.

I rub my forehead and stare at the notes on my legal pad. The bright yellow paper contrasts with my dark red pen, making the letters stand out. I've not made one single note about Quinn's witnesses or any rebuttal I may have. The only reason I objected to his questioning of that shop owner was because I wanted to cool my face off.



Otherwise, I'd let him drone on for days. It would buy me time to figure this thing out. As it is, we have a few days at best to make something happen or Callahan wins, and this entire city may as well go up in flames. If our justice system is infiltrated by criminals, what hope do any of us have left for a moral life?

The notes in front of me aren't organized. They're just bullet points and chicken scratches of what I know to be true. The evidence, the suspicions about Callahan. I add to them a suspicion about Liam—his name in all caps, boxed in with a thick, heavy line and a large question mark.

Then something catches my eye. It's a slip of pink paper, the corner of which is peeking from under my legal binder. I narrow my eyes at it as I glance around. I don't use pink paper for anything, not a note pad, not even a Post-It. Someone has put this here when I was away, and I'm curious to see what it is.

The hairs on the back of my neck rise to stand on end as I pull it out and instantly recognize the handwriting. Callahan's penmanship is unmistakable. I'd recognize it anywhere. The small note must've come from him somehow, though he was in his chambers, so I don't see how he could've put this here, which means he also has a court official on his side too.

When I look up at him, he's staring at Quinn, but his eyes flick to meet mine. The same dark, inky gaze that terrified me more than a week ago in his office locks on me for a split second and I almost piss myself. When my eyes peer back at the paper, I have to blink a few times to force them to focus.

The note reads, O'Connor is guilty. Convict him, or you'll be sentencing yourself. No appeals. No second chances . It makes a chill creep down my spine, pooling in my gut, stirring up my nerves. I shake as I read it again, and my body feels like I've been plunged into ice water. But I'm sweating.

Before I can stop it, I'm dry heaving, rising to lean over the edge of the table where bile and stomach acid comes up and pours onto the floor. The pitcher of water on my table spills, toppling over the edge, and I gasp for air.

Never in a million years did I think trying a case like this would put me in this position, but I know better now. I know I need help. I need Finn, and McVeigh, and anyone else who will be in my corner, because the forces I'm up against aren't going to stop unless they suck me into the vortex with them.

24

FINN

The car rolls to a stop outside Mick's farmhouse. I can see instantly the pain on Isla's face. Her father isn't here to meet his new grandchild. She's hurting as much as I expect Brennan and Rebecca are. I'm here with Declan and his family to do as I promised Mick I would. I have to speak with Brennan and help her understand her cheating husband and his foolish ways. He might be a scoundrel of a man, but he's no murderer—not Aiden, anyway.

"You okay?" Declan, my older brother, asks his wife.

Isla nods but snuffles as she unbuckles the baby's car seat and begins to pull it out of the car. I climb out and suck in a deep breath of country air. We're south of the city, not quite halfway to County Wicklow but still in beautiful country. Mick chose his operations to run from this place and it was perfect for a time. For long enough, in fact, that neither of his daughters knew a single thing about his life of crime. He kept it all under wraps by running this massive farm.

"Go on in," I tell them, taking a few minutes to collect my thoughts.

Declan ushers Isla indoors with the baby while I stand in the misty fog. It's cool against my skin, moist. I sense movement in the barn but hear the flapping of wings and see a bird launch into the air. Not much is happening here now since the Garda raided the place. Mick's men have all taken jobs within the O'Rourke organization for the time being. I doubt any work will happen in this place again except for genuine

farming.

I hear a horse whinny, more birds' wings flapping, and sigh. I'm on edge even when things are peaceful. I'm sure Brennan feels the same way with her husband on trial. She has to be distraught from it all. The idea of facing the future without Mick is just an annoyance, a setback to us. But to her, it's losing her life partner.

With my sails adjusted, I walk into the house. The atmosphere is heavy. It feels like someone died, not like Mick is just on trial. The curtains are drawn. Dust hangs in the air. A single lamp in the corner is on, and Brennan sits in an old wooden rocker with a lap blanket draped over her legs. There's a cup of tea next to her, tea bag still draped over the edge, but Rebecca, Isla, and the baby are nowhere in sight. Only Declan sits with the matriarch of this broken family.

I stick a finger in my collar and loosen my tie, having no hat to hold in my hand. Brennan looks up at me with forlorn eyes and nods. She looks tired, hair a frazzled mess around her head and shoulders.

"Sorry I don't have any tea for ye." Even her voice sounds hampered by sorrow and fatigue.

I sit down in the chair nearest her and allow my eyes to adjust to how dim it is in here. The faint chatter of women in the other room meets my ears and I wonder why Brennan would send Isla away with her new grandchild. Why wouldn't she want to hold the little one?

"How is he?" she asks me, and I shrug before sucking in a deep breath.

"He's a rugged old man, Brennan. He'll do fine if he knows his one true love is fighting for him." I search her expression as she frowns and looks away, into the light of the old Cranberry glass lamp. Like the woman in front of me, the lamp has untold

value to the right person. "He needs you there fighting for him."

She pauses a beat, blinking her eyes a few times before smiling softly. "I know the kind of man Mick is." Her words come out distant, like she's projected herself to another time or place where life was a fairytale and no one had hurt her or wounded her sense of morality. "I know the things he does." Her eyes turn to meet mine, and I see the sadness in them. "I just didn't think he'd want the world to know."

Realization dawns on me. Brennan has known Mick for who he really is—a liar and a cheat—her whole life. It's the shame of the world knowing that he's that way, and knowing she has allowed it to happen to her and stayed with him. That's what's gotten to her.

"Loyalty isn't a thing to disdain, Mum," Declan says, touching her knee. She pats his hand and smiles warmly at him and the way he speaks with her familiarly. I'm glad for her sake that she can lean on my brother as the son she never had, especially while this trial is ongoing and she has no man in this house.

"Loyalty, against all odds, is a mark of honor." When I speak, she looks up at me and nods.

"Aye, it is." Her response doesn't faze me at all. Women who marry into this lifestyle know what they're getting. Men like Mick are a dime a dozen. And what man among us hasn't at least thought of what he's done?

Still, just thinking of doing that to Siobhan stains my conscience with a searing mark I'm not sure I could ever undo. Seeing how Brennan hurts makes it all too real to me. Mick is a lucky man.

"If I appear in court after that, the world will see me for who I really am, and I'm not sure I can face that." She withdraws her hands and folds her arms over her chest,

tucking her hands into her armpits. I feel her pain, and I won't push her to do more than she's willing.

"He wants you to know he's sorry and he loves you." I barely get the words out when I hear a crash and shrieks.

Declan and I jump to our feet, turning toward the sound. Brennan rises more slowly as Isla and Rebecca come racing down the hallway with the baby in Isla's arms. They look frightened and they are coughing as smoke rolls out the bedroom door they just exited.

"Fire," Isla chokes out, eyes watering, arm drawing up over her face.

"Feck's sake," Declan grunts, and I move to the large window obscured by thick, dark curtains. I pull it back and see the house surrounded. "We've got company." There are a few cars out front, but several men, each with a gun in hand and a few of them with a bottle of some sort of liquid and a wick in each burning.

"How many?" Declan asks, checking his weapon. The women are hysterical, gasping and whimpering.

"At least ten. Mother of Christ, why can't they feck off already?" I reach for my weapon as the stench of smoke meets my nostrils. I know nothing about this property or the home, so I can't begin to tell these women how to get to safety. The men outside are Doyles, sent here by Cormac Doyle himself to hunt me down because they know I have Sean McCarty in my custody.

"Isla, is there a way out of here that's not the front or back door?" Declan asks, and Brennan is already ushering the girls toward the kitchen. I race to the bedroom from where the smoke is pouring out, filling the rest of the house, and then follow them to the kitchen.

Declan moves the large dining table toward a wall as Brennan shouts out orders. The girls huddle in the corner, glancing out the window overlooking the back pasture, and I see men closing in.

"Duck," I shout at them, and I raise my weapon to fire on the men before they can throw their firebombs into the windows back here. The blasts terrify the women and baby. All of them are sobbing as Declan rolls back the carpet and opens a trap door into a cellar.

"We can't go into a cellar of a burning home," I snap, keeping my weapon raised up as the men outside scatter and take cover. Seconds later, the firebombs smash against the back side of the structure and flames erupt there. They're followed by gunshots which pepper the wooden siding and cause me and Declan to drop to one knee.

"There's a tunnel out the back side to the south pasture. Just go." Brennan ushers us one at a time, but Declan won't let her be the last to descend. He forces her to go before him, and I bring up the rear. It's pitch black down here and cold. There are shelves of canned goods and a cache of weapons too.

Declan glances at me, and I know what he's thinking. "Everyone take one," he orders, and even Rebecca and Brennan grab a gun. Their hands are shaking in fear, terrified of the war raging overhead as their home burns to the ground above us.

"We'll need lights," Brennan says breathily. Her hand floats to her chest and she nods at the shelf next to the guns where I find a few flashlights.

"We don't have time. This place will be up in just minutes. Let's go." I lead the way with my light slicing through the darkness, praying they don't know there is a secret tunnel under this house.

Together, we huddle in the narrow, damp passageway, scaring rats out and making

our way toward the exit. The ground dips and descends farther, then a hill causes us to rise, and slowly, we ascend a flight of stairs.

It leads us to a horizontal door which is stuck fast. I can't budge it despite throwing my shoulder into it. We've got to be five hundred paces from the house, God only knows where, and hopefully out of earshot from the men who are laying waste to Mick's homestead.

"Let me help," Declan grunts, and together, both of us strain against the door until it rises open and fresh air sinks down into the tunnel with us.

The baby is still screaming, wrapped in Isla's arms now, as she lavishes it with kisses and soft words. I peek out first, making sure we're not being spotted, and find a hill blocks the view of where we're at from the house.

"Come on," I order Declan, and he follows me up and out of the cellar. We climb the hill and lie on its crest, watching the house be licked up by the flames. Doyle's men still surround it, like they're waiting for the shrieks of death to tell them we're all dead.

"They're not stopping, are they?" I ask him, and Declan shakes his head.

"They'll never stop. We have to get Mick out of this and we have to do it now. And then we have to make a plan because this war has only just started." I listen to my older brother and know he's right. The stench of smoke in the air carries our direction on the wind and hangs like an omen. Even if we get Mick out alive, the DoYLES have started a war we can't ignore. We have to fight back now. And I have to make sure Siobhan is safe while we do.



25

SIOBHAN

Men come with buckets and mops. I sit there in humiliation at my table watching them clean the mess. Callahan isn't so nice this time to call a recess. He glowers at me the entire time the men mop up my vomit, though he has cleared the rest of the courtroom of the jury and audience, at least. I feel vulnerable without my security detail, but Callahan isn't going to pull any shit with Quinn and O'Connor here, not to mention the court official too.

When the porters have gone and the mess is cleaned up, Callahan speaks frankly with us and all I can do is take it. "Ms. Gallagher, I suggest you hold yourself together a bit better. If you're sick, assign someone to this case to try it for you. If not, then manage these symptoms appropriately. We cannot finish a trial with you spewing vomit every other day." He's being cold and harsh, though I do understand his point. Had this been any other case, I'd have recused myself already.

I know if I do that now, however, Mick will go to prison for certainty. With me here, at least he has a fighting chance now. It's funny how I've gone from being adamant the man was guilty to understanding how entirely twisted this thing has gotten and wishing I'd never been a part of it, to seeing how innocent men go to jail for the guilty. I want to do the right thing, not the easy thing.

"I apologize, Your Honor, and I am feeling quite ill. I thought the case would be over today and I would be able to rest up afterward, but?—"

"Enough," he spits, glaring at me. His eyes shift to Quinn and he asks, "How many more witnesses do you have?"

Mr. Quinn glances at me nervously, like he thinks I'm his life vest in this roiling sea of anger. Neither of us wants to be held in contempt and I'm sure both of us are ready for this to be over today. I just know if he says no more witnesses, the judge will recall the jury and ask them to decide. My fingers inch together, crossing in hopes that Quinn won't give up the ghost just yet. I need more time to do things the right way.

"Sir, we have one more witness. Ms. Miriam Flaherty, the?—"

"Whore, I know," he interrupts again. It's degrading to hear him speak about her like that. She's a sex worker, and maybe that's all she has left to do to make a living. "We'll hear her testimony tomorrow starting at ten a.m. Then court will adjourn for jury deliberation." He turns to me in anger again. "Unless you have some objection, Ms. Gallagher?"

"No, sir. Your Honor, that sounds fine to me." I'm shaking as I take a deep breath and nod at him. Less than twenty-four hours to make this idiot pay for everything he's done so far and get Mick O'Connor at least a fair trial, if not freedom from every baseless accusation.

"Tomorrow, then," he says and smacks his gavel on the sounding board.

I waste no time gathering my things, haphazardly shoving my papers into my legal binder and then into my briefcase. Quinn and O'Connor watch me frantically scurrying about with curiosity in their eyes, and I rush from the room with one thing on my mind. I have to get to McVeigh and pray he's not as crooked as they come too.

The bodyguards wait just outside the courtroom entrance. One of them takes my case

to carry it, but both walk along in rushed steps with me as my heels click on the marble floors.

After reading that note, I slid it into my pocket. I have proof now, not just hearsay from evidence that can't be entered into a trial, but real proof that Callahan is dirty. His handwriting on this note, threatening me with death if I don't make sure Mick O'Connor is found guilty, is enough to put him behind bars for a long time, if not forever. And he'll never preside over a case again.

"Ms. Gallagher, I'm under strict orders to take you to your penthouse." One of the guards tries to stop me, and I sidestep him and scowl.

"Stay out of my way, please. I need to get to the director of public prosecutor's office right away." The look on my face must show him how serious I am because he opens the door for me and falls into step without asking any more questions.

"How can we help?" the other asks, and I shake my head.

"Keep me alive long enough to make these sick bastards pay for their crimes," I retort as I walk faster. It's only a block to the building where my office and the other prosecutors' offices are. I know McVeigh is there now. I spoke to him before trial this morning about Finn's suspicions. He told me even if I had "alleged images" of criminal wrongdoing, I couldn't use them. I needed something more.

While the note came as an utter shock that had me shaken to my core, in the aftermath I knew it was just what I needed. Now I scurry toward my boss's office to provide that proof in hopes it will end this trial dead in its tracks. At least Mick will be able to have the proper trial he deserves then and not be sentenced to life in prison without it.

When we get there, the guard flings the door open and I rush in, scrambling past

McVeigh's assistant who swears he's in a meeting. I barge right into his office to see a judge parked in the short wooden armchair across from McVeigh, and both men look up at me in surprise.

"Ms. Gallagher, I'm in a meeting. Can this wait?" He stands slowly, nodding at the judge whom I know to be Winslow O'Hare—another man I've always believed above reproach, but I'm not sure what to think now.

"Apologies, Mr. McVeigh, Your Honor, but this cannot wait. It's a matter of quite some urgency." My chest is hammering, pulse racing. I pray Callahan hasn't seen me walk into this building so hastily. Someone has been watching me, but I don't know who or how or where. I feel sick again just thinking of it.

"Mr. O'Hare, could I ask you to step outside for a few moments while I address this rude interruption?" McVeigh eyes me with caution as he addresses the judge, and the man nods and stands up.

I watch as he leaves, shutting the door behind himself, then pluck the letter out of my pocket and thrust it out toward my supervisor. "He wrote this. Callahan is threatening me." My hand shakes as he takes the pink slip of paper and reads over it. His eyebrows rise and he meets my gaze.

"Do you know what this means, Siobhan?" McVeigh stands holding the evidence, and I'm trembling thinking he's going to rebuke me, tell me he, too, is dirty and I'm in a hell of a mess.

I can't stand anymore. My legs feel weak, knees ready to give out. I sink into the chair, still warm from the judge's body, and cover my mouth with both hands.

"We have him. We can do this." McVeigh walks around to my side of the desk and stands over me. "This is proof that we've been waiting for."

"So, you go arrest him or what?" I'm relieved, ready for this to be over and for me to have my life back. I don't know how everything will work out with Finn yet, but just knowing I won't have to live under the thumb of an evil man is a huge weight off my shoulders.

"Not yet," he says, sitting on the edge of his desk. "Now you can't spread this to anyone, but I wanted you to be the first to know. A videotape has come in revealing the real killer of Aiden Hughes. His name is Hagen Doyle, son of Cormac. He's the heir to the Doyle throne and we've got him red-handed. We also have word that there is an eyewitness placing Hagen at the scene of the crime, and we know the weapon used never belonged to Mick O'Connor."

The news swirls around my head and makes me dizzy. There is physical evidence that's been hidden from me by someone in the Garda who knew about it. Liam... it has to be. My eyes rise to meet McVeigh's.

"So it's over?"

"Not quite. There are a few players we're not sure about and we have to fish them out." His expression turns serious and he taps the paper against his opposite palm. "Are you willing to ride this out a bit longer? We need a few more things to come together before we can play our hand, but we have to do it the right way. We want every guilty party who played a part in this at the same time. No chance for an escape act by any of them."

I'm sickened, scared to death of what Callahan may be capable of. He was in my kitchen that night, without alarming my security or setting off the penthouse sirens. He actively threatened to kill me if I didn't do what he said. Now he's going to be free for as long as it takes McVeigh to finish this thing.

"I'm not sure," I say, feeling like retching right here again. "Sir, these men are

threatening to kill me."

"And you have one of them in your bed," he says, raising his eyebrows. "Surely, you can pursue this a bit longer." A cold chill makes me shudder. McVeigh knows I'm fucking Finn? It paralyzes me for a moment as I think of how he knows. I told him I was going undercover, snooping out dirt on them, but that wouldn't immediately mean I'm fucking him.

"How?" I say, narrowing my eyes on him.

"Eyes and ears are everywhere, Ms. Gallagher, and while you did come forward to tell me what was happening, I can't look past the indiscretions." He sets his jaw and his eyes wash with a serious expression that I know means he's not backing down. I've dug my grave and I have to lie in it now. "Whatever thing you have going with O'Rourke will produce sufficient evidence to ensure our friend Callahan goes away for a long, long time. And how I gather my information is of no consequence to you." He sighs and stands back up.

"For now, just trust that you've found one moral soul who hasn't been perverted by the dark thread that weaves through the rest of this system trying to snake its way into any life that will allow it." He walks around his desk and blinks at me. "And sweep your home for bugs at least once a week."

The friendliness in his tone relaxes my shoulders. I see honesty in his eyes when he looks at me, and I nod. "Thank you, Sir."

"Then you're on board to sink these feckers back to the depths of where they came from for good?" McVeigh's eyebrows rise, and I nod with certainty. I know what I'm doing and I'm going to finish it—for Trevor.

"Yes, sir. Let's do it."

I may be shaking the entire way, but I'm going to finish this if it's the last thing I do. And when it's done, I'm going to reassess whether finding Trevor's killer is the right thing for my future. I have a baby to think about now.

FINN

The courtroom is packed today, standing room only. Solicitor Quinn has called his final witness, and following that, we will hear the closing arguments. I spoke with Siobhan this morning in her penthouse curled around her naked body as she told me quietly how scared she was for today. I assured her that it would be fine, that we would figure it out. I told her then to say only truthful statements and let the chips fall where they may.

Now as Quinn takes his rest and sits behind his table next to Mick, I'm concerned Siobhan won't be able to follow through, that her resolve will wane and she will fear the tentacles of this machine poised to devour her more than the fear of doing the wrong thing. I, myself, have been in this position so many times in my life and I've always chosen to do the wrong thing. Though the monster hunting me is a life separated from my family, while hers is certain death. The Doyles won't care about ethics or whether she was right or wrong for her arguments.

"If that's all, we'll move to closing arguments." Callahan scowls at Siobhan. It's been his constant expression for the past week. He knows she has seen him for who he is and he doesn't know how that all came about yet, but with the evidence we have against him, there's no getting out of it. Siobhan says her boss, McVeigh, will step in. She's sure of it. But she's still frightened.

"Of course, Your Honor." She stands, tugging the hem of her suit jacket, then walks around the tables to stand in front of the jury box. It's her time to shine. I don't know



what she'll say, but after lying in bed with her agonizing over closing arguments last night, I know she believes Mick is innocent now.

Siobhan sucks in a deep breath so loud the entire courtroom can hear it, though that's not difficult. You can hear a pin drop in here. There are murder cases every year in Dublin, but this one is the case to follow. Rival syndicates have blown up this city quite literally in an attempt to ensure the pieces fall on the right sides of this division. Ronan has men prepared to storm the Doyle compound and take them all out if investigators don't get there first. I'll just be happy to take Siobhan into my arms and hold her as the stress of it all melts off her.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, what you've heard over the past few months is testimony in the case against Mick O'Connor accused of murdering Aiden Hughes in cold blood." She paces as she walks, carefully avoiding eye contact with Mick or the judge. She's walking a tightrope and she knows it. One wrong move and she falls, and there's no safety net to catch her.

"You've heard Mr. O'Connor's testimony, how he lied about his alibi, only later to reveal that he was with another woman the night of the murder." She's choosing her words carefully, but they're not looking good for Mick. I hear the bench behind me squeak and know it's Brennan. I reach over the back of my bench and take her hand and squeeze it as Siobhan continues.

"You've heard that it's possible for him to have left the sex worker's house and make it to the scene of the crime, murder the man, and then return to the sex worker's house. You've seen video of Mr. O'Connor at that same sex worker's house to prove he was there. And you've also heard testimony that his DNA, along with a muddy boot print in his same shoe size and tread pattern, were found at the scene of the murder."

She pauses and turns to look at me, then spins around back to the jury. I watch her

carefully. She seems unsteady on her feet, a sign of the nerves she's trying to swallow down. She's hoping for a hail Mary, for her supervisor, the director of public prosecutions, to come in and stop this nonsense. The fear etched on her forehead shows me she doesn't want to cross that swindling judge, but she has to do what's right.

"And you've heard how Detective Garda Liam Kearney was alone at that house when the alleged evidence was found." The statement makes a few members of the audience gasp, but she doesn't stop. "All of this may lead you to doubts or hesitancy to convict Mr. O'Connor, and I implore you, as citizens of this great country, to do your due diligence and consider all the evidence."

Callahan is glaring, face red, seething with rage I know he'll turn to action soon enough. Siobhan strolls back to her seat on wobbly legs as Callahan stares her down. A court official walks up to him carrying a manilla envelope, sliding it across the bench carefully. The judge nods at him and clears his throat as he opens it and pulls out a slip of paper. Everyone is on the edge of their seat waiting as he looks up at Siobhan with more hatred than anything else in his expression now.

"Please give me one moment. Everyone must remain seated." Callahan stands, taking the envelope with him, and walks out the back entrance of the courtroom into his chambers.

Siobhan looks over her shoulder at me, biting her lip, and I nod at her reassuringly. Something is coming, an explosion we can all sense. Whatever this is isn't normal, and abnormal usually means not good. I wonder for a moment if it's her boss's intervention, but there's no sign of that. And when I look back at Brennan, she seems just as anxiously confused as everyone else.

"What's happening?" Rebecca whispers, but no one, not even Ronan seated to Brennan's left, can answer.

When the judge returns and walks back up to his seat at the bench, he removes his glasses and sits down. "It has come to my attention that the counsel on this case has become compromised." He rubs the bridge of his nose in an exaggerated act that seems overly dramatic before continuing. "Ms. Gallagher, you are being removed from this case, and I'm forced to declare a mistrial."

"What?" she gasps, standing up. Her fingers press into the wood of the table. "I demand to know why!"

The room is a babbling brook, a constant undercurrent of hushed whispers and talking. Judge Callahan shakes his head, lips pursed, and smacks his gavel on the sounding block.

"Order in this court," he demands, and then continues. "You are being removed for impropriety and unethical behavior after being found having sexual relations with a member of the defense's familial ties." Callahan does the unspeakable, lifting a tablet up and turning it around to show the entire courtroom.

On that tablet, a video plays. Siobhan is draped over her couch with her head thrown back in pleasure as I take her from behind. The night was incredible, but reliving it like this is mortifying for her, I'm sure, though the only thing more shocking than seeing it on that tablet in the courtroom is the person who's sharing it with us. The filthy, crooked bastard was in her home, and we know why. He planted that camera there to watch her and keep tabs on her. It all makes sense now too. They wanted to have a plan to discredit her just in case she grew a moral compass that pointed her away from their scheming.

"Mother of God," she mutters and covers her mouth. I want to leap to my feet and defend her, but before I can do anything, the door bursts open and men start filing in. It's McVeigh and a smattering of Garda officers.

Callahan nods at them and glowers, pointing at Siobhan. "She's there," he says, tipping his head in her direction, but McVeigh goes straight to the judge's bench and takes Callahan's wrist.

Siobhan melts into her seat, and I lean forward over the wall, wrapping my arms around her. She's sobbing, and I kiss her cheek and squeeze her.

"It's over, Sib. They're going to take him down now." This couldn't have happened at a better time. She clings to my arms, wrapped around her shoulders, and I hold her as they tell the judge he's being arrested for blackmail and extortion and a dozen other charges. I know he's not the one behind this and it's evidenced as more Garda officers find Liam Kearney and arrest him before he's able to slip out of the room too.

Siobhan is still shaking when I'm forced to sit back down. A tall man in a judge's robe, balding head, no glasses takes the bench. He stands with a looming presence staring down at everyone and has no need to use the gavel. Everyone in this room wants to know what's going to happen now. Callahan declared a mistrial, but he's been removed from the room and will probably face time in prison.

"Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Judge Ross Gregory. I'm appointed to oversee this proceeding and finish things. As I have not been here to hear the trial, and it has come to our attention that several factors have weighed on this trial, Director McVeigh and I will declare a mistrial." He nods at Siobhan, who is wiping her eyes, and then at Mr. Quinn, who both seem relieved.

"You are dismissed," the new judge says and then turns to the court officiant. "Please remand Mr. O'Connor to?—"

"No, Your Honor," Siobhan says, standing quickly. "We don't need to put Mr. O'Connor in remand. I am dropping all charges. We have a new suspect and stronger evidence to build a case."

It feels like the entire courtroom erupts in cheers, though I'm sure there are a few people who aren't as pleased to hear this news. But Siobhan has done it. Mick is free to go, and I am proud of her for holding her ground and following what she knew to be truth.

Mick stands to his feet, shaking the solicitor's hand, and Brennan pushes past a mob of people to get to his arms. Everyone is up, moving around. I find my way to Siobhan first to pull her in for a hug, and it's like we're alone in the room despite everyone surrounding us.

"Well done," I tell her, pushing some hair off her forehead. Her eyes are still misty with emotion.

"Thank you. I'm glad that's over." Her lip still quivers as she speaks, and I can tell something is still bothering her.

"What is it?"

"They were in my penthouse, Finn. And when Liam... well, he..." She blinks and looks down at the space between us. I take my finger and lift her chin.

"What did he do?" She hasn't spoken to me about anything regarding that man, though I've known he was a snake since the first time I saw him going into her apartment.

"He tried to get me to sleep with him in my living room. I smacked him. I swear nothing happened, but?—"

"But he was trying to get you to do something unethical to set you up for failure. If you wouldn't back down, he'd make you. He knew that bug was there." I could kill the bastard, but he's behind bars where he's safe from me for now.

"I can't believe this. I'm so disgusted. McVeigh told me to sweep my place for bugs, but I didn't think he was serious." She covers her face and folds into my chest, and I hold her tightly.

"Hey, shh, it's over. It's done, and you don't have to think about it anymore. I'm sure you'll have to give a statement, but that will be that." I don't know what the future looks like for us, but I'm ready to put all of this behind us and find out. I want a life with her, not this runaround. "Let's get out of here," I tell her, and I guide her through the crowd and out.

We have some important things to discuss and I can't wait to have her alone.

### SIOBHAN

Leaning into Finn's side, I relax for the first time in weeks. I know being seen with him will affect my life, maybe permanently, but I'm not thinking about that right now. I'm not really thinking clearly at all.

The weight of doing the right thing by Mick O'Connor is lifted, but the larger threat of Judge Callahan and whoever is working in the darkness, pushing him to go astray, is still there, still hovering over me like a dark cloud. I'll never be able to live free from this heaviness and looking over my shoulder, but I do hope one day, it goes away so I can have some semblance of a normal life.

"You did it," Finn says again. His grin is enormous. I can tell this is the outcome he's been hoping for, and I can't say I blame him. When I saw the videotape McVeigh shared with me revealing someone else shooting Aiden Hughes, I knew it wasn't Mick. The person on the video was far too short and left-hand dominant. There was no way it could've been Mick.

That was the moment that solidified things. Even without Finn's mysterious witness, I got Mick off, but that man will definitely come testify in the new trial. The Doyle heir will be arrested and tried for the murder, and the entire Doyle family will rally to support him. No doubt, there will be attempts on Sean McCarty's life, maybe McVeigh's, and possibly even mine too.

The courthouse is packed. We move toward the elevators and wait for one to take us

downstairs. Finn is extra physical right now, pulling me into his side, nuzzling my neck. I can imagine what we'll do when we get back to my penthouse, and it has my body firing up for the attention.

"You know my career is blown. McVeigh is going to see this as far more than my snooping for attention undercover with the Mafia." I grin at him as he leans down to capture my lips. A long kiss silences me for a moment before he pulls away.

"Is that what you told him? You're undercover?" He is greedy, squeezing my ass even though we're still surrounded by folks. The elevator doors slide open and we walk in, but even here, we're not alone.

"I had to say something. Liam was leaning on me. I think he knows we've been involved." Remembering how horrible Liam was to me makes me shudder. To think those sick bastards watched me fucking Finn right there in my living room on more than one occasion... I shake my head. He almost got me to screw him too.

"I'd like to get under the covers with you," Finn whispers in my ear, and I push him playfully.

"Stop it," I hiss and snicker. "I guess I'll have to get a new job. If I'm not with the prosecutors, that means I'll have to go into defense. I wonder if this is how it happens for all the prosecutors who go solo."

The doors slide open and the people begin pouring out. Finn's hand grips my ass again as I lead the way, and he follows. "You mean they all find a sexy criminal to get into bed with and leave the straight and narrow to follow their hearts?"

I can't believe he's being so cheeky with me. I turn and walk backward, prying his hands from my body. "I mean, they get ousted for being unethical."



"I could use a good defense attorney. You can put me in the witness box tonight. I'll testify to how incredible you are." Finn pulls me in again, cupping both cheeks and forcing my lips to his. After this show, there's no way I'll be able to convince anyone I'm just undercover. But I'm not sure I'd want to, anyway. Finn makes my heart come alive, and I want my heart to stay alive with him.

"Finn," I breathe when he gives me a chance.

"What?" he asks, pulling back. He looks into my eyes and searches me, and all I can do is smile at him.

"I haven't said anything because I was afraid you were going to force me to recuse myself or something but..." I nip his lower lip and kiss him again. I'm ready for this. I can't see any other future for myself than one with him, even if I have to go private and not be a prosecutor. I love him. I know I can still pursue justice for my cousin even if I'm not a prosecutor. The idea of taking down the underworld is more terrifying than I imagined. I'm not sure I'll ever be ready for that.

"What is it?" he asks again, this time not allowing me to kiss him, though that's what I'd like to do.

"I'm going to have a baby. Our baby."

The news slips off my tongue, drawing a smile from his lips. "You're what?"

I nod. "I found out a few weeks ago, and?—"

"Wahooooo!" His loud squeal is coupled with a crushing hug as he lifts me and spins me in a circle then sets me down and kisses me hard. His stubble scrapes over my face, and I try my best to hold on for the ride as he devours me in his glee.

"Feck, I can't believe this. I'm gonna be a dad?" He barely gives me space to breathe, but I don't want space. Not at all, not anymore.

"Yes. And I can't wait to be a mom."

Our celebration draws more attention than I'd like, and I take Finn's hand and start down the stairs in the front of the courthouse before stopping short. My briefcase is on the table upstairs. I've been so emotional, I haven't been paying attention. Maybe pregnancy brain really is a thing.

"My briefcase," I blurt out, and he sighs.

"I'll get it. You wait here."

"No..." I say, stopping him. "I'll get it. You pull your car up." It's silly for me to stand here waiting on him when I'm the one who made the mistake and forgot my things.

Finn scrunches his nose but nods at me as I dash back up the steps. My heart is light, my shoulders loose and relaxed after months of stress. I fight the stream of people filing out of the building and opt for the stairs to the second floor this time, rather than waiting on the lift.

When I get to the second floor courtroom, the hall is empty. Everyone has left already, and my case still sits open on the table with my things splayed around it. My shoes click on the marble floor as I waltz up to pick everything up, and I never hear anyone in the room with me at all until I feel the cold steel of a gun pressed into my side.

"Ms. Gallagher, that was an awesome show you put on for us." I don't recognize the man's voice, but I'm not surprised that someone is here. The judge wasn't working alone. Liam's arrest was only part of that. He had at least one juror, maybe a court

official too. Whoever this is may only be a pawn too. The Doyles are behind it all.

"Who are you?" I ask, trying to turn around, but the gun bounces off my head hard and I wince, covering my head with my hand.

"You like to play hardball, but I'm just not a player, Ms. Gallagher. Callahan was easy. Kearney was like taking candy from a baby, but let me tell you, if you don't do what we require, we're not afraid to get our hands dirty." The gun returns to my side, pushing in hard, and I whimper.

A quick glance over my shoulder reveals exactly whom I'm dealing with. Hagen Doyle has his weapon set to kill me, eyes of steel burrowing into the back of my skull. He's already got one murder charge. What's another to add to his laundry list?

"You're not going to get away with this," I tell him, my hand slipping around the handle of my briefcase.

"Oh, but I am, and you're going to help me." His sinister laugh makes my chest ache. I can't let him hurt me or take me away from here.

Thinking quickly, I grip the handle of my open briefcase and spin hard, swinging it with me. It slams into his head, forcing him to lurch to one side, giving me time to run. And run I do. I take off, losing one heel, breaking the heel off my other shoe, and dart toward the door. The man chases me into the hallway where I slip and fall, and he's on me, pinning me to the ground, gun to my head.

"You dumb cunt, you won't get away. You won't ever get away. Don't you see that?"

I push at him, kicking and clawing, but he's heavier than me. And two more men dressed in dark suits appear over us as we wrestle on the ground. They've got guns. I'm outnumbered, and all I can do is scream for help and hope someone hears me.

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FINN

I watch Siobhan as she disappears through the courthouse doors, a quiet joy settling in my chest. She's carrying something so precious now, not just for me but for the life we've yet to build. I can hardly believe it. The weight of what she said hits me all at once—I'm going to be a father. It's surreal, and for a moment, I almost can't breathe.

A father. Me.

This isn't a role I ever imagined for myself, especially in this harsh and unforgiving world. It wasn't even a dream I dared to entertain. Too much violence, too many blood-soaked memories haunted my past for such thoughts. But now, in this moment, I feel a flicker of hope, a tiny spark igniting a vision of something better than the life I've always known. Siobhan, with her gentle strength and unwavering spirit, is carrying my child. Though she remains unaware of this profound truth, I am resolute in my vow to protect them both with every fiber of my being.

I envision the tender image of her cradling our baby, her arms gently wrapped around the tiny bundle of life, and then I see myself, holding them close. I can almost picture it clearly —her soft, melodic laughter resonating throughout our home, the gentle way she'd converse with our child, each word filled with love and warmth. I imagine myself watching them grow, witnessing each milestone with a heart full of pride. The scenes play out so vividly in my mind, yet a persistent, uneasy feeling twists in my gut.

The Doyles.

They won't let her go easily. I know it.

I shake the thought away and focus on the joy, on what's ahead, but that damn screech of tires rips me back to the present. The sound is deafening in my ears. I spin around, adrenaline flooding my veins. The sedan belongs to the Doyles. I've seen it before, the day those thugs beat the hell out of me. They were here? Of course they were. They have a stake in this game.

"Siobhan," I breathe, remembering she's inside that courthouse without me. I should never have let her out of my sight, not now.

I don't waste a second. My legs move before my mind has fully processed the danger. My hand slaps against the courthouse door, pushing through it. The flood of people leaving is now a mere trickle, most of the audience and jurors already gone the instant the drama ended. Mick isn't here. Ronan and Quinn took off too.

I'm alone as I sprint up the grand staircase to the second floor, where the lights have been dimmed to a soft, shadowy glow. The ornate banisters glisten faintly under the subdued lighting, and the air is thick with the scents of polished wood and old paper. A porter glides across the gleaming marble floor, pushing a dust mop, whistling a carefree tune that echoes gently through the corridor. He seems oblivious to the tension that lingers in the air.

I burst into the courtroom, my heart pounding, the scene still vivid in my mind where moments ago we were in the throes of an intense battle against a corrupt judge.

Her briefcase lies there, forsaken, a mere few feet from where she had been seated for the proceedings. Her purse is nearby, its contents strewn across the ground, papers fluttering like autumn leaves caught in a breeze, forming a haphazard trail into the

unknown.

My chest constricts painfully at the scene of disarray, the evidence of a struggle etched into the chaos. She was just here moments ago, her presence still palpable, and yet, inexplicably, she has slipped away from my grasp. How did I manage to lose her?

I feel the panic rising, a knot of fear that twists tighter with every step I take toward her things. This isn't right. She wouldn't just leave without a word. Something's happened.

"Siobhan!" I call out, but my voice cracks under the weight of the terror in my chest. Turning, I race back into the hallway, past the man sweeping and down the stairs. My phone is already in my hand dialing my brother's number.

I hit the dial button, my finger trembling, but I force myself to stay focused. The phone rings once, twice—then Ronan answers with a happy tone. We've just won the battle, but the war still rages.

"Finn, what is it?" he asks, celebratory cheers going up in the background. He must be with Mick.

"Siobhan's gone. She's not here, Ronan. She—" I choke on my words, struggling to steady my breath. "I think they took her."

A moment of silence follows, heavy and suffocating, before Ronan speaks again, his voice sharp. "What the hell do you mean, 'they took her'? How do you know?"

"Her things," I mutter, voice strained. "Her briefcase. It's scattered everywhere. Like she fought back... but I don't know what happened, where she went." I'm halfway to the door now, the courthouse's heavy wooden doors ahead, and my heart pounds like

a war drum in my chest. “Ronan, it’s the DoYLES. I’m sure of it.”

I hear him exhale sharply on the other end. "Stay calm, Finn. I’m on my way. I’ll gather some men?—"

“Mother of God,” I snap, not waiting for him to finish. “I need to find her now. They’re already ahead of me.” I slam my hand against the door as I burst outside.

I reach my car in a matter of seconds, heart pounding in my chest. The streets are quieter now, the hum of the city fading as I slam the door shut behind me. My hands shake, but I force them to steady as I fumble with the keys.

The engine roars to life as I turn the ignition, the sound loud in the silence of the night. My grip tightens on the wheel, knuckles white. My mind races with one thought. Siobhan .

I hit the gas hard, tires screeching against the pavement as I tear out of the parking lot. Time is slipping away, and I’m not going to lose her. Not like this. They’ll kill her without hesitation. This is what they’ve been waiting for, and now that she’s gotten Mick off, they have no reason to even want to keep her alive. She has evidence against Hagen. She’s their worst nightmare.

I slam my foot harder on the gas, the engine growling as I speed down the street, ignoring the red lights that flash in my peripheral vision. The wheels screech in protest, but I’m relentless, focusing only on the path ahead.

The sedan—where the hell is it? It had a head start, but I won’t let it slip away. My heart hammers in my chest as I scan every corner, every side street, every reflection in the glass.

The streets are more familiar now, the rough edges of Doyle territory creeping into

my view as I push my way deeper into their world. I know this place—the broken sidewalks, the faded neon signs, the unmarked buildings that are nothing more than a front for something darker. The air feels heavy, thick with tension. Every corner I turn only leads me further into their domain.

I'm focused, but the knot in my gut keeps tightening. I have to get to her fast. They won't keep her for long.

I take the next corner with a burst of speed, my eyes darting across the intersection ahead for any signs of danger. My car surges forward through the amber glow of the traffic light when, out of nowhere, a black SUV comes barreling from the left, slicing across my intended path with alarming speed.

My heart leaps into my throat, and instinct takes control. I yank the steering wheel with all my might, swerving violently to dodge the impending collision. The tires scream in protest, and the car fishtails wildly, the rear end swinging out as if in slow-motion—a surreal moment where the world seems to twist and contort around me. The shriek of rubber skidding across asphalt is ear-splitting as I battle to regain control of the vehicle.

My teeth grind together as the car jolts back into a straight line, mere inches from the unforgiving edge of the curb. The SUV roars past me, its dark silhouette a blur that narrowly avoids contact. I remain frozen for a heartbeat, my hands clenched around the wheel, my breaths coming in heavy, ragged bursts that fill the cabin. That was too close—far too close.

For a second, I think I should wait and hope Ronan can help me, but there's no time. I press my foot to the floor again and take off. Even if I have to hunt every last one of them down myself and slaughter them individually, I will. They won't hurt her and my unborn child.



### SIOBHAN

My heart is racing, every muscle in my body rigid as the men who've attacked me jerk me around. I can't scream, can't fight back. They've shoved a bag over my head then tied something around my mouth making it impossible to make a sound and difficult to breathe. And my hands and feet are tied too tightly, fingers and toes going numb.

The only thing I know is they've shoved me into a tight space. I can't stretch out, but I can feel every bump in the road. I think it's the trunk of a car because every now and then, the inertia changes and I slam my head into something hard. I'm terrified and I wish I could at least see things.

I try to calm myself because crying won't help me, and my sinuses are making so much mucus, it's making it even more difficult to breathe. I hate to admit it even to myself, but Liam was right about this whole thing from the beginning. I hated how he treated me—like a child. But he was a good friend despite being dirty. He knew what I was getting into better than I ever imagined because he was living it.

I wonder what they did to him to break him, if this is something they do to everyone or if I'm different because I'm the prosecutor. Every bump in the road makes me question whether my time here on Earth is over, if my breaths are numbered now.

When the car comes to a stop, finally ending the beating I've been taking, I hear male voices. There are at least two of them out there, laughing and joking. They snatched

me right out of that courthouse with ease like they were taking candy from a baby. I wasn't prepared for the assault, but I'd never have stood a chance against two grown men at once, anyway. I wonder if they're the same men who tried to attack me on the street too.

"Let's take her in," one of them says, the only thing I can understand of their muffled conversation. I hear the latch pop and it takes a moment, but I sense more light and fresher air seeping through the fabric of this burlap sack over my head.

"Come on, Princess." The man's rough voice is followed by his firm grasp. He takes my arm and yanks me upward, not caring about my safety. My head slams into something very hard, and I wince, whimpering into the gag, but the fabric swallows it up. I want to protest and fight them, but it's impossible with these restraints. Physically, I have succumbed to my fate of being their captive, though my mind is still sharp and reactive. I won't let them break me.

More hands encircle my other arm. I feel myself hoisted upward, and then my knees hit something very hard. I soon realize it's the ground as they start dragging me, tearing the flesh from my kneecaps and shins. My back goes stiff. I dig my toes into the ground hoping to stop the pain but quickly remember I've lost my shoes, and the pavement is much kinder to my knees than my tiptoes.

It's horrid feeling the skin slowly being peeled back from my lower extremities. I'm helpless to fight against them, though I do try to get my feet under me and walk. Until I feel a kick to my side and I crumple back to a hanging position, one man on each arm.

When the pavement gives way to grass, I cry tears of relief, only for it to become worse as grass fades to gravel, and then a set of stairs where each step jars my pelvis. All I can think of is the baby and what this might do. I don't want to lose the baby. I don't want to be here. I want Finn and I want to go home, and all of those thoughts

bring on more tears as I realize they're not fucking around. They're going to kill me.

So why haven't they done it yet?

At last, relief comes when somewhere inside a building, they drop me and let my arms relax against my back. I lie on my stomach for a second, catching my breath, smelling the stench of cigar smoke and booze. I'm lying on carpet, though it's not well padded. I can feel it against my chest where my shirt dips.

The room is quiet for a moment as I suck in stuttering breaths, trying to clear my airway of snot and emotion. My shoulders ache from being bent at an awkward angle to drag me in here and my knees throb from being dragged. But I remind myself that I'm still alive. They haven't killed me yet, so there is hope. Hope that Finn will realize I'm not back with my briefcase and that he has to come find me.

"Gentlemen, that's no way to treat a lady. Now is it?" The new man's voice is mocking, unkind, but he represents change in my situation. A third man who may hopefully undo what these men have done. I try to roll to my back but feel a boot on my shoulder pinning me down.

Then something happens and my hands are loose. I lie perfectly still, wondering what is going on as then my feet are loosed, and they rip the bag off my head, along with the gag.

Blinking my eyes, I put my hands under my chest and force myself upward. The boot on my shoulder lifts, and I look up to see the man who cut me loose. We're alone now, the other two filing out the door as I clamber to a seated position on the floor. My face must be a wreck. I use the back of my arm to wipe away snot from my lip and cheek.

"Here, let me help you up," the new man offers, extending his hand to me.

I glance around the barren room. It's just ugly colored brown carpet and bare walls. Two chairs at a metal table that looks to be bolted into place. It's very reminiscent of an interrogation room at the Garda station, but I think this is an office building of some kind, or a home. The walls are plaster, not concrete.

Swallowing hard, I allow myself to take his hand, and he helps me up. My knees are badly bloodied. Bits of rock and dirt cling to my skin. He clicks his tongue and hands me a handkerchief with a large, cursive D embroidered into it.

"Clean yourself up, Ms. Gallagher. We have a lot to talk about." A cold chill creeps across my skin as he gestures at one of the chairs and says, "Have a seat."

First, I use the kerchief to wipe my face and blow my nose. Then I use a clean side to dab at the blood which is already clotting. Scabs are going to form over this filth and I'll get an infection. I shake my head and glare at him.

"Who are you? What is this? Why am I here?" I don't have ground to stand on here. Those men are strong enough that they can snap my neck if they want, but lying down and being their punching bag isn't my style.

"Why, I'm Cormac Doyle," he says smoothly, running a hand through his hair. "I'd like to discuss the murder of Aiden Hughes and how the trial will go." He gestures again. "Sit."

My throat constricts. This is the man in charge of the entire Doyle crime syndicate? His son, the one alleged to have murdered Aiden Hughes, will be arrested and stand trial soon. A trial I have no desire to be any part of. My blood runs cold as I lower myself onto the chair and stare at him with wide eyes, no longer caring about my appearance, or my bloody knees, or even the unborn child I carry who alone gives me a will to live.

"Ms. Gallagher, we are going to arrange it so that you oversee Hagen's trial. I'm sure I don't have to tell you who Hagen is?" His eyes narrow at me, and I shake my head. I have no words for this monster. "Good. Now, what's going to happen is we are going to provide you with ample evidence, a few experts who will help you along, and we are going to pay you all a hefty sum to ensure my son stays out of prison. All you have to do is follow the script. Can you do that?"

I think of Finn again, begging me to do the right thing. He wasn't asking me to get Mick off because he had some nefarious plan of beating the system. He knew Mick was innocent. Finn was pressuring me to see the truth, to do the right thing. This man in front of me is asking me to lie and cheat and bury the truth. He wants me to be his dark messenger to tell the world he is above the law, that his son is untouchable, and I don't think I can do that.

"Sir, I think you've got the wrong woman." The words come out choked, stuttered. I'm shaking in this seat, praying he doesn't just slit my throat now.

"Oh?" He cocks his head and raises his eyebrows. "Are you not Siobhan Gallagher? The woman with a mission to bring down every underworld crime syndicate in Dublin? The woman whose cousin was murdered in cold blood after a deal gone wrong?" His eyes narrow on me, and I see the malice in them, hatred, hunger for some dark, senseless plan. "How did Trevor die again?" he asks, and I shudder.

I can't respond to him. He clearly knows everything about me. He's probably seen the videos of me and Finn, probably understands my ties to the O'Rourke name. And maybe he suspects more from me too, that I'm on their payroll, which couldn't be further from the truth. He thinks he can make me turn, the way Liam turned, the way Brendan turned. I won't. I set my jaw and lock my eyes on him, but I don't speak.

"Well then, you just take some time to think about this." He stands and slides his hand into his pocket. When it emerges, he pulls out a pair of handcuffs and dangles

them in front of me. "I'm going to make sure you stay put here for a while, and when I come back, hopefully, you'll have an answer for me."

I try to resist him, but he manages to clip one of the cuffs on my arm and the other around the leg of the table which I correctly assumed is bolted in place. The cuff is tight, pinching my arm, but not as bad as the bag over my head felt. I glare at him, but I'm smart enough to know not to speak.

"I suggest you agree to my proposition, Ms. Gallagher. You don't want to know what happens to you if you don't. That O'Rourke boy will be crying over your grave, and he'll end up getting himself shot too. You know... vengeance for love lost and such." He gestures with his hands casually as he speaks such horrible threats against me and Finn, and then he walks out saying, "Think about it."

I don't have to think about it. The answer is no. I won't help him get away with murder. God only knows what other crimes this bastard has committed. But if I have to lie to him and tell him I will, just to have a chance to be in contact with Finn, I will. Because I know Finn won't let them do this to me. I just have to play my cards right.

30

FINN

After twenty minutes of searching this side of the city for that damn car, I park near a strip of row houses and wait for Ronan. I'm so enraged I'm not thinking clearly. That SUV wasn't the only close call I had. Two times, I ran a red light and was almost T-boned in an intersection, so when Ro told me to "park my ass and wait for him", I knew he was right.

I sit with my car idling, staring up the street into Doyle territory. The way they snatched her and ran so fast completely took me by surprise. I never saw it coming. I don't think anyone did, though now that Mick is safe, Ronan's focus will be on him and building the alliance stronger than ever. I doubt he even cares about Siobhan and what may be happening to her. She was a means to an end for him, but to me she is everything.

Ronan's car pulls up, and he and my brother Lochlan climb out and walk back to my car. Both of them have serious expressions, both carrying their weapons. When they climb in and shut the doors, I'm so seething mad about this, I can't even speak. Ronan has to speak for me.

"She's not our problem anymore, Finn." His tone is even and low. I know to him this is nothing for us to be concerned about. He's ready to focus again on what's important and he has no clue what has actually transpired between me and Siobhan.

"She's pregnant," I tell them, and I stare out the driver's side window, watching cars

pass by. Siobhan might not be a concern to him, but the blood that runs through that baby's veins is O'Rourke blood. He's bound by an oath to protect any O'Rourke life to the death and he knows it.

He sighs hard. I hear Lochlan shift in his seat and glance at the rearview mirror to see him scowling at me too. I didn't do anything I wasn't supposed to do. My job in this was to make her see the light, and I did. In the end, things worked out for Mick. What I did to make that happen is of little consequence now, except that it resulted in my falling for her. Even if she wasn't pregnant—which I fully believe that she is—I would still rescue her. I won't let Doyle scum hurt her.

"Christ almighty, Finn." Ronan's tone is biting, but he knows a war is coming anyway.

"Look, they attacked Mick's character. Exposed him for more than just the murder. He's going to lose everything anyway, still may end up doing some time for the gun trade, and all you care about is the fucking alliance." I round on Lochlan and glare at both of them, arm stretched out across the car to the back of Ronan's seat where my fingers grip it tightly. "She's having my child. She is an O'Rourke. You're either with me, and loyal to O'Rourke blood, or you're not. Which is it?"

I have no right speaking to my chief this way, but I'm done with semantics and rhetoric. We either stick together as a family or we don't.

"Chill the feck out, Brother." Ronan pulls his gun out, chambers a round, checks the safety is on, then puts it back in its holster. "We're with you. Now what did the car look like?"

The tension in the car snaps and I feel relief as I pull into traffic and head toward the row of shops a block up. I tell them about the incident where two Doyles tried to attack Siobhan on the street outside that restaurant, then the time they attacked me in



the street in front of her home. The car is one in the same, and I am on a manhunt to find them. I know they've brought her here into their territory, and I won't stop searching until I find them. If she's still alive, I'll save her. And if she's not, I'll kill them all singlehandedly.

We park along the strip mall and get out. All three of us are very aware that we are deep in Doyle territory, breaking unwritten rules for this city that we know will mean death. But the war was started by Cormac months ago when his son murdered Aiden. It was made worse as they continued to attack us by framing Mick. Today, we are bringing it back to them, though it won't be ended today, even if we recover Siobhan.

"We'll check each store here, ask shop owners if they know anything. We'll find something," Ronan instructs, and I'm on board with his plan. We walk into the first place, a little sushi shop that's family owned. The man behind the counter—an older man with greying hair and a puckered face—looks up at us with fear in his eyes. He knows who we are by the looks of it, or at least what we're about. It's promising.

"I can't help you," he says defensively, raising his hands in surrender. I don't believe him, so I lean on the counter with one elbow allowing him to see into my shirt where my gun is holstered under my arm.

"You seem afraid," I say, and he nods.

"I can't help you," he says again, this time shaking his head. His hands remain in the air.

"You know the Doyles?" My eyes search his trembling features. Men like me have come into this place and terrorized him before. It's obvious by his reaction.

"Yes, and I cannot help you, so please leave." He's backing away now, so I pull my gun and point it at him. I don't care that there are several people here enjoying their

sushi and noodles. I'll gun him down if he doesn't start talking.

Ronan, on the other hand, has more sense about him right now. He presses one finger to the muzzle of my gun and lowers it, and the man stops backing up.

"Sir, we are looking for our friend. A pregnant woman, pretty, long legs... have you seen her? We believe Mr. Doyle has taken her."

The man shakes his head and repeats for the third time. "I can't help you, sir." His eyes flick around his dining room and he smiles a very strained smile. "Perhaps next door." His slight nod, accompanied by the way his eyes are shifting, tells me that's the most help we'll get. Next door must be some code for someone else in this strip mall knowing something.

I glance at Ro and he scowls, but we retreat. If that man is worried about what we'll do, I imagine he's terrified of what Doyle would do. He's probably already calling Doyle's men to warn them we're coming, which means time is ticking now.

"What the feck was that about?" Lochlan asks, and Ronan rubs the back of his neck as we walk.

"Doyle has these people scared shitless." Ronan leads the way into the next shop, an old used electronics store where everything is covered in dust.

I walk past the rows of old gaming consoles, broken coffee machines, and hand-held devices to the counter where a stumpy old man with no hair and a cigar hanging out of his mouth sits reading a magazine. He doesn't even look up at us as he approaches. Not until I point my gun at him. I'm done playing nice guy. I need answers.

"Listen, buddy, I paid up already. Tell Cormac to get fucked." His eyes only flick up to meet mine briefly before he looks back at his magazine to ignore me.

"I'm not here for Cormac. I'm here to get answers. Where is Cormac? Does he have a safe house? A place he does business?" The tension in my chest is an over-tuned piano string ready to snap. I can't take much more of this. It's been almost an hour since they took her and there's no telling what hell she's being put through.

The man folds his magazine shut and glowers at me as he takes his cigar from his mouth and points at the door. "Well, I don't answer to you. I have a deal with Doyle, and if you're lookin' for him, you're not my friend. So get outta here."

Ronan can't move fast enough. I use the butt of my gun to smash the man on the head, and he drops his cigar to the ground, wincing and covering the red lump as it begins to swell up.

"Tell me where the feck to find him," I order, and Ronan shoves me back. Then he stamps out the cigar on the ground and grabs the man's tie.

"I swear, buddy, I can't help you. If I tell you where that bastard lives, he'll come kill my family." The man is a blubbering fool, straight from badass to yellow-bellied, and Ronan has him by the throat.

"So you know where he lives?" Ro asks, and the man shakes his head. "If you're lying and I find out, I'll come kill you myself." He pulls his own weapon and puts it right into the man's mouth, shoving it in so far he can't even speak, though he tries.

"What's that?" I ask, and I feel Lochlan grab my shoulder and pull me back.

"Ronan," Loch cautions. We don't need a scene here to alert the Doyles of what's coming their way. What we need is to get the information and get out of here. But that doesn't stop me from wanting to bust this man's ass.

"Tell me where he is, now, and I'll let you live," Ronan says, removing the gun from

his mouth, and the man starts singing like a canary.

"Downing street. Big blue house on a corner with some rock garden out front. Please, Mister, I'm just tryin' to do my job here." Before he can finish what he's saying, I whack him in the head again. This time, the blow is hard enough to knock him out. He crumples to the ground under his own body weight and lies there like a lump of coal.

Now that we know where to go, we don't lose any time. I race back to the car, and Ronan and Lochlan are on my heels. Without knowing what we're getting into, this could be risky, so Loch calls for backup. Declan, Connor, and a dozen other men will meet us there, and this war is about to get very violent. I can taste the blood in the air already.

### SIOBHAN

It's been a long time, hours maybe. My wrist is growing chafed from the friction caused by this handcuff rubbing my skin. It's growing dark outside now, sun setting over the city while I waste away in this stinking room chained to the table. If Doyle thinks this is going to intimidate me into doing his bidding, he's wrong.

I hear noise outside the house from time to time, children's laughter, shouts of parents calling them inside. I tried shouting, but it earned me a hard smack and another threat, so now I sit in silence waiting for the inevitable. Either Finn comes to save me or these eejits come back to threaten me more, possibly kill me.

A lot of things go through my mind, but mostly, I think of how many warnings I had that this situation would be deadly, starting with Trevor. Why did I ever think I could take on the different factions of the Irish Mafia and live to tell about it? Trevor was strong, much stronger than me, and they murdered him in cold blood. Why not me too? And why didn't I listen to Liam's warnings?

I should've known something horrible would happen. If the fear I had niggling at me for weeks before the trial started wasn't a big enough red flag, I should've recused myself the instant I learned Callahan was dirty. I should've stepped away when I had the chance, and now I'm here, praying to God that I don't die.

The din of neighborhood traffic is interrupted by the squealing of tires and shouts of angry men. I don't know what's going on, but in my mind I picture Hagen Doyle

figuring out that his father has me held captive here. He's come to silence me, probably force me to cough up evidence I don't have. McVeigh has it all. In fact, he'll be the one probably trying the case when it goes to court. I'm done with this life. I can't go after these people. They scare me.

But then, I hear something familiar. The warmth of a baritone I recognize. It isn't Hagen Doyle at all. It's Finn. He's with someone else, and there is shouting. I know the tone of his voice, though I've only heard him this angry once or twice.

I listen carefully for a second, hoping to hear what is being said in all the shouting, but then gunshots break out and I'm terrified.

"Finn! In here!" I scream over and over. The noise is so loud I can't even hear myself think. The gunshots rattle me, each one making me jump out of my skin. I push the chair back and crouch under the table, praying none of the rounds pierce the walls and reach this far.

Tears well up and I'm shaking as the firefight continues. They're closer now, in the house. There has to be a dozen of them, and all of them are firing at once. Doyle must have been taken by surprise. I know he wasn't expecting this.

The gunfire continues to tear through the air, but now, it's closer. The floor shakes with each shot, rattling the walls and my bones. I'm trembling, crouched under the table, hands still chained to it. My pulse is so loud, I can barely hear the shouting outside, but I know Finn's out there. I know he's coming. The sound of his voice cuts through the chaos like a beacon.

"Siobhan! Stay down!"

I barely manage to swallow the scream building in my throat. I want to shout, want to run to him, but my legs feel like lead, and the cuffs are a cruel reminder of my

helplessness. I grip the edge of the table, heart racing. The sound of heavy boots grows closer, the door rattling in its frame, and then— crash .

Finn bursts into the room, and I can't stop the sob of relief that escapes me. He's here. His eyes lock on mine, and his face is a mix of fury and determination. He doesn't waste a second. Without saying a word, he kicks the leg of the table, and it breaks under the force. My arm jerks to one side, but I quickly slide the handcuff from the table leg and free myself.

"I've got you," Finn says, pulling me to my feet.

I stumble, but Finn's hands are steady on my shoulders, guiding me. His brothers are right behind him, Declan and Ronan, guns raised and scanning the room. Shots ring out from the hall, and I flinch, but Finn doesn't even hesitate.

"Move!" Finn growls, and I don't need to be told twice.

The air is thick with gunfire, but Finn keeps me close, his body shielding mine. I can barely keep my balance, but he's pushing me toward the door, not giving me a chance to breathe. Declan and Ronan cover us, their guns barking, and the sound of tires screeching fills the air.

The car is close, and I can hear it, the engine roaring to life. Finn doesn't slow down. He shoves me toward the back door, his grip tight around my wrist.

"Get in!" he demands.

I dive in without thinking, Finn right behind me, and in an instant, the world is a blur as the car roars into motion, speeding away from the madness. My breath catches in my throat as I glance back toward the house, but Finn's arm is already around me, pulling me close, his voice low and urgent.

“We’re not out of it yet, Siobhan. Stay with me.”

I nod, holding onto him as if my life depends on it—because it does.

The car speeds through the streets, tires screeching as the driver expertly navigates the tight corners, pushing the car faster. I keep glancing behind us, but there's no sign of anyone chasing us—yet. My heart pounds in my chest, the weight of the night catching up to me. Finn sits beside me, tense, his eyes scanning the road ahead, his jaw clenched.

“Almost there,” he mutters.

I cling to his side, the shock of everything threatening to overwhelm me. Finn’s arm wraps around me, pulling me close, offering the only comfort he can. His voice is soft, but steady. “You’re safe now, Siobhan. I’ve got you.”

The car turns down a narrow, tree-lined road, and I realize we’re pulling into a driveway—one I’ve never seen before. The house looms ahead, large and quiet, a stark contrast to the chaos we just left behind.

Finn exhales, his shoulders relaxing for the first time all night. “We’re here.”

I don’t move at first, the weight of everything still sinking in. But Finn’s hand gently squeezes mine, and I nod. I’m still shaking. Everything happened so fast, I don’t even know where we are. But Finn is at ease, his shoulders still taut but his face calm.

"Where?" I ask, looking around. It's so dark now. I can't see anything but lights streaming from the windows of a large house we're parked in front of.

"Home," he tells me, and as he says it, he opens the door. His home is massive, a sprawling expanse of brick towering over us. I climb out of the car but never break



contact with him. He is my refuge, the safety I've needed to feel all day.

He leads me inside, leaving the door of his car open. I hear him talk on his phone, telling his brothers we're safe, that we're at his house now. Everything is a blur now, like my life flashed before my eyes and now I'm not sure what to even think.

Finn babies me, walking me straight into his bedroom and into the ensuite where he starts the water for a hot shower. "Strip off. Let me clean you up," he says, and his hands are already working to undress me. I feel like things are moving in slow motion now.

Cormac Doyle's scarred face haunts me. Every time I close my eyes, I see it looming over me, threatening me. I must be in shock. I'm moving on autopilot, struggling to make it all make sense.

Until the steamy water hits my flesh and awakens me. Finn steps into the shower with me, wrapping his arms around me as I begin to cry softly.

"You came for me," I mumble against his chest, and he kisses the top of my shoulder while tipping my head back into the water to dampen it.

"Of course I did. I love you." His words begin to sink in as he lathers my hair and rinses it. His hands are gentle, touching the bloodied scabs of my knees as he kneels and washes the dirt away. "My God, those animals," he growls, but I grab his hand and pull him up again. I need his arms around me now.

"Thank you," I tell him, pulling him in for a kiss.

"Baby, you don't have to thank me. It's what we do, okay? You're safe now. They'll never touch you again." His hard body against mine is anchoring, calming my nervous system to allow me to think more clearly.

"They want me to try the case of Hagen Doyle." I'm shaking my head, hands trembling.

"No, you're not going to do that. McVeigh can find someone else." He clasps my hands in his and calms me, and I let more tears escape, though they mix with the water from the shower and wash away faster than I can cry them out.

"They'll kill me," I whisper.

"I'll hunt them down one at a time and cut off their balls." He kisses my cheek, whispers in my ear, "I'm never letting them harm you again. Do you understand? You belong to me."

His lips claim mine possessively, and I let him. The ache of desperation—to live and be loved—has clawed at my mind all day. Now, in his arms, the only thing I can think is how much I want to be alive, with him.

Finn's hands roam, relearning my body, and mine are no exception. I press against him, seeking solace in every muscle, every little ripple that promises safety. His arousal hardens between us, and he doesn't shy away from it, instead guiding me to wrap my legs around him.

"I need you," I tell him before his mouth takes mine again. "I need this."

He moans into the kiss and lifts me up, pressing his length against me as he crushes me to the shower wall and pins me up against it, impaling me roughly. "God, I've missed your pussy," he growls, and I arch my hips to meet him.

It has been too long since we were together like this—though it's only been a few days—and the heat of him inside me is all I've craved since our last time together.

"Finn," I breathe, raking my nails down his back, and he groans, picking up the pace. The water pelts my skin, mixing with our comingled sweat as Finn moves faster and harder against me, the only sound our labored breaths and the slap of our bodies coming together.

"Jaysus, feck," he growls, pressing harder into me, and I cry out, feeling him rhythmically pumping. His biceps are rock hard, muscles flexed as he holds me up. I press my elbows into his shoulders as I kiss him harder. He bites my lip. My hands grip his head, fingers tangling into his hair.

"Shit," I pant, my orgasm building. My thighs burn from exertion. I hold onto him tighter, lean into the wall as the first waves begin to rise from my core upward into my belly.

"That's it, come for me," he growls, picking up the pace until I'm screaming into his mouth, my entire body shuddering around him. I lose myself, panting and moaning, arching against his chest as he bites one of my nipples. His grip on my hips is bruising, but I don't care. Not when his moans fill the bathroom, echoing off the tiles. All I can think of is how incredible it feels to be alive, to be with him.

"Siobhan," he pants, pulsating inside me as he shudders, and I clench around him, feeling his climax in my core. His lips find mine again and again as we both ride it out, gasping for air as our minds catch up with our heaving chests.

"I love you," he says after a few minutes, and I can only nod in agreement.

My body is spent and aching in the best way possible. After the day I've had, this was the only possible ending. Finn holds me like I weigh nothing at all, kissing me like I'm the most-treasured thing he owns, and maybe I am.

"I love you too," I mutter when he gives me an opportunity to breathe. He sets me

down, but he remains close, still pressing me into the cold tile.

“And I’m never letting you go.”

“I wouldn’t dream of leaving,” I tell him, and I drape my arms around his shoulders loosely. Because right here is where I want to be, damn the consequences. I don’t know what my future looks like, but I see him in it. It’s the only way I want it.

### EPILOGUE: FINN

Siobhan tucks into my side as I drape my arm around the bench behind her. It's been months since the end of Mick's trial. Things have moved progressively in a positive direction since we put Doyle in his place. He escaped that shootout at his safe house, but Hagen was arrested that day, found with a load of cocaine the Garda refused to overlook. Even the ones on his payroll have been scared straighter than they were.

Today is closing remarks at his trial, and Siobhan, while scared of what Cormac may do to her, insisted that we be here to support Mr. McVeigh for his kindness in helping her bring down the judge and the dirty Garda officers responsible for allowing Doyle to gain such a hold over the city's justice system.

McVeigh stands behind his table, waiting for the judge to address him. The entire trial has been very public. The entire city seems to have tuned in on the news and social media to find out if the justice system will have the backbone to convict the son of one of Dublin's most powerful men. Cormac himself is here, bathed in the most expensive suit he could find and surrounded by his family members who all await the end of this mess. I'm sure he's paid off several more court officials and Garda officers, but this judge is clean. And there is no jury to tamper with this time.

"Mr. McVeigh?" the judge says, nodding at him.

"Thank you, Your Honor." McVeigh buttons his suit coat and walks around his table. He only has the audience and the judge to address, so he faces the one person in this

room who can place Hagen Doyle behind bars where he belongs.

Ronan was set to decimate the Doyle family and their business, cut off their trades, and kill them one by one, but Siobhan insisted we do this thing the right way. I don't blame her. She has a lot riding on this, and it's personal. We discovered Hagen Doyle is the one responsible for killing her cousin, and the judge who dismissed charges before Trevor's killer ever saw the back of a cruiser was none other than Brendan Callahan, who will stand trial next month.

"Your Honor, you've heard how eyewitness Sean McCarty saw Hagen Doyle kill Aiden Hughes in cold blood. You reviewed the video footage of the crime, recorded by an anonymous person who also saw the murder and who also saw Mr. McCarty there at the scene. With evidence from the O'Connor trial being thrown out, this is an open and shut case. We don't need to waste the court's valuable time with this anymore.

"Hagen Doyle is guilty of the murder of Aiden Hughes. The evidence proves it empirically. There can be no doubt in your mind that Mr. Doyle pulled that trigger. He has no alibi, and he had the motive and opportunity. The means was supplied to him when he stole a weapon from the glovebox of Mr. Mick O'Connor's car, parked only a few blocks away from the scene of the crime, also caught on video." McVeigh turns and glares at Hagen, who has a cocky sneer on his face.

Siobhan snuggles into my side harder. She's tense. She knows if this man gets off, he will not only continue to steal and murder people, but his family will retaliate against mine for harboring her. I pull her closer and whisper in her ear, "You're safe, baby."

Then I rest my hand on her growing belly, nearly thirty weeks now, and my child will come soon. I can't forget that because nothing else in this life even comes close to meaning anything without them. One year ago, I'd have told you I'll never be a father. The family was my life. My job was my world.

Now Siobhan is everything, and this child is my world. And I'm making this world a safer place by ensuring men like Doyle and his father go down. When Siobhan learned that Hagen was responsible for Trevor's death, even she wanted to kill him, which is also something I won't allow. She won't do that. I won't let her.

Siobhan has a vengeful streak, but she has a pure heart, and she wants what is good and right and pure. She quit working for McVeigh, and she has chosen to become the legal counsel for the O'Rourke family. She says even hardened criminals deserve a good defense, and I agree with her.

We listen to Hagen's solicitor give his final remarks, and the judge takes no time at all in offering his verdict. Hagen is guilty of murder, for which he will be sentenced next week pending a review of the case from the higher court. After such corruption being exposed, all cases are now being reviewed until further notice.

When the gavel smacks, every member of my family in attendance, including Ronan and Mick, stands and applauds. Cormac glares at us as he and his posse leave, surrounded by his bodyguards and the men who support him and his murderous son, but I pull Siobhan into my arms and kiss her like I haven't seen her in ages.

"It's done," I whisper against her cheek, and she squeezes me hard. Her belly is getting in the way now, but I still enjoy every inch of her body.

"I'm so relieved," she responds as her arms close around me more tightly.

Ronan slaps me on the back and squeezes my shoulder. "We're going to dinner. Join us?" His invitation isn't just for me. His initial hesitancy to accept Siobhan into my life is gone now. He knows what an asset she is to me and how I feel about her. Now she is part of this family.

"Of course we will," she tells my older brother, our Chief.

"This woman's going to be my wife, Ro." I grin at her as I pull her closer against my body, and she smacks my shoulder playfully.

"If you learn to propose correctly," she murmurs, batting those sexy eyelashes at me.

"I apologize for my brother. He's rough around the edges." Ronan chuckles as he walks away and starts the exodus of our family from the courtroom.

I lower my voice to a whisper in her ear. "Siobhan O'Rourke. It sounds really fucking sexy. What do you think?"

Siobhan props her hands on her hips and pretends to think it over. "I'm not sure about the O'Rourke part," she teases, and I playfully scowl at her before lowering my lips to hers in a slow, lingering kiss that leaves her breathless and blushing. "But I could get used to it," she whispers against my mouth after I pull back.

"Good," I growl against her lips. "Now let's go celebrate the end of this trial, and my son." I take her hand and follow Ronan out of the courtroom into the hallway. I'm not letting her out of my sight for a single second now. Just coming here had to be difficult, but this is about as happy of an ending as we could possibly imagine. The future is bright now, and I can't wait for what comes next.