



# There is No Try (Needing to Score #2)

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**Category:** Sport

**Description:** Wanting a big change after a break up, Lucas Robinson leaves Australia to play for a newly established rugby team in Ireland. While he's waiting for his new home to be built, he becomes temporary flatmates with Bridget O'Leary—his mate's sister he was warned to stay away from.

After an amazing season, his immigration status is hanging in the balance, and they agree to a contract marriage to grant him citizenship. Except, both Lucas and Bridget have unresolved feelings for each other, complicating their friendship and his relationship with her brother. With everything out in the open, Lucas finally has the woman he's always wanted. But when has a love story ever been that easy?

There is No Try is a deliciously spicy romantic comedy novella, intended for mature audiences. Just because its a romcom, doesnt mean you should forget to check your content warnings

**Total Pages (Source):** 13

## PROLOGUE — LUCAS

“ I have something I’d like to share,” Ronan announces, interrupting Russ on our weekly group therapy call. I was daydreaming and missed the first part of the conversation, unable to listen to Russ droning on for the thousandth time about how he didn’t mean to hurt a man on the ice. He can only claim it was an accident for so long—we’ve all seen the footage; he clearly has anger issues he needs to address. He snapped. It happens. Though every session is the same when we get to him and it’s easy to zone out.

I’ve been attending therapy for the past six months. My rugby club requires it of all players, and I was able to find a small group with three other athletes. Ronan plays football in Ireland, Russ is a suspended hockey goalie in Canada, and Will’s a top quarterback in American football. I prefer this group to ones that have a few of my mates here in Australia; it keeps my private life private.

“Met someone?” Russ asks Ronan, brows pinched, and I tune back into the conversation.

“I suppose I’m using ‘met’ loosely; we’ve been talking for over a year,” Ronan continues, and I perk up. “This past month, things have been shifting between us to the point I haven’t dated... anyone . No one interests me. I know this isn’t meant for dating advise, but I don’t know what to fucking do!” He blows out a long breath, raking his hand through his dark auburn hair. “I’m like a damn teenager with a crush.”

With Cork interested in me for their rugby team, Ronan and I have been talking

almost daily for the past few weeks. It's come up a few times that he's interested in an English reporter. He's never shared in our group messages with Will and Russ about her, and I'm glad he's finally telling them.

"Ronan, we've been over this," Vicky, our therapist, interjects. "We'd like to keep our f-bombs to a minimum here. This is a safe space. Russ, can we pause on your incident and circle back to it?" He nods. "Ronan, feel free to tell us about this woman."

I can't help asking Vicky, "How do you know it's a woman?" Ronan's friend, Nora, is most definitely a woman, but I hate how there is always the assumption. Personally, I don't care if they're a man, woman, or nonbinary; when I fall for someone, it has nothing to do with what's between their legs. Each and every time I tell a friend or my family that I'm dating, they always jump to, "Who is she?" even when they know I'm pansexual.

"True, a valid point, Lucas," Vicky agrees.

Ronan rolls his eyes and groans, "Yes, it's a woman. She's my mate's ex." He's told me on several occasions how he's pissed at himself for falling for Nora, so I don't take the eyeroll personally. It's an impossible situation.

Will's voice booms through the screen, startling me. "No, nope, noooo! Run away, change your name, change your phone number." I stifle a laugh; Will would rather suck his own cock than settle down with anyone.

"It's not like that," Ronan professes. "They dated over a decade ago, and we're just friends. She interviewed me when I played for Ireland in the World Cup and we kept in touch. She's smart, fucking beautiful..." He blows out a long breath. "In the last month we've been... flirting? At least I am. She's coming to Ireland in a few weeks for work. What should I do?"

Vicky carefully offers, “You could ask her on a date when she’s there after discussing it with your friend? But as far as relationships are concerned, I’d highly recommend that any potential partners you gentlemen court are privy to the fact you’re attending therapy. Don’t wait until eight months into the relationship to discuss your mental health.”

Russ folds his arms over his chest and huffs, “I don’t have mental health issues.”

“We know,” I groan at the same time as Ronan and Will.

“I say go for it,” I suggest. “What’s the worst that can happen? Single mums are hot.”

“When was the last time you dated, Luc?” Will’s question is honest, void of his typical alpha male bullshit, taking me by surprise.

“It’s been a while,” I admit. I’m in a similar predicament as Ronan—no one interests me. “I think I need a change. The new Irish rugby league has been interested in me for a while. I should move to Cork, then Ronan’s girl can match me with one of her friends.” I wink, and Ronan cocks an eyebrow for a moment, then bursts into laughter. “What do you say, mate?”

Ronan smirks but doesn’t reply, and Vicky wraps up our call after we discuss Will’s current debacle with his PR manager. A minute after I shut down my laptop, I have a text from Ronan.

Ronan

As long as you don’t fuck Bridget, come play for Cork!

Who is Bridget?

My sister! I've told you about her.

Oh, right. Sorry, mate.

Why are you bringing up your sister?

Because you're the asshole who mentioned single mums are hot.

They are.

Rest assured, if I come to Ireland, I won't fuck your sister.

You should play here, but have you seen the proposed Cork rugby mascot?

No.

A fucking puffin.

We hardly have any puffins here.

At least it's not a hare.

Fuck right off.

I leave the final message and chuckle to myself as I step out of the conference room at the training facility. The only time for therapy that works for everyone is one in the afternoon on Mondays, which causes me to miss half of my strength and conditioning session. Walking out to find my coach, I can't help wondering about Ronan's sister. His comment intrigues me, and I'm quite sure Bridget must be an incredible woman for him to mention her so protectively.

Perhaps signing with Ireland could be more interesting than I originally thought...

### CHAPTER 1

#### LUCAS

#### ONE YEAR LATER

Moving to Ireland last month was the easiest decision I've ever made. Being part of a new league, a new team, is every player's dream. Well, maybe not every player's dream, but it's certainly mine. The fresh start is a welcome change.

As one of the top hookers in Australia, my agent was able to secure a contract with Cork worth double what I was making. Though the money only sweetens my decision to leave Australia, there's only one reason I would move to the other side of the world, and it sure as fuck isn't rugby—it's a woman I can never have.

A few months ago, I was visiting Ronan in Cork for a surprise proposal, and it was one of the sweetest moments I've ever witnessed in my life. As I expected, Ronan fell in love with Nora the moment her plane landed in Ireland. While he is obsessed with her, the proposal wasn't from Ronan, it was Nora who popped the question. I fucking love the plot twist.

Will, Russ, and I made the trip to be there for her grand gesture asking Ronan to marry her. There was no doubt in my mind he would say yes, so I booked my flight as soon as she sent the details. The trip also gave me an opportunity to meet with a few of the rugby league organisers who had expressed interest in me. If it wasn't for my visit, I may not have made the move to Ireland. Cork shouldn't have been on my radar, but after that weekend, it most definitely was my top choice.

Ronan's warning about his sister made much more sense once I met Bridget. Not only is she fucking stunning, she's the perfect blend of sweet and sexy. On top of her being a single mum? Sign me up. How her husband could've left her is fucking diabolical.

But, she's Ronan's sister—the epitome of off-limits.

So, I did what any other masochist would do. I moved in with Bridget while my new home is being built. I have the money for my own temporary housing, but I'd much rather torture myself. Not only do I have to see her every day—and keep myself from touching her—I've spent the past month getting to know Bridge and her son, Gavin, better. The only thing harder to ignore than the physical attraction is my emotional attachment. It's been impossible to not fall for her.

I promised Gav I would help him work through drills tonight. He's only twelve and incredible on the pitch but wants to change positions this year. I've been trying to convince him to play rugby, but his footwork was meant for soccer. Bridget and Gavin tease me for not calling it football, but as far as I'm concerned, rugby is proper football.

Gavin is great as a forward but will be a fucking beast as a mid with a bit of practise. He plays on the same team as Ronan's step-son, Leo, and with their match coming up this weekend, I'm bringing Gav to Ronan's home where there's a small pitch on the property.

The boys are working through drills, and I welcome the excuse to visit with my mate. We talk often, mostly in our group texts with Russ and Will, but it's rare I get to talk to him, just the two of us. With Ronan being the new Cork FC assistant coach, the times we're both free never match up.

While Leo and Gav are preoccupied, Ronan rubs the back of his neck and nervously



asks, “What does your schedule look like these days?”

The question takes me by surprise, and I reply with a shrug, “Depends on the day; I’m sure it’s similar to when you played. I’m up by six, on the pitch by seven-thirty, and home a little after five. I have dinner with Bridget and Gavin, then go for a run, and, uh... straight to bed.”

Fuck, I hate lying to him. I can’t help my mind wandering to last week when I accidentally overheard Bridget fucking herself with a vibrator through our shared wall. I assumed it was something wrong with an appliance, but the moment her soft moans accompanied the buzzing, there was no denying she was touching herself. My hand may or may not have slipped into my shorts to fist my cock that night... and every night after.

Guilt seeps in and I clear my throat. “W-why do you ask?”

Ronan yells to Gav, “Tap left to get it away from him! Yes! Make him work for it!” He then tells me, “If you have time, I was wondering if you could assist with the boys’ team this year? Even if you can only come one night a week, and an occasional match when it doesn’t conflict with your schedule, I’d love your help. As much as I love working with Leo, it’s difficult straddling the line between coach and father. I’m struggling with Gavin too. I need someone I trust who can push them and the other boys.”

“Of course, I’d love to. I’m not familiar with youth soccer here—you may need to get me up to speed with any special rules—but I’m happy to help any way I can.”

His grin is wide as he clamps his hand on my shoulder. “Thank you. The boys will be excited.”

I look out onto the pitch and can’t wipe the smile off my face. Leo and Gavin are

fucking around more than they should be; I did the same when I was their age. If you're not having fun, what's the bloody point?

My phone vibrates in my pocket and I check it. Though Bridget never sends me anything inappropriate, with her brother standing beside me, I've never been so grateful for my privacy screen. My blood pressure spikes finding several missed texts from her.

Bridget

We're low on eggs, so I'm going to stop by Frannie's. Her hens are over producing and offered to give me a few dozen.

Do you need more?

Okay, I've convinced her to give me thirty-six, but I may need something to sweeten the deal.

Six dozen in hand. All it took was promising her you'd pop by the farm this week. I suggest shirtless.

I stifle a laugh and type out my reply.

There's already one cock there, no reason to add another. Tell her I can pay her for them!

I'm sorry I didn't message you earlier. I'm with Ronan and the boys and didn't see this until now.

Her name illuminates the screen with an incoming call and my stomach twists. I tell Ronan, "Bridget is calling. Do you mind if I..."

“What? Are we having fucking tea?” Ronan asks, and I pause, still waiting for his approval. He chuckles, “Don’t be fucking thick worrying about manners, answer it. She’s probably wondering how much longer before you’re home.”

“Hey pup,” I answer without thinking. Fuck, fuck, fuck. There is no denying what I called her, but I quickly correct, “Bridge, hi. We were just talking about the boys.”

There is no doubt in my mind Ronan caught my slip-up. His jaw is tight, and though he keeps his eyes focused on Leo and Gav, I’m fully expecting he’ll lay into me the moment I hang up. I’d deserve it. I love Bridget and Gavin as if they were mine, but there’s no way in hell I can admit it to Ronan.

“Oh, is everything okay?” Bridget seems flustered, her voice squeaking.

“Yes.” I huff a small laugh and attempt to calm her by teasing, “Did you put Ronan up to asking me to coach Leo and Gav?”

“No.” Her nerves are replaced with excitement. “He didn’t mention anything to me. You’re going to coach?”

“It seems so.” I keep my eyes on Gav as I continue, “Gavin’s form is looking great, so is Leo’s. Ronan asked me to help him, since things are...” I glance to Ronan as he shouts something to the boys. “It’s difficult to train and coach family, and he’s been tasked with working with not only his son, but his nephew.” I rake my hand through my hair and continue, “Do you mind if I help? Gav’s your son, and I don’t want to overstep.”

“You’re not overstepping, but my brother has enough cheek for a second arse; don’t let him take advantage of you.”

I sputter a cough. Unsure of what the hell that means, I change the subject. “We

should be finishing up here in an hour. Thank your friend for the eggs for me.”

“Right, that’s why I was calling. Do you mind if I give her my tickets for your next match?”

Of course I fucking mind; I play better when Bridget and Gavin are there. Stifling a groan, I offer, “I’ll secure additional tickets.”

“It’s okay, you don’t have to.”

“I insist.”

“Well, thank you.”

My heart swells hearing the smile in her voice and I can’t help my own grin as I tell her, “We’ll be home soon.” We say our goodbyes and hang up.

The moment my phone is in my pocket, Ronan grumbles, “Anything you’d like to tell me?”

“Bridget’s friend wants tickets to my match,” I rush out. “She’s been giving us eggs, and last week sent Bridge home with fresh bread and butter.”

“Oh.” He hums thoughtfully.

As Ronan is about to say something, Leo calls to me, “Lucas! Can you step in as goalkeeper?”

“Only if Ronan’s your striker!”

“You’re in trouble, Robinson.” Ronan chuckles darkly, then runs onto the pitch.

I let out a full laugh, and while I may have dodged a bullet tonight, I'll need to be more careful around Ronan where Bridget is concerned. The last thing I need is to ruin a friendship over my feelings for his sister.

### CHAPTER 2

brIDGET

NINE MONTHS LATER

I've watched Ronan fall head over heels in love with Nora. I've never seen him so happy, and I couldn't be more pleased for the two of them. Even though he married an Englishwoman, I don't hold it against her; she's an incredible mum to Leo and loves my brother fiercely.

I'm not jealous... All right, I'm a bit jealous. I've never known an all-consuming love like they share. My ex-husband and I married when we were young, and we struggled with infertility for years, which put a strain on our marriage. Ultimately, it was too much for him, and he left when I was pregnant with Gavin. My own father wasn't around growing up, and I hate that the cycle isn't broken.

As I'm packing a bag for Gavin's match, my phone vibrates on the counter. Secretly hoping it's cancelled, I unlock my phone and hold back a grin seeing Lucas' name illuminating my screen.

Lucas

G'day, pup. Are you free for dinner tonight?

When Luc and I first met, he caught a glimpse of my one and only tattoo on my shoulder—a paw print I impulsively got when I was twenty. His little nickname has

stuck for the past year. I should tell him to stop, but I selfishly don't want him to. My stomach wooshes every time he calls me pup.

Lucas had only planned on staying with us for a few months while his custom home was being built. In the middle of the project, the contracted company was investigated for money laundering and Lucas never found a replacement to finish the house. He sold the land and has been with us this whole time.

As much as I love having him here, it's time I gently insist he move out. I've developed feelings for him that grow deeper each day, and it's only a matter of time before I get hurt. While he's a massive flirt, there's no chance he's in love with me as much as I am with him. It's best to keep it to my fantasies. There's also no reason he should be living in my ridiculously small apartment with me. He's worth millions and could do so much better.

I glance around nervously even though I'm alone. His teasing has increased exponentially in the past few months. With Gavin at Ronan's home, I'm free for dinner before Leo's birthday party, but spending time with Luc alone is a terrible idea.

No, sorry, I'm not free.

Yes, you are.

Come have dinner with me.

Is that supposed to be a question or a command?

Neither. It's a request.

Well, my answer is still no.

Why not?

I already ate.

Liar.

I'll see you at 7:15.

I'm going to leave the flat at 7.

Then I'll be sure to come home at 6:45.

You're impossible.

No, I'm your date for the night.

For the hundredth time, you don't need a date for Leo's birthday party.

As much as I long for more with Lucas, it would ruin everything if it ended badly. Gavin loves Luc, so do I, which is why I need to keep my gorgeous flatmate at arm's length.

Either I'm your date tonight, or you're going to tell me why your hand was between your legs thinking of me while you were in the shower yesterday.

I should lie, but he's caught me in the act twice. Who knows how many times he's heard me and didn't say anything.

The first time, he thought I was having a nightmare, which wasn't too far off. Fantasising about your brother's friend is one thing; it's all pretend. Coming down from your mind-blowing orgasm to find the sexy as fuck man sitting next to you on



the bed is... There is no word to describe the torture. The way I wanted his hands on me, swirled with embarrassment of being caught, it was absolute hell.

The second time was yesterday morning. While I was showering, the bastard heard me moaning his name while I fucked my vibrator. He was supposed to be out for a run with Ronan but came home early. He heard me call out his name and he burst into the bathroom, thinking I needed something. My luck is absolute shite. I've avoided him since.

I already told you I wasn't calling out your name.

You absolutely did. There's no shame in touching yourself thinking of me.

I wasn't. I was imagining a different Luc.

Yeah? Which one?

Panicking, I type without thinking.

Luke Skywalker.

If you want a man to make you see stars, pup, say the word. I'm more than happy to oblige.

Lucas!

We shouldn't be talking about this.

I disagree. We need to talk about it, which is why I asked you to dinner. Also, I have important news I want to share.

I chew on my lip; I'd much rather pretend yesterday never happened.

You should go to the party without me. I'll tell Nora I'm not feeling well.

You can't avoid me forever.

Watch me.

I glance at the clock, and if Lucas is true to his word, he'll be here in forty-five minutes. He knows damn well I wouldn't actually miss Leo's party, and part of me is curious what his news is.

I rush to get ready, hoping to make it out the door before Lucas is home. Per usual, luck isn't on my side, and the click of my entry door closing makes me jump. Scurrying out of my bedroom to make my exit, I faceplant into Lucas' hard chest. I'm not a short woman at 5'9" but he's a 6'6" giant towering over me. And, fucking hell, he smells good. I hold my breath to avoid his earthy pine and citrus scent.

"Someone's in a hurry," he purrs. I attempt to step back but he slips his hand to my back, keeping me close.

"I... Um..."

"Ready for dinner?"

I wince and don't dare glance up. If I do, all it'll take is his hazel eyes meeting mine for me to do whatever he wants. "We really shouldn't," I insist, though my voice shakes.

"It's only dinner." Lucas tilts my chin, forcing me to look at him. He's letting his beard grow out and it only makes him more handsome. Leaning in, it tickles my

cheek as he whispers, “We eat together nearly every night; this is no different.”

“Except you keep calling it a date, and I don’t know if you’re serious or not.”

He pulls back and I immediately miss him in my space. “I may tease you, pup, but I would never joke about something like this.”

“Even if I wanted to, I can’t.”

“It could be your last chance.” He huffs a humorless laugh. “I was going to tell you at dinner but... You know my working holiday visa is expired. My agent has been working to secure a service employment contract but it’s a stretch seeing as I’m not a scientist or anything.” He sighs and pain seeps into his expression. “I’ll have to go back to Australia for a while and reapply for a visa.”

My breath catches in my throat. “You’re leaving? What about the club? Is there anything they can do?”

“They’re trying.”

“When would you have to go?”

“Next week.” Luc tucks my hair behind my ear, a sad smile tilting his lips. “If you can’t come with me, I want to take you to dinner. For at least one night, I want to pretend you’re mine.”

“Yours? Go with you? You aren’t making any sense. What are you talking about?”  
My brows pinch.

“Come home with me. I’m in love with you, pup.”

“Love?” I scoff, taking a step back. Selfish bastard. “You wait until you’re leaving to tell me? That’s not love, Lucas.”

“At least I’m admitting how I feel. You love me too. I know you do, but both of us have been too afraid to be the first to say it. I never wanted to ruin my relationship with Gavin, or with Ronan, if you didn’t feel the same way. I’d rather be your friend than nothing at all, but I can’t move to the other side of the world without you knowing how I feel about you.”

I still can’t say the words. No matter how much I love him, if I tell him, it’ll make it too real. He’s leaving. I take a deep breath and on the exhale it’s as if alarm bells are going off in my head. “You were asking me out last week. How long have you known about your work visa issues?”

Luc lets out a long sigh. “About two months, but I only found out this morning I’ll have to get creative if I want to come back. I thought for sure the league would’ve had it sorted for me, but that wasn’t the case. My agent fucked up the paperwork and I was denied.”

“Is there any way you could stay?” My heart squeezes. I close the distance and wrap my arms around his middle. Holding me tighter, he kisses the top of my head, and tears prick behind my eyes. I’m not the only one losing Luc, my whole family is.

“Come with me. You and Gav,” he whispers and it only makes it harder to keep myself from crying.

“I can’t. Gavin’s life is here. We can’t pick up and leave. Do you have any Irish family? You could apply for citizenship.”

“No.” He groans, and I feel the deep rumble everywhere. “I’d be able to stay if I married.”

I glance up, resting my chin on his chest. “Don’t joke about that.”

“I’m not joking, pup. When I looked into citizenship, it’s an option.”

I marinate with it for a moment, then blurt, “Then let’s get married.”

“What did you say?” His voice is low and gravely, making my body light up.

I swallow thickly and repeat, “Let’s get married. You’ll get to stay, and we wouldn’t need to tell anyone. If they ask, you can tell them your agent was able to extend your visa.”

“When I get married, it’ll be for love. I do love you, Bridge, but...” He shakes his head. “No. We can’t do this. Not like this. I won’t drag you or Gavin into anything with a contract marriage.”

“What if you leave and they aren’t able to negotiate anything? Then, what? We’ll never see you again?” The thought sours my stomach.

“I’d never let that happen.” Lucas says it so matter-of-factly, I can’t help believing him. His eyes dart between mine in silent question and my whole body is buzzing in anticipation. Taking my cheeks in his hands, he brings my lips to his in a sweet, soft kiss I feel all the way to my toes. He’s my brother’s mate, I shouldn’t let him kiss me, and definitely shouldn’t indulge in the fantasy he’ll stay, or return to Ireland if he leaves. Yet, here I am.

Reality barrels into me, and a whimper escapes me as I break our kiss. “I’m sorry, Luc. I shouldn’t have kissed you.”

“I kissed you first, pup.” Lucas grins, the dimple on his left cheek popping. “And I’m going to do it again.”

As he pulls me closer, his undeniably hard cock is pressed against my stomach. I can't help teasing, "Is that a light saber in your pocket?"

"Absolutely." He lets out a full laugh and slides his hand into my hair, tugging gently. I stifle a moan. "My apologies, pup, it doesn't vibrate or light up."

My cheeks heat, but my embarrassment quickly disappears as Luc leans in to kiss my neck. For the past year, I've suppressed how I feel about him. If it doesn't end well, not only would it break Gavin's heart, it'll put a strain on his friendship with Ronan.

Except, he's leaving... And no one would know if we spent this week sneaking around.

"Have dinner with me?" he whispers against my skin.

As he trails his kisses up my neck to my jaw, I give in and reply, "You win, Luc. I'll have dinner with you."

### CHAPTER 3

#### LUCAS

I've wanted Bridget since the moment we met, but I need to slow everything down. No matter how much I lie to myself, nothing about this is casual. Her words repeat over and over in my head on the drive to dinner. The thought of marrying her has crossed my mind more than once this past year, but I'd never want to marry her for citizenship. It isn't fair to her or Gavin to consider any of it, but...

What if?

With Gavin at Ronan and Nora's house for the night, I can't help wondering if there's a chance Bridget will consider staying in my bed tonight. I don't care if she doesn't so much as kiss me; I'd be perfectly content spending hours with her wrapped in my arms. My cock may have other plans, but it's nothing a cold shower can't fix. Bridget means more to me than a quick root.

We drive together often, and I'm usually able to focus my attention on the road. Not today. After parking on the street, I round the car to open the door for her. She steps out and my heart nearly leaps out of my chest being this close to her. Her gaze burrows into my soul, and I could so easily lean in to kiss her again. Fuck, the need to touch her is unbearable. I take her hand in mine, interlacing our fingers. For a brief moment, I'm certain she'll pull away. I swallow thickly waiting for it, but it never comes. We stand there for a moment and time stops. Nothing but her exists.

Without tearing my eyes from her emerald green ones, I close the car door and lock it

with my fob. The chirp breaks the spell we're under. "Shall we?" she offers breathlessly, and I reply with a curt nod.

I lead her into the pub, but I'm regretting my suggestion; Bridget deserves more than a pint and steak sanga. It's somewhere I'd come with mates after a match, and it's just as busy today with only two barstools available. With a shake of my head, I turn on my heel and bring Bridge with me as I walk out.

"What's wrong?" she asks as she quickens her steps to keep up with my longer stride.

"We can do better, pup."

There's a smaller pub two doors down that has more of a café feel with eclectic installations from local artists. Their stout options are better, and the only negative is the limited food options. I'm not concerned about it; Ronan and Nora will likely have some sort of catering for Leo's party later. More than anything, I want to spend time with Bridget.

I've had dinner with her hundreds of times, but never alone. I can't stop thinking about our kiss and have butterflies in my stomach like a damn teenager. For the past few months, I've wanted nothing more than to touch her. I can blame it on me leaving, but if I have to go, I want her and Gavin to come with me, not caring if it's temporary.

A server comes over and takes our order of two pints. I have no fucking clue what we ordered, I left it to Bridge, who could've ordered me piss and I would've thanked her for it.

As soon as I have her alone, I can't help asking, "What would it take for you to come with me?"



“You’re fucking mad! Asking me to pick up with my son and leave...” She scoffs. “As much as I want you to stay, there is no reality where I would consider moving for you, just as I’d never ask you to move or stay for me. My life is here. Gavin’s life is here.”

“I would,” I admit. “If you left Cork, I’d follow.”

“Luc, I do love you, but if you have to go, I can’t come with you. If you’re only here for a little while longer, can we enjoy the time you have left? I can check with Ronan to see if he can take Gavin for a week, then you and I can?—”

“No,” I growl, then quickly clear my throat. “I’m sorry, pup, but if this is how you’re going to play it, I want to spend time with Gavin too.”

She chews on her lip, shaking her head. “It will hurt him to see you go.”

Our server returns with our drinks, delaying my protest. As soon as they’re gone, my heart leaps into my throat. I can’t leave Cork, can’t leave Bridget and Gavin. My agent and immigration claim their hands are tied, and I’m afraid citizenship is my only option. Ronan will likely murder me for what I’m about to suggest, but what he doesn’t know won’t hurt him.

“As much as I love the idea of having you to myself until I’d need to leave, I can’t do it. If you won’t come with me, then I’m not going. But in order for that to happen, I’d likely need to marry. I know I said I wouldn’t want a contract marriage, but it would solve everything.” I reach across the table to take her hand, swiping my thumb across her knuckles. “Is it still on the table?”

Bridget chews on her lip. “We would need rules,” she concedes. “I don’t want Gavin to be hurt by anything. He’s my number one priority.”

“Of course. What do you have in mind?”

“We need to be honest with my family.”

“Absolutely,” I agree. “What else?”

Bridget pulls her hand back, setting it in her lap. “We should have boundaries.”

“What sort of boundaries?” My jaw tics; I can’t fucking help it.

“We remain friends, but that’s where it ends.” Her words slice through me like a freshly-sharpened knife. I don’t want to be her friend, I want her. “I can’t risk getting my heart broken, Luc.”

My brows pinch. “Why do you think I’d break your heart?”

“Because you have a reputation.” She sighs and keeps her voice low, despite no one being within earshot. “I’ve seen the social media posts. You had beautiful models, actors, and athletes on your arm before you moved here. You’re, well, you. I’m only a football mum who hardly has spare minutes to swipe a coat of mascara on a few days a week. I could never compare to them. It will only be a matter of time before someone better comes along.” Anger seeps into my veins at the blatant lies she’s telling herself. She’s fucking beautiful and it kills me that she doesn’t see it. I’m about to correct her, but she continues, “Please let me get this out. It took me years to be comfortable in my own skin, I won’t risk the blow to my self-esteem if you fall in love with a gorgeous man or woman. It’s one thing to have a temporary fling before you’re gone, it’s another to fool the world into believing we’re madly in love, only for you to leave me for?—”

“Bridget,” I snap. “Stop. When was the last time I dated?” She glances away in thought. I don’t give her more than a few seconds to consider it before answering my

own question. “Years. I haven’t dated anyone since I moved here. I’ve been interested in exactly one person— you . Before I came to play for Cork, your brother asked me not to sleep with you. I thought it was a strange thing to say to someone at the time, but the day I met you, I knew exactly why he warned me. While you are easily the most beautiful woman— person, really —I’ve ever met, I’m not in love with you because of how fucking gorgeous you are, pup. Though, it doesn’t hurt.” A light blush creeps up her neck and I can’t help the smirk tugging at my lips. “I don’t want anyone else, I want you. I don’t need to pretend I’m in love with you to sell a fake marriage, it would be real for me.”

Bridget’s chest rises and falls with a few deep breaths. Her voice is quiet as she admits, “It would be real for me too, which is why we can’t be more than friends.”

“Friends?” I bark out a laugh. “Bridge, you have to understand how bloody awful that sounds. I’ve tasted your lips, heard your sweet whimpers as you come. Granted, it was through a door or a wall when I was tortured by you moaning my name. Still, I’d last less than one day as your husband without wanting to sink myself inside you to feel your tight cunt strangling my cock. I can guarantee I’d make you scream louder than any of your vibrators could.”

Eyes wide, she glances around nervously and whisper-shouts, “Will you keep your voice down? Someone might hear you.”

“Good. Let them hear. I won’t hide or be ashamed about how I feel about you pup.”

### CHAPTER 4

#### brIDGET

When I suggested we get married, I was only half-serious, assuming he would scoff at the ridiculous idea, and that would be the end of it. In a matter of a few short hours, he somehow convinced me to not only marry him, but to throw all of the rules out the fucking window. I can't blame it on drinking; I only had two pints. The fantasy of Lucas and I being together was always just that, a fantasy, an indulgence I used for inspiration while touching myself. Lucas is flirtatious, but it's always been harmless banter. I had no reason to believe he felt anything real for me. I'm certain it's a dream and I'll wake up at any moment.

On the drive over to Ronan's, my stomach is in knots. Are we really going to do this? Get married? We agreed to not say anything to our friends and family until we've told Gavin everything. It doesn't calm my nerves any. If anything, keeping a secret from Ronan makes it worse.

Lucas parks next to Ronan's car and gets out to open my door. He offers his hand, which I stupidly take. Of course he won't let go of it and my heart skips a beat. "Luc, we can't go in there looking like we're dating."

"We're not dating; we're engaged," he corrects. His wide grin meets his eyes and it's a sin how beautiful his smile is. "Who will be the wiser if I hold your hand until I knock on the door?"

"Are you sure about this?"

“About you and me? Absolutely. We’re not getting married for the right reasons, but I don’t have a single reservation about being with you. We’ll take this slow, no matter how much I want to jump in with two feet.” He releases my hand to knock on Ronan’s door, then stuffs his hands in his trouser pockets. “But it doesn’t mean I’m any less yours.”

“Lucas, I?—”

The door opens and Nora’s beaming. “Bridge, Luc!” She opens it wider for us to come inside.

I begin struggling off my jacket, and Lucas helps me out of it the rest of the way, whispering beside my ear, “We aren’t going to hide like Ronan and Nora did.”

Nora clears her throat and I hope with all of my being she didn’t hear him. “Gavin and Leo are outside playing football, everyone should be here within the hour.”

Gavin adores Lucas and will probably be over the moon the moment we tell him, but he deserves to be the first to know Lucas and I are engaged. Fucking hell, I’m engaged? I never thought I would remarry, and certainly not someone like Lucas.

We make our way out to the small pitch Ronan had put in when he bought the property. The boys are laughing as they play with Ronan. Lucas slings his arm around my shoulder, a gesture he’s done in the past and I never thought much of it—he’s always friendly and affectionate. We’re spotted by Leo who yells for Lucas to join them. Squeezing once before releasing me, Lucas whispers, “Are you going to cheer me on, pup?” He doesn’t wait for my reply as he jogs over to the boys. They greet him with open arms and my heart is caught in my throat.

“Pup? You’re in so much trouble.” Nora chuckles and I’m unable to keep my eyes off Lucas laughing at something Gavin said to him.

“What are you talking about?” I ask, guilt seeping in.

“Don’t play stupid with me, Bridge. I’ve been saying it for ages: that man is in love with you.”

I blow out a long breath. “If I tell you something, do you promise to not tell Ronan?”

“No,” she laughs. “I don’t keep anything from your brother, but if you’ve been secretly shagging Lucas for months, I’m sure Ronan already knows, or at least suspects it.”

“What?” My squeaky question comes out a bit too loud, getting Lucas’ attention. When he resumes playing, I lower my voice and grit out, “I’m not sleeping with Lucas.”

“Are you serious? Not once?”

“I think I would remember having sex, Nor,” I grumble. “It’s much worse. His agent and lawyers fucked up his visa, and he has to leave Ireland.”

She gasps, hand flying to her mouth. “No!”

“Unfortunately, he’s exhausted all of his options but citizenship.”

“Don’t you have to live and work here for a year?” I don’t reply and she sucks in a breath. “He doesn’t have family here, they are all in Brisbane, aren’t they? Unless he marries... Bridget! Are you going to?—”

“Hush! What is it with everyone loudly sharing incredibly personal information today? Yes, we’re going to have a contract marriage so he can stay, but we’re going to talk to Gavin about it first. I warned Lucas if Gav isn’t on board, I’m out.”

“That beast of a man is okay with marrying you for rugby? There has to be more to it.” Nora may not be buying my explanation, but I’m not ready to share the full truth.

I look out onto the pitch, my heart full of love for all four of them playing. Lucas towers above Ronan and the boys, but height is the least of it. He’s a wall of muscle with his broad shoulders, thick neck, and even thicker thighs. I can’t help wondering if his cock follows the same physical aesthetic.

“He may or may not have heard me fucking myself a few times,” I admit.

“So?” She gestures vaguely in his direction. “It wasn’t as if you were thinking about him while you touched yourself... Oh. You totally were, weren’t you?”

I wince. “Yes.”

“Bloody hell, Bridge. Don’t tell me he heard you moan his name.”

“He did,” I groan. “He thought I needed something and came into the bathroom to check on me.”

“He hears you mid-orgasm, then asks you to marry him? I’m missing something here. According to Ronan, Lucas had several girlfriends and boyfriends, and a few... they friends, I guess you could call them? I’m not sure how he referred to them—you’d have to ask Lucas—but he was always in a relationship or dating someone. He came here and hasn’t been on a single date. You don’t find that strange? Then, all of a sudden, he’s proposing? It doesn’t add up, especially with how that beautiful man looks at you.”

“Yes, okay, fine, I’m in love with Lucas. I have been for a long fucking time, and apparently he feels the same. Is that what you wanted to hear?” Her smile grows wider at my admission. “It’s complicated. While the marriage will be for his

citizenship, it's more than that. I don't want him to leave. Getting caught mid-orgasm and the marriage aren't in any way related, except he said some things I'm definitely saving for later when the boys aren't home."

Nora laughs and asks, "If you get married, shouldn't one of the perks be that you get to climb him like a tree? No vibrator required."

Before I can answer, Gav calls to me, "Mum, come be my goalie!"

"What about Nor?" I yell back.

Ronan answers, "She'll be mine!"

Nora groans, playfully rolling her eyes. "Come on. They're not going to stop asking until we join in."

Nora and I only have to play for a few minutes before a few of the boys' football friends arrive and we're able to sneak away. I've hardly been focused, unable to stop thinking about Nora's suggestion. I couldn't have meaningless sex, my heart couldn't take it. Lucas is undoubtedly one of the most wonderful men I've ever known, and I trust him when he says he loves me, but we've never been on a real date. If this is going to work, I need to insist we truly take things slow.

With the boys preoccupied with the birthday celebration, we don't have a chance to talk to Gavin. Still, Lucas finds subtle ways to touch me in ways an outsider wouldn't be suspicious. Except Nora, who can't wipe the stupid smile off her face. I'm able to convince her to wait until tomorrow to tell Ronan and breathe a sigh of relief we won't be there for him to become a protective big brother.

Once we're home and dressed for bed, Lucas and I sit with Gavin on the couch for the conversation I'm now dreading to have. I finally ask Gav, "What would you think



if Lucas had to leave?”

“Why does this sound like my friends’ divorced parents?” Gavin crosses his arms and sits further into the sofa.

I hate how he’s being defensive, but he could see this as someone abandoning him. A deflection. I try again. “Something has come up, but what if we had a way Lucas wouldn’t have to leave?” He perks up and I continue, “Luc had an issue with renewing his visa, meaning he can’t stay in Ireland unless he’s a citizen. I don’t want him to go back to Australia, unless he wants to.”

“And I don’t,” Lucas chimes in. “You and your mum are family to me.” Glancing to me, he tells Gav, “Which is why I’ve asked your mum to marry me.” He quickly dips his gaze back to Gavin and insists, “But you are our priority. If you’re not comfortable with it, we’ll table the idea.”

Gavin’s eyes have been wide since Lucas uttered the M word. “But you have to be in love to get married,” he utters almost as a question as his eyes dart between me and Lucas.

Before I can answer, Lucas admits, “I love you and your mum so much. Even if I don’t marry her, I’ll still love you. I’ve lived here with you both for so long because I couldn’t imagine being anywhere else. I told her tonight now I felt, and I also told her about me having to leave. In the end, I’ll only stay if you want me to.”

As excited as Lucas is about this, I’m worried about Gavin and him possibly feeling as if all of this is on him. “While all of that is beautiful,” I say cautiously, “there is no pressure, Gav. It was merely something we were discussing today and wanted your opinion.”

“Do you love him?” Gavin asks me. I nod and smile. “And if you get married, he’ll

stay?”

I glance over to Lucas and his eyes are so full of love and light. My heart beats a little faster as I reply, “Yes, he’ll stay.”

Gavin’s voice pulls me from Lucas as he asks, “If you don’t get married, what happens?”

“I’ll have to go back to Australia,” Luc explains. My stomach drops at the thought. “I love your mum, and even if I didn’t have to leave, I would ask her to marry me.” He lets out a light chuckle. “Maybe not so soon, but I can’t imagine my life without the two of you in it. What do you say, mate? Are you up for it?”

Gavin wraps his arms around Luc’s middle and tells him quietly, “I don’t want you to go.” I hold back tears watching them. While they share no blood, the love between them is just as real, and maybe even stronger.

“I’m not going anywhere,” Lucas assures him, wrapping his arms tighter around my son. “There’s nowhere else I’d rather be than right here.”

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### CHAPTER 5

#### LUCAS

Telling Gavin went better than I thought it would. I fully expected him to push back on the idea, but my heart has never felt so full knowing not only Bridget loves me, but so does her amazing son. They've become my family since I moved here, and I meant what I said, I'd absolutely ask her to marry me one day regardless of my visa situation.

Waking up in my bed instead of hers is a special kind of torture. Gav is comfortable with me marrying his mum, and he likely wouldn't mind if I stayed with her, but I don't want to press my luck. So much happened yesterday, I need to bide my time.

My phone vibrates on the bedside table and my stomach drops as I check it.

Ronan

What did I say about fucking my sister?

I kept to my word and never fucked Bridget. I assume Nora told you I'm about to be your new brother-in-law?

Find someone else if you need to marry.

I'm not going to fight with him over text messages and click the phone icon to call. Without a greeting, he lays into me. "Bridge deserves better than a bloody contract

marriage, Luc! Don't drag my sister into your immigration problems."

"It's not only a contract marriage," I admit, but quickly backpedal. "As much as I appreciate how protective you are of her, she's a grown woman who can make her own decisions. She's the one who suggested it."

"Of course she suggested it!" he roars.

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"Who are you talking to?" Nora asks him, her voice distant. "Is it Lucas? I told you to not bother him today."

"Yes, it's Lucas," he seethes and I don't think I've ever heard him so angry, especially directed at me.

"Luc, don't listen to him. I think it's lovely."

I chuckle to myself, then tell Ronan, "I'm sorry we didn't tell you yesterday. It was important that we talked to Gavin first." I sit up with a groan. The last thing I want is my mate pissed about this. With a deep breath, I admit, "I love her."

"You better." Ronan then grumbles, "Feckin' eejit."

I'd never hurt Bridget or Gav. It doesn't matter that we've never officially dated, I've never loved anyone as deeply as I love her. I'm done hiding how I feel and can only hope Ronan will eventually accept it.

There's a soft knock on my door as Gavin asks, "Are you up?"

"I'll be ready in five," I shout to him, then tell Ronan, "Sorry, I have to go. I

promised Gav I'd take him to breakfast this morning."

Thankfully, he doesn't berate me again, and we hang up on a semi-positive note. After I'm dressed, I meet Gav in the kitchen. He's laughing at something Bridget said to him, and her smile falls when she spots me. Eyes wide, she blushes and quickly turns away. I hate how so much has changed already. My heart twists in my chest as I fight the urge to take her in my arms. It's always been this way with her, but today it's so much worse. She knows how I feel about her, and by some cosmic miracle, she loves me back. Still, she's not mine.

But she will be.

"Are you ready to go?" I ask Gav, and he hops off his stool with a wide smile. "We should be back in a few hours."

Bridget pivots quickly, her dress twirling an extra second longer. "Hours? I thought you were only having breakfast."

I rub the back of my neck, wincing. I hate lying to her, but want to keep it a surprise. Before I can offer a version of the truth, Gavin chimes in, "We need a few things."

"What sorts of things?" Bridget doesn't wait for a reply and makes her way to her handbag, rummaging through it to find her wallet. She pulls out a few notes, handing them to Gavin as she asks, "Will this be enough?"

Gavin laughs, and I bite back a smile as I reply, "I've got it, pup." She lifts her gaze to me with a frown. Gavin hands her back the fifty euros, which definitely won't cover what I will be buying today. I close the distance and press a soft kiss to her cheek, whispering, "We'll be back soon." There's an adorable hitch in her breath and it takes everything in me to not kiss her.

Gavin and I leave and once we're in my car he bursts into laughter. "Do you think Mum suspects anything?"

"Not a chance." I wink and we drive off.

His favourite breakfast spot is a little bakery called The Void. As much as I shouldn't overload on carbohydrates today, I can't help ordering a croissant eggs benedict and a cappuccino. Gavin gets his usual French toast and a hot chocolate. I insist he order a side of eggs or sausage, and he agrees with a playful eye roll. His mum would never approve of so much sugar without at least a little protein, and I'm glad he doesn't fight me on it.

Once our order is placed, he dives right in and asks, "When you marry me mum, will we still live where we do? Or will it be like Leo?"

"How do you mean?"

"Leo and Nora moved in with Ronan, and... Never mind, it's selfish of me to ask."

"If you love your home, we don't need to move. If you want to move somewhere with more space, maybe with a practice pitch to rival Leo's, we can ask your mum about it."

His eyes light up. "Really?"

"Of course," I chuckle. "The only reason I've stayed with you so long is because I love you and Bridge. I don't care where we live, but it's probably a good idea to look for a bigger place."

"I think we should. Can I ask you something?" he asks nervously, and I nod. "Why didn't you tell her sooner?"

I should've anticipated this would come up. I blow out a long breath and admit, "I was scared. I love you both so much. If she didn't feel the same for me, I was worried I could lose you. I was told I only have a little while longer before I'd have to leave, and I asked her if the two of you could come with me. I had nothing holding me back from telling her how I felt. I hope you don't feel blindsided by it and know how much I care about you."

"If you really love me mum, then we better pick out the perfect ring. We need her to say yes," he states matter-of-factly.

I don't correct him that she already has. Instead, I agree, "You're absolutely right."

After breakfast, we make our way to the jewellery store. Browsing what has to be hundreds of rings, varying from simple to intricate, nothing is standing out to either of us. Money isn't the issue, Bridget deserves something beautiful and timeless. They don't feel right.

Gavin is looking at a few with centre stones that aren't diamonds. One in particular draws my attention. The white gold is braided along the band, and instead of a traditional diamond, the sign says it's a blue diamond. It's more of a dark teal than blue and absolutely beautiful. He points to it, insisting, "That's the one."

"I couldn't agree more."

I flag down an associate and she tells us Bridget could have it fitted to be bigger or smaller if it doesn't fit. Gavin pulls out a ring he swiped from his mum's jewellery box to compare sizes. The associate confirms it's the same size, almost as if it was made for Bridget. Once I've paid, I tuck the ring box into my pocket and Gavin and I make our way home.

The scent of cinnamon and vanilla fill the kitchen. Whatever Bridget is baking is

absolutely mouthwatering and the last thing I should be eating. Next week's training is going to be brutal, but there's no harm in a small bite... or five.

"You're back early. How was breakfast?" she asks, pulling a pan out of the oven.

"Good, great. I'm going to go read," Gavin rushes out, sounding guilty as fuck as he scurries off, leaving Bridget and I alone.

Bridge busies herself taking the pastries out of the pan and doesn't glance up as she questions, "Where did you go after breakfast?"

I stuff my hands in my pocket, my right hand meeting the resistance of the jewellery box. As much as I should hold off for the perfect, romantic moment to give it to her, I can't wait another minute. "Why don't we have a seat, and I'll show you?"

Her eyes snap to mine, a swirl of intrigue and suspicion dancing in them. I don't wait for a reply and make my way over to the sofa. She reluctantly sits next to me.

I take her hand in mine. Her touch has me feeling more grounded than I have in the past twenty-four hours, and can't help pouring my heart out to her. "Gavin asked me something today. He wanted to know why I waited so long to tell you I love you. I was so damn scared that you didn't feel this, but it doesn't excuse it. What we are about to do is so incredibly backwards. If you're going to be my wife, you'll need a ring." I pull out the box from my pocket and release her hand to open it. "I was going to wait until tonight, but I've waited long enough to call you mine."

"Luc," she sighs. "You didn't need to get a ring."

"Yes, I did. If I wasn't such a fucking idiot, I would've moved out a long time ago and asked you on a proper date. Maybe then, we would already be married."



Bridget cups my cheek, her eyes searching mine. “Are you sure about this? Marriage for the sake of citizenship is one thing, but this...”

“I want to marry you, pup, not just so I can continue to play for Cork. I love you and would be the happiest man on earth if you wanted to be with me until we’re old and grey.”

“Ronan’s going to kill you. You know that, right?”

“Worth the risk.” I huff a small laugh. “Is that a yes?”

“You didn’t ask me anything.” A teasing smirk tugs at her lips.

Unable to wipe the smile off my face, I drop to one knee in front of her and ask, “Bridget O’Leary, will you marry me? Be my wife because you want to be, not just because I’m an amazing hooker.”

She stifles a laugh and her wide grin matches mine as she replies, “I don’t know, if it wasn’t for those incredible thighs, I would probably say no.”

I pat my leg and glance behind me to ensure Gavin is still out of earshot. Keeping my voice low, it comes out as a purr as I tease, “Are these what you think of when you’re touching yourself?”

“Lucas!” she shrieks, then whispers, “You can’t say things like that.”

“They aren’t?” I cock an eyebrow and she bursts into a fit of nervous giggles. I fucking love how I can rile her up. “What do you say, pup? Be my wife?”

“I should tell you no.”

“And why’s that?”

Bridget leans in and whispers beside my ear, “Because I doubt you’ll live up to the fantasies.”

My ego and cock are up for the challenge. I slide my hand into her hair and keep her close. “We’re going out tonight, and when we come home, you’ll be wishing I didn’t live up to your fantasies. I’ll make you come so hard you’ll forget your own name.”

“I’ll hold you to that.” She takes out the ring and slips it onto her finger. My heart swells at the sight—she’s mine.

Fuck, is this really happening? Do I really get to marry this incredible woman I’ve wanted for so damn long? To think, I could’ve had her this whole time. We might be getting married for all of the wrong reasons, but I’m going to keep her for all of the right ones.

### CHAPTER 6

#### brIDGET

As predicted, Ronan is less than happy about my engagement. I don't blame him, he asked his mate to not sleep with his sister. One could argue what Lucas is doing is far worse. While he and I never had sex, marrying me implies we have or will. Since our father wasn't around, Ronan's always been a protective sibling. I don't have as strong of a relationship with our brother, Jeremy, but he'd likely have the same reaction if I told him I was marrying a sexy as sin rugby player so he can continue playing here. It isn't that anyone dislikes Lucas, it's alpha-male protective bullshit.

It doesn't matter if Ronan agrees or disagrees with the engagement, I believe Lucas when he says he loves me. Why else would he remain here for months when he could've been living in a posh flat or a beautiful property like Ronan? And now I'm going to be his wife? The thought of being anything other than friends both terrifies and excites me.

While Gavin packs an overnight bag to stay with his friend, Declan, for the night, I can't take my eyes off the most gorgeous ring I've ever seen. I had a feeling the boys were up to no good this morning, but never in a million years would I have guessed they were picking out an engagement ring. Not only is it unique, it's absolutely stunning, and I love that Lucas included Gavin in choosing it.

"Almost ready to go?" Lucas' voice pulls my attention to his bedroom door. He's wearing an expertly tailored, grey suit, with a crisp navy collared shirt under, looking as if he walked out of a magazine advertisement.

My jaw drops and I can't help drinking him in. "Where are we going that you need to be dressed like this?" I gesture up and down his body.

"It's a surprise." He trimmed his beard, making an adorable dimple on one of his cheeks more prominent.

I glance down at my simple black dress I've been wearing all day. It's pretty, but I'd be severely underdressed for wherever Lucas has planned. "I should change."

His smile falls as he stalks towards me. "Absolutely not." When he reaches me, my breath is stolen from me as he snakes his arm around my waist and pulls me to him by the small of my back. "You're beautiful."

My cheeks warm at his praise. I'm about to ask again where we're going when Gavin walks in. Gav drops his bag on the sofa and sits to tie his runners. For a moment, I consider breaking away from Lucas, but we aren't doing anything inappropriate. I don't want to hide around my son; it's important that he sees how women should be properly treated.

Lucas kisses my forehead before releasing me and asks Gavin, "Do you have your backpack for tomorrow?"

"No, one second." He rushes off the couch and retrieves his bag for school in the morning.

Gavin has spent many nights away from home, but this is the first time butterflies are dancing in my belly in anticipation. If Lucas and I were home alone, a wall separated us. My nervousness takes over when I consider how I could be terrible in bed. Hell, Lucas could be all talk and, fuck, what if he is into things I'm not? I'm supposed to marry this man and know absolutely nothing about his sexual appetite. Talking about it is bloody awkward, but what is my alternative?

Once Gav is ready, we drop him off at his friend's home and my heart is pounding wildly against my ribcage. Luc slides his palm onto my thigh, making matters worse. I cover his hand with mine, unsure what's expected now that everything's out in the open. He fills the silence telling me about meeting with his agent this afternoon, and all I can muster is an occasional hum in agreement. I'm only following half of what he's saying, stuck in my own head. We've never had awkward silences, and I've never felt nervous around him, but everything has changed in a day. Even if he didn't need to get married, he admitted he loves me.

He. Loves. Me.

"What do you think?" he asks hopefully.

Fuck! What was he talking about?

I fidget with the hem of my dress and reply, "I'm sorry, I didn't catch that. I'm a bit distracted."

Luc squeezes my thigh and laughs. "A bit? You've been in your own little world since we dropped Gavin off."

"I'm sorry," I sigh and stare out the window.

"Why are you apologising? Talk to me, pup, what's going on?"

"It's nothing," I lie, and he grips my leg tighter. "All right, it's not nothing. I'm just worried. My last serious relationship was almost thirteen years ago. I was only twenty-one and I've hardly dated, except for here and there. And now I'm getting married? Oh, and not to just anyone, to you? What will the media say?"

A growl escapes him and my fun, sweet Lucas is long gone, replaced with an intense

energy I've never seen from him. "Are you serious? I don't give a fuck about what anyone might say. If you're worried about it, Nora is a sports reporter, and a damn good one. She'll help change the narrative if necessary. Then there's her friend, Elle. She is a PR manager for an American football team, well versed in media relations. Do you think for one second she wouldn't step in if someone dared to speak one negative word about you or Gavin?"

"You're entirely too confident about this."

"Because since the moment I met you, I wanted more. We can keep it quiet, only telling family, the league, and my club. I can understand wanting to protect Gavin, but I won't hide away like your brother did. If anyone asks, we don't have to mention marriage and can tell them we're dating. I may be one of the best on the pitch, but no one is interested in my dating life here." He parks in front of an upscale smokehouse I haven't been to in years. While I love my dress, I would've chosen something prettier to wear if he had told me where we were going. Shifting in his seat to face me, he continues, "I want to take you out, to openly hold your hand and kiss you. And, fuck, do I want to kiss you again."

My eyes fall to his lips, debating on making the first move. I don't have a moment to consider it when he takes my chin between his thumb and forefinger and brings my lips to his. A soft whimper escapes me the moment they touch. He licks the seam of my lips, teasing for entry I ardently grant him, and I fucking melt. What starts as sweet and tender quickly leaves me breathless as we explore each other's mouths. Any concerns I had about Luc or what we're doing disappear in this single kiss.

When we break apart, I swipe away my lip gloss from his bottom lip. "Sorry."

Lucas leans in with a beaming smile and kisses me again, muttering against my lips, "Stop apologising." He pulls back and while they aren't as shiny as before, more gloss transferred to his lips, I reach to swipe it away but he grips my wrist and presses

a soft kiss to my palm. “Leave it. You’ve marked your territory, pup.”

With a wink, he exits the car and opens my door for me. Like last night, he keeps his hand in mine, but this time he doesn’t release it until he pulls out my chair. Even then, my fingers are interlaced with his again as soon as he’s seated. He’s always been affectionate but never like this. My whole body warms at his touch.

A server comes by and takes our drink order. I try a specialty cocktail with gin and Luc requests a whisky neat. For dinner, I’m deciding between spare ribs and a grilled rib eye, and Lucas suggests he’ll order the ribs so I can try both. The sweet gesture makes my heart ache. How did I not see any of this before? It isn’t just friends sharing a meal, he has always made a point to put my wants and needs first.

“There’s an important conversation we need to have when you aren’t distracted.”

I wince. “I’m sorry.”

“Seriously, stop apologising, pup. A lot has happened since yesterday. It’s okay if you’re still working through it. I was talking to Gav at breakfast and he wanted to know if we could move. We can talk more about it later, but I never want you to think I’m keeping anything from you. For what it’s worth, I think it’s a good idea.”

“Oh.” I chew on my bottom lip. “I don’t think I have it in the budget right now.”

Lucas lets out a full laugh. “My contract is for over half a million euros a year, and that’s before endorsements.”

“That’s your money, Luc.” I lower my voice. “Unless I can afford it on my own, I don’t want to move.”

He squeezes my hand tighter and brings my knuckles to his lips. “You’ll be my wife .

I'll sign whatever I need to sign, so if anything happens, you and Gav get the house. I'll buy it outright, no financing. It'll be yours."

"You can't buy me a house, that's?—"

"I'm buying us a house. We don't need anything as extravagant as your brother's but I would absolutely put in a small practice pitch. This is my last chance at the Olympics; I'll want to train as much as possible if I want a shot at playing for Ireland. It'll keep me closer to home, closer to you, if I don't have to drive twenty minutes each way to practise or get a quick workout in. We've made so many big decisions this weekend, we don't have to move tomorrow, but will you consider it if we find some place to call our own?"

Just like yesterday, he's nearly convinced me to join in on his madness in mere minutes. "I'm not opposed to any of it—the marriage, being with you, or moving—but everything is happening so fast."

Our server drops off our drinks. Once he leaves, Lucas taps his glass with mine and takes a sip. "It is, isn't it?"

"This isn't us," I sigh.

"If I wasn't forced to leave, and I had only confessed how I feel about you, what would your response have been?"

"I would've taken you to bed and had my way with you," I tease, speaking into my glass.

Luc leans in to whisper, "Do you know how many times I've had to talk myself out of stroking my cock as I heard your soft moans through my wall? Each and every night I wished it was me making you come, not a fucking toy."



Goosebumps trickle down my arms as I suck in a breath. “I was single for over a decade before you moved in. I have needs; you can’t fault me for that.”

“You’re no longer single, pup. I’d happily bend you over and feast on your cunt right here on this table.” He pulls back, taking a sip of his whisky. I stifle a whimper, missing him being so close. “But you’re right, things have been moving quickly. The cunt devouring will have to wait.”

I can’t remember the last time I had a man’s face between my legs. Five, maybe seven years? He can’t actually be thinking about it; he’s having a laugh, likely sneaking one of my romance novels for inspiration. Still, I can’t help the undeniable heat pooling in my belly at the thought of him making me come with his tongue.

“I won’t touch you tonight,” he insists, “but I’d be lying to you and myself if I didn’t admit I want to wake up next to you. This morning was bloody torture knowing you were one wall away.”

After considering it for all of four seconds, I ask, “If I stay in your room, or you in mine, are you going to make a habit of us staying the night together?”

Lucas bites his lip to hide his smile. “If I have any say in it, you’ll be begging me to share a bed with you. Every. Single. Night. When we get home, you’re going to take a long, hot shower, vibrator or no vibrator, your choice. Then, you’ll change into comfortable pyjamas. Not the sexy ones you have, I want you to relax, even if it’s in those hideous black and white plaid ones you own.”

“That mouth of yours would make an arse jealous. They aren’t ugly!”

“They absolutely are. We’ll watch a movie, and you’ll fall asleep in my arms. It’ll be the best night of our lives, and you’ll miss resting your head on my chest all day tomorrow. I have my therapy call first thing in the morning, so I’ll try to not wake

you, and likely fail. You'll forgive me, and tomorrow night you'll ask me to stay with you again."

"You're going to ruin me for all other men, aren't you?"

"That's the plan, pup. I'm yours now. You're stuck with me."

### CHAPTER 7

#### LUCAS

I make a mess with the spare ribs, including a few unavoidable drops of sauce on my shirt. It makes Bridget laugh, and it's worth it to see my girl smile.

Through the rest of dinner, Bridget relaxes. It could be her cocktail, but considering I've seen her polish off half a bottle of wine before and still be stressed, I choose to believe it's her accepting everything that transpired over the past two days.

The ride home feels more like our normal banter than it has in days. I can't help wishing with all of my being that nothing will change when the season starts.

Except, it absolutely will.

I'll be gone all day during the week, then away more than I'm home on the weekends. I'll miss most of Gavin's matches, just as I did last year. I'll have leftovers for dinner Bridget insisted were extra, despite knowing she made enough for me. I'll miss her so fucking much. My heart will likely try its best to escape my chest the moment I see her after several days of passing each other in her kitchen...

Is this going to be our life? No, I refuse to accept it. We'll find a way to make it work. My career is coming to an end and we both know it. I was never supposed to be a hooker; my height is a disadvantage. I'm not built for it. If I don't constantly work on strengthening my neck and shoulders, a scrum could easily snap my neck. Still, I only have one, maybe two years left, then I'm all Bridget's.

As soon as we're home, it takes everything in me to not maul her like a wild animal. She's fragile—this is fragile. I'm a man of my word, and keep my promises... Even if every ounce of me is craving to touch her, kiss her, be in her space. I resist.

“I meant what I said, Bridge. Go get comfortable.”

She nods, biting her lip, and I want nothing more than to take it between my own teeth. All of this is proving to be more difficult than I anticipated. Turning on her heel, she saunters off to her bedroom, and I rush into mine. After a quick change into light grey joggers and nothing else, I make my way back to the couch, attempting the most nonchalant but seductive pose I can muster.

It's an epic fail, obvious to anyone who could walk in.

Should I wear a shirt?

Hurrying back to my bedroom, my second attempt isn't much better, but even without a shirt, at least I'm wearing underwear this time around. The shower is still running, and I can't help being a fucking creep listening in to hear if she's touching herself. I love and hate that she's not.

Several minutes later, she emerges in her atrocious black and white pyjama pants and a solid black tee that still hugs her curves beautifully. I sit up straighter but she stops before sitting beside me.

“All of the times you sat here without a shirt on, was it intentional?”

Her question takes me off-guard, but I admit, “Yes, but I was hoping to get a rise out of you and it never happened.”

Bridge smirks and folds her arms over her chest. “If you truly want a movie night,

you'll put a shirt on."

"If you're truly not affected by me, you'll take yours off," I counter.

"I never said I wasn't."

Touché. Bridget - 1.

Lucas - 0.

"It's a good thing you're not climbing on my lap to find out exactly how much you affect me."

Bridget looks away, attempting to hide the break in her stoic expression. She returns her gaze to me and asks, "What movie are we watching? Empire Strikes Back , again?"

"How can you beat 'I love you, I know?' You can't!" I insist, reaching for the remote.

Bridget takes a seat beside me, remaining rigid. The movie hasn't even begun and she blurts out, "Are you really not going to put a shirt on?"

"Am I distracting you, Bridget?" I chuckle, loving how easily she's flustered.

"No." She scoffs, but her voice is no less than an octave higher than normal, giving her away. "I'm not distracted."

"Shame, because I am. I don't care how many pieces of clothing you have on, I can't get the image of you riding my face out of my mind."

“Luc!” She playfully smacks my chest with the back of my hand, and her ring hits me with more force than I prepared for. The spot where the stone hit me stings and I stifle a groan, but it comes out sexier than I intended. Her throat bobs as she swallows hard, and her voice is laboured as she repeats my name as a whisper, “Luc.”

“Yes, pup?” This time, my purr is intentional.

Her hand travels lower, grazing my stomach. “We shouldn’t do anything. It could complicate all of it.”

“Nothing about how much I want you is complicated. I’m all in for whatever you’re up for but consider this a warning—if you touch my cock with that ring on your finger, you’re claiming me as yours.”

“Well, sorry to disappoint you. No one is being claimed tonight,” she teases, tucking into my side.

“I’m not disappointed.” I wrap my arm around Bridget, and her hand never leaves my stomach, no matter how much I desperately want her fingers to travel lower.

Keeping my abdominal muscles flexed for another thirty minutes is truly a feat my training staff would be proud of. Bridget couldn’t care less how toned I am, but I still feel as if I have something to prove. If she was anyone else, I’d have her on her back writhing under my tongue. Instead, I’m in a bullshit limbo between friend and fiancé, and I fucking hate it. I want her to crave me, and that requires more than dinner and a movie.

We’ve watched the series no less than a dozen times start to finish, with emphasis on episodes four through six. After the long weekend we’ve had, it’s no surprise both of us fall asleep on the couch. I wake to the last scene with Luke, Leia, and the bots watching the Millenium Falcon leave. As the credits begin to roll, I turn off the telly

then carry Bridget to bed. What I intend to be a sweet, romantic gesture goes horribly wrong as she startles in my arms and I nearly drop her.

Bridge grips me tighter and shrieks, “Luc! What are you doing?”

“I was bringing you to bed.” I chuckle and carefully set her on her feet. Keeping her body flush with mine, I quietly ask, “Is it all right if I stay with you?”

“Your bed is bigger than mine. You’ll be uncomfortable.”

“True.” I release Bridget to toss her over my shoulder. She lets out a full laugh and the sound makes my heart swell.

I have to be mindful of the narrow doorway but manage to bring her into my room without issue. Tossing her into the bed, her giggles cease. I’d give just about anything to spend the night with her soft, naked body tangled with mine.

Not tonight.

After we both brush our teeth and she takes her nightly medication—including her birth control pill and melatonin—we slide under the covers and I keep her close. With my arms wrapped around her, she rests her head on my chest, and we let out a collective, satisfied sigh. She fits perfectly tucked against me. I love this woman more than words could ever express, and I don’t know how I’ll manage a night without her after tonight.

I wake several hours later for my weekly group therapy call. When I was in Australia, it was the middle of the day, but being here in Ireland, I’m forced to be an early bird like Ronan. I put on a shirt and log on a few minutes before we’re scheduled to begin. Russ is already on video.

“G’day, mate.”

“Hey, Robinson. You weren’t in the group chat this weekend. How’s everything going?”

I keep my voice low to not wake Bridget in my room. I’d typically do the call from my bed, but the kitchen table will have to do tonight. “Sorry about that, it’s been busy and I don’t think Ronan would appreciate seeing my name appear on his phone.”

“Did you two have a lovers quarrel?” he teases, wiggling his eyebrow.

“Not exactly,” I reply carefully. “I’m marrying his sister.”

Russ is mid-sip of his coffee and nearly chokes. “What did you just say? Did I hear you correctly? You’re marrying his sister?”

“Yeah, mate, yeah.” I rub my hand down my face, not wanting to rehash the past weekend.

He’s about to say something when an additional square appears on the screen. My stomach drops, thinking it’s Ronan, but breathe a sigh of relief to see it’s Will.

“Will! I just saw the footage from the game. That was a nasty hit,” Russ offers. “Are you okay?”

He groans, “Fuck, my back is killing me. It’s only preseason. I shouldn’t be playing with these young fucking rooks.”

“What happened?” I ask, feeling like an arse for not knowing what my mate went through today.



“I was sacked by a fucking beast. The kid easily had over a hundred pounds on me; knocked the wind right out of my lungs.” Will adjusts in his seat and winces. “I’m getting too old for this shit.”

“Try it without padding,” I jest with a wink to lighten the mood.

“Fuck off, Luc,” he laughs. “Not all of us have thunder thighs and tree trunk torsos to work with.”

“As beautiful as that alliteration is, to be fair, if I played American football with men who had that kind of physical advantage, I’d need padding too.”

Vicky comes on the call and greets, “Good morning, gentlemen. Who would like to start today?”

“Where’s Ronan?” Russ asks, and though his question is directed to Vicky, it feels accusatory towards me.

She adjusts her glasses and replies, “He emailed that he would be unable to make it.”

Fuck, I hope it’s not because of me.

Will begins, talking about how he’s contemplating retirement. I can’t say I blame him. All of us are in our early thirties, but being in contact sports, it takes a toll on your body. He complains, yet again, about his team’s PR manager, and so far today’s session is a rinse and repeat of every other meeting we’ve had. I do my best to stay present, but I’m bloody exhausted and want nothing more than to climb back into bed with Bridget.

When Will is finished, Vicky moves on to Russ, who I’m pleased to admit has made great progress since we began these calls. For so long, he was in denial about an

altercation he had on the ice. Now, not only has he seemed to come to terms with it, he's been working hard to control his anger using healthy outlets.

Vicky directs her attention to me. "Lucas, I know you don't typically have anything new to share, but?—"

"He does this time," Russ snickers.

As much as I'd love to tell him to fuck off, Vicky doesn't like us using profanity... and also he's right. I take a deep breath and admit everything that's happened, from confessing how I feel about Bridget, to the not-so-fake marriage. Vicky remains quiet, taking notes and occasionally prompting me to continue. When I'm done with my story, Will's mouth is agape. Russ is smothering a smile, but his eyes are still twinkling through the screen.

Will takes a moment to work through everything I've shared then barks out a laugh. "I thought you were just friends with her. All this time, you were fucking his sister? No wonder he's not here."

Fuck, is he really avoiding me?

"I wasn't, we haven't," I insist. "Ronan's less than thrilled about everything, but I can't help how I feel about Bridget. He'll come around."

Vicky suggests I reach out to Ronan and says if I need to meet with her separately she's available. We wrap up our call and uneasiness settles in my gut as I close my laptop.

If I go back to bed, I'll have at least two more hours before I need to wake up and get ready for the day. I keep my pyjama pants on but remove my shirt, then slide into bed with Bridget. As I reach for her, I'm met with the smooth, soft skin of her hip, not her

shirt or pants. They must've slipped or adjusted while she was sleeping.

I tuck in behind her, and my chest is met with her bare back. I still, unsure what to make of it; Bridge definitely had clothes on when I took my video call. She glances over her shoulder, and her sweet lips are so close I could claim them.

“What are you up to, pup?”

### CHAPTER 8

brIDGET

We've had a rough weekend. I'm still processing everything, and I'm likely giving Lucas mixed signals, but while Lucas was on his call, my pyjamas made their way to his floor. I selfishly want to feel his chiselled, naked body pressed against mine. I can't remember the last time I felt the weight of a man on top of me, and I'm desperate for it.

I'm tired of talking it into the ground and questioning everything. Twisting in his arms to get closer, a feral groan rumbles in his chest as he asks again, "What are you up to, pup?"

"I was warm," I lie, and it earns me a playful smack on my arse. His hand lingers, keeping a fistful in his grip.

"Fuck, Bridge, I was trying to be a gentleman and not touch you."

"And now?"

Lucas rolls me onto my back, his hard length pressing against my centre. The smile in his voice is undeniable as he replies, "Now I'm going to make you scream my name louder than when you're fucking yourself thinking of me."

"You're quite confident considering you don't have fourteen settings."

Luc kisses my neck and chuckles against me. I feel the vibration everywhere. “I’m going to have so much fun with you.”

My fingers tangle in his hair as he kisses down my body, swirling his tongue around each of my pebbled nipples. Grazing his teeth against them, I can’t help the moans and whimpers escaping me. His mouth trails lower and my breath hitches as my legs are tossed over his shoulders.

“You don’t have to if you don’t— Oh, fuck .” I shudder on contact as he licks firm circles around my clit. He doesn’t stop until my back is arched and I’m gripping the sheets for dear life. I’m so close and he hasn’t even been inside me.

“That’s my girl, just like that,” Luc murmurs against me. “Come for me.” He nips at my clit and I shatter on command, dizzy with bliss as my orgasm crashes over me in waves. “Well, it seems we’ll need to try that again. I promised you’d scream my name, and I intend to deliver. Going to make a mess of this cunt before I’m through with you.”

No man has ever spoken to me like this. He’s rivalling characters from romance books I read with Nora, and part of me is wondering how much of this is Lucas or if he’s stolen lines from a hot billionaire romance or even an omegaverse. If he’s using unoriginal material, I may as well do the same. I search my memory of all the sexy things I’ve read for something sultry and seductive to say, but come up empty.

Maybe I should tell him I want him to fill me? No, I don’t think he has a breeding kink. Or I could suggest he fuck me hard and fast? Except, I don’t want him to, at least not tonight.

Brows pinched, he asks, “What’s wrong?”

“I’m trying to work out something,” I admit, though it’s not the full truth.

“Yeah? What’s that, pup?”

My head falls further into the pillow as I groan. “I can’t come up with something sexy to say.”

“Are you serious?” He laughs and moves up my body until his lips are a breath away from mine. In the dark, I can still make out his features, his wide smile is undeniable. “Do you know what would be so fucking hot? Tell me what you think about when you’re touching yourself.”

I gasp, feigning shock. “I can’t tell you that.”

“Close your eyes.” I do and his warm breath tickles my neck as he whispers, “Tell me, Bridget.”

“Don’t you dare laugh.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it.”

As he peppers sweet kisses on my neck and shoulder, I muster all of the courage of the universe to tell him, “You come home late after a match, freshly showered but the light hint of sweat still lingers, even after you were out celebrating with your mates. I’m already in bed and you slide in next to me. You think it’s yours, but when you realise you’re in my bed, you don’t leave.”

There’s a dip in the mattress and my eyes fly wide. Worry courses through me with the thought he might leave. As my vision adjusts to the dark, I squint to find Lucas stripping naked, then prowling towards me on the bed. “Eyes closed. Keep going.”

I stumble over my words as I continue, “You’d tell me I need to be quiet.” Lucas turns me onto my side and settles behind me, kissing my shoulder. “You fuck me, just

like this, playing with my clit.”

Lucas hikes my leg over his opening me for him. His hand wanders down my body until he’s between my legs, gently stroking my sensitive clit. “Like this?” I let out an unintelligible sound in agreement. “Do you want my cock inside you?”

“Yes,” I whimper. “Please.”

He lines himself up and presses in, only an inch. “Are you going to be my good girl and stay quiet while I claim this tight cunt as mine?”

Lucas slides in until he’s fully seated inside me. It takes me a moment to adjust to the stretch, but it feels incredible. He doesn’t move, increasing the pace and pressure on my clit. I wind tighter and tighter, my second orgasm almost in reach.

“All this time, I could’ve been touching you like this.” He nips at my earlobe and I shiver. “So fucking perfect, your cunt was made for me, pup.”

His cock swells inside me, and I whisper into the darkness, “I need more.”

“So greedy.” He chuckles darkly and playfully bites my shoulder. “Where do you want me to come? Deep inside you? Down your throat? Or do you need me to christen your arse tonight?”

“All of it.”

“I’m a talented man, but even I have my limits before we need to get up for the day. Time isn’t on our side.” Thrusting impossibly deeper, I cry out, and he reminds me, “Stay quiet for me, pup. Can’t have the neighbours hearing your sweet moans, those are just for me.”

Luc begins rocking in and out of me at an agonizingly slow pace, yet each time he pushes inside me is more delicious than the last. I'm right on the edge. So close, almost... Fuck. He pulls out and flips me onto my back. Guiding his thick cock back inside me, he's able to get deeper. My moans are swallowed by his slow, languid kisses I feel all the way to my toes. I wrap my arms around him, gripping his back, needing him closer. There's an indescribable ache in my chest, as if his soul is tethering to mine. It only takes mere minutes until I'm moaning his name into his mouth, my orgasm barrelling through me. Truly, it wasn't on purpose, habit has me calling out for him every time I come.

"Such a good fucking girl, making a mess all over my cock." He thrusts a few more times, short and shallow as my cunt pulses around him, and he finds his own release. "Fuck, Bridge, that was... Fuck."

"Yeah," I chuckle.

He kisses me softly and whispers against my lips, "You're incredible."

Lucas carefully pulls out of me and sits back on his heels. My words escape me without thinking, "Need me to clean that up with my mouth?" Apparently, in my orgasm haze, I'm able to come up with something sensual to say. I sit up, tucking my legs under me, and reach for him, lowering my mouth to his cock before he can protest. He's still hard and twitches against my tongue as I lick him clean.

Gliding his hand into my hair, he tugs me off him, and in an instant, his lips are in mine. He growls into my mouth, "I warned you, pup." As we break apart, he adds, "I've always been yours, but now that I've tasted you and my cum is dripping down your thighs... you're mine."



### CHAPTER 9

#### LUCAS

#### ONE MONTH LATER

The league, my club, and Irish immigration were all satisfied with our marriage license. I've loved Bridget for too long to put on a pretend wedding and she insisted we only go through a civil ceremony with the two of us... and Gavin, of course. Once the season is over, I'll speak my vows in front of the rest of our family and friends, giving her the wedding she deserves.

It's my first match of the season and I'm both excited and nervous. Seven minutes in, Murphy is out on a yellow card, Gibson is a fucking beast, and we've been flirting with the try line twice already. The only thing missing is Bridget and Gav watching. He has his match today and I'm distracted wondering how he's doing.

It's wet and windy, more than any of us expected, and as soon as the ball's on the floor, it's hard to control. Our defence is missing tackles, sliding on the wet pitch. It's going to be a long fucking match. Thankfully, after a steady scrum, Williams sneaks away and slips through a gap, completely untouched for the second try of the match.

Our luck runs out and the rest of the match is bloody miserable as the wind picks up and light rain whips in our faces. With only four minutes left and up thirty to fifteen, I allow myself to slow down. As Will would say, "I'm getting too old for this shit." My body isn't what it used to be, and I'm now wondering how the hell I'll play for another year. The thought of two more seasons feels excessive at the moment. It's

best to reserve what little energy I have left, especially since I have Bridget all to myself tonight.

Unfortunately, slowing down also leads to mistakes. The slippery pitch has been a host for injuries today. I'm tossed to the ground by their blindside flanker—aptly named at the moment—and my ankle twists. It doesn't feel broken, but I won't be able to walk on it for a while.

The medics help me off the pitch and I'm able to get in with the team doctor quickly. After a quick assessment, she's confirmed it's a severe sprain, not broken. I breathe a sigh of relief, but only for a moment. It'll take weeks to heal, benching me for a good portion of the season. I'll need physical therapy, and all I can hope is I won't be released from my contract. Or worse, sent back to Brisbane in a trade. I've worked too hard to stay here with Bridget for it to be taken away because of a bloody ankle sprain.

I'm packing my bag in the changing room, about to call Bridget, when I notice texts from a contact I should've blocked ages ago.

James

Saw what happened.

Are you all right?

I miss you.

James was part of the reason I was so eager to leave Brisbane. I was in love with him. We were living together and I saw myself spending the rest of my life with him... until he fucked my mate. My heart shattered into a million pieces. Moving to the other side of the world felt like the best way to lick my wounds.

And then I met Bridget.

The love I have for my wife is a million times stronger than anything I felt for James. Part of me wants to be petty and reply with something that will hurt him. Thumbs poised to type, I resist. There's no point in making his life more miserable than it already is.

When I began group therapy, I kept to myself for the most part. Many of the various sports leagues have required therapy of their players and I was merely checking a box by attending. As I became comfortable with Ronan, Russ, and Will, I eventually opened up to them about the break up and betrayal. My mates became more like brothers, supportive and accepting. Time healed my broken heart, but therapy helped me work through the anger and hurt. I smile at the progress I've made since meeting them.

"Someone must be feeling better," Bridget jests, startling me. I drop my phone and it skitters across the floor. She picks it up and does a double take before holding it out to me. "Who's James?"

"It's not what it looks like," I defend, despite how it makes me sound incredibly guilty. "He's my ex, but I swear to you, I thought I blocked him."

Bridget chews on her lip and asks, "James, the one who cheated on you? You're still talking to him?"

"Come here." She sighs, cautiously closing the distance until she's standing between my legs. I grip her hips to guide her the last few inches, refusing to let go. "Check the thread. When was the last time I spoke to him? Check my call records if you need. I'm yours, pup. Only yours."

She clicks a button on the side of my phone to darken the screen. "I believe you. I'm

sorry if I sounded jealous or suspicious, it's just..." Her eyes close, pain marring her features as she shakes her head.

"No. Bridget, look at me." She does, and her eyes are glassy. It rips at my soul. "Your heart is so fucking beautiful. You trust me with it, making me the luckiest man in the world. I don't take that for granted and I'd never do anything to hurt you. If you think for one moment I'd dare to talk to or even look at another person, when I have the most incredible one I've ever known right in front of me, then it's me who should be apologising. I hate that you have a shred of doubt." I take the phone from her and properly block his number.

"Luc," she sighs, resting her hands on my shoulders. "You don't need to do that."

"Yes, I do. I thought I already had. I wasn't smiling at the text when you came in, I was thinking about how I've grown over the past few years while in therapy with my mates."

Bridget's lip tilts on one side. "If you hadn't met my brother in therapy, I wouldn't be your wife."

"Beginning therapy with them was the best decision of my life, other than marrying you." I set my phone aside and pull her to me, wrapping my arms around her. "The staff shouldn't allow my gorgeous wife in here when everyone else is gone. It's too tempting to rip off your jeans and?—"

"I'm not letting you fuck me in the changing room, Luc." She laughs and it's the lightest I've felt since she walked in.

"Fair enough. Where's Gavin? How was the match?"

"They won, Leo scored the winning goal. Gav is staying the night at their house

tonight. But how are you? How's your leg?"

"Not good," I groan. "Nasty ankle sprain, I have to keep off it for weeks."

"Fuck, Luc. I'm so sorry. What does that mean for your contract?"

"I don't know yet. But even if they release me, I'm not going anywhere. I promise."

Two weeks and no less than a hundred angry phone calls later, I'm forced to break my promise to the love of my life.

### CHAPTER 10

#### brIDGET

A small part of me knew it was a possibility, but seeing Lucas go hurt more than I ever thought it would. I don't blame his club for trading him back to Brisbane; they need a hooker who isn't warming a bench. My heart shattered into a million pieces the morning he boarded his plane for Australia, and for the past few days, it's taken everything in me to not burst into tears. Trying to remain strong for Gavin is more difficult as each day passes.

Nora was kind enough to pick up Gav from school and drop him at home this week. The moment they're here, the boys scurry off to the bedroom. Once they're out of earshot, I allow myself to fall apart.

"Bridge," Nora sighs, bringing me in for a warm hug.

Doing my best to stifle my sobs, I admit, "I miss him, so fucking much, Nor."

"You can go see him," she offers. "Gavin can stay with Ronan and me. We have the space and Leo would be thrilled."

"What good would I do? Luc is living on the other side of the world for at least a year. It's better if I stay here and forget he ever came to Cork."

Nora releases me and laughs. "He's your husband. It's a little hard to forget him."

“True.” I chuckle, wiping my nose on the sleeve of my shirt. I could never forget him, even if we weren’t married.

“You’re miserable. Go visit your husband. Lucas isn’t able to play yet, and though Ronan isn’t supposed to share conversations from therapy, he did tell me Luc’s bloody miserable without you. Ronan’s still a little upset about you and Luc, but I think it’s mostly because he wants to walk you down the aisle and hasn’t had the chance yet. Also, seeing Lucas broken hearted softened him a bit.”

“Ronan has no room to be angry about anything,” I huff. “He knew you dated his goalie when you were younger, but he still pursued you. This is no different. Lucas knew who I was the day he stepped foot in Cork. It isn’t as if we slept together and he found out I was his mate’s sister after the fact.”

“I know, the hypocrisy is ridiculous, but I really feel he’s come around to all of it. Lucas is a good man, and it’s clear he wasn’t using you.”

I blow out a long breath and nod. “Maybe a quick trip?”

“There’s nothing quick about a full day of travel in each direction,” she deadpans.

I check my watch and it’s about time to eat before Gav’s football practice. Nora and Leo stay for a quick dinner and I’m grateful my husband’s name doesn’t come up again. We get the boys to practice and once we’re back home I sit Gavin down for a chat.

“I’m thinking of visiting Lucas,” I begin.

“When are we going?” he asks excitedly, shifting in his seat. “I miss him.”

“Oh, I was thinking of going by myself. Nora offered to have you stay with them

while I go.”

“No. I think we should move.”

“What?” I bark out a laugh. We have been trying to move for months, but the housing market hasn’t been in our favour... and then Lucas left. “I don’t think it’s the right time.”

“Not here. We should be where Lucas is.” He says it so matter-of-factly, he’s clearly given this some thought.

“You’d want to move away from your friends, from school, from family?”

“Lucas is our family too. He tried to stay. He would’ve stayed. Cork didn’t want him, but you do. And so do I.”

I pull Gav in for a tight hug, willing myself to not cry. My brilliant son is smarter than I am most days and if he’s up for a big change, then so am I. With nothing standing in our way, I book two one-way tickets to Brisbane for three weeks from today.

After tossing and turning in bed for several hours, I can’t sleep. A swirl of excitement and nervous energy swirls within me. It’s almost one in the afternoon for Lucas, and he’ll likely be training or in physical therapy. A little text he’ll read later couldn’t hurt.

I wish you were here. My vibrator is almost dead.

Lucas

Such a liar. You always have three fully charged. Drop the bullet and slip the thick



one in your cunt. Then tell me how it feels.

I meant it as a joke, but at his suggestion I pull out my vibrator with entirely too many settings. I only use the bzzzzzz setting, despite trying all of them at one point or another. The bzzz bzzz bzzz doesn't do it for me. After a quick dollop of lube, I slip my vibrator between my legs, pressing it fully inside me but not turning it on.

Can you call me?

I have five minutes, pup. Use them wisely.

I call him and he picks up on the first ring. "Is my little wife going to be quiet for me?"

"Yes," I whisper, loving him calling me that a little too much.

"That's my girl. Turn it on." I do and he groans as he hears the vibration through the phone. "Pull it out slowly, then roughly thrust it back inside you. Just like that, Bridge. Let me hear how much you wish your husband was filling you."

I cheat, not fucking myself the way he would. Until he has me bent over and gripping the headboard as if my life depended on it, I torture myself with long, slow thrusts into my cunt. "Keep talking," I whimper, needing his words to take me over the edge.

"I'd fuck you harder than that, pup. Let me hear your sweet moans that are only for me... That's it, keep going. Who does that delicious cunt belong to?"

"You," I admit quietly into the darkness.

"That's right. You're mine, Bridget."

I increase the level of my vibe and within minutes I come for him, soaking my sheets and toy. I struggle to catch my breath and my heart won't stop racing. We've never had phone sex before tonight; I've been too ashamed to ask for it. After this call, I don't think I could go another day without hearing him talk me through an orgasm.

"I love you, pup," he admits softly and it pierces my heart.

"I love you too... And not only because you made me come."

Lucas lets out a full laugh. "I'll call you in a few hours when you wake up. Be my good girl and get some sleep." We hang up and I sleep better than any other night since he left.

Wanting to surprise Lucas, Gavin and I arrive in Brisbane undetected. I talk to Luc daily, and keeping this secret has been one of the hardest things I've ever done. After nearly thirty hours of travel, Gavin and I are exhausted. It's after midnight, and even though Luc's probably asleep, I try calling him before I check into the hotel.

"Hey, pup," he answers, his voice low and gravely.

"Sorry if I woke you. I always mess up the time difference."

"It doesn't matter, you can always call me." He groans and there is a rustling of fabric as if he's sitting up in bed.

"I was wondering if you could remind me what time your match is tomorrow?" It's an awful excuse to call him because I could easily look it up.

"Tomorrow night, so you'll have to wake up early to watch."

"Think you can get me tickets? Two, actually."

Lucas switches to video and his brows are pinched. “Where are you?”

I glance behind me to the luggage carousel. “The airport.”

“We’re in Australia!” Gavin announces, popping into frame of the call. He then attempts what has to be the worst Australian accent I’ve ever heard. “Here for the shrimp on the barbie and?—”

“You’re joking?” Lucas laughs and slides out of bed, dropping the phone on what seems to be a dresser or desk. When he picks it up again, he’s now wearing a shirt and a smile that could light up the night sky. “Bridge, are you messing with me? Are you both really here?” He’s on the move but it’s hard to tell exactly where he is going with how dark it is.

“Yes, we’re really here. We’re going to check in at a hotel and?—”

“No. Stay right there. I’m on my way.”

We hang up and thirty minutes later he pulls up to the curb in his black sports car, which is more suited for two passengers, not three. He gets out, the car still running and door wide open, and rushes over to us. The moment I’m in his arms, I’m finally home for the first time since he left. He pulls Gavin into our embrace, and I’m unable to keep myself from crying.

“I missed you so much, pup.”

“We missed you too,” I sigh, holding him tighter.

A security officer approaches to tell us we need to move our vehicle. Lucas lets go of us and a tear leaves the corner of his eye. As I wipe it away, he leans into my touch. “I love you, both of you. Why didn’t you tell me you were coming? How long are

you here for?”

I glance to Gavin, then back to Lucas. “I bought us one-way tickets. We’re here as long as you are.”

“Are you serious? You’re moving here?”

“Move along, or you’ll be towed,” the security officer chimes in.

“Right, sorry, mate.” Lucas puts our luggage in the boot, then adjusts the passenger seat for Gavin to climb in. He barely fits but doesn’t complain. “Sorry, Gav, it’ll be a tight squeeze but we’ll be home soon. I’ll buy a new car in the morning for you and your mum to use and it will have more room.”

Lucas moves the seat back to the original position and I slide in. He rounds the car and once he’s inside he laughs to himself, shaking his head. Keeping his hand in mine, we drive to his house and as soon as we’re inside, he shows Gavin to the spare room. It’s bare, with only a bed, vanity, and plain navy walls.

“You’re welcome to decorate it however you like, and we can order whatever you need until we get your things from Ireland delivered,” Lucas insists, then gestures to the attached bathroom. “That one is yours, and there’s a smaller one down the hall too.”

“It’s late, we should all get a good night’s sleep. Especially you.” I poke at Lucas’ chest. “You have a big match tomorrow.” Even with him benched due to his injury, I don’t want to be the reason he’s nodding off in the middle of the match.

“Yes, Mum,” he teases, then tells Gav, “If you need anything, let me know.”

Gavin rocks back on his heels. “Thanks. Were you surprised?”

“Yeah, and it was the best surprise I’ve had in a long time.”

We leave Gavin to shower and change for bed. Once we’re in his bedroom, Lucas sighs, pulling me into his arms. “You’re really here? Really moving?”

“You didn’t think you could get rid of your wife that easily, did you?”

“My wife. Fuck, I love the sound of it each time you say it. Let’s get to bed, it’s been far too long since I’ve tasted you. Can you be quiet, pup?”

I lightly lick my lip and reply, “I don’t know, why don’t we find out?”

### CHAPTER 11

#### LUCAS

She's here. Bridget, my wife, my whole fucking world. She's. Here.

My soul has felt as if it was ripped in two, with one half of it remaining in Ireland when I left. Having Bridget in front of me doesn't feel real; I have to pinch myself to ensure it's not a dream. I've had a lump in my throat, willing back tears from the moment she confirmed she was at the airport. As much as I'd love to do more than make her come on my tongue, she needs to rest. We both do. I've spent too many sleepless nights without her. Holding her is enough, even if my cock protests.

My ankle is almost healed, but I am still prohibited from doing anything more than warm-ups. I'd give just about anything to have a doctor sign off, allowing me to play. Bridget and Gavin are watching me today, and I hate that I'm stuck beside my coach with a bloody headset when I could be on the pitch.

Fifteen minutes into the match, I glance over to Bridget and Gav, only to find an all too familiar face behind them. James wasn't there before, maybe he was late, but he's the last person on the planet I'd want to see. My phone is in my duffle, and I'm kicking myself for not having it on me. I can't warn Bridget, though he can't know who she is unless...

Fuck, is he stalking me?

I only last four minutes before I can't take it any longer, asking to be dismissed. I

rush off the pitch to the changing room to retrieve my phone, and send off a text to Bridget.

I promise I didn't invite him.

Bridget

What are you talking about?

The man directly behind you. I'm sorry.

I don't understand. Everyone behind us has been nothing but kind to Gav and me. Do you know them?

One is James. I don't know if he is there on purpose, or if I just have the worst fucking luck. I'm so sorry. I promise I didn't ask him to come.

Several minutes pass and she doesn't respond. I pocket my phone and rush back to the pitch. Bridget and Gav aren't seated, and James has a smug smirk I can still spot from here. There's little doubt in my mind he's up to something, and all I can see is red.

My phone vibrates and I eagerly check it, not caring if it'll get me in trouble.

I don't feel comfortable watching the rest of the match with him behind us. He seems harmless, but it's best to be safe.

I'm getting concessions with Gav. Call me when you're ready and we'll leave.

As I'm typing my reply, my phone is snatched out of my hand by one of the assistant coaches and I'm reprimanded like a child, told I won't have it back until the end of

the match. With no way of contacting Bridget, my anxiety surges. I risk a glance back at the seats Bridge and Gavin were in. James is also gone and my heart rate spikes. If anything happened to them, I'd never forgive myself.

Cheers erupt around me as Jamison sneaks in another try. I can't focus on any of it. The coach who has my phone is strategising with a player as my heart is thumping wildly in my chest.

"I have to go," I tell Coach Richards mid-celebration. "Family emergency." I don't wait for his reply and march over to the coach with my phone, demanding he hand it over. I trade him for my headset and rush off the pitch to find Bridget. I try calling, but she doesn't answer. She mentioned concessions and my hope is she's in line or eating.

I breathe a sigh of relief finding her and Gav having what appear to be sliders or small sanga. They're laughing, and as I make my way to them, a hand clamps on my shoulder.

"Lucas." James' voice has anger instantly coursing through me. I quickly turn and brush his hand away. "Shame you aren't playing, the match would've been more enjoyable." His gaze rakes my body, landing on my thighs. I'm wearing athletic pants, but I feel fucking naked.

My jaw clenched, I growl, "Why are you here?"

"I heard you were married and had to see for myself how serious it was.

My suspicions were correct, and I hate that I was right. Who knows how long he's been looking into me or Bridget. Fuck, and Gavin? This ends now. "Stay away from me and my family. If I find out you've been in contact with my wife or stepson, a restraining order will be the least of your worries."



I push past him, not allowing him to get a word in. He calls after me, getting Bridget's attention. The moment I reach them, I pull them into my arms, feeling like a failure for not protecting them, even if Bridget can absolutely protect herself.

"Luc, what's going on?"

"We're going home," I reply flatly. "And then we're finding a new place to live or moving back to Cork. I don't care about my contract. I'll pay my way out of it if I need to. And we're getting married, the right way."

"What?" She laughs but I don't release them. "Is this about your ex? Lucas, we just flew to the other side of the world to be with you. There's no reason to run from whatever you're worried about... But I'm not opposed to a real wedding."

"If you don't play rugby, are you going to do what Uncle Ronan does and coach?" Gavin asks, surprising me with his question.

"I don't know," I reply honestly. I finally let them go but wrap an arm around each of their shoulders and lead them towards the exit.

There are cheers echoing all around us and I stop to check what has everyone so excited. Our winger brought the score to twenty-ten.

Gav gestures to the pitch with his slider still in his hand. "Can we watch the rest of the match?"

I glance around and James is nowhere to be found. Gav deserves to watch the remainder of his first Union match in Australia, and I need to find a way. Not wanting to risk returning to their seats, we make our way to guest relations where I purchase membership for Bridget and Gavin. There's a section exclusive to members that includes a private dining area. If I haven't caused too much trouble with my club, I'll

be playing in a few weeks, and be able to relax knowing they're safe.

We watch the rest of the match, and it's another Brisbane win. It's bittersweet watching when I should be playing. I collect my things from the changing room and smooth everything over with my coaches. After explaining my situation, I'm grateful they are understanding. They've assured me they'll look into safety protocols for the club members to ensure James doesn't get anywhere near my wife and Gav.

Once we're home, Gavin's exhausted and insists he needs to rest before we eat dinner. I have no idea what we'll make and will likely need to order out. My adrenaline crash is hitting me hard, and after a quick shower, I follow Gavin's lead and take a nap. Bridget joins me, curling into my side, resting her head on my chest.

I'm half-asleep when her hand wanders lower until she's toying with the waistband of my shorts. My eyes fly wide and I pull her tighter into me as I tease, "What are you up to, pup?"

"Shh. Can you be quiet for me?"

Sliding her hand into my pants, she takes out my cock. I can't help the groan that escapes me. She begins long strokes up and down my shaft, keeping her grip tight. I've missed her hands on me and allow myself to selfishly enjoy her touching me. "Bloody hell, Bridge. That feels amazing."

"When you were in the shower, I put my plug in my arse."

"What?" It comes out louder than I intended and I lower my voice. "Since when do you have an anal plug?"

"I bought it online. Actually, the first one I bought was too big and I had to buy a second that was a little smaller."

“Fuck, do you have any idea how hot that is?” She grips my cock tighter and I moan. “That’s it. You’ve had your fun. Pants off, Mrs. Robinson, I’m filling all of your holes tonight.”

Bridget releases my cock and strips out of her clothes as I remove my pants and boxer briefs. She’s so damn beautiful, a fucking vision. I pull her on top of me and she straddles my lap, with her wet cunt pressed against my now incredibly hard cock. I have all night to worship her the way she deserves, but I’m desperate to be inside her, to feel her walls flutter around me as she comes.

I grip the front of her throat and bring her lips to mine. As much as I love spending time with her—naked or not—I’ve missed kissing her whenever I want the most. She slides her warm pussy up and down my shaft, and while part of me wants to toss her onto her back and drive into her until we’re both spent, I let her tease and torture me.

Precum coats the head of my cock, and we’re already making a mess even without me being inside her. She puts me out of my misery, reaching between us to grip my cock and guide me inside her. I savour each blissful inch entering her. Our kisses aren’t rushed, and I don’t think I’ve ever felt so close to someone as I do with Bridget.

As she rolls her hips, she whimpers into my mouth, “I missed you, Luc.”

“Show me how much.”

Bridget sits up, hands pressed on my chest, and I can’t help admiring her incredible body. I run my hands over her soft curves, loving the feel of her skin beneath my fingers. Having her like this is almost too much and I’m fighting back the urge to come.

As she continues to ride me, I swipe my thumb across her bottom lip and command,

“Open.” She does and I slip my thumb into her mouth. She instinctively closes her lips around it, teasing the pad with her tongue. “Get it nice and wet for me. Just like that.” I tug on her jaw to open for me then reach between her legs to play with her clit. Her head falls back as soft whimpers pass her lips. “That’s it, pup. Show me who I belong to.”

I hold on as long as I can but the moment she comes, strangling my cock, it’s my undoing. She rocks onto me, keeping me deep inside her as she rides out her orgasm, taking every last drop of my own release. My heart is pounding so damn loud, it’s ringing in my ears. Pulling her to me, I wrap my arms around her and refuse to let go.

While I have all night to bring her pleasure, it’s not enough. I lift her off my cock and pull her up my body until her glistening cunt is hovering over my mouth. Keeping a firm grip of her thighs, she settles onto my face, and I lick, suck, and tease her clit with light flicks of my tongue. I couldn’t care less that she tastes like a mix of the two of us, devouring her until her legs are shaking and her second orgasm draws out her whimpers. I slowly lap at her until her breathing returns to normal.

I help Bridget dismount off my face, then carry her to the bathroom bridal-style. There’s a pang in my chest that we never had a real wedding or a honeymoon. She deserves both, where we can celebrate with everyone we love. I don’t care when or where it is, I want to shout to the world that she’s mine.

“I can walk, Luc,” she protests, but I don’t set her down until we’re in front of the shower.

“I want to marry you,” I admit, still stuck in my own head.

“We are married.”

“On paper, you’re my wife, but I want a real wedding with a proper honeymoon. I

also want to have a serious discussion about adopting Gavin, but that conversation needs to wait until we're no longer naked."

Bridget reaches to cup my cheek, searching my eyes with pinched brows. "Where is this coming from?"

I turn on the shower and reply with a sigh, "I love you, so fucking much. I hated every moment I was here while you were still in Cork." I pull her hand to my lips and kiss her palm. "My contract is up at the end of the year, with a possible one-year extension. After that, I'll likely retire. We can move back if you'd like, but I want to be wherever you are. You and Gav are everything to me, and I want our marriage to be more than a legal document, to speak our vows to each other."

"Only if you sneak Star Wars quotes into your vows," she teases. "Maybe a 'do or do not, there is no try.'"

I smack her arse, making her chuckle. "Fuckin' brat. Just for that, I'm going to take out your plug and fill your arse with something significantly bigger."

"You better," she sings, lifting onto her toes to kiss me. "I love you."

If she wants movie quotes as vows, then that's what she'll get. I smile against her lips and whisper, "I know, pup, I know."

### SIX MONTHS LATER

My move to Brisbane was impulsive. The only research I did was of schools for Gav. Everything else, I figured I would rely on Lucas. So much is different here, it's taken time for Gavin and me to adjust.

Lucas' injury was unfortunately career ending. He wasn't able to be a proper hooker, struggling during scrum, and his ankle still causes him pain. The stubborn arse refuses to play any other position. Thankfully, he was able to finish out the season, but they released him from his contract after his last match. He had dreams of playing in the Olympics, if only to fuck with my brother who played in the World Cup. It breaks my heart he won't have his chance.

Luc has been offered various coaching positions and hasn't accepted one yet. We're still deciding if we are moving back to Cork or staying here in Australia. Gavin loves it here, and there's no harm in staying for a few more years until he's off to university.

Our wedding took longer to plan than I expected, but I was able to hire an incredible coordinator, Sage Winters, who is based in the United States. She flew across the Pacific three times before our big day to ensure everything was perfect. It took six months to properly plan, but everyone we love is here to celebrate with us today.

Gavin is getting dressed with Luc and Ronan. Choosing my bridesmaids proved to be difficult, and I'm only having Nora and Gav standing up with me. I don't have many close girlfriends, especially ones who would fly across the world to see me. I also didn't have a chance to connect with the girlfriends or wives of his rugby mates here

in Brisbane, and kept to myself in the member suite for the matches most of the time.

All of the people we love are in attendance; even my brother, Jeremy, is here. Luc's friends, Will and Russ, brought their girlfriends, and I should really try to get to know them better. While the boys have always been great at staying in touch outside of therapy, the time difference makes it difficult for me to reach out. This year, I vow to do better.

Once I'm dressed, Sage gives me a rundown of the ceremony, but I'm only half-listening, twisting my ring around my finger. She places her hand over mine to cease my fidgeting. "It's normal to be nervous. You've been married all this time, but wedding jitters are to be expected. Take a few deep breaths with me." I do, and Nora takes my hand to join us with exaggerated breaths. She isn't mocking me, but it's funny all the same. "Okay, are we ready?"

I nod and we leave the bridal suite. The ceremony is on a private beach Lucas paid entirely too much for us to reserve. I take Ronan's arm and he leads me to the rows of chairs where our family is waiting.

"He's a good man, Bridge, but if he ever does anything to hurt you or Gavin, I will absolutely end him," my brother teases, nudging my shoulder.

The moment Lucas comes into view, time stops and my heart leaps out of my chest. He's entirely too handsome, filling out his tuxedo perfectly. I can't help admiring his strong shoulders and muscular thighs. With all eyes on me, I keep my gaze focused on him until I'm down the small, sandy aisle. I only make it a few steps before he's rushing to me. He doesn't stop until he's cupping my cheeks and kissing me.

"For fuck's sake, Robinson, you couldn't handle two more minutes?" Ronan groans with no malice behind it, and finishes strutting down the aisle.

Our friends laugh, and even find myself chuckling against his lips. "Luc, I think

you're supposed to wait until we say 'I do.'”

“I don't care.” He takes my hand and leads me the rest of the way to the officiant. While they begin the ceremony, Luc whispers, “You are my chosen one.” I can't tell if it's a quote or not, but it feels honest all the same. I can't help my smile and stifle a small laugh as he squeezes my hand tighter. It may have taken us a long time to get here, but the love we share is once in a lifetime, worth every obstacle we've overcome. “I love you, pup.”

“I know,” I whisper back, and he interrupts the ceremony to kiss me.

In this life and the next, he'll be mine, and I can't wait to spend forever with him.