

Chapter Three - A Long-Overdue Conversation

Harrod

I sat outside on the stairs of the main entrance, waiting for dad to come home. Gabe, the butler, had retired to his quarters. I was alone in the whole house, as I usually was, but since the sleep terrors the house felt small. I longed to be outside, to be free, although I didn't know what freedom meant for people like us. The guys in the black suits had been there since I opened my eyes, and I doubted they would leave before I closed them forever. They were one of the perks of having the Director of Central Intelligence Agency for a dad, and a billionaire oil tycoon for a grandfather.

I watched the sky change color as the sun set behind my back. Blue at first, then motley hues of orange, pink, red, purple and finally black. I gazed at the void above me until tiny specks of starlight appeared. I wondered what our house looked like from up there, decked out in red and white lights that cost a fortune to keep on, and would be enjoyed by no one except the people living under this roof. I wanted to ask dad so many questions, and not just those relating to my 'condition'. I just wanted, for once, to be able to have some sort of normalcy in my life.

I knew my dad was coming when I saw ten headlights heading this way from afar. The road was long and winding, but it only headed one way — to my home. There was a security check post at the far end of the road, and the next one was at the gates. As he arrived, the other cars headed toward the parking lot while his car crawled slowly to the front of the stairs.

He was talking on the phone when he stepped out of his car, but clicked his phone shut as soon as he saw me.

“Harrod,” he said, arms opening wide.

“Dad,” I said, getting up reluctantly.

He hugged me. We hadn't seen each other for five days.

“I heard about your visit to the therapist. Why didn't you tell me?”

“It’s nothing,” I said.

“Sleep terrors and panic attacks are not nothing. Anyway, I am your father, Harrod,” he said, in that bossy tone of his. “When something like this happens, you should talk to me first.”

“Who told you that? That was confidential!”

He gave me a look, a look I knew all too well. It spoke of things that shouldn’t be spoken of. It told me that I know better than to ask. I did know better, but I’d like some privacy.

“Come with me,” he said. “I want to hear all about it.”

It wasn’t like him to be so interested in mental health problems all of a sudden. He was very dismissive usually, apathetic about my life and problems, always giving me the same look. Hell, he never even asked me to go hunting with him, although he went every month on the farmlands my grandfather lived on. After retiring, my grandfather had taken up residence in the lands that had been in our family for generations. I remembered asking my dad to take me with him when I was young, but he had refused. I knew better than to ask again.

I followed him into his study, a room where he usually spent his time alone. He poured himself a drink, set up the chess table, opened the window and told me to take a seat. A small brightly decorated Christmas tree stood there as well. It was different than the one in our main lobby. This one had been designed by some French designer.

“Always better with fresh air, no?” he mused to himself, before turning to me. “So, about this visit. Why did you lie to the doctor?”

“Isn’t that what you told me to do?”

“I did. Good, that’s private stuff. But I think it’s finally happening.”

“What is?”

“We’ll get to that. First, tell me about the dreams.”

“They are nothing, really,” I began. “I see these mountains full of snow, tall trees, giant feral dogs...it's stupid stuff. They started with the mountains. The next dream zoomed in a bit, and then there were trees, then dogs, then the moon.”

“They weren’t dogs, they were wolves,” he corrected me, almost offended. “What does the moon do, does it change or anything?”

“No,” I said. “It’s a full moon, and it’s always full. But I think I am trapped in the body of a dog in the dreams, looking at the moon, barking or crying with the other dogs. Sometimes I see eggs hatching, wombs, veins...something trying to break free.”

“Go on,” he said. Honestly, I was surprised he was even listening to me talk about my dreams, but his eyes were fixed on me intently.

“That’s about it,” I told him. “You’ve read the rest, or heard it, or whatever.”

“Harrod, what I am about to tell you won’t be easy to digest, but I need you to man up and listen to me. You will have questions, but I need you to understand. Take your time to process everything.”

I just nodded. My dad has been possessed.

“Remember what your mother said?”

“Yeah, all those delusions she had,” I said.

“They weren’t delusions. She was telling the truth.”

Chapter Four - The Cat's Curiosity

Siobhan

When I got home that day, I found Harrod on Facebook. Imagine my disappointment on finding out that his profile was completely private, save for the photo. It was a nice picture, though. He stood next to a couple of older men at some sort of official dinner, the type that my mom goes to. I never get to go with her, not that I want to.

The next day, when he didn't show up to class for the project, I got curious. I decided to give him a visit. I could say it was for the project or that I was worried about his health. I got his number and address from one of his friends, Jacob, when I found him alone. I know, I know I said I wouldn't, but the project thing is not entirely an excuse. I had a GPA to worry about if I were to get somewhere in life.

It was almost evening when I reached home. For some reason, I wanted to look good. It's not that I have a crush or anything on Harrod — I just wanted to look good in that way girls want to look good around guys. And Harrod didn't really seem like a bad guy, unlike his friends who were snobbish jerks. But then I barely knew him. I took a cold shower, braided my curly hair and tied it into a knot. I slid into a gray, knee-length skirt, which I paired with a white blouse, a white pearl necklace, classic, black pumps and a cream cardigan, which covered my plump derriere. I know what I sound like, but that's how my mom dresses and that's how she taught me to dress. I looked fine, my face didn't betray me: subtle makeup, pearl earrings, no lipstick. I was going to surprise him.

I asked my mother if I could have the driver. She agreed, without asking me where I was going. So I headed towards where Harrod lived, uninvited. This would all be a huge waste of time if he wasn't home, but he was so sick yesterday and missed university today, so I was sure he'd be home. On the way to his place, we were stopped at the start of the road that led to his house. There was a checkpoint, and an officer walked over. I rolled down the window.

“Ma'am, do you have a pass?”

“No,” I replied.

“I am sorry, you need to have prior clearance to go beyond this point.”

“I am here to see Harrod. Harrod Ford.”

“What’s your name and the purpose of your visit?”

“I’m Siobhan. Like I said, I want to see Harrod.”

The officer whispered into his walkie-talkie and signaled another officer. “I need to see your ID.”

I handed him my ID and he walked away with it. He returned after above five minutes and gave back my ID. “You are cleared to go,” he told me, then turned to the driver. “Stick to the main road. Once you reach the residence, wait for clearance outside the gate.” He nodded and stepped back as the car lurched forward.

I knew Harrod was super rich, and I did expect him to live in a mansion, but I gawked when the car stopped outside the gates and I waited for clearance. This wasn’t just a mansion, it was the mother of mansions. The size of it was only underlined by the gorgeous lighting that had been arranged over the towers and parapets of the building, outlining the massive space and size of the structure against the dark of the sky behind it. He lived in a mini-freaking-city. There were roads inside the gate! A guard directed us to stop in front of the stairs that led to the house. Once I got out, I was greeted by a butler, who took me to the drawing room.

“Wait here,” he told me. “Mr. Harrod will be here shortly.”

“Actually, I was wondering if you could take me to his room. I know he isn’t well, so I don’t want to get into all the formalities and all. I just want to see him, then I’ll let him rest. I am sure he won’t mind.”

“If you insist,” he replied. “Follow me.”

The mansion had really high ceilings, like a museum. Tall, stone columns lined the corridor. I paused to gape at the sight of the single, giant Christmas tree that had been placed in the main lobby of the mansion. I had seen massive, well-decorated trees before. I was the daughter of a senator, so I was used to ostentatious displays of power, as she called them. But this was something else. It was almost a parody and I couldn’t tell if whoever had placed the tree there had done so out of sincerity or mockery.

My heart was thumping. The butler left me outside Harrod’s room. Once he was out of sight, I went in. I caught him just as he was pulling up his pants.

“Oh my god, I am so sorry. I should have knocked. I got so nervous.”

“It’s okay,” he said, as he zipped up his pants. “Come on in, have a seat. Sorry my room’s a mess.”

He was shirtless and looked like Tarzan. As he got up, he seemed way taller than he usually appeared, but that was probably because I had never stood that close to him. He was easily 6'7. His body was lined with muscles that you normally only see in magazines. A flat stomach, biceps, triceps, six-pack, pecs, Hugh Jackman-like thighs and what not. I had always thought he was just 'large.' There was a stipple of black hairs on his arms, a light peppering of it on his chest and a thin line of hair which ran down his stomach into his pants. I mean, he never came to university in those sleeveless shirts that other buffs did, and he never showed off his body. But, my god, was he gorgeous! Medium length black hair, messed up, fell to his sides. I have had the hots for guys with chiseled jaws, but his entire face was chiseled. Square-ish, strong sides formed a sexy chin. His light beard was sparse in the mustache area, giving him the Wolverine look. His eyes were deep set, cold and blue as ice. His nose accentuated his features. It wasn't very thin, not like the nose of a singer or a movie guy. It was average, erect and strong. This was all in stark contrast to how I had always seen him in university. He dressed modestly and formally, although always in branded clothes, and with a slick hairstyle and shaved or trimmed beard. It really minimized his looks.

"You look like crap," I said quickly. I hoped he hadn't seen me eyeing him up.

"Thanks," he said, extending his hand. "You look pretty fucked up yourself. Welcome to my humble abode."

When I shook his hand, it felt really nice. If you knew me, you would know that I don't suck up to guys or drool over them or any of that crazy desperate stuff, but I did something like that anyway, just this once. I went on and gave him a hug.

"I was worried about you," I said, pulling back quickly as his hand went from the small of my back to my hips.

"Why? You barely looked at me yesterday."

"Well, you were all sick yesterday and you didn't show up to class today. Besides, I need to get into a good university for my Ph.D. and for that I need good grades; and to get good grades, I need my project partner."

"Yeah, sorry about that," he said, scratching his head. "I have just had a lot on my...I have just been sick."

"Safe to assume you saw a doctor?"

"Yeah, I did. He said it's nothing."

"What? It wasn't nothing yester—"

“So, what do you wanna do?” he interrupted. He wanted to change the topic, so I didn't push.

I saw him looking at me. He was definitely checking me out. Was he interested in me? I was about to find out.

“Oh,” I said. “I just came to check on you. I wanted to make sure you were okay. Since you appear fine, I guess I should head back.”

“No, Siobhan, stay! Please.”

“My mom's going to need her car back. I can't stay long.” This bit was true.

“Don't worry about it. I'll send your car back now and my driver will drop you later.”

“Are you sure?” Now I really wanted to stay. He was genuinely nice. “I don't wanna be a burden.”

“Oh, hell, no,” he said, in a husky voice. “Not at all.” Then he went out and shouted, “Gabe!”

When his butler came, he told him to send my driver back. And now I felt stupid. There weren't any other people in the mansion, at least none that I had seen so far, and anything could happen. Doesn't this sound like the kind of situation where girls get drugged and raped?

When he returned, he stood in the doorway. “I've asked Gabe to set dinner for two. You will join me, yes?”

He looked uncertain when he asked me this, almost boyish.

“You are not telling me you live here all alone, are you?”

“No,” he said. “I live with my dad. But he's not always home for dinner, so I have to eat alone. Would you do me the honor of joining me tonight?” he asked, putting his hand forward again.

“Yes,” I said, taking his hand. He spun me around, pulled me close to him, then pushed me onto his arm to kiss me, but I turned my face. He kissed me on the cheek anyway.

“What was that for?”

“For being a good friend,” he said.

“Okay,” I replied.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

“Tell me, you’ve got the look. Just spill it out. I won’t bite, I promise.”

“Look,” I began. “I am here as a friend, that’s all. I don’t want you to get any ideas. By the way, my mom’s a senator.”

He laughed scornfully. “Why, did you think I was gonna rape you or something?”

“No, of course not. I just...had to put it out there.”

“I do know all about your mom, though. I’ve seen her file.”

“What file?”

“The place where my dad works, they have a file on all government officials.”

“Ah,” I said, as I put the dots together.

I sat on the bed as he put on a shirt, rolled up his sleeves to the elbows and buttoned it up. Then he turned to me. “Listen, Siobhan, I may not know how to say your name right, but I’m not an asshole. I know you won’t believe me, and you have some preconceived notions about me, but trust me, I’m not a bad guy. Let’s not turn what we have into another Pride & Prejudice.”

“What do you mean?” I asked. “What do we have?”

“Come on, don’t pretend like you don’t know. I saw you checking me out.”
Crikey, he did see me! But why did he say ‘what we have’ like we had something?
We had nothing. I don’t date guys like him.

“I really don’t know what you are talking about,” I stated, flat as a robot.

“Really?” He gave me a knowing look. “It’s alright if you aren’t interested. I won’t push it, then. I thought we had something, but maybe I was wrong. Fine with me.”

Crap, I’ve already screwed up. Why does it always take me so long to understand things?

“I didn’t say we don’t have anything,” I said. “I mean...we could have something. But you’re gonna have to show me that you mean it, because trust me, I am not

going to satisfy your whims. I am not the type of girl you can have just because you're a rich boy who gets everything he wants."

"Rich boy, seriously, you're bringing that into this?"

"I think I should leave," I said. "I am ruining things. I suck at this."

"You're fine," he laughed, putting his hand on my shoulder. "Come on, have dinner with me. We'll take things as we go. Don't read too much into everything."

"Okay," I said, and followed him to the dining room.