

It Happened One Summer Novel – Chapter 18 -

Piper woke up to her phone ringing.

She blinked at the device, then at her surroundings. White walls, navy bedspread, beige chair angled in the corner by a lamp. No storm sounds. Was it over?

The world was almost eerily quiet around her, save the jangling notes of her ringtone, but she ignored the winding sensation in her stomach. There was a glow on the horizon that told her it was very early in the morning. Everything had to be fine now, right?

Taking one final inhale of Brendan's pillow, she answered her sister's call. "Hey, Hanns. Are you all right?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. I just got back to the building. Where are you?" Piper's cheeks fused with heat. "Brendan's," she said sheepishly. "Oh." There was a long pause. "Piper . . ."

Suddenly alert, she sat up, shoving the fall of hair out of her face. "What?" "I don't know any of the details, okay? But I ran into one of the crew

members' wives on the way back. Sanders? All she said was . . . there's been an accident."

Her lungs filled with ice. "What?" She pressed a hand between her breasts, pushing down, trying to slow the rollicking pace of her heart. "What kind of accident?"

"She didn't say. But she was upset. She was leaving for the hospital." "Which . . . ? What?" Piper scrambled off the bed, naked, the towel having

loosened overnight. "Did she say anything about Brendan?" "Just that he's at the hospital."

"*What?*"

"I'm sure he's fine, Piper. Like . . . he's built like a semitruck."

"Yeah, but he's up against a body of fucking water and a cyclone. A *cyclone!*" She was screeching now, off the bed and turning in circles, trying to figure out what to do. Where to start. "Okay, okay, I'm not his girlfriend. I can't just go to the hospital, can I?"

"Pipes, I'd like to see someone try and stop you."

She was already nodding. As usual, her little sister was right. If she stayed there and waited for news, she would go absolutely insane. "Did she say which hospital?"

“Grays Harbor Community. I already mapped it and it’s half an hour away.

They were brought to a hospital in Alaska first, then flown back here.”

Piper yanked open a middle drawer in Brendan’s dresser and grabbed the first shirt she could find, then ran for the bathroom. “In a helicopter? Oh my God, this is bad.” She met her own wild eyes in the mirror over the sink. “I have to go. I’ll call you in a while.”

“Wait! How are you going to get there?”

“I’m stealing Brendan’s truck. There has to be a spare key around here somewhere. He’s such a spare-key guy.” Her hand shook around the phone. “I’ll call you. Bye.”

It took her five minutes to put on Brendan’s shirt and her hang-dried yoga pants from the day before. She found a spare toothbrush under the sink, used it in record time, and ran down the stairs while finger-combing her hair. After shoving her feet into her still-soaked sneakers, she began her search for the truck’s spare key. It wasn’t in any of the junk drawers or hanging from any convenient pegs. Where would Brendan put it?

Trying desperately not to dwell on the image of him in a hospital bed somewhere, unconscious and gravely injured, she jogged to the kitchen and climbed up on the counter, running her hand along the top of the cabinets. Jackpot.

She was out the door a few seconds later, sitting in the driver’s seat of Brendan’s big-ass truck. And dammit, his scent was there, too. So strong that she had to concentrate on punching the hospital name into her map app, cursing autocorrect every time it swapped out right letters for the wrong ones. “Come on,” she whined. “Not today, Satan.”

Finally, she was on her way, flooring it down the quiet, empty, debris-strewn streets of Westport and onto an unfamiliar highway. There was no one on the roads, and she hated that. It made last night’s storm seem even more

serious. More likely to cause casualties.

Please, please, please. Not Brendan.

Okay, fine. She wasn’t planning on getting serious with the man, but she really, *really* needed him to be alive. If someone that vital and enduring and stubborn could be wiped off the face of the earth, what hope did the rest of them have?

She used her shoulder to wipe away the moisture dripping down her cheeks.

Not getting serious about Brendan. Right.

It took her twenty-five minutes to reach the hospital, and it was as quiet as the roads. There were a couple of cars parked outside and a sleepy administrator manning the front desk. "Sanders. Taggart," she blurted.

The woman didn't look up from her computer screen as she directed Piper to the fourth floor, nodding toward the elevator bank across the lobby. Upon entering the elevator, her fingers paused over the button.

The fourth floor was the ICU.

No. No. No.

After pressing the button, she closed her eyes and breathed, in and out, in and out, all but throwing herself through the doors when they opened. More lack of activity greeted her. Shouldn't doctors and nurses be rushing around trying to save Brendan? Her wet sneakers squelched on the linoleum floor of the dim hallway as she made her way to the information desk. There was nobody there. Should she wait or just start checking rooms?

A nurse left one room and ran to another, a clipboard in her hand. Going to see Brendan? Was something wrong?

Heart in her throat, she crept toward the room where the nurse had gone— "Piper?"

She whirled at the sound of Brendan's deep voice. And there he was in his signature jeans, beanie, and sweatshirt, the sleeves pushed up to his elbows. Above his head, the hallway light flickered, and briefly, she wondered if that meant he was a ghost. But no. No, there was his scent, the furrow of his dark brow, that baritone. He was there. Alive alive alive. Thank God. His eyes were so green. Had she ever noticed how beautiful a shade they were? They were ringed with dark circles, but they were incredible. "Oh good," she croaked, his image rapidly blurring. "Y-you're okay." She tried to be subtle about swiping the tears from her eyes. "They just said there'd been an

accident, so I . . . I just thought I would come check. To be neighborly and all."

"Neighborly."

His raspy voice sent a hot shiver down her spine. "Yes. I even brought you your truck."

Brendan took a step closer, his eyes looking less and less tired by the moment. "You were at my house?"

She nodded, backed up, narrowly missing a supply cart.

His chest rose and fell, and he stepped forward again. "Is that my shirt, honey?"

Honey. Why'd he have to go and call her that? "No, I have one just like it." "Piper."

"Mmm?"

"Please. Please come here."

* * *

Brendan's heart hammered, the tendons in his hands aching from the strain of not reaching for her. She'd come to the hospital. In his clothes. Did she realize tears were spilling down her cheeks and she was shaking, head to toe? No, she didn't. Based on her flirty shoulder shrugs and attempts to wink, she thought she was playing it cool, and it made his chest burn.

This girl. He'd be keeping her. There was no way around it.

There had been a moment last night when he'd thought his luck might have run out, and there'd just been images of her, flashing back to back, and he'd railed at the unfairness of meeting Piper but not being given enough time to be with her. If they weren't at the outset of something real here, his gut was a filthy liar. If he was honest with himself, it had been trying to tell him Piper would be important from the second he saw her in her floppy hat through the window of No Name.

"Piper."

"Mmm?"

"Please. Please come here."

She shook her head, stopped trying to put on a brave smile. "Why? So you can put me in the recharging station? You have the most dangerous job in the *country*, Brendan." Her lower lip wobbled. "I don't want your hugs."

His brow arched. "Recharging station?"

"That's what I call it . . ." Still backing away from him, she flipped her hair back, sniffed. "Never mind."

"When I hug you?" *Fuck.* His heart was turning over and over like a car engine. "My hugs are your recharging station?"

"Stop assigning meaning to my words."

An obstruction formed in his throat, and he had a feeling he'd never be able to swallow it. Not as long as she looked up at him, all beauty and strength and vulnerability and confusion and complications. "I should have called, but I left my phone on the boat and

it's been hectic transporting him here on the helicopter. I didn't have time to find another phone, and then I worried you'd be sleeping." He paused. "Can you be mad at me while I kiss you, baby? It's all I've wanted to do for the last two weeks."

"Yeah, okay," she whispered, reversing directions and coming toward him. She jogged the final step and leapt. He made a gruff sound, wrapping his arms around her as tight as possible, and lifted her off the ground when her trembles increased.

"No, honey. No shaking." He planted kisses in hair that smelled suspiciously like his shampoo. "I'm fine. I'm right here."

Her face pressed into the crook of his neck. "What happened?"

"Sanders has a concussion. Bad one. A wave sent him sliding down the deck, and he clocked himself on one of the steel traps. We got back to Dutch and took him to the hospital." He rubbed circles on her back. "I left Fox in charge of bringing the crab to market and flew back with Sanders this morning."

"Is he going to be okay?" "Yeah. He is."

She nodded, wrapped her arms tighter around his neck. "And the hydraulic system worked well the whole trip? No problems with the oil pressure?"

With an exhaled laugh, he angled his head back to meet her eyes. "Did you do a little googling while I was gone?"

"Maybe a little," she said, burying her face farther into his neck. "Are you sure you want to kiss me with my eyes all red and puffy?"

He fisted her hair gently, tugging until they were nose to nose. "I especially want to kiss you with your eyes all red and puffy."

The moment their mouths collided, Brendan knew he'd made a mistake. He should have waited to kiss her until they were home in his bed, because the uncertainty of the last eleven days reared back and punched him. It did

the same to Piper—he could feel it.

She gave a broken moan and opened her sweet mouth for him, her breath coming in short pants almost immediately, just like his. He'd barely slid his tongue between her lips when she gripped his shoulders, drew herself high against his chest, and slung her legs around his waist. And Jesus, he'd already been halfway to hard, but his cock surged against his fly now, swelling like a motherfucker when she settled the warm give of her sex on top of him, the drag of friction making him curse. Making him wish they were anywhere but a hospital hallway, half an hour from his house.

Still, he couldn't keep from kissing her like he'd been dreaming of doing every night since he'd left, roughly, hungrily, using his hold on her hair to guide her left, right, meeting her lips with wide slants of his own, swallowing down her little whimpers like they were his last meal. God. God, she tasted so fucking good. Better than any port after a storm.

Home. He'd made it.

"Piper," he growled, taking two steps and flattening her against the closest wall, his mouth raking down her delicious neck, his left hand sliding up to cup her tits. "I can't fuck you here, baby. But that's exactly what I'm going to do if we keep at it like this."

Dazed blue eyes met his, her mouth wet from kissing. "I need you now," she said hoarsely, tugging on the collar of his shirt. "Now, now, Brendan. Please, I can't wait."

He learned something about himself in that moment. If this woman tacked the word "please" onto any request, he would find a way to fulfill it.

Build me a palace, please. How many floors, baby?

Brendan was already carrying her to the darker end of the hospital corridor before she finished phrasing her demand. Thank Christ the floor was mostly empty, because nothing was going to stop him from getting inside her now. Not when she was scoring his neck with her teeth, her thighs clinging to his hips like ivy. He stopped in front of the farthest door from the mild action in Sanders's room, looked through the glass to make sure there was nobody occupying it, then brought her inside, capturing her mouth in a kiss as he walked them to the far side of the room. She rode her pussy up and down the rigid length of him, mewling into his mouth and pulling at his shirt, and Jesus, he was so turned on, their surroundings were inconsequential in comparison. Still, he wouldn't have someone walking in and seeing Piper in a

private moment—that was for his eyes only—so he forced himself to focus. Just long enough to make it right.

He set Piper down on her feet and called on his willpower to tear himself away from her mouth. "Don't move," he said, propping her against the wall

—yes, propped. Her legs didn't appear to be working, and hell if he wasn't gratified to know he wasn't so far out of practice that he couldn't get Piper hot and bothered. Thank God.

Wanting to get his hands back on her as soon as possible, he charged to the door and shoved a chair under the handle. On his return to the far side of the room, he yanked the curtain that would block them from view, in case anyone walked past. Then he was in front of Piper, framing her face in his hands, marveling over the feverish urgency in

her eyes. For him. Less than twelve hours ago, he'd been sure his luck had run out, but he'd been wrong. It overflowed.

She ran her hands up under his sweatshirt, her fingernails dragging through his chest hair. "Will you take your shirt off for me?" she whispered, scrubbing the ridges of his abdomen with the heels of her hands. "Please? I love your body."

"That's my line," he said unevenly, rocked by her confession. Yeah, he took care of himself and the work kept his body strong and able, but he was a damn long way from perfect. Not like her. But as he'd already discovered, if Piper said please, he would comply, and he did so now, tugging off the sweatshirt in one quick move, finding her mouth as soon as his head was free of the collar.

Lips seeking and wet, their kiss escalated to the point of no return again. They both wrestled with the waistband of her yoga pants, shoving them down past her hips, lower until she could kick them away. And then she was back to climbing him, her lithe thighs skimming up to his waist, his hips punching forward to get his cock up against her softness, pinning her to the wall in the process.

"Noticed we didn't have to get any panties off," he said in between kisses, finding her incredible ass with both hands and kneading her buns almost angrily, because Jesus, this thing drove him fucking crazy. "You drive here in my truck with a bare pussy, Piper?"

She bit his bottom lip, tugged. "Slept in your bed with it, too."

"Christ." A rumble started in his chest, didn't stop until he'd drawn off the borrowed shirt she wore, dropping it to the ground, leaving her completely,

blessedly naked. Naked and wrapped around him, all messy morning hair and eyes puffy from crying over him. If his cock wasn't throbbing with pain, he might have gotten down on his knees and worshiped her. All those moments on the boat, begging to see her one more time, had been well founded. If anything, he should have begged harder, because she was a siren, an angel of mercy, and a horny woman all rolled into one. A fucking dream.

And she was trying like hell to get the fly of his jeans open.

Brendan aided her, undoing the top snap, wincing as he lowered the zipper and his cock surged, filling with even more pressure now that it had room to breathe. It crowded into the notch between her legs, and she whimpered, digging her heels into his ass to bring him closer—and he came, grinding against her slippery flesh. One thrust and he'd be home.

That's when the worst possible thing occurred to him.

“Goddammit, Piper.” His life flashed before his eyes. “I don’t have a condom.”

She paused in the act of laying kisses on his neck, her breath hitching. “You’re lying. Please tell me you’re lying.”

“I’m not. I don’t carry them.” Her head fell back on a sob, and he couldn’t stop himself from licking the sexy line of her throat, catching his teeth on her earlobe. “I didn’t think I’d see you . . .”

Their heads turned at the same time, another kiss pulling them deep deep deep, and his hips pumped involuntarily, moving in the act of fucking, his shaft sliding up and back through the smooth lips of her sex without breaching her entrance.

“Brendan,” she panted. “Yes, baby.”

“I had a physical. Right before I left.” They breathed hard against each other’s mouths. “I’m all clear and I’m on the shot and I just need you so bad. So bad.”

He dropped his face into her neck and growled, reached between them to fist his erection. “I’m all clear, too. Piper, Jesus, are you going to let me fuck you bare?”

“Yes. Yes.”

She purred that second “yes,” and his balls cinched up painfully, making him grit his teeth, mentally ordering himself not to come too fast. But when he notched his first few inches inside of her wet heat, it became obvious what a challenge that would be. “God, baby. God.” He rocked deeper, and she

gasped. “You’re tighter than sin.”

By the time he filled her completely, she was shaking like a fucking leaf, and he had to focus, focus on staying still. Just long enough to organize his lust, garner some semblance of control, or he’d just take her in a frenzy. He just needed a minute. Just a minute.

“Rough,” she sobbed, her back arching off the wall. “Want you rough.” There went his minute.

Brendan’s first upward thrust drove her up the wall, and she choked on a scream, those beautiful blue eyes glazing over. He clapped a palm over her mouth and pumped again, harder, their eyes meeting over the curve of his hand. There was a coiling in the dead center of his chest, and it must have registered on his face because something flared in her gaze. A ripple of panic in the lake of her lust.

She pushed his hand away slowly, her expression changing. Her eyelids dropped to half-mast, and she looked up at him through the veil of them, biting her lip. “Does this

feel good?” Rhythmically, she squeezed him with the walls of her pussy, humming in her throat, killing him slowly. “Are my thighs open wide enough for you, Captain?”

His legs almost gave out, but he held on. Held on, even though part of him was so starved for release that he was tempted to let her make this just about sex. Even though she’d slept in his bed, worried for him enough to show up at the hospital crying. But he would fight this battle with her as many times as it took. Until she realized he wasn’t falling for it and there was more here. A hell of a lot more.

Brendan glued his mouth to her ear and started to fuck—hard—her legs jostling around his hips with every vicious thrust. “Came here to be neighborly, Piper? Is there anything neighborly about the way I’m giving you this cock?”

God, he loved the way she whined his name in response.

“I was out in the middle of a fucking storm thinking about you. Thinking about how pretty you look in my garden. Thinking about you waiting for me at the end of my dock, in my harbor. Standing there in the sunset so I can touch you before I even touch land.” He opened his lips on the pulse at her neck, razing the spot with his teeth, his hips moving in hard punches. “I thought about your mouth and your eyes and your legs and your pussy. I never stopped. Now you knock that phony shit off, baby, and tell me you missed me.”

She inhaled hard, her fingers curling on his shoulders. “I missed you.”

A balm spread over his heart, even as his need, his urgency, wrenched higher, hotter. “You can wrap me as tight as you want around that little finger, but I won’t play games about what this is. Get me, Piper?”

Their eyes locked just before their mouths did. They knew the battle of wills was far from over, but their hunger was going to eclipse it for now. He took hold of her ass and hefted her higher against the wall, jerking her knees up and propping them on his hips. He angled himself deep, inward and up, so he could hit that spot inside of her—and he went at her hard. Her throaty whimpers told him to stay right there, keep delivering, and he did. He put a lock on the hot seed inside of him dying to get loose and focused on the way her face changed every time he increased his pace. It went from optimistic to astonished to desperate.

“Oh my God, Brendan, don’t s-stop.” Her eyes lost focus, her nails digging into the skin of his shoulders. “Harder. Harder. You’re going to . . . you’re going to make me . . .”

“Every time, Piper.” Out on the water, he’d replayed Piper having an orgasm while he licked her clit on his kitchen table about a thousand times, but feeling it happen around his cock flipped some primal switch inside of him, and he let loose, pressing their foreheads together and drilling into her sweet, snug channel that was already starting to

convulse. “Come on, baby. Let’s have it. Show me what I do to that high-maintenance pussy.”

Her mouth formed an O, and she tightened up, her hands slapping at his shoulders—and then she crashed, her flesh rippling around him. She writhed between him and the wall, fighting the pleasure and requiring it at the same time, her eyes wide and seeing nothing. “Brendan. Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ. *Brendan.*”

Hearing his name on her lips pushed him past his breaking point, and the seal ripped off his resistance. The bottom of his spine twisted, molten lust impacting him low, hard, more urgently than he’d ever felt anything. Piper’s legs went limp right as he came, but she held on to him tight as he bucked. Lifting her feet off the floor until the last of the unbelievable pressure left him. And he collapsed against her.

“*Holy . . .*” she breathed into his neck. “Holy shit.”

His heart pounded in his jugular. “Couldn’t agree more.” She puffed a dazed laugh.

He kissed her temple, pulled back to search her eyes. “Don’t tense up on me, Piper.”

“I’m not sure I’ll ever be tense again,” she whispered, her lids falling.

With a chest full of pride, Brendan kissed her forehead, cheeks, mouth, then knelt down and kissed her belly, picking up her borrowed shirt before straightening. He dropped it over her head, helping her put both arms through the holes, and zipped himself back into his jeans. With Piper still leaning against the wall in a stupor that he definitely didn’t mind, he found a box of tissues, plucked out a handful, and cleaned his spend off the insides of her thighs.

That last part woke her up. “I can do that,” she said, reaching for the tissue box.

He caught her wrist. “I like doing it.”

“Brendan . . .” Her swallow was audible. “Just because I missed you . . .” There it was. “Yeah?”

“Well . . .” She stooped down and collected her pants, dragging them up her legs with trembling hands. “I—I’m worried I’m leading you on—”

“Jesus.” He laughed without humor, took a moment to pull his sweatshirt over his head, and ignored the pinch in his chest. “I can only imagine what kind of idiots you’ve dated, Piper. But I’m not one of them. I’m a grown-ass man, and I know where we stand. I know you’re going to make me work for you, and I’m not scared of it.”

Her eyes went momentarily dreamy, but she snapped out of it fast. “Work for me? There’s nothing to work for!”

“What the hell does that mean?” he barked.

“It means . . .” She wrung her hands. “I’m . . . I’m not available to be your girlfriend.”

Brendan sighed. Was he annoyed? Yes. Did he want to be anywhere else in the world? No. And that was fucking confusing, but apparently it was what he enjoyed now. Being confused and charmed and pulled apart over this woman. “What do you want to call this, Piper? Let’s compromise.”

“Friends with benefits?” “No.”

“Why?”

He reached out, cupped her pussy roughly through the Lycra of her yoga pants, teasing the seam with his middle finger. “This is a hell of a lot more than a benefit.”

Piper swayed.

He removed his hand quickly and caught her, gathering her up against his chest. “How about we call ourselves ‘more than friends’?”

“That’s too broad. It could mean anything.” She rubbed absent circles on his chest while he counted her eyelashes. “Married people are more than friends.”

It was too soon to examine why he liked the word “married” on her lips so much, right? “We’ll go with ‘more than friends,’” he rumbled, kissing her before she could protest. It took her a few seconds to participate, but their mouths quickly turned breathless. He backed her against the wall once more, Piper’s palm molding to the front of his jeans where his cock rose again, ready, desperate for more of her—

“Brendan Taggart, please make your way to the fourth-floor information desk,” came a tired voice over the PA system, repeating itself twice while they remained frozen mid-kiss.

“Fuck,” he ground out, breathing through his nose and willing his hard-on to subside. There was no way it was happening, though, so he adjusted himself to be as inconspicuous as possible, then took Piper’s hand and tugged her toward the door. “Come with me.”

“Oh.” He looked back over his shoulder to find Piper patting her haphazard hair in a way he found adorable. “Um. Okay.”

Brendan moved the chair he'd braced under the door handle, and they walked side by side into the dim hospital hallway. He looked down at her, trying to puzzle together how she felt about the label "more than friends." This conversation, this war, was far from over, but he couldn't help but feel like he'd won a battle, just getting her to hold his hand as if it was the natural thing to do. *You're not getting rid of me, Piper.*

"Brendan?"

The sound of his father-in-law's voice caused a hitch in his stride. Brendan tore his attention off of Piper to find Mick loitering by the information desk. "Mick."

His father-in-law went still, dismay marring his features as he split a look between Brendan and Piper. Their joined hands. Piper's messy hair. And for a few seconds, Brendan couldn't stave off the guilt. Not completely. But only because he should have gone to Mick, told the man about his feelings for Piper. Blindsiding him like this was the last thing Brendan wanted to do. He'd never seen Brendan with anyone but his daughter, and the shock had to bite.

Distracted by his regrets, he didn't react quickly enough to Piper pulling her hand away.

He tried to get it back, but it was too late. "Hey, Mick," she said quietly, wetting her lips.

Mick didn't respond. In fact, he blatantly ignored Piper, and Brendan felt a surge of anger. This was his fault, though. He'd missed a crucial step, and now here they were, in this awkward situation that could have been avoided. And dammit, the last thing he needed was to hand Piper another reason to keep distance between them.

"Oh good," said a smiling nurse, stepping behind the desk. "You found him."

"Just came to check on Sanders," Mick mumbled, jerking his thumb at nowhere in particular.

"Oh, um. I'm going to . . ." Piper started. "I, um . . . You can get a ride back with Mick, right?" She wouldn't look at him, was already edging toward the elevators. "Hannah is probably wondering where I am. I should head home."

Brendan followed Piper, catching her by the elbow before she could hit the call button. "Stay. We'll drive home together."

"Stop." She batted his chest playfully, falling back on flirting. "You totally have to stay here and make sure Sanders is okay. I'll just see you later!"

"Piper."

“Brendan,” she echoed, mimicking his serious face while her finger desperately punched the elevator button. “It’s fine, okay?” When he still hesitated to let go of her elbow, she lost her bravado and begged him with her eyes. “Please.”

With a stiff nod, he watched her disappear behind the doors of the elevator, already missing the weight of her hand inside his. He wanted to go after her, at least kiss her before she drove home, but had a feeling she needed space. He just hoped the headway they’d made this morning on the journey to “more than friends” hadn’t been erased in a matter of minutes.

Duty and respect pulled at him, so while he vowed to make things right with Piper later, he turned on a heel and went to face his father-in-law.

Mick put up a hand as Brendan reached him. “You don’t have to explain, Brendan. I know you’re a young man with oats to sow.” He rubbed at the back of his neck. “Not a lot of fellas who’d be able to ignore a girl like that.”

“No. She’s . . . impossible to ignore.” He’d made it all of one day, hadn’t

he? Less? Before she’d started feeling . . . inevitable. Brendan couldn’t help glancing back at the elevator. When he turned around, Mick was fixated on his ring finger. The lack of hardware surrounding it, rather. The lines around Mick’s eyes turned stark white and a sheen filled them.

Brendan hated the feeling of disloyalty that burrowed under his skin. Logically, he knew there was nothing disloyal about him pursuing Piper. Not at all. But this man who’d taken Brendan under his wing, made him the captain of his boat, and been a damn good friend and father figure . . . shit, disappointing him burned. It was right there on the tip of his tongue to explain that he was serious about Piper, not sowing oats, but Mick seeing he’d finally taken off his wedding ring was enough for one day. He didn’t need to hit the man over the head. Not when he probably saw the lack of Brendan’s ring as one more piece of his daughter being chipped away.

He clapped Mick on the shoulder. “Let’s go check on Sanders, all right?”

Mick, obviously grateful for the change of subject, nodded, and they walked side by side to the wing where Sanders was healing.