

Chapter 6 (Elowyn): The Biggest One

Watching Lachlan walk straight toward me through the store was like watching a train come at me in slow motion. He might be a big man, but instead of lumbering, he moved like a track star. People moved out of his way, and I'm not sure he even noticed them he was so focused on me.

He came to a stop barely two feet in front of me. "Elowyn --"

I held up my hand. "I'm at work. Whatever this is will have to wait."

Frustration crossed those rough-hewn features, but he nodded sharply. "When're you o?"

"Guess you'll have to wait and see," I said without giving him an answer, then I deliberately turned my back on him and spoke to my boss about the new employees she thought we needed to hire. I watched her eyes follow Lachlan out of the store.

"Who was that?" she asked. "Anyone we need to worry about?"

"Not at all."

"OK, so we don't need to call the cops on him, but you still didn't answer who he was to you," she pushed. "Something tells me he's not your brother or cousin"

"He's an ex, Nia. But he's not dangerous or any kind of threat."

So, I was lying through my teeth. Lach could definitely be dangerous. The first time I'd met him, there'd been something in his eyes that told me he was more than capable of hurting or even killing someone. And then I'd seen him in semi-action before I even knew his name.

I'd been out back on my break, on my knees, giving one of the regulars who came to the bar a blow job. Except tonight, Tim had decided he wanted it a little rougher than I appreciated, making me gag once too often, and he was ignoring me trying to push him back to get him to ease up just a bit. I was about to handle it with my patented twist to the balls -- this wasn't my first rodeo by a long shot, and I knew how to make them stop -- when Tim was yanked away from me and shoved up against the bricks.

A dangerous looking man in worn jeans, a black Henley and a leather cut pressed his forearm against Tim's throat. "Since you like blocking airways, let me return the favor," the stranger said. Tim couldn't answer, and the man pressed his forearm repeatedly against Tim's throat in pretty much the same rhythm Tim had been using on me. In no time, Tim had involuntary tears streaming down his face and was desperately trying to dislodge the man's forearm arm from his throat, but nothing short of a bulldozer was going to move that muscled arm.

Without stopping what he was doing, the man looked over at me. "You OK?"

I nodded, looking down, completely and thoroughly embarrassed that this man had seen me in such an intimate situation, and in the back alley of a bar no less, which just screamed class. I was wondering what he now thought of me, and equally curious as to how long he was going to keep fucking with Tim.

"What's your name?" he asked me, his voice low and a bit gravelly.

"Elowyn," I said so ly.

"Never heard that for a name. I'm Shadow."

"Never heard that for a name," I tossed back at him, realizing he wasn't acting like he thought I was some slut. In fact, the way he was acting toward me was making my humiliation fade fast.

He grinned at me. "Go inside. You don't need to be here for the rest of this."

At that, he stepped back from Tim, who fell to his knees, hand at his throat.

"You're not going to, um, kill him, are you? It was consensual."

"Looked to me like you were trying to get him to back o."

"He was being rougher than usual, but I had it under control. I was about to use my patented move on him. And I made a yanking, twisting gesture with my hand that let him know what I had been planning.

That earned me another grin. "I'm not going to do anything permanent to him," he promised. "I'm just going to have a chat about manners."

"A chat. About manners?" I knew I was right to be skeptical.

"Yeah, I'm a real stickler for eti-fucking-quette. Now go inside."

I went inside and stopped o at the ladies' room to rinse my mouth, wash my hands and fix my hair before I clocked back in. A few minutes later, Lachlan came in and sat at the end of the bar, his eyes on me.

"Beer. Don't care what kind," he told the bartender.

"How'd it go, Miss Manners?" I asked, placing a napkin in front of him.

The bartender set Shadow's beer in front of him and walked away.

"Miss Manners," Shadow laughed once, shaking his head. That was the first night he sat at the bar and watched me while I worked but it wouldn't be the last.

"Lo?" my boss called my name.

I shook my head, and detoured o Memory Lane and back to the present.

"Sorry, Nia. I was just surprised to see him."

"He's a yummy ex, but I guess you already know that. I'm thinking it doesn't look like he got the exmemo, though. You sure he's OK? He won't try anything with you, hurt you or...?"

"Lachlan would never hurt me," I assured her, laughing to myself at the irony of the lie I'd just told her. Lachlan had delivered the worst kind of hurt I'd ever experienced in my life: he'd broken my heart, something I'd never let someone do in a romantic way before.

Four hours later, done working for the day, I walked out to my car and wasn't surprised to see Lachlan next to it, his bike parked in the spot next to my car. As he had in the store, he walked right up to me.

"I don't even know where to start or what to say to you, Wyn, and that's never been a problem with us."

"I don't know how true that is," I said, and he knew exactly what I was referring to.

"Let's go somewhere and talk."

I gestured to the parking lot. "Here is fine. There's not a lot to say."

"Elowyn," he said, and his voice was rougher than usual with frustration. "This is going to be more than a two-minute conversation in a parking lot. We have a lot to talk about."

What to do, what to do?

"Is it because I le and you didn't get to end it? Is that why you're here?"

That actually made him step back. "What the fuck, Wyn? Is that what you really think? You le without warning, without talking to me and you think I'm not going to try to fix things when the woman I love just walks out of my life?"

"Oh, no! Yomi le you?"

That got me a very irritated look because apparently someone wasn't in the mood to appreciate my humor. "Yomi lied to you, Elowyn. What she told you was bullshit."

"How do you know what she told me?"

"She told me and it wasn't hard to put together, especially a er that fucking picture you sent me. She saw your car on the street, by the way, and decided to give you a show that morning. That's all that shit was. You're the only woman I've ever kissed, Wyn."

"Her lips on yours kind of makes that a big, huge lie."

"She kissed me, Wyn. I pushed her o as soon as I could get her motherfucking claws out of my hair and let her know what a mistake she'd just made."

"Well, obviously she felt comfortable enough to approach you since you'd been exclusive with her for a year and made her your girlfriend."

"That's exactly why we need to talk and it's going to take a while to work through things, so let's go some place to eat or go to your place, I don't really give a fuck where, as long as it's some place we can talk."

I thought about it for a minute, and realized that I actually had a lot to get o my chest, so maybe a talk would be a good way to end things once and for all and then both of us could move on. Somehow

Since he'd found me, I knew that he already had my apartment address, knew what kind of car I was driving, where I worked and what my new cell number was.

"Fine. Let's go to my place and talk."

"I'll stop and pick up some pizzas, OK?"

Since I was hungry, I agreed. We could be civil about this last conversation between us and it would put Lachlan in a better, more accepting mood, I hoped, since he had this thing about feeding me.

"All right. See you when you get there."

When I went to get in my car, he called my name.

"Yeah?"

"I missed you, Wyn."

I stared back at those eyes that seemed so sincere and intent and strengthened my resolve. "You'll get used to it."

He frowned, definitely not liking my answer, but it was nothing more than the truth. He'd have no choice but to get used to my absence.

I drove away, Lach right behind me until he turned for the pizzeria that I liked -- I wasn't surprised by that in the least. I'm sure he knew where I bought groceries, got my gas, and had my hair cut, too. He obviously knew where I got my co ee since I worked there.

Making my way up to my apartment, I took o my work clothes and changed into my favorite jean shorts and a so T-shirt. I tidied up the one bathroom, and made sure everything else was neat. Habit, I supposed, because Lach had always come home from work and told me how nice it was to come home to calm and not chaos.

Then he'd kiss my lips so ly and pull me into his arms for a hug, and I would forever associate the slight scent of motor oil with comfort.

"No," I said out loud in the silence, not entirely sure what I was objecting to or why I was even putting that out there in the universe.

Thirty minutes later, Lach knocked on my door. When I opened it, he stood there, eyeing me with relief -- had he been afraid I wouldn't be here? -- and he walked past me when I stood aside. He took in my apartment and nodded once.

"Looks nice, Elowyn. Homey."

I took the pizzas to the kitchen counter and opened the boxes. One was my cheese-only deep dish pizza and the other was a garbage pizza. Lachlan liked everything on his pies.

"Let's just eat and then talk a er," he suggested, and I was fine with that. No need to ruin my enjoyment of good pizza with depressing shit.

I ate two pieces before I was stu ed, but Lachlan worked his way through his entire pizza and a slice of mine. Once he was finished, he looked at me, and I knew it was about to get serious.

"Let's start with Yomi and her lies," he said, jumping right into what was a huge issue between us.

But not the biggest one.