

## Chapter 7 (Lachlan): Five Years Overdue

"OK," Elowyn said. "Tell me all about your girlfriend and her lies."

"Can we go sit on the couch?" I asked.

She shook her head and indicated the small four-person table we were seated at in her tiny dining room area.

"I'm fine here. We don't need to be comfortable for an uncomfortable conversation."

"She's not my girlfriend. Not even close."

"Well, that's not what she told me. She said you'd been exclusive with her. For a year. How is that not girlfriend material?"

"Yomi's a liar, Wyn. Plain and simple."

"She told me you'd made her your girlfriend and you were exclusive with her because you'd fallen in love with her."

"Well, that's the biggest crock of shit I've ever heard in my life."

"So you weren't exclusive with her?"

"I was but not in the way you're thinking. About a year ago, one of the brothers was away on club business. He brought back an STD and one of the club girls got it and everyone freaked the fuck out."

"Oh, my God," she said. "I'm so glad I always made you wear a condom."

"No, Wyn, I hadn't -- hadn't been with anyone since he brought it back. We all got tested immediately whether we had a need to or not, and I was clear. But Butcher got pissed, called church and threw down a hat with all the club girls' names in it. He told us to pick a name out of the hat if we were going to mess around with them and whoever we picked was the only girl we could be with and no other brothers could go there with her. Whatever names were in the hat, those girls had to leave the club. Butcher said if anyone fucked with his rule, he'd be getting rid of all of the club girls."

"And you picked Yomi's name."

Her voice was so quiet I could barely hear it, but I heard enough in it.

"I did."

"So you fell in love with her?"

"You'd have to talk to someone to fall in love with them, and I was already in love with you."

"In a year, a whole year, you're trying to tell me you didn't talk to her once?"

I hated talking about this. I hated that look in Elowyn's eyes. I hated that I'd driven her away. I hated every single thing about this because it was my own damn fault.

"I'll tell you what it was like, Wyn. I don't want to, but I will so you can understand that she was lying and so you can see exactly what it was and what it definitely wasn't"

I signaled to Yomi and stalked to her room. Unzipping myself, I rolled on a condom.

Knowing the drill, she pushed her shorts down, kept her back to me and put her hands on the wall. She knew to keep them there.

"Shadow --"

"Shut it."

I pushed into her, my hand on her neck to keep her from trying to turn around or touch me. After a few strokes, I pulled out and finished myself off with my hand. Taking off the condom, I tied it at the end, zipped myself up and left her room, going directly to mine. Throwing out the condom, I washed my hands, disgusted with myself, then I tore off my clothes and showered in the hottest water I could stand, staying under the spray until it turned cold. After drying off, I walked to my bed and sat on the edge, head in my hands, trying to shut out the voices from my past.

"Every time was exactly the same, Elowyn. She was trying to fuck with you, to make it seem like it was more than it was. How she got a relationship out of that shit and my rules, I don't know."

"Rules?"

If I felt sick talking about this, I could only imagine how Elowyn felt having to listen to what an asshole her man had been.

"Yeah, my rules: no talking, no kissing, no touching, no oral, no foreplay, no being on a bed or anywhere except against a wall, no face-to-face fucking, no unprotected sex, no making her come, no coming inside her and as soon as I made myself come, I leave."

Even though the rules were linked to my need for control, hearing it put like that made me face just how fucked up I was, how fucked up what I'd done to Wyn was. For a minute, I thought I was going to get sick and my eyes shot to Wyn's to make sure she was OK.

"You warned me," she said dully. "And I signed up for it."

I had, and she had, but that was absolutely no comfort now. None. Even before the warning I'd given her, I'd hinted at it, held us back from a formal commitment. Or maybe we'd both held back for a while. "

I've never been with anyone like you," Wyn had said one night when she was cuddled up against me on my bed. I was sipping my fingers through her hair, just enjoying having this woman so close to me. I had plenty of experience with sex, but I'd never had the calm after the storm like this. As soon as I was done, I was gone. With Elowyn, it was different. She settled me, calmed those words that rattled around in my head and helped drown them out with her surprising tenderness.

"Just a sec," she said before jumping out of bed, and I enjoyed watching the curves of her body move gracefully as she grabbed something out of her purse and hopped back up on the bed right next to me.

She put a small, wrapped box on my chest. "You probably don't realize this, but we've known each other for a year. Today, I mean. It's been a year today. Since we met."

Wyn was adorable when she got flustered and stumbled nervously over her words.

I looked at her and picked up the gift. "What is this?"

She smiled, and I realized how light she made me feel. "Open it."

I sat up and just indulged in the unfamiliar feeling of being given a gift for a minute, but then, looking at her eyes shining with excitement, I ripped off the wrapping paper and opened the box, where there was a braided leather wrist band.

For a minute, I couldn't say anything.

"Don't you...do you like it?"

I looked into her face and knew I wanted to look into those eyes for the rest of my life.

"I love it," I said simply because I knew if I tried to say more, I'd fucking lose it. I wrapped it around my wrist and had her join the ends of the clasp. I put my hand at the back of her head and pulled her down to me for a sweet kiss. Then, twisting, I opened my nightstand drawer and pulled out a little gift wrapped box. It was the first gift I'd ever wrapped so it was nowhere neat as hers had been.

"I know exactly how long we've known each other, Wyn. It's been the best year of my life."

She opened her gift and lifted the lid on a pair of little aquamarine studs.

"It's your birthstone, and you said once that this color reminded you of my eyes." And damn if I didn't start blushing like a nun who'd just heard a dirty word for the first time.

"I love my earrings," she said, giving me a deep kiss. "Thank you, Lach."

"I want to give you more, Wyn. I just don't know if I can be faithful--"

"No. Not today." Her voice was firm. "Today, we're celebrating. We have time for that talk later if we decide to get serious. For now, we are what we are and I don't want anything more. It's too much pressure for me to deal with."

"I thought we were going to talk when I got back, straighten out the Yomi situation and our other issues."

"It was time to go," she said simply, and I panicked inside hearing that.

"For four years you had this other job. How did that happen? I feel like I should have known this but you were never nothome when I was. I was blindsided when Mother told me you'd been working for four years."

She shook her head. "I made sure you didn't know. I leave a key for you in the mornings and I got home before you did at night. I told them I couldn't work weekends. I leave my phone at home but forwarded my calls to my second phone that I got to use when I leave the house. I got my own bank account in a different city and put every penny I earned in that account. When you asked how my day was, I just said it was fine and I told you about the things I did between the time I got home and you did."

"You were planning to leave me for four years, Wyn."

"It wasn't planning to leave so much as getting ready to go when you got rid of me. I knew that was coming after you proposed to me and I turned you down. I knew that was definitely coming when Yomi told me you'd made her your girlfriend. And even if she hadn't told me that, you would have eventually gotten rid of me. It was just a matter of time."

"I never would have ended things with you, Elowyn. Never."

"Well, it didn't seem like that to me. And what if I'd pushed about the other women, Lach? Every time I brought it up, I admit I didn't push the subject and let it drop too easily, but you clearly wouldn't talk about it. Just your usual spiel about how you'd always come home to me. You're seriously telling me that if I'd put my foot down, you wouldn't have ended things?"

"No, I wouldn't have ended things. Not with you, Elowyn. But I would have liked the opportunity to figure out a way through it."

"You could have talked to me. You knew I wasn't happy with the arrangement."

"I felt like you've always had a foot out the door."

"Because you wouldn't be faithful to me."

"No, Wyn, it was even before we had that talk. Almost from the start."

"Why couldn't you be faithful, Lachlan?"

That question was at the heart of everything and the answer to it was about five years overdue.