

## Chapter 8 (Elowyn): Handle It

\*\*\*TW for child abuse reference\*\*\*

Lachlan looked at me when I asked him why he couldn't be faithful as if I'd asked him to explain the meaning of life or solve some incredibly difficult math problem. He shot to his feet and filled my little dining room space with his sheer bulk.

"Wyn, I want to just say because I'm a stupid dick and let it go at that. You don't know how bad I want that. Just forget the past shit and figure out being together again."

He looked at me with serious eyes, and I looked right back at him, not willing to give him a pass. Of course, that meant I wouldn't get a pass, either, if he pushed, if we began sharing our histories.

"But I know I owe you more than that. We've been together for six years, officially together five, and we've never fuckin' talked about our pasts. I've been good with that since I'm not really the type to talk about shit and you aren't really either."

That was the actual truth. Why revisit the past? Unless it was to stop letting it control your present and future.

"Lach, we don't need to talk about it since we're done --"

"No!" Lach's normally deep voice was almost shrill, as if he was panicking. "I can't stand here and listen to you say that. I don't want to be done. Wyn, you know I love you --"

"No, I don't Lachlan. I don't believe that you love me, and maybe you never did. We worked for a while, but you're not enough for me anymore. What you're offering isn't enough anymore. I want all of someone, not someone who shares himself. When we first got together, I thought I could handle you cheating on me, but from that first time you spent the night at the clubhouse, it hurt it hurt me knowing you were with other women and I wasn't enough for you."

He came right over to my chair and hunkered down next to me, clutching my hand in his.

"No, Elowyn. No You were always enough for me. You have it backward -- I wasn't enough for you and I knew you'd leave me one day. But you were always enough for me. You're everything I ever wanted in a woman."

"Lach, I spent every day of the last four years just waiting for you to tell me to go. That's why I got the job and hid it from you. I was afraid if you knew I was working, you'd tell me to go sooner. So I saved all my money to give me a fresh start, a cushion, for when you didn't want me any more. And it was coming. You know it was. Every year you spent more nights at the clubhouse than the year before."

"Because I felt like I was losing you, Wyn. I felt it." I'd never heard Lachlan sound like this. He was always sure and confident and his voice was never shaky. "I knew it deep down, and the nights at the clubhouse made me feel in control for a bit. I had no control over you, I couldn't force you to stay with me if you really didn't want to, but I needed to feel some control."

"You were practically pushing me out the door, Lach! The other women, Yomi. I saw the way you looked at her when we were at the clubhouse for parties. All the hot looks whenever she came into the room, the way your eyes tracked her every move. I'm not blind."

"What the fuck are you talking about? I didn't look at her like that! That bitch meant less than nothing to me. I wasn't attracted to her at all."

"For a year you were with just her and you never felt attracted to her? So how'd you manage to have sex with her then if you weren't attracted to her?"

"Already told you how it was with her and the others before her. I gave 'em my rules and they did what I asked. It was just about having control, not about being with them. That's what I got on. If I was giving looks to Yomi, it was because I didn't want that bitch coming anywhere near you, and I was warning her off, to keep away from you. And I tracked her movements to make sure she wasn't working her way over to you and maintained her distance. But I can guarantee I never once looked at her with heat"

I shrugged, not knowing what to believe, but finding it hard to wrap my head around sex for control.

Then it hit me.

I'd done the same thing with sex not for control but for a action. For approval. For praise. It never lasted past the guy zipping up, but I'd craved every so good, baby or you're a great fucker never been sucked that good Before I'd met Lachlan, the men I was with were my attempt to find someone to care. Even after Lach started sitting at the end of the bar, I'd still go out back on my breaks. And I'd look up and see Lach hidden in the shadows of the doorway.

He never called me names for doing what I did, never once judged me, but he waited and listened when I went out back to make sure none of the guys got out of hand. They didn't, maybe realizing Lachlan was hovering nearby like a guardian angel, but if they had, he'd have been right there for me. When I was done, Lach would walk me down the hall to the bathroom and wait for me, then take his seat at the end of the bar while I finished my shower. After a month or so, I simply stopped going out back on my breaks. I'm sure Lach noticed, but he never said a word, just continued to watch me while I worked and then he'd take me home at the end of my shift. Lachlan was showing me something back then, but I wasn't sure what.

"Why didn't you ever stop me, Lach? Tell me to not go out back with those men?"

He'd looked at me, holding me close on his lap and pushed my hair over my neck so he could press a soft kiss below my ear. "Got no say over you, Wyn, then or now. You had to stop on your own. I didn't mind waiting for you."

"But you stood by and listened --" I'd cringed at the thought.

"Couldn't make sure you were OK if I wasn't nearby. That was more important to me than anything."

"It just...what I was doing wasn't right. I mean it wasn't for the right reasons. It was for stupid reasons."

He'd tucked my head against his chest. "We all have our own ways of slaying the dragon."

Held in his arms, sitting on his lap, his heartbeat under my ear...I'd felt like I'd found someone to care, but didn't quite yet realize that his way of slaying the dragon would end up slaying me.

"So you have an issue with control." No question, just a statement to him. Lach got up and started pacing around the dining room table.

"Fucking hate this. I'm not going to get into all the details, but here's the basics. Took one intro to psych class in college to meet my general requirements for my finance degree. The professor usually put me to sleep, but one day he was lecturing us about common issues people struggle with and swear to fuck he was looking right at me when he started talking about control issues. He said people who are scared of being at the mercy of others can gradually develop a need to be in control. Could be control over one particular thing or a bunch of 'em. And then he said it can come from some traumatic shit. Like if you're a kid and some big thing hurts you or scares you, stuff like that. Well, that was my entire fucking childhood. My mom died suddenly, then my dad's mom died right after, then my mom's mom, and so, given all that loss, my dad wasn't making the best decisions. He started moving us around, like ten times from the time I was eight until I was eighteen, making me leave my friends, my schools -- and he was always chasing after new girlfriends to try to take mom's place. I had no say in my life. None. When my dad proposed to mom's first potential replacement, she left him. He proposed again to someone else less than six months later, and no surprise, she left, too."

In all our years together, Lachlan had never mentioned one word of it to me. This was all brand-new information. Then I thought of all the brand-new information I could offer to him and it was no wonder we never wanted to share our shitty pasts.

"Dad proposed again. She took off, too. He blamed me in all sorts of ways that hurt Smacked me around while he told me women didn't want to stay around a kid that wasn't theirs. Then he said if he could get 'em to marry him, they'd stay. Told me every time he proposed that if a woman was willing to marry you, she'd be willing to stay with you. Heard that for fucking years through his additional marriage proposals, and they eventually left before they married him."

"How many?" I asked, and he shrugged.

"Lost count, but every time dad said we were pulling up stakes, I knew another woman had dumped his ass and he was leaving to start fresh and find a new one. It was his way of being in control, I realized. So when I grew up, I looked for ways to stay in control. Some small way and it became sex. Sometimes I'd do somewhat normal sex, but most of the time, I had all these rules in place to control the woman. Not until you, Elowyn did sex become something intimate. You were the only woman I didn't want to control like that."

"But you tried in other ways," I said. "Refusing to discuss your cheating was a way to control me."

"I never thought about it like that but I guess it was. I'm sorry about that, Elowyn. I don't like talking about all that shit, and I'm not offering it as an excuse, but I wanted you to know."

"So because I wasn't willing to marry you after you asked on our first anniversary together...in your mind, I wasn't going to stay."

"Yeah. And it ate at me for a couple weeks, thinking you were going to leave, and that feeling of needing control started itching at me for the first time in a long time. You were going to leave me and I didn't know how to handle that."

"And now I have left you, Lachlan. And I'm sorry, but you're going to have to figure out how to handle it.