

Chapter 10 (Lachlan): Irony

We had a rotating schedule in the guest room as our MC called it. If someone was in the guest room, that didn't mean we needed to put clean sheets on the bed and hang fresh towels in the bathroom. It meant we needed to get ready to inflict some pain and hose down the evidence.

In reality, the guest room was an underground, cement cell that had a chair bolted to the floor in the middle of the room, a large hook in the ceiling and a hidden wall of your typical tools: crowbar, flame thrower, a huge assortment of knives, screwdriver, saws, hammers, bolt cutters and, of course, a hose next to an industrial size container of bleach.

Regardless of a person's position in the MC, all of us except Orion had to serve on the guest room rotation, three brothers per week. This was my week in here, and since our guest wasn't leaving here alive, we had the wall of tools exposed. That was terrifying enough, and many of our guests had made the mistake of thinking the wall was simply a flex, but they soon learned it wasn't.

Today's guest was brought to us by a technicality that got all charges against him dropped despite being guilty as hell. Guilty of some very serious, very nasty crimes. Crimes that Butcher refused to allow in his territory and would ensure a message was sent letting people know this.

"Did you see the game last night?" Prick asked as he shoved a rag in the terrified guy's mouth. The screams got tiresome after a while, so a long time ago, we'd just started stopping them before they could begin. Prick was the brother Butcher sent in when someone needed to die quietly in his sleep while at home, someone who was too important to simply disappear and never be heard from again. So, one hidden needle prick and the job was done.

"Lost a hundred bucks on it," I told him. "And I don't even like baseball."

"Shoulda talked to me. Woulda told you it was a bad bet."

"Yeah, next time I will. The first and only time I didn't check it out with you, I lost. Lesson learned."

And wasn't that the theme of my life lately? Lesson learned! I'd spent the last week since visiting Elowyn thinking, Googling certain phrases, reading and then thinking some more. I went to a couple of bookstores, made some purchases, bought some highlighters...and felt like I was in college again. Only this time, I was studying and what made me into the person I was. The person who could do what I'd been doing, knowing it was hurting Elowyn.

Every day I would send her two texts. The first was to wish her a good morning and a good day. The second one I sent at night, and I texted her a quote from whichever book I'd been reading. Then after each quote, I ended the text with I love you

She didn't respond to any of them. I could see they were delivered and they were read, but what she was thinking I had no clue. Maybe she wasn't thinking anything. Maybe she just wished I'd stop bothering her. I kept waiting for her to block me, to give me that final push out of her life, but she never did. So, reading that as a good sign, I continued sending my texts.

When Elowyn had told me I had to get used to living without her, I don't think I'd ever felt so out of control before, not even when things were at their most awful with my father. What I feared most in life had happened and losing Elowyn was the worst thing I could have imagined.

So why did you put it at risk? Why risk the woman you love for a woman who means nothing to you except as a way to exert your control?

Those questions stumped me, but I knew I needed to figure out the answers if I ever hoped to win her back. I knew I had to change my thinking and some of my actions. Not every part of me needed to change, but the part that needed control in certain areas -- the part that became more important than Elowyn -- had to undergo a complete change.

To start, I made a list of everything Elowyn had complimented me about over the years, and I labeled that side THE GOOD.

I like the way you hold me close.

I love the way you're gentle with me.

I admire the way you work so hard for us.

That had been a conversation early on when she'd first moved in with me. She'd come home late, after I was already at home and she'd thrown herself onto the couch next to me.

"What's wrong, Wyn?"

"I hate my job," she'd said. "My boss is the biggest asshole in the world and he's always on me, just trying to get me to mess up."

"Any reason you have to stay there?"

She'd shrugged. "I just can't stand the thought of having to look for another job yet again."

"Unless you want me to take care of your problem, you're either going to have to bite the bullet and look for one or put up with him."

"I know," she said, sounding so dejected. "And as much as I appreciate the offer, I don't want you to take care of him. I mean it, Lach."

We'd had variations on that conversation a number of times, until I made a different offer to her one day. It went against my nature to not wait for her boss in the parking lot and have a talk with him about the way things were going to be. Elowyn had warned me repeatedly against trying anything with him, and I was willing to respect that. For now. My line in the sand was if she ever came home in tears, at which point I'd find her boss and draw out some tears from him.

But one day she came home so upset, she was shaking with rage, so I pitched her an idea I'd been thinking about for a while.

"Quit," I told her. "And before you protest, listen. Quit, and then take some time off for yourself. You've been working since you were fourteen, and maybe you need a break to think about what you want and how you can get it so you don't have to be under these assholes all the time. Take your time, put out some feelers and see what pops. I want you to find a job that you like, in a better situation, one that makes you happy."

"Lach, I've never not paid my own way."

"I've got it covered, Wyn. You know I can afford to support both of us."

"I know," she'd admitted. "But I feel like it's taking advantage."

"You didn't ask, sweetheart. I offered."

Then I made a list on the other side of the paper labeled THE BAD, and under it I listed the aspects of me that I knew had hurt her.

Looking at that list gave me a direction to focus on. A starting point to becoming a better man.

And what irony there was in that, I thought, as I applied the blow torch to our guest