

Chapter 16 (Elowyn): I Can Help

TW for mentions of child abuse

Lachlan had followed me home after we finished dinner and talking, and he walked me to my door.

"Thank you for tonight, Wyn. I know it can't be easy to see me so it makes me appreciate your willingness to meet me even more."

He'd been brutally honest all night, so I thought I'd return the favor and give him a glimpse into me, a specific one I'd never been willing to give him before when we were together.

"It's not easy...and it is. I'm tempted every day to go back to you and sweep what you did under the rug because at least you never hit me or threw things at me or broke my arms or ribs."

Although he tried not to react, my confession electrified Lach and he seemed to grow before my eyes, his face furious.

"Elowyn." Agony in those three syllables.

And then he stepped to me, his arms wrapping protectively around me, my ear pressed to his chest.

"I'm so sorry, Wyn. So damn sorry."

What he was sorry for exactly, he didn't say. It sounded like he was apologizing both for what I'd witnessed and experienced as a child and for cheating on me when we'd been together.

But he continued.

"I'm sorry for adding to your pain. I'm sorry I didn't stop hurting you when I could see how much pain I was causing you. I'm sorry we talked about every damn subject under the sun except the most important ones -- our fucking pasts."

Even though his arms around me felt so good, felt like home, I stepped out of his hold and he loosened his arms immediately, letting me go. His eyes, though, his eyes were darkened with pain for me.

"It's ironic," I said to him. "How easily we could talk about anything and everything but neither of us was willing to discuss how we grew up."

"Told you tonight I'm not afraid to talk about things anymore. You got a question, I'll answer it. You want to know something, I'll tell you. I know to have a hope in hell of getting you back in my life, I can't hide shit anymore and I don't want to. It's total shit, but it's part of me, and you need to know about where I came from and the reasons behind why I did what I did. Not saying the reasons excuse it but that understanding has been helpful to me so I can start to correct shit."

"I think I'd like to get to that understanding myself. I know what you're doing isn't easy or fun, so I think what you're doing takes guts."

"It ain't easy, that's for sure," Lach said. "I'd like to see you again in a few days. Hell, I'd like to see you tomorrow and the next day and all the rest of my days, but I think I should back off for a few days. Let it all sink in."

"I think that's best, too, Lach."

"Then I'll spend the next few days focused on club business, which'll make Butcher happy."

"He does happy?" I looked skeptically at Lach. His MC president was the scariest man I'd ever seen and in all the years that I'd been in his vicinity, I'd never seen him smile.

"OK. Yeah. That might be a stretch. Maybe it will make Butcher less homicidal than normal?"

I laughed because he wasn't wrong, and since it was always good to end a night with laughter, I told Lachlan good night and went into my place. Going to my front window, I listened for the loud thunder of Lach's Harley, and when I heard it rumble to life, I peeked out my curtain and watched him ride away.

Then I threw myself down on my couch and went over the evening.

I'm going to remind you about the good parts of us. The good things, the right things, and there were good things despite all the bad things I did. There were ways we were strong. Those are the pieces I'm talking about fitting together again.

As much as I didn't want to admit it, Lach had been right. It sounded ridiculous to say that other than that nasty cheating habit of his, we had a good relationship. I wasn't sure if that was valid. Did the cheating negate everything we had? I'd need to talk to Roberta since she'd been cheated on before and seemed to have a realistic view of life.

I thought of the way Lachlan and I had talked every day. Sometimes the conversations were basic, handling details like what to make for dinner and bills and things on the calendar. But most of the time, we talked about everything imaginable. Funny things we'd heard that day, things we'd seen, current events, local politics, neighborhood happenings, movies we'd seen, TV shows we were enjoying. And although he was nowhere near as social as I was, he loaned muscle when needed for our neighborhood block parties, he'd man the grill or act as bartender. Sometimes, he'd take on all three for one event if we were short on help.

"You say you hate socializing, but you're always at the block parties," I'd teased him.

"Because you are," he'd explained as if it were the most obvious thing. "You want to go be social, have time with your girls, I'll go with you and talk with the other men. It's not my favorite thing, but you are, so I go."

Unwilling to think about the other things we'd shared, I decided to put the rest on hold and ask Roberta when I saw her in a few days.

This week, I'd been impatient for book club to be over. The ladies' banter and obscene comments didn't make me smile to myself this week like they always did. I didn't want to give them a five minute discussion topic at the end. I wanted to order everyone out so I could talk with Roberta.

At long last, the book club members filed out, new books in hand, and Roberta was the last one to make her purchase.

"Roberta, can I ask you something?" I asked after I put her book in a bag.

Her smile was sweet. "Absolutely."

"So I apologize in advance if what I'm about to say brings up some old pain, but I wonder, when you got cheated on, did that mean everything about your relationship was a lie? That it couldn't have had anything good about it because the cheating overshadowed everything else?"

She gave me a strange look before speaking. "Let me ask you this, Elowyn. You knew he was cheating. He wasn't hiding it. And you stayed, for a long time. Did it feel as if every moment was a lie?"

"No, not every moment. Maybe they started to in the end when he was cheating more often. Did you feel that way?"

"I'm curious why you think I've been cheated on."

"You told me," I answered.

To answer your question, a cheater can change if he, or she, decides to commit to change. I know. And if you ever want a sounding board, I'd be happy to listen.

"Oh, I can see where I wasn't clear," Roberta said, "I was talking about my experience with several couples who had faced infidelity. I've been with them through the worst of it."

"And did their relationships survive it?"

"Some of them did," Roberta said. "And that's because they fought hard for it. And they wouldn't have fought, Elowyn, if they felt their whole relationship was a lie. They wouldn't have fought if they didn't think there was something to salvage from the wreckage."

"No, I guess there'd be no purpose to fighting if they didn't have anything real to save."

"Exactly. You only try to save those relationships with people you love."

"Lachlan and I had a good talk when we went out the other night," I explained to her. "And we both agreed that just like he's working on himself, I need to look at all that's broken in me and glue it back together so I don't make the same mistake again. So I stop hurting myself. Until I do that, there's no point in even trying to have a relationship with any man. I just need to look deep inside and fix myself."

"I think we were meant to meet," Roberta said, "because I can help you with that."