

Chapter 18 (Lachlan): The Looks In Their Eyes

The only time I'd set foot in Elowyn's store before, I'd been too damn focused on Wyn to really take in the details of the place. I'd just scanned it for threats and then locked onto Wyn and kept my eyes on her.

Today, as Orion and I pushed through the glass door with the curly writing of the store name -- Sweet Reads-- on it, I noticed a so series of chimes that announced our arrival. Kind of felt like a little AC/DC would have been more appropriate for the two of us coming into this place, but whatever.

The walls of the store were painted a pale yellow, and all the rows and rows of bookshelves were painted white. In the center of the store was a long display case, and at the far right was a sleek Point of Sale cash register. Everything to the le was bakery items, and even though I wasn't much for sweets, they looked good to me. Behind the display case was a long counter where the co ee shit happened with a couple of complicated, copper and brass machines. A younger woman stood behind the counter, purple haired and wearing a white apron with the store name on it.

O to the side when you walked in was a seating area with two worn-leather couches facing each other and two overstued chairs at each end. An old, wooden industrial cart with cast iron wheels served as a co ee table. A bright bouquet of flowers was the only decoration on the co ee table.

Didn't know if Wyn had decorated the place, but it looked cozy and comfortable, just like she'd made our home. There were plants all over the store, and that definitely screamed Elowyn to me. My girl liked her greenery.

The seating area was currently filled with five older ladies who had their eyes glued to us. Orion looked over at the ladies with their jaws dropped, some frozen in the act of sipping co ee from their fancy china cups.

"If one of those bitches calls the cops on us, I ain't gonna be happy," Orion said to me quietly.

We would come to wish they'd been contemplating calling the cops on us.

Elowyn came around the end of one of the book shelves, carrying a small stack of books.

"Hello!" she greeted before we were fully in her view, then, when she saw who her latest customers were, her steps stuttered for a minute. It didn't take her long to regroup, and she walked toward us.

"Oh. Hey, Lachlan, Orion." She was trying hard not to stare at Orion's two black eyes and swollen nose.

"Lachlan?" I heard from one of the ladies.

"You know these boys, El?" one of the other ladies said.

I cringed, knowing that El was a shortened version of her name Elowyn didn't like very much. There was something in the lady's voice that, if I had to guess, wasn't fear but excitement. That surprised me since people usually weren't happy to see us.

"Yes, Velma," Wyn said. "These are some old acquaintances of mine."

That seemed to be a cue for all of the women to get up and rush over to us.

"Well, in-tro-ducas, please," one woman said and, without waiting, beamed up at Orion and me. "I'm Gladys," she practically cooed, while she blinked rapidly at us. "And aren't you just gorgeous. Mmmhmmm."

"Please, no," Elowyn murmured.

"The fuck?" Orion said to Gladys. "You got a problem with your eyes?"

"Hel-loooo, boys! This is so exciting to meet you. I'm Velma, and I've never met real, live bikers before." A woman with unnaturally red hair was saying this as she pushed forward, practically panting.

"You meet a lot of dead ones?" Orion asked.

"We are so excited to meet you!" Another woman came to stand next to Gladys and her hair was unnaturally blonde. "I'm Henny! I have never seen such delicious specimens of manhood! So, so big and yummy."

Without warning, she spun around and snapped a selfie with us. I saw the picture. She was smiling big as fuck and Orion was scowling like he wanted to kill people and I looked pissed the fuck o.

"Oh, this is perfect. You've got the tough biker look down and you did it without even being told!"

"We should all get a picture!" a fourth lady exclaimed. Her hair was somewhere between gray and purple and her lips were bright orange. "Are either one or both of you into cougars, by any chance? Asking for a friend"

Then the women -- except for one -- crowded around us and asked the one woman who stood back to take pictures.

"I'm not sure --" Elowyn tried to say, but with a shrug, the woman standing back li ed her phone and took pictures, and I could only hope Orion wouldn't pull his gun.

"Don't smile boys!" one of them pressed against us said. "We want you to try and look tough."

Not smiling was no problem.

"Oh, we totally need a biker book this week. Raunchy biker sex is the best! They get me all hot and bothered and poor Stan just can't keep up when I get like that."

"Yes!" another one called out. "Bikers are always hung like horses and down to fuck. I got that expression from my granddaughter."

"Oh, my God!" yet another shouted. "Next week, we should all come to book club dressed as club whores!"

That started a chorus of agreement.

"OK, I think that's enough pictures," Elowyn broke in. "Ladies, your five-minute debate topic today is who makes better book lovers: bikers, athletes, Doms or mafia men? In fact, let's make it ten minutes today."

"So nice to meet you boys," they all called some variation of that to Orion and me as Elowyn shoed them back to their seats.

Orion looked confused as hell, and I felt like I'd just been attacked by the perfume bitches trying to spray shit on you in the mall. While the women debated their topic, Elowyn herded us to the other side of the store.

"Why are you here?" she asked us quietly.

"We came here as customers," I said. "But I kind of feel like a piece of meat now."

That made my girl smile. "They're my book club ladies. They're interesting."

"Ladies my ass," Orion grunted. "I thought the one was about to grab my dick."

"They're all talk," Wyn said. "I'm pretty sure they wouldn't touch you."

I wasn't so sure about that, so I switched topics.

"Elowyn," I said, " We came in because we needed some books on suddenly discovering you're a father. Of a seven-year-old."

Wyn paled and stepped away from me fast, her eyes filling with tears. I stepped right a er her, realizing how that sounded.

"Oh, fuck, Elowyn, not me. It's not for me. It's for Orion."

Her hand went to her stomach and she looked slightly less sick. "Really?"

"Really, Wyn. Orion found out a couple months ago a er you le that he's got a seven-year-old boy."

She swallowed, the color slowly seeping back into her cheeks. "How's Kadie doing with that news?"

I could feel the anger rolling o Orion. "She disappeared," he said flatly.

I gave her a slight head shake before she could follow up. "Do you have any self-help books like that in stock, Elowyn? Or could you order some for him?"

"We have some parenting books in this section," she said, shi ing into book seller mode, and we followed her three rows of shelves toward the back of the store. "As you can see, not a huge selection, but this is a general parenting book, with a section on specific challenges for each age up to twelve. Tells you how to talk to them at each age, how to ask them questions and what you can expect them to do, roughly, at each age."

Orion took the book she o ered from her hands.

"What does he like to do?" she asked Orion. "Does he have any particular traits -- do you need a book on raising a creative child? Is he super smart? Because that could be raising a gi ed child. Is he athletic? There are all sorts of books for the di erent aptitudes your child shows."

"Got no idea what he likes. He's a kid. That's about all I know."

Elowyn looked a little surprised at that. "Oh, OK, then here's a book about becoming the parent that you'd like to be. Maybe this one on developing your child's mind. And maybe this one on raising a happy, mentally strong child."

"That's a shit ton of reading," Orion grumbled.

"It's an important job," Elowyn chided him. "You don't want to mess it up because it's a little child you're dealing with and if you get it wrong now, your child will be paying for it later."

"I'll take all of 'em," he said grudgingly.

"And I'll look up some other titles for you that might help," she promised. "Since you're in town for a while."

"Thanks, Wyn," Orion said.

Wyn cashed him out just as the old ladies got up to hit the Romance section.

"We're going with Riding His Throbbing Bike" one of the ladies called to Wyn.

"Excellent choice," she called back.

"Can I see you soon, Wyn?" I asked her so ly.

"Yeah, actually I was going to call you tonight to ask if you could come over Saturday night. I need to talk with you."

"Six OK? Can I bring dinner?"

"Sure," she said.

"I'll look forward to it," I said.

"It's not going to be a fun talk," she said, her face tight. "I have a lot to get o my chest."

I leaned toward her. "I don't care if you spend the whole night screaming at me about all the ways I wronged you. No less than I deserve and if it helps make you feel any better at all, you can do whatever the fuck you want, Elowyn."

Taking a piece of paper from inside my cut, I slid a slip of paper across the counter to her. "Would you mind ordering these books for me? Just let me know when they're in and I'll pick them up. Rather give my business to your store than anywhere else."

She looked at my list and nodded, but she still looked tense.

"Wyn."

She looked up at me.

"I can take it. Whatever you need to say, I hope you say it all. I'll be there Saturday, right at six. You need me before then, just give me a call."

"Brother, they're heading our way, and I don't like the looks in their eyes," Orion said from a few feet behind me when he noticed the ladies coming at us.

"See you, Wyn," I said, and then we beat it out of there before they could surround us again.