

## Chapter 20 (Lachlan): It's All Darkness

\*\*\*TW for violence/deaths and graphic language\*\*\*

Elowyn fell asleep in my lap, and I just continued to hold her for a while, not knowing if I'd ever have the chance again given what she'd told me tonight. Given the many and various heartaches she'd unleashed. Given the way I'd added to her hurt by hurting her so badly.

She'd fallen asleep in the arms of a man who was just one of many assholes who'd hurt her. Never had I hurt her physically, but who's to say which is worse? I'd been in fights, been punched, been kicked and it hurt, but the bodily part of it healed. Then I thought of the shit I carried inside. That hurt, too, but it hadn't healed.

I was working on it, facing it, but that shit left scars. Wyn carried scars, too, and I thought of many of my brothers. Maybe all of us, in one way or another, carried scars inside, and maybe that was better because we could hide them from others. We could act normal and not let others see all the ways we'd been carved up with pain.

But after holding her for so long, when she squirmed slightly in my arms, trying to find a more comfortable position, I decided she really needed her bed. So I stood up with Wyn, not letting go of her until I absolutely had to, and carried her to her bed. I flipped the so comforter and sheet aside and laid her down in the bed, making sure to pull her socks on. She never once slept in socks when we'd been together, no matter how cold it got, and I was betting that hadn't changed. I pulled the comforter up to her chin and her eyes fluttered open.

"Don't go," she said, her voice raspy from all the tears and the screaming. "Just stay with me tonight. Please."

For a moment, I looked at her and then nodded, and her eyes dried close with the assurance that I'd stay and she wouldn't be alone.

"Thank you, Lachlan," she whispered.

Anything for you, Wyn. But I was afraid, especially after what I'd discovered tonight, that I'd learned the lesson too late.

If Wyn couldn't sleep with socks on, I couldn't sleep with a shirt on. Pulling on my socks, cut and shirt, I walked around to the other side of the bed and got under the covers. At some point in the night, I came awake. I was on my side, my hand splayed over Wyn's stomach, and she was on her back, pressed right against me, sound asleep. I bent my arm up and rested my head in my hand, staring down at Elowyn.

You hurt me.

I wasn't a man who cried in front of others, ever, but sometimes at night when I was alone in bed, I let the tears come. Every night after I fucked around on Wyn, I'd stayed at the club house because of guilt and because I cried.

Looked like tonight was going to be one of those nights, and that scared the hell out of me because it'd be easy to lose it tonight, easily the hardest night of my life; I couldn't speak for Wyn, but maybe it had been for her, too. I could feel the tears forming even as I thought about Wyn's so voice uttering those three words at the beginning of our conversation.

You hurt me.

I would rather have been a guest in the MC's guest room and have Butcher use every single fucking tool we had at our disposal on me than have to come face to face with how much and how deeply I'd hurt Wyn. No torture could come close to the pain I felt holding my screaming, crying Elowyn in my arms as she let it out.

My Elowyn.

No matter if she was done with me forever, I'd never stop loving her. But I was my fucking father all over again. He'd hurt me, and I'd hurt Wyn, the woman I loved, and not even his fists had ever hurt me like her pain tonight had torn into me. I hadn't sat down on the floor to hold her as much as I could no longer stay upright with the weight of her pain forcing my knees to give out.

You hurt me. You hurt me, Lach, for years. You hurt me, and I know I agreed to it, but it hurt. And it hurt more and more the longer it went on, and I wanted you to stop because I wanted you to be the one person in my life who never hurt me.

The tears were pouring out of my eyes now, dripping onto Wyn's neck, her chest, her arm.

You hurt me. You hurt me. You hurt me. You hurt me. You hurt me.

Once tears start, it's hard as hell to stop them and maybe we shouldn't. Maybe it's OK to let them come, maybe each tear is mining some of the pain inside of us and carrying it away, outside of us. Each of my tears fell silently onto Wyn, and it wasn't a baptism so much as it was a cleansing. I was hoping the tears could somehow wash away some of the hurt I'd brought into her life.

I cried for a long damn time for the ways I'd hurt this woman, silently, though, so I wouldn't wake her, but inside I was yelling and screaming the way she'd done, only I was crying out. I'm sorry, Wyn.

I'm so damn sorry.

Once the tears stopped, I fell asleep with my Wyn tucked against me.

In the morning, I woke up the second she stirred and she gave me a solemn good morning.

"I always slept better with you," she said.

"Same," I told her, and I meant it.

"Thank you for staying," she said.

"Thank you for asking. It was the best night I've had since you left."

She declined breakfast with me, saying she needed some time to think before she headed into work, and I kissed her head and tapped the tip of her nose when we stood at her door.

"I'm going back home for two days," I said. "I'll try not to bother you. Give you some time. But call me if you need me, OK?"

She nodded.

"I love you, Wyn," I said. "I just need you to understand that. I think you're the strongest woman I know, and I'm sorry you had to be stronger because of me. And even though I can't be the man who never hurt you, I'd like to be the man who learned his lesson and who loved you like you've never been loved before in the way you always deserved."

A day later, I was back at the club house.

Six men stared at me from our guest room.

Butcher stood next to me.

"Gentlemen, thank you for joining us today. Let's get right to it: you're all gathered here because I find each of you to be abusive assholes and we're going to fight, not because that will make up for what you've done, but because that will make me happy as fuck to see you six get back a little bit of what you dealt out."

"Oh, yeah. Real fair. Two of you and six of us and you both look like you're giants on steroids," one of them said.

"No," I said. "He's just a bystander and won't be interfering. Six of you, all at once, against me."

"I'm just here to rip your hearts out of your chests and eat them once he beats you to death," Butcher said. Then he smiled at them and the fuckers just about pissed themselves.

"I think you all remember Elowyn," I said, my voice suddenly serious.

"Pretty little girl, sweet, her mother's only child."

At my girl's name, they all froze, suddenly understanding that this was not just retribution but Retribution.

I opened the file folder I held in my hands and detailed each man's crimes against Wyn. When I finished, I looked up at them.

"So now you know why you're here. We need to get started because I have things to do and Butcher skipped breakfast today so he's hungry as hell."

They didn't move.

"OK, guys, that was your cue to attack."

"Don't do this, man," one of them said, shaking. "I'm begging you --"

"I imagine Wyn cried and asked you to stop a couple of times, but you didn't, so...you can either stand there and let me do to you what you did to her, or you can give taking me down your best shot. Up to you."

"Fuck this," another man said and he rushed me, the others following suit, thinking to overwhelm me with their numbers.

And then it began. Even six to one, it was an unfair fight. Mayhem. Brothers were trained by the best...or maybe the worst, depending on your viewpoint...and I took the six of them on and even toyed with them a while until I got bored and ended each asshole, one after the other. All of them died with broken noses, broken arms, broken ribs.

It didn't change anything. Their deaths didn't erase what had happened to Wyn, but they couldn't hurt anyone else now -- and they had all left a long string of hurt in their wake, right up to the present day.

I stood looking down at the bodies for a minute.

Butcher looked at me.

"Better?"

"Not really," I said. "Got a ways to go, I think."

"Get your light back, Shadow. Otherwise, it's all darkness."

Then he walked out, and I was wondering if I'd just hallucinated that shit.