

"You keep eating that crab that way and I am going to be arrested for doing unspeakable things to you in this restaurant," Damien muttered across the table at Sionn. "And I swear to God, you suck your fingers clean one more time and there will be a reenactment of Cell Block Tango with you and my dick."

"I'd like to see you try," Sionn shot back, winking at him. Damien was outrageous and loved to push buttons, so it was always fun to tease him back, just to watch his expression. "Because if I've got to choose between you and five pounds of garlic-steamed Dungeness crab, you will wait and the crab will not. Although, both of you are pretty tasty with melted butter."

Damien sat back, speechless.

The waiter who'd come up to refill their wine chortled briefly then got his expression under control. "Will there be anything else I can get you, sirs? Or would you like some privacy?"

"We're fine. Thank you," Sionn replied. "Although, we'll probably want dessert later."

The hotel's restaurant was a five-star dining experience set on the cliffs of a breathtaking Southern California seashore. They checked in that afternoon, a spur of the moment trip down the coast in Damien's Challenger that turned into a weekend retreat. A quick stop at a mall for spare clothes and a duffel bag turned into a brief autograph session with Damien and a bunch of musicians then a photo session with a pack of young girls and their fathers who'd stopped to see a movie.

Sionn amused himself by playing the rock star's security guard, biting the inside of his cheek as one of the girls gasped when Damien pinched him on the ass.

"This is nice." Damien stared out at the ocean, the restaurant's lights soft on his handsome face. The sea was a bit choppy, a silvery weave of blue gilded by the full moon, its color reminding Sionn of Damien's eyes. His lover turned to him, his mischievous grin turning soft and sensual. "I love Miki —"

"But?" Sionn interjected, picking up his one glass to sip at the fruity, smoky white.

"I love being able to spend time with just you. It's nice." Damien reached for a crab leg, studiously cracking it open and avoiding Sionn's gaze. Emotions were often hard for Damien. Or at least showing them. As brash and outrageous as he could be, his heart was tender and easily broken, not something he showed most of the world. In fact, maybe it was a part of him he only shared with Sionn and Miki. "Me and Miki, that's easy. The band gets little harder but the whole family? That's like being in a storm of Irish and I'm drunk off of whiskey and the boat's leaking."

"I'd like to say they're not that bad but I know my family," he saluted Damien with his glass. "They're that bad. Especially the younger ones. It's like they have something to prove so they're louder, more in-your-face."

"You and I have it lucky. We're solos..." Damie trailed off, his mind probably taking them to places he didn't want to go. Shaking his head, he dug out a long strip of crab with a fork then dipped it into lemon-rich butter, his cocky smile back on his face. "To be honest, Sionn love, would you want to be Kane and Connor's younger sibling?"

"I'm their cousin, remember? My Gran constantly compared me to them and even worse, she'd throw Quinn's accomplishments in my face whenever I got it B in school." Sionn chuckled under his breath, remembering his grandmother's habitual disgust at his grades and the slight rivalry she had in her head between him and the Morgan boys. "Despite Brigid being a Finnegan, as far as she was concerned, they were a rival clan to be bested every turn. She liked to fight. I think that something every Finnegan woman is born with. The lust for a sword in their hand and a battle to engage."

"Brigid certainly does," Damien pointed out. The table was small enough for him to reach out and take Sionn's hand, tangling their fingers together as the wind carried the scent of salt and the night air towards them. "Don't take this wrong but I'm glad she's not your mother. There's a lot of expectations there in that busy head of hers. It's like

she's single-handedly trying to build a dynasty and we are pawns on her chessboard. I think if you were her kid, she'd be measuring our fingers for gold bands and picking out houses."

Sionn shook his head, tightening his clasp on Damien's hand. "She's not that bad. They wanted me to live with them when I came over but my Gran wouldn't let me go. And I loved her for wanting me so badly but she was old and set in her ways. Dealing with me was not something she planned on doing. Brigid was there to pick up the pieces and smooth down feathers, one warrior woman to another.

"I was angry back then. I felt kicked around and unwanted. Not to mention all of the crap going on in my head because of what the church told me. That I was wrong. That falling in love with another man was a sin." He brought Damien's hand up, kissing his lover's fingers. "Brigid and Donal laid a path down for me to find a way out of my rage and my hurt. Because I love my Gran but all she did was feed it. So, I have a very soft spot in my heart for Aunt Brigid."

"Your grandmother used to love chasing us off the pier. Sometimes I don't know what she hated more, seagulls or musicians." Damien took his hand back to wrestle with another piece of crab.

"In her eyes, you both were one and the same. Right up there with sewer rats." Sionn passed Damien the bowl of lemon wedges. "You were always in the way, shit on everything, and made a lot of noise. She didn't see much of a difference."

"Would you think less of me if I told you every time we play down at Finnegan's I get a secret thrill at thumbing my nose at your grandmother?"

"Honestly, D," Sionn replied. "In a lot of ways, you're exactly like her."

"See if you get any tonight." Damien wrinkled his nose. "Wait, no. Forget I said that. No sex for you also means no sex for me so since you know how selfish I am —"

"I know how you like to pretend you are but you're really shitty liar, Damien Mitchell." Sionn unraveled the warm, wet towels the waiter left behind. "How about if you finish up that crab of yours and we can go take a walk on the beach? And when we get back, we can have dessert in our room and then maybe like good hobbits, have second dessert between ourselves."

"I am not a hobbit. For one, I'm not short," Damien mumbled around his fingers, sucking them clean of crab and butter. "And between the two of us, I'd like to remind you, my foot was not the one Ryan's hamster mistook for a sex doll."

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They'd taken off their shoes and buried their toes in the sand, sitting down on the beach's gentle slope. The stairwell down the cliff was lit well enough to see but not so bright as to intrude upon the milky darkness of a romantic evening. The ocean kept them company, murmuring of far-off lands and midnight swims but neither one of them felt inclined to put any part of their bodies into cold water.

Sionn sat as close to Damien as he could, wrapping his arm around his lover's waist. It took Damien a minute before he finally relaxed enough to lean into Sionn's embrace. The tiny sigh from the musician's parted lips was as sweet as the bit of chocolate they'd been given at the end of their meal.

"Do you think people wonder about how the two of us get on?" Damien murmured. "I was at the studio the other day and I saw a guy I used to know back before — before Sinner's got big — and he asked me if I would hook up with him. I told him I was with you and he kinda laughed at me. I'm not sure what that says about me or maybe the two of us."

"I think that says more about him than it says about you," Sionn remarked. "In a lot of ways, you're just as private as Miki. You just have a different kind of face you wear. You're more sociable but it's kind of a front, that rock star thing you play at. Your partner in crime just doesn't know how to people as well as you do."

"Miki is about as sociable as a rabid wolverine with sea urchins caught up its ass." Damien snorted. "I just wanted you to know that... you and I? I don't ever want to see my life without you in it. I love you so fucking much, it hurts sometimes to look at you. And I know I don't say that a lot. Fuck, maybe I don't say it at all but you mean as much to me as Miki does. Maybe... okay, in some ways even more. Because I don't have to share you with anybody and I feel like you get everything that I am."

"Yeah, I get you." Sionn tangled his fingers into Damien's hair, pulling his head back with a tug. Capturing Damien's mouth in a fierce kiss, Sionn drank from his lover's lips until he left Damien breathless. "I love you, D. I love the quiet you the nobody knows. And I love this fierce, argumentative warrior who will stand in front of a rushing horde to protect his broken brother. But most of all, I love the man who shares my bed and my heart and sometimes even lets me eat my own bacon. So, just so we're clear, I will always be in your life, just like you'll always be in my soul."