

Chapter One

“Need another drink?” The words were clear despite the general ruckus of the bar, the voice like whiskey on the rocks. If Cillian O’Malley put a little imagination into it, he could almost taste her tone. It was the closest he’d come to having an actual drink in ten months.

Olivia.

He looked up, straight into night-dark eyes that made him think reckless thoughts about leaning across this bar and kissing the hell out of this woman. It was something the old Cillian would have done, and if the look on her face was any indication, he would have gotten the shit kicked out of him for the effort. He smiled despite the dark mood that had brought him wandering into Jameson’s to begin with. “Hey, gorgeous.”

The guarded look on her face was the same as the first time they’d met, like she expected him to whip out a gun and start shooting or threaten her or some shit like that. Since he knew for a fact he’d never so much as raised his voice at her in the two times they’d interacted previously, it stung a little that *that* was her knee-jerk reaction to him.

And it made him want to show her how wrong she was.

“You know, I’d pay good money to know what I did to piss you off so much.”

Olivia’s expression iced over in a way that would send a smarter man running. It just made Cillian more intrigued. He’d been caught up in his family’s dramas for so long, it was refreshing to having an unconnected interaction—even if it was with someone who hated him. Hell, it was almost better this way.

It just added to the tangled mess inside him caused by sitting in this bar. Jameson's and he had a complicated history that he'd never be able to escape. It was the last place his family had felt whole. He'd been here with his brothers, Aiden and Teague and Devlin, on the final night when they'd been celebrating Teague's impending marriage. And then Devlin had been shot in a drive-by on the way home, and the O'Malley family had lost the closest thing to an innocent they could call their own. Cillian hated this place as much as he loved it, but it was here his feet brought him when he wandered.

Olivia crossed her arms over her chest, which only served to accent the way her breasts pressed against her shredded T-shirt. It wasn't ripped enough to be truly indecent, but he could see several slices of her dusky skin beneath the black fabric, and it was distracting as hell. She cleared her throat, but he still gave her body a slow look, taking in her spiked combat boots, tiny skirt, coming back to that shirt, and then settling on her face. She was beautiful in the way good models were—a little too sharp for strictly traditional good looks, but all the more striking because of it. The mass of dark hair and the anger in near-black eyes took her over the edge into devastating.

She looked like the kind of mistake he would have jumped at a year ago. He *had* jumped at her six months ago when they'd first met, and it had gone in the same direction their current interaction was headed. She'd taken an instant dislike to him, and nothing he could say seemed to convince her that he wasn't this monster she seemed to label him as.

So much had happened between then and now, so much that weighed him down and threatened to drag him under for good. He hadn't even been out by himself since he was shot—the same night he'd last seen Olivia. He rubbed his shoulder, half-sure he could feel the scar beneath the fabric of his shirt.

What would it be like to be that carefree and crazy version of himself, just for one more night?

“Do. You. Want. Another. Drink?”

Maybe I could let it all go—the stress and the guilt and the sick feeling I can’t quite escape—just for a little while. He leaned onto the bar. “You want to get out of here after your shift?”

Her mouth tightened. “I don’t know why I bother. Never mind.”

“Wait.” He took a deep breath and let go of the wild impulse that had driven him to offer. He wasn’t that guy anymore, and trying to reclaim it was like spitting on Devlin’s grave. Cillian sighed. “I’ll have an apple juice.”

She blinked. “Apple juice.”

“Yes, please.”

He thought he’d sounded perfectly polite, but she frowned harder. “You come in here a couple times a week—or at least you used to from what Benji says—and you’ve been sitting here, nursing an *apple juice*?”

“Yeah.” He hadn’t touched alcohol since the night his youngest brother was killed in a drive-by shooting. He was the reason they’d been on that street to begin with, walking home in an effort to sober him up a little. If they’d just called a cab, Devlin would still be alive and... Cillian exhaled harshly. It was pointless to wish for things to be different, but the truth was that he was at least partially responsible for his brother’s death, indirectly or not. He could barely stand the thought of drinking again and potentially putting someone else he loved in danger.

Olivia seemed to realize she was staring and shook herself. She bent over and grabbed the apple juice, shooting a look at him like she’d never seen him before. “Why don’t you drink?”

Alcoholic?” It was almost amusing watching the horror appear on her face. “Shit, sorry, it’s none of my business.”

Maybe not, but a perverse part of him liked that she wanted to know more about him, even if it was morbid curiosity. “It never brought me anything but trouble.” *There are plenty of other ways to get into trouble.*

“It doesn’t stop most people from doing it.” She finished pouring his juice and slid it across the bar.

“Has anyone ever told you that you’re something of a pessimist?” The edges of her lips quirked, and Cillian cocked his head to the side. “Holy fuck. That was almost a smile. I think you might not hate me as much as I thought.”

Instantly, her amusement was gone. Olivia stepped back, as if the two-foot bar between them wasn’t nearly enough space. “Are you opening a tab or paying now?”

He hadn’t set out tonight planning on coming here, but it was the first time he’d left the house without the muscle his father and brother usually insisted on, and he hadn’t wanted to waste the opportunity. He nodded. “Benji knows me. Have him put it on my running tab.”

She hesitated like she wanted to argue, but then turned and stalked to the giant owner of the bar. Benji had been operating on O’Malley territory before it was O’Malley territory, and Cillian always got the feeling that he’d still be here twenty years from now, regardless of the power struggles that ran through Boston like fault lines. As expected, the big man nodded, and Olivia walked back to him, her permanent frown firmly in place. “Who the hell are you?”

“Cillian O’Malley at your service.” He held out a hand, waiting for a full five seconds for her to take it before he lowered it. “Usually a handshake takes two people.”

“O’Malley.” She glanced around, but the bar was unusually slow tonight, and there was no one within easy eavesdropping range. “I know that name.”

Just once in his godforsaken life, he’d like to meet someone and not see that light bulb go off behind their eyes, but the chances of *that* happening in a bar in his family’s territory was nonexistent.

Suddenly tired, he sat back. “You know what? Never mind. I’m heading out.” He slid the coaster he’d scrawled his number on across the bar. “If you change your mind about letting loose, you give me a call.” He downed his drink and dropped a wad of cash onto the bar. The surprise on her face was almost reward enough as he pushed to his feet and strode out of the bar.

Almost.

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Olivia Rashidi watched the O’Malley walk out the door and told herself to leave it alone. She’d figured out all she needed to know about him after they’d first met six months ago. He’d had trouble written all over him, from his tattoos to his ridiculously expensive suit to the way he’d carried himself, as if he was waiting for someone to give him the excuse to start a fight. Exactly the kind of thing she avoided—and for good reason. Men like that created chaos and then walked away unscathed, leaving the people around them floundering in their wake.

It didn’t matter if she hadn’t seen much of this O’Malley in the meantime or if he’d had new shadows in his dark brown eyes. She had other priorities right now, and jumping from the frying pan into the fire wasn’t her idea of a good time.

“What are you still doing here, Olivia?”

She turned to face Benji, trying to keep the guilty look off her face. He'd told her to head home ten minutes ago, and she'd stopped to poke at Cillian O'Malley. *Good job staying away from that guy.* She held up her hands. "I'm leaving, I'm leaving."

"Don't forget your tip."

So he'd seen that and known the reason she hadn't immediately left was because she'd let her curiosity get the best of her. *Awesome.* Olivia worked to keep a smile on her face. It wasn't Benji's fault that she had a nasty attraction to trouble, even though she knew better. She snatched the cash off the bar and froze when she realized how much Cillian had left her. The bills weren't ones.

They were twenties.

Goddamn it. She stared at the money in her hand and, for a long second, actually considered keeping it. But then reality reared up and kicked her in the teeth. She couldn't keep it. *But...*

No. She wasn't the type of woman who could be bought, and she wasn't going to give him the wrong idea that she was. He might not have asked for anything in return, but being in his debt was bad no matter which way she looked at it.

And maybe you're just looking for trouble in all the wrong places...just like you always do.

Shut up.

"See you later, Benji." She was moving before she decided on a course of action, grabbing her jacket from behind the bar and heading out the front door. A quick look down the street showed a familiar figure striding away. "Hey!"

What are you doing?

She ignored her inner voice and started after him. “Hey! Cillian, wait!”

He didn’t turn around, and she cursed him in both Russian and English. Growing up the way she had, she knew plenty of creative cursing in both languages.

“Hey, stop!”

She ran after him, thankful she’d put on her badass studded boots instead of the pair of heels she’d been jonesing after. An eight-hour shift on her feet would have her hating herself if she’d gone with the pretty shoes—and they would have made it impossible to catch up with the O’Malley.

She grabbed his arm and froze at the feel of his muscles flexing in her grip. *Holy wow.*

He finally turned to face her and it struck her that, without the bar between them, he was so much larger than she was. Not large like her ex, Sergei—this man was built lean instead of for brute strength—but he still dwarfed her. And he smelled good, like some kind of spicy men’s cologne that instantly had her thinking thoughts she had no business entertaining.

Like what it would be like to bury her nose in his neck and inhale deeply. The insane desire to do so almost overwhelmed her.

Everything about him was overwhelming, from his beautiful face, to his impeccably styled dark hair, to the tattoos peeking out of his clothes at neck and wrists. The ink creeping up the side of his neck was like a wild thing trying to escape from his insanely expensive suit, a strange combination of brutal strength and poised polish that she should have known better than to be attracted to.

Except, apparently, her body hadn’t gotten the memo.

She realized she was still clutching his arm and made herself let go so she could offer back the cash. *Right, because that's why you chased him down a dark street.* “I don't want your money.”

“It's called a tip, sweetheart. It's just good manners.”

“I don't want it.” Even as she said it, she wondered why she was being so damn stubborn about this. He hadn't asked anything of her. All he'd done was throw too much money at a bartender, which was something plenty of drunks did from time to time. Except he wasn't drunk. She should be elated at having the extra cash—God knew she needed it. Instead, there was a growing recklessness in her chest, one she'd thought she'd outgrown a long time ago. “Just take it, okay?”

“No.” His gaze narrowed on her face, giving her the sudden thought that he saw too much. Before she could decide what to do with that, he moved closer, giving her another whiff of that cologne that made her whole body break out in goose bumps. Or maybe it was the man himself, the streetlights creating a skeleton's mask of his face, turning his eyes into dark pits of shadows. “Why do you care so much?”

“Oh my God, just take it back.” She should drop the cash and head for home. Or, hell, at least take a few steps away so that she wasn't in danger of brushing against him if she took a deep breath.

But she couldn't force her hand to unclench or her feet to create any distance between them. She cleared her throat, trying to get her thoughts back on track. “I didn't ask for your charity.”

“Yeah, I got it. You win. I'm an asshole.”

“I didn't say that.”

“Not in so many words, no.” His gaze raked her body much the same way it had back at the bar, making every alarm in her head go off. Spending any more time in this man’s presence was dangerous, though she couldn’t say for sure what she was most afraid of. She lifted her chin in challenge, demanding...She wasn’t sure what she was demanding. Her gaze dropped to his mouth, and she licked her lips. *What am I doing? Walk away. Walk away right now.*

No. Not yet.

He murmured, “If the shoe fits...”

And then he gripped her jaw and kissed her.

She was so surprised that she opened for him—or at least that was what she told herself when his tongue slipped into her mouth and stroked hers. He didn’t touch her anywhere else, and somehow that only made their point of contact that much more erotic.

It should have stopped there. He was even in the process of leaning back when her too-long-denied hormones got the better of her and she fisted the front of his expensive shirt and yanked him back to her. *This. This is what I came out here for.*

He froze for one endless moment and, frustrated, she nipped his bottom lip.

She barely had a chance to register his going tense before he dug one hand into her hair, tipping her head back so he could get better access to her mouth, taking her as if he had every right to it, his tongue stroking hers. He tasted of apple juice and cinnamon, making her head spin. She should stop this. She would. Really, she would.

No, you won’t. You’ve never been able to stop yourself once the recklessness in your blood takes over.

She didn’t care. She didn’t care about anything other than maintaining the pleasure his touch brought her for just a few minutes longer. Her back hit the brick wall, his free hand

hooking the back of one of her knees and hiking it up and around his waist. And then... *oh my God*. There was only his slacks and her panties between them, his cock a hard ridge that lined up perfectly with her clit, the contact so good, it temporarily overstimulated her.

He broke the kiss, resting his forehead against hers. “This isn’t what I planned when I kissed you.”

No, she had no one to blame except herself for the desperation beating in time with her heart. She *knew* she should stop. She knew too many men like him. She didn’t like anything that he represented—a pampered son of a family grown rich on the backs of others and their own illegal activities. Hell, she didn’t even like him.

But she didn’t want to stop.

It was like the last two years had her turning into one giant snowball of need, and Cillian just happened to be in the right place at the right time to shred her perfect record of self-control.

That’s all this is. He’s beautiful and he’s here. Nothing more.

She was reaching and she knew it, but she didn’t want to stop.

He sighed, the same world-weary sound he’d made at the bar. “Another time.”

“Wait.” She clung to him, her inner voice screaming that this was a mistake, but she wasn’t listening.

He went still, but it wasn’t with surprise like the last time. No, this was a predator ready to pounce. “Say what you want, sweetheart. I need you to be perfectly clear.”

Again, her common sense tried to say this was an awful idea. *Two years of being good and keeping to the straight and narrow. If I’m going to jump off a bridge, it might as well be with this man. There’s no chance of feelings getting involved and me making the same mistake I did with Sergei.*

One night.

One time and then I walk away with no strings attached.

She reached between them and cupped the front of his slacks. “I want this.” She stroked him, the feel of his thick length in the palm of her hand making her entire body perk up even further. “Just this once.”

He didn’t back up, his lips brushing hers with each word. “This is a mistake.”

“Yes.” There was no way she could pretend otherwise.

“Fuck.” He nuzzled her neck, making her shiver. “Just...fuck.”

And then he lifted her off the ground, waiting until she wrapped her legs around his waist to walk a few feet down the street to an alley. It was cleaner than the one behind Jameson’s, but not by much. She didn’t care, as long as he didn’t stop touching her. Cillian readjusted his grip so he could wrap a fist around her hair, tilting her head back so she was forced to meet his gaze. “You’re sure?”

“Stop talking before I change my mind.” She kissed him, rolling her body against his until he cursed and kissed her back. The barely controlled desperation in every muscle of his body made her feel wild and free in a way she hadn’t in a very, very long time.

He guided her to stand, his hand going to the hem of her skirt. When he hesitated, she took his hand and guided it up to cup her between her legs. “You have a condom?” she asked.

“I don’t get you.”

“You don’t have to. Just don’t stop.”

“You don’t like me.”

“Nope.”

His thumb dipped beneath the band of her panties, stroking her so lightly, she was half-sure she imagined it. She made a sound of frustration and the bastard chuckled. “Damn, sweetheart. I think I like being someone you don’t like.”

He pushed a single finger into her, cursing when she clenched around him. She had the wild thought that it’d been too long and too much had happened and it would never work, but he pumped a few times, her pleasure building with each stroke.

She kissed him for everything she was worth, needing this more than she needed her next breath. A second finger joined the first, spiking her desire. “*Yes.*” She rolled her hips, trying to take him deeper, but he apparently wasn’t about to let her drive things.

Cillian’s whole hand dipped into her panties, cupping her even as he continued working her. “When’s the last time—”

She reached down and squeezed his cock. “Are you really going to ruin this?”

“Hardly.” He slipped an arm around the small of her back, holding her in place while he stroked her, his thumb sliding over her clit, teasing her until her breath came in gasps and her whole body was strung so tight, it was a wonder she didn’t fly apart at the seams.

“The condom.”

He didn’t argue, just shifting enough that he could withdraw it from his pocket. She had the wild thought that he’d expected to take someone home tonight, but it didn’t matter. He had protection and *that* was the most important thing. He freed his cock and rolled the condom on.

“How do you want it?”

Has anyone ever asked me that?

Stop thinking so much.

She turned around, shoved her panties to her knees, and braced her palms on the brick wall. Cillian's chuckle curled her toes, and then he was there, pressing against her back, his lips on the sensitive spot behind her ear as he notched his cock at her entrance. "You think if I take you from behind that you won't know it's me." He shoved into her, drawing a strangled cry from her mouth. His hand snaked around to stroke her. "Please, sweetheart. It's *my* cock inside you, *my* hand on your clit, and it's *me* who's going to make you come. Right. Fucking. Now."

He filled her impossibly, the feeling of him sliding in and out of her almost too much. And he was right—there was no escaping the knowledge of him, like he was imprinting himself on her skin. He circled her clit as he fucked her, surrounding her until her entire world narrowed down to Cillian and the orgasm that drew closer with every stroke.

"Now." His free hand came up to cover her mouth, his words in her ear a dirty fantasy she never knew she had. "Let go."

It was too late to go back, even if she wanted to. She came, crying out against his hand as he pushed her over the edge, her orgasm so intense, her knees actually buckled. He kept her pinned to him as his strokes became ragged, and he followed her over the edge, muttering her name on his lips as he did.

Olivia opened her eyes and tried to find her place in the new order of things. She took a deep breath, and then another. *Nothing has changed. It can't.* But that was okay. He'd allowed her an escape, no matter how brief.

She withdrew and straightened her clothes, watching him out of the corner of her eye as he did the same. "Thanks."

"Did you get what you wanted?"

She inhaled sharply. "That's not what this was."

“Don’t insult me.” He took her elbow and walked her out of the alley. “That’s exactly what this was. You had a need and I fulfilled it—gladly.” He flagged down a cab that had just deposited a group of men in front of Jameson’s. She started to protest, but the look he gave her stopped her dead in her tracks.

Still, she made herself keep going. “I’m taking the red line.”

“Sweetheart, you can barely walk straight right now. Put your pride in the backseat and let me get you a cab.”

“But—”

He gripped her chin exactly the way he did when he first kissed her, those dark eyes seeing entirely too much. “You’ll be seeing me again, Olivia.”

He didn’t wait for an answer, opening the back door and guiding her inside. Then he shut the door before she could formulate a response, shoving some money at the cabdriver and stalking away. Olivia watched him go, her body still aching from his touch, her mind terrifyingly blank.

Oh my God, what did I just start?