

Le Français Chapter 59-68

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Chapter 59

Sinead didn't like the fact that going to Marc's apartment made her feel like a high school freshman getting picked up for a date with the cute junior. Her palms were sweaty, she had to remind herself twice that she'd shaved her legs the night before, and she found herself breathing rapidly three or four times.

The mystery was gone, wasn't it? After their talk on Monday, she knew he wasn't the big bad blackmailer. She had the power. He'd said it over and over.

She could step away at any time. One word and he would stop everything.

And yet her nerves were spiking as she rode the elevator in his building. Her fingers clung to the handrails of the metal box nervously. Her foot tapped impatiently. It had warmed up over the week and she was wearing black, open-toed heels since the snow had melted. She'd worn a high-waisted, tight pair of faux leather pants that hugged her legs snugly, and she'd paired it with a cream buttoned blouse that billowed out nicely and let her show off her small amount of cleavage without looking slutty.

Marc had said they were going on a date when he'd summoned her. And it had been a summoning, not an ask. Not a request.

'Be at my place at 4 PM on Saturday, ma petite rebelle. Casual but classy dress. I'm taking you somewhere fun, but indoors and non-active.'

Sinead knew her ass looked fantastic in the tight pants, and she'd used some of the tricks from the stylists Marc had treated her to before to get her hair looking better than she'd ever managed herself in the past. She'd looked so good she'd even taken a picture and sent it to Jules, who'd immediately asked who her hot date was with. That had made Sinead obfuscate, saying it was a blind first date set up by her cousin.

Jules, of course, wanted updates. Sinead had managed to hold her off and set up that they'd meet for lunch the next day. She was... mostly sure she'd be free by then.

The idea that maybe she wouldn't be had Sinead feeling a little hot under the collar.

Up on the correct floor, Sinead marched down the corridor towards Marc's door, her hips swaying due to the high heels. She felt hot and sexy. She felt confident. She felt... nervous. Still.

She knocked and waited, and after a few moments Marc opened the door and flashed her that fucking smile that looked so good.

"*Bonjour, ma petite rebelle,*" he said, offering her a hand and escorting her inside. He made an obvious, long once-over of her outfit. He smiled even more broadly when he saw she was wearing the necklace and earrings he'd given her. "You look ravishing, Detective. *Parfaite.*"

"You look pretty dressed down," Sinead responded, raising an eyebrow. He was wearing athletic shorts and a T-shirt, which was much different than the very nice suits she usually saw him in.

"I was at the gym down the street working out, and a conversation delayed my return," Marc said, a small conciliatory smile on his lips. "I will need a moment to get myself together. Please, follow me." He led her down the hall and into the kitchen - despite apparently running behind, he already had a glass of wine poured for her. As usual, it was fruity and fragrant and tasted *expensive*, unlike the cheap bottles or boxed wine she had at her place. Just the smell of it made her relax though, and she followed Marc willingly from the kitchen to the stairs, and up towards his bedroom.

The last time I was up here... Sinead thought to herself and glanced at the bed, imagining what she'd looked like kneeling there on the edge, her bare ass raised up and turned red from the paddling. Her pussy dripping from the brutal attention. It put a flush to her cheeks and she tried to dispel the image by sipping her wine.

"I'll need to take a quick shower, Detective," Marc said, setting down his glass on the dresser and opening a drawer. He delicately pulled out several pieces of what was immediately recognisable as lingerie, setting them out on top of the dresser. "While I am busy, please change into these. I saw them and couldn't think of anyone looking better in them than you. And also, I think you should replace your current accessory with this one." He pulled out another item from the drawer. A gold-coloured buttplug.

And it was bigger than the one currently seated in her ass.

Sinead gulped slightly, looking from it to him and back. She'd gotten used to putting the silver one in now and wearing it. She'd even worn it a couple of days that week even though she wouldn't be seeing him. She'd masturbated with it in three different times.

"OK," she said and licked her lips.

Marc gave her another of those fucking smiles of his and he reached out, cupping her jaw gently. "*Ça va bien se passer, Sinead,*" he said.

Sinead wasn't sure what he'd said, but the tone had been reassuring. *I really need to start refreshing my French*, she thought to herself. Grade Nine was a long time ago now and most of her government-mandated education in the language was *long* gone.

She nodded, and Marc leaned forward and placed a small, chaste kiss on her lips before winking and heading towards the washroom. He pulled off his shirt on the way and Sinead found herself staring at his back as he went into the room, only closing the door most of the way. He might not have been super well-muscled, and age had softened him a bit, but he was still sexy.

She looked back at the lingerie and quickly drained her glass. It was a pretty green colour, no doubt to compliment her hair and eyes. The bra was slim but well-constructed, the cups designed to give her a nice lift, and the lace would probably look and feel amazing. There was a lace bikini panty, which was a little surprising considering she would have assumed a man would always revert to a thong when buying underwear for a woman, but there was also a garter belt and a pair of black, thigh-high hose. They definitely weren't necessary with her pants, but...

Marc wanted her to wear them, so she would.

That was the deal. He asked; she decided whether she had a reason to say no or not. She didn't have a reason, and he wanted it.

She started unbuttoning her pants, glancing at the washroom again as she heard the shower running. It wouldn't take much to go to him in there, to slide into the shower. To feel his cock in her hand, his skin on hers...

But he hadn't asked for that. He'd asked her to change.

Sinead swallowed and tried to reconcile what she wanted with what he wanted, and realised it was all for the same reason they weren't just jumping into bed and fucking. Why he hadn't actually fucked her at all yet.

Anticipation was seduction. He was seducing her and had been the whole time. And that was kind of scary, but it was also kind of hot.

"Fuck it," Sinead murmured, speeding up her undressing. She'd wear the hell out of the lingerie and make it look *good*.

Translations

- "*Ça va bien se passer, Sinead,*" = "It's going to be okay, Sinead,"

Chapter 60

Marc showered quickly and stepped out of the glass stall, drying himself off and hitting his hair with the blowdryer as he brushed it out. A little bit of product to keep it from becoming mussed and he was ready to go - he did, however, hesitate over his clothes. He could go back out naked, or he could go back out wearing his athletic shorts without underwear. The first option would be a little more intimidating, his cock out like that. Especially since he intended to use it. The other would be a little more about temptation though. Sinead would see the bulge in the front, but not get a good look until he wanted her to.

He opted for the shorts, sliding them on quickly and bundling his underwear and shirt together to toss into his laundry bin. Then he stepped out of the washroom and made a point of not looking at Sinead until he'd opened his closet and tossed the sweaty clothes inside.

When he did turn to her, he pursed his lips slightly as he controlled his reaction.

She looked stunning. The bra must have been a near-perfect fit - it was always difficult to purchase Felicity something for her bust that fit comfortably since every damned bra maker in the world seemed to work by different standards and sizes. This one hugged Sinead's small breasts wonderfully though, lifting them into a slight cleavage without being too ridiculous. The lace and see-through mesh teased without revealing more than a couple of glimpses at her areola, and the extra 'cage' straps that framed her inner cleavage and connected to the main straps hinted at an element of bondage without being obvious about it. The garter belt fit her waist nicely, and she'd donned the expensive thigh-highs he'd ordered a couple of weeks before from France - nothing made in America seemed to compete with British or French work when it came to hose.

Sinead was standing between the bed and the mirror, likely having been looking herself over in the standing mirror, and she was chewing on the inside of her lip nervously as he gazed at her.

"Turn, *ma petite rebelle*," Marc said, stepping towards her and twirling a finger.

She did as he asked, slowly turning. Her ass was framed perfectly in the panties, and her thin, lightly muscled back with its smooth, pale skin looked delightful.

Marc approached her fully as she finished her slow spin and caught her chin between his thumb and forefinger, looking down into her eyes as she looked up at him - a spark of challenge in them. She knew she looked good, and she didn't like that he wasn't saying so. *That* was the Sinead he was used to dealing with, the fun Sinead that was a little resistant without being petulant about it.

"How do the stockings feel?" he asked her, diverting her attention.

“They feel- fuck, I’m not usually a pantyhose kind of woman but they feel amazing,” she admitted. “I’ve never felt anything so smooth before.”

Marc smiled and nodded. “Only the best for a woman I share my time with, Detective,” he said. Then he let go of her chin and stroked his finger over the necklace he’d given her. “You look ravishing, Sinead,” he said quietly. “Good enough to eat.”

“Thank you,” she said a little breathlessly, responding to him giving her what she’d wanted.

“In fact,” he said, then surprised her by reaching around her and picking her up by the ass, twirling her around in a circle once before lowering her to the bed until she was sitting, and then laying back, on it as he loomed over her. “I think I’ll do just that.”

Marc spread Sinead’s legs at the knees purposefully, and she looked at him with wide eyes as he knelt beside the bed and let his lips brush along the silky, lace tops of the thigh highs before trailing to her warm, bare skin. He kissed her there, and then swapped legs to the other bare portion of thigh, before kissing higher still.

And then he sighed.

“Detective, *attention*,” he said. “From now on, when you are wearing a garter belt, the panties or thong go on after the belt is connected to the stockings, *compris*? Now how am I supposed to easily pull these panties off of you? And how are you supposed to go to the washroom?”

“I- Uh,” Sinead said, flushing a bit in embarrassment. “I’ve never *worn* a garter belt before,” she said. “I didn’t think of that.”

Marc *tsked* and sighed softly, then raised an eyebrow. “What did you wear for your wedding with your ex?”

“I didn’t wear stockings or pantyhose,” she said. “Just a garter for the garter toss. It was a summer wedding, pretty casual.”

“*Quelle honte*,” Marc sighed. “And now I must fix things.” He slowly began undoing each band from the garter belt that was attached to the stockings, taking his time to tease her with little touches and looks.

“Um...” Sinead said after a long moment. “This is... a weird question, and you can say no. Would you want to fuck me in my wedding dress?”

Marc stopped what he was doing, blinking in surprise as he looked at Sinead. “I hadn’t thought about it,” he admitted. He would have assumed that, if she still had the dress, it would be something of a sacred item.

"I only ever got to wear it like three times, and two of those were for fittings and once for the wedding," she said. "I always loved how I looked in it though. And my ex... well, let's just say he wasn't as adventurous as your pinky finger, let alone how you are, Marc. I think it would be kind of hot to maybe, sometime, play around in it. Just for roleplay. Or whatever."

Marc had finished his unbuckling of the garter straps and he wrapped his fingers into the waistband of her new panties, slowly tugging them down as he looked her in the eyes. "If that's something you would like to do, Detective, I think we could have a very intimate night of fun with that particular game. Perhaps you are the runaway bride, and I am the best man disgusted by his cheating friend?"

"That would be good," she breathed out and nodded.

"Then let's put a pin in that, as my employees like to say," Marc said as he gently pulled the panties down her thighs and over the stockings, taking them all the way off her legs and leaving her bare to him. "Because as I mentioned, you look good enough to eat."

Translation

- "*Quelle honte,*" = "*What a shame,*"

Chapter 61

For all that Marc had played with Sinead before, he'd never eaten her out. He'd tasted her on his fingers, but it had always only been fingers touching her pussy to get her off. And even though she'd been ass-up the last time she'd been in his apartment, his focus had more been on that ass and not the pussy below it. Sure, he'd gotten a good look at it, but not like this.

Sinead's pale skin flushed so easily it was endearing. Even her inner thighs after a few kisses were a little warm. But her pussy - well, it was pretty and pink and looked so *needy*. Her outer labia were two little swells of smooth skin that looked utterly kissable, and her inner labia were a little pouty but not overly dominant. Her ass also made a nice little cleavage on the edge of the bed between which the golden disc of the buttplug was sitting.

Rather than diving right in, Marc smirked a little and blew a thin stream of air in a zig-zag across Sinead's nethers, teasing her and making her squirm a little. She was leaning up, propped on her elbows, and watching him with big eyes and the tip of her tongue caught between her teeth.

"Elle est magnifique, Detective," Marc said. "And I love how you smell."

"R-"

"Shh," Marc hushed her before she could get out a word. "This is my time, Sinead. Only answer the questions I ask you. Do you understand?"

She swallowed and nodded.

"Good," Marc said with a smile. And then he leaned in and just grazed the edge of his tongue along the outermost edges of her inner labia, making her quiver. "Mmmm," Marc hummed softly. "And such an exquisite taste."

Marc worked her slowly, layering in little techniques to tease her without driving her forward. He'd spent hours practicing those methods with Felicity, and plenty of time before that with his various short-term girlfriends through his early thirties and his twenties. It had always seemed so strange to him that the whole 'macho man' thing abandoned such a simple way to look like a Giver of Pleasure to a woman.

Sinead's breathing was steady and deep as she tried not to say anything, or reach down to him. He could tell she wanted to as she grabbed the sheets on the bed with both hands and bit her lip.

"Very nice, Detective," Marc eventually said. It had maybe been seven or eight minutes of teasing her and he hadn't delved his tongue deep enough between her lips to see or taste her inner core, but they were starting to subtly shift with her arousal as her outer labia swelled with the increased blood flow from the desired attention. Rather than delving in however, Marc

brought up a hand as he pressed his lips below her pussy onto her perineum. That kiss made Sinead shudder, and that shudder grew as he pressed his finger to the base of the gold buttplug and pushed on it a little.

Marc chuckled softly as he eased off the pressure, and then pressed on it again. "How did you enjoy putting in your new accessory, *ma petite rebelle*?" he asked.

"Um," Sinead gasped. "It was- shit- it was easier than I expected?"

"That's good," Marc said, then kissed her perineum softly again. "You've been wearing the other one more often, haven't you?"

Sinead was already a little red across her chest and up her neck to her cheeks from the play, but that deepened. "Yes," she admitted.

"You've been a very good girl then, getting ready for me," Marc said, kissing a little higher towards her pussy. "Was there any pain, putting in your new little friend?"

"No, just... uncomfortable for a minute."

"So if I were to..." Marc said and gripped the base of the buttplug and tugged on it, slow but insistent. Sinead began panting almost immediately and he could tell she wanted to close her eyes but also didn't want to stop watching him. Marc tugged, and tugged, and then her asshole started to part and the golden bulb of the plug slid out of her, stretching her until just the dull point of the tip was in her. "Good girl," Marc murmured gently, using his other hand to rub her thigh. Then he pressed the plug back into her just as slowly as he had taken it out.

"Fuuuck," Sinead exhaled as her ass tensed, then relaxed and accepted it.

"Very good girl," Marc said quietly with a smile, looking up and meeting her eyes. "Keep doing what you are doing, *ma petite rebelle*. Soon your ass will be ready. But for now-" He pressed his lips to her pussy fully, driving his tongue into her. She tasted warm and silky, with notes of chestnut and a hint of cherry - he had to stop himself from continuing down the path of being a Sommelier to her pussy as he smiled to himself and teased her.

Sinead sucked in a breath, her stomach pulling in as her diaphragm fluttered. Marc put a hand on each of her thighs and pushed them back and away, giving him more room to work, then slid his hands closer so that he could use his thumbs to spread her pussy wide, looking at the gorgeous, healthy pink of her before teasing her little nub of a clit with his tongue.

She came. Marc hadn't been expecting it to come on quite so fast and hard but then realised she must have been feeling a lot more backed up than he did if she wasn't seeing anyone while he'd been with Felicity regularly. Her orgasm was beautiful as her jaw went a little slack and her forehead scrunched up a little. She didn't squirt, but she oozed a little milky trail of creamy fluid

from her opening that Marc didn't hesitate to lick up. It was a more pungent taste of her natural lubricants and made him growl a little as he drove his tongue into her through her orgasm, seeking more of the intimate taste.

Then Sinead heaved out a heavy breath and her legs relaxed and she started panting. Marc stood up quickly, looming over her as he leaned in and kissed her. She kissed back, tasting herself on his lips without complaint. His cock, hard in his shorts, pressed against her crotch. She threw her arms around him, cradling Marc to her, and he hummed appreciatively of the deep kiss.

But he wasn't done.

Marc broke her hold on him easily, standing up and dropping his shorts as she couldn't decide whether to look at his face or his hard cock. He gestured to it pointedly. "Most of the time, Sinead, you won't have the pleasure of gaining your release without asking for permission first, and certainly not before earning it. Now you need to close the gap if you want anything else while we're together. Attend to me, Detective. And don't be messy, we're still going out and I would not stand for going where we're going with you looking a sight."

Sinead blinked and rolled over, getting on her knees. "Yes, sir," she said as she reached for his cock.

"Good girl," Marc said as she grasped it. *Very good girl.*

Translation

- "*Elle est magnifique, Detective,*" = "*She is beautiful, Detective,*"

Chapter 62

Looking into the mirror, Sinead let out a long, slow breath before she started to reapply her lipstick. She could hear Marc outside of the washroom, in his closet, getting dressed.

The mission had been accomplished, mostly. Despite giving Marc a fairly heavy blowjob, most of her makeup hadn't got messed up in any way. Lipstick was tough *not* to get at least a little worn off though, and her hair needed a bit of work to get back to where it had been beforehand. To be fair, she wasn't sure if her hair being mussed was from giving or receiving though.

Marc had made her cum so hard she'd felt it in her toes. She wasn't even exactly sure *how* that had happened. He hadn't done anything revelatory in the cunnilingus department. He didn't have any special moves as far as she could tell. He didn't introduce any new toys or anything. He just... ate her out, and she came like she'd gotten the best fuck of her life.

But then, when had he *not* made her come like that?

After that sort of orgasm, she hadn't wanted to hold back on the blowjob. Not like that first time when she'd started and tried to punish him for leveraging her wants on the case. She already knew that doing that was pointless; she *wanted* his dick in her mouth. She wanted to feel the power of making him moan and groan, of knowing that his focus was on *her*. That she was making him feel things that couldn't be controlled because he was so controlled.

Marc hadn't exactly held back, either. He hadn't shoved his cock into her throat or anything. He didn't even make her gag. But Sinead had spent about half the time in command of the blowjob, working every little skill with her lips and tongue that she could think of, and the other half he'd - well, he'd fucked her face. Gently, sure, but he'd been in command. Thrusting between her lips. Driving his cock against her tongue.

And she'd enjoyed it.

That was the strangest part, as she looked at herself in the mirror. She'd never been the kind of woman who had an oral fixation and loved the idea of giving a blowjob. She'd done them, sometimes happily, but she'd never looked at a cock she'd just made pop with the taste of cum in her mouth and thought, 'I wish I could do that again. Right now.'

"Almost finished, *ma petite rebelle*?" Marc asked as he came into the washroom. He stood right next to her at the sink counter and placed his hand on her bare ass. She hadn't even put the lingerie panties back on yet. The thing was, he didn't *slap* her ass. Her ex would have done that, back when they'd been getting along. A playful smack that would make her smirk at him in the mirror, and him smirk back.

Marc's hand just rested on her butt, firm and... possessive.

Fuck, that's a bit much, Sinead thought as she felt her legs quiver. She wasn't livestock to be owned. Marc didn't own her. But for some reason, the idea that he felt possessive was hot as hell.

"Nearly," Sinead said, putting her lipstick back in her purse and standing up, running her fingers through her hair. "Where are we going, Marc?"

He smiled that fucking smile of his. "I think you will appreciate the surprise, Detective."

His hand was still on her ass. Not groping, not moving, just resting. It was infuriating. *Do something with it!* She wanted to say. Squeeze it. Slap it. Play with the buttplug, for fuck's sake. That was the point of it, right? To tease her?

Well, Sinead felt thoroughly teased. He'd given her a great orgasm and she wanted more.

But he didn't do any of that. He just stood with his hip resting against the counter and his hand on her ass and watched her do her hair. Sinead could feel herself blushing at the oddly intimate feeling - had her ex-husband ever just... watched her? She could see the look in his eyes in the mirror. It was a weird mixture of pride, and caring, and hunger.

"Done," Sinead said.

"*Bien*," Marc nodded. "You look lovely."

He let go of her ass and took her hand, leading her back into the bedroom. While she'd been in there he'd lain out her clothes on the bed - the green panties, the faux-leather pants, the billowy blouse, even her shoes. For some reason that little thing made her heart skip a beat. Another strangely intimate gesture.

Sinead got dressed as Marc watched her. Getting the pants on was a little bit of a show for him as she got them over her ass and hips, and he smiled seeing her bounce on the balls of her feet a few times. Once she was dressed Marc approached her, looking down into her eyes, and she thought he was going to kiss her.

Instead, he used a couple of fingers to adjust a strand of hair that had fallen out of place while she'd been getting dressed. "*Parfait*," he said softly and winked at her. "Come. We should be leaving. *Ça ne se fait pas d'être en retard*."

Leaving the loft apartment didn't take long, and Marc was always the gentleman opening his car door for her. Once they were on the road, Sinead took a breath and then decided to take a risk. She reached over and put her hand on Marc's leg. She wanted.... She wasn't sure what she wanted, but after noticing him doing all those intimate things she wanted to do something like that back. She just wasn't sure what her goal was.

Marc glanced at her with a little raise of his eyebrow but didn't say anything. Then they were at a red light and he took one hand off the steering wheel and put it on *her* thigh, high up and holding the inside with his fingers. She didn't say anything about how it made her pussy tingle. He let go when the green light came on, and she pulled her hand back as well, digging her thumbnail into her forefinger.

God, I'm acting like a fucking schoolgirl, she thought to herself.

"What are we doing here?" Sinead asked when Marc pulled them onto a very familiar street.

"We're attending a card game," Marc said with one of those smiles of his. "Ready to go undercover with me again, Detective?"

Sinead raised both her eyebrows as they pulled up in front of Victor Berisha's warehouse near the port. The one she'd been staking out with Jules earlier that week.

"You've got to be shitting me," Sinead said.

Translation

- "*Ça ne se fait pas d'être en retard.*" = "It's not appropriate to show up late."

Chapter 63

"This could go so wrong in so many ways," Sinead murmured. "And if anyone recognizes me, I'm fucked for making this case."

"Well," Marc murmured back. "The good news is that you're here as my guest, and I was invited. Completely above board."

"You know it wouldn't be so cut and dry!" Sinead hissed, but she couldn't put up any more arguments because they were approaching the warehouse door.

Marc *did* know it wouldn't be so 'cut and dry' on the Detective's end, and he felt a little off about that. He had to admit to himself that he had perhaps focused just a little too much on his own goals, and not the needs of Sinead when it came to *making* her case and not just breaking it. Marc had seen an opportunity to do something that sounded fun with the Detective, and she'd responded so well to the 'going undercover' date before that this seemed like a natural extension.

But she was right - it was going to be harder to explain her presence here with Marc and then appear in a courtroom or possibly even an interrogation room. And, worse, he had misjudged the impact on himself. Eventually, Sinead would need to make arrests, and even if no one else remembered her, Victor certainly would. And he would know the connection between the Detective and Marc.

And that could very well lead to some awkward moments as to why he was involved at all.

All of that ran through Marc's head as he lifted his fist to knock on the door, and he wondered if perhaps he should have brought Felicity to this engagement. Or even Astrid. Either of them would have been a safer long-term choice than Sinead.

And yet, there the feisty redhead was, her arm looped with his as he knocked.

A small eye-port slid open in the door, a dark form beyond looking out at them. "Name?" a gruff voice asked.

"Marc Fornier," Marc said. "And guest."

There was a long moment as the person behind the door seemed to be eyeing them up and down, and then a whisper happened, and the eye-port slid closed before the door unlocked heavily. It opened with an angry squeal of dry metal hinges.

Inside the warehouse was dark and cavernous. The majority of the lights were off except for a single one over the inside of the door illuminating a short red carpet that led from the door and made a hard right turn towards a metal gantry stairway that led up to what had likely been a

business office at one time. Beyond the small illuminated area it was clear that the warehouse was fairly empty, but there was a small stack of crates at the far side. Much more pressing due to their closeness were a pair of bouncers. One was a man, slight with a bit of a rat face, his short hair slicked back and wearing a suit that was of expensive taste but tailored a little too large for his frame. The other bouncer was a woman who stood well over six feet, and despite her feminine cocktail dress there was no hiding her bodybuilder's muscles. She filled the dress out like she was about to burst out of it, and Marc couldn't imagine why she would have chosen to wear it for a guard duty job. The black boots she wore weren't exactly adding to the aesthetic, either.

"Welcome, Mr Fornier," the big woman said. "Mr Barisha and your fellow guests are meeting up in the game room. We'll just need to pat you down for weapons, cell phones and recording devices."

"If I'd known that, I would have left my phone in the car," Marc sighed as he affected a mildly irritated tone. In reality, he'd somewhat been expecting such a thing - Barisha was an idiot, but he wasn't a fool. Angry gamblers were like any other angry sort of addict and letting them have a gun, or even a phone, when they were getting their fix could be a problem.

"Arms up," Rat Face said as he picked up a detector paddle from a little stand they had set up next to the door. Marc sighed and stepped forward, taking his phone out of his inside breast pocket and sliding it into the banker's bag the woman held out to him before Rat Face waved the wand over him. There weren't any beeps, but he clocked the bulge in Marc's jacket and tapped it. Marc reached in and pulled out the stack of cash that he was buying into the game with. Ten thousand dollars. The man nodded and waved him past.

"I think your compatriot will be the one checking my companion," Marc said sharply.

Rat Face narrowed his eyes slightly as Sinead was stepping forward, but nodded and handed the paddle over to the female bouncer. The big woman gave Sinead a once-over after the Detective's phone joined Marc's in the bag. Marc had actually considered warning Sinead not to bring a hidden gun strapped to her thigh or something before the date, but the lingerie earlier had dissuaded the need to do so.

Then the wand pinged as it waved over Sinead's ass.

Both the bouncers eyebrows went up.

Sinead immediately flushed red from her chest to her cheeks.

"A private accessory," Marc said flatly, feeling like a fool for not considering that the high-quality plug with its smooth metal coating would set off a metal detector. "She will not be removing it."

Rat Face looked like he wanted to argue, but the big woman waved the paddle over Sinead's backside again and the ping very obviously happened right in the middle of Sinead's butt where here tight leather pants weren't showing any sort of odd bulge or anything. The female bouncer snorted softly. "Should be fine," she said.

"Alright, all good," Rat Face said. "Enjoy the game."

Marc made a show of handing the cash to Sinead, who looked at it coolly as she took it and then looped her arm with his again, her hand grabbing his arm tightly. They left the bouncers and headed for the stairs, at the bottom of which Sinead decided they were far enough away to say something.

"Oh my fucking *God*, Marc," she hissed.

"I apologise, Sinead," Marc said. "Apparently I paid attention to *almost* every detail."

Sinead sighed and shook her head, trying to let it wash off her. She hefted the cash in her hand. "Is this just a card game, or fucking Casino Royale?" she asked.

"Possibly both," Marc murmured. "That's the buy-in."

"Fuck, Marc," Sinead hissed. "I could have just busted this game and had enough to manoeuvre Barisha."

Marc shrugged. "Isn't this more fun, though?"

Sinead sighed, gripping his arm a little tighter as their feet made rhythmic *bong* sounds on the metal stairs. As they approached the top a door opened in the side of the raised office structure and soft music spilled out along with a dull red light.

"Fine," she said. "Maybe it is. But no more fucking surprise dates!"

Chapter 64

Sinead was *not* thrilled.

Well, maybe she wasn't admitting the truth to herself.

She knew she shouldn't be thrilled. She knew this was a bad idea with lots of possible pitfalls that could go really poorly. And yet, as they were invited into the warehouse that she and Jules had staked out during the week, she couldn't help but take advantage of the situation. Her eyes scanned the place, taking in the structure. The shape of the crates at the far end. Were they wooden, or more like black roadcrew crates? They weren't stacked very high, maybe only up to around chest height, so were people opening them to put things in or take things out?

The bouncers had distinguishing features. The skinny guy had a tattoo peeking out from under his sleeve on his left wrist, and a scar on his right cheek. The woman, who felt like she dwarfed Sinead in every physical aspect, had a small tattoo in the crook between her left thumb and forefinger, and another one behind her right ear. Neither of them matched the descriptions that came across her desk, but that didn't mean they were clean.

As Marc escorted her up the stairs she gave it to him a little, but when he flashed that smile of his and suggested that this was going to be a lot more fun than just busting the poker game, she had to agree.

Another woman stepped out of the door at the top of the stairs leading to the office area of the warehouse, this one model-thin with cascading blonde hair and a dress that was definitely meant to tease and distract. It had a low cut on the front, a high cut on the bottom and she somehow made both look less trashy than they should have.

"Hello, Mr Fornier," she said. "It's so lovely you could join us. My name is Rachel, and I'll be your host for this evening. First, have you brought your buy-in?"

Marc looked to Sinead with a little smile, and Sinead lifted the wad of cash. It wasn't the largest amount she'd ever held in her hands - she'd physically carried a couple of duffle bags filled with about \$250,000 each after a successful drug raid on a distributor a few years earlier, not to mention the value of the heroin, coke and pills she'd seized over the years. This was, however, the most money she'd ever held in her hands that wasn't evidence. Rachel reached out for it, and Sinead handed it to the woman with a bit of a pit in her stomach.

Marc was spending \$10,000 to get them into this game. Unless he was a gambler and hadn't mentioned it, that was likely the last time they'd see that money. It was almost four times as much as her monthly rent. And he was just... spending it.

Fuck, Sinead thought. *I should really get this necklace and the earrings checked.* How much had he spent on her so far? He'd covered the dinner at George, the lunch at Canoe. Hired the stylists. The dress, the jewellery.

The least expensive things he'd given her were likely the fucking buttplugs.

"Lovely," Rachel said as she accepted the cash. "I'll get your chips once we've stepped inside. Mr Barisha has asked me to remind you that he hopes you do have an enjoyable night, Mr Fornier, but that he hopes you can speak business closer to the end of the evening."

"Absolutely, Rachel," Marc said with a nod.

"Please, follow me," she smiled, turning and leading them into the lifted office area. Through the door was a hallway that ran the back length of the office with a hardwood floor and a rich decor that looked more like a fancy hotel than a grimy warehouse. The light sconces along the walls had red lightbulbs in them, casting a strange hue on the entire space. Rachel led them to a pair of double doors - oak, with frosted windows and brass knobs, and motioned for them to wait as she went further down the hallway to another door. She knocked, spoke through it, and when it opened Sinead noted it looked like reinforced steel rather than wood. Rachel handed the cash over to someone and received a rack of poker chips. The door shut, and she returned to them, handing Marc his funds.

When Rachel opened the doors into the parlour, and there was no other way to describe the space than as a game parlour, Sinead's cop brain went into overdrive as she scanned the figures in the room. The staff, three dealers, two waitresses and a bartender, didn't set off any alarm bells. The two bouncers lingering near the door were higher on the danger list, especially considering they each had a shoulder holster openly displayed since they weren't wearing suit jackets. They were both big guys with thick jaws, maybe brothers, though one wore glasses and the other didn't. Again, nothing immediately pinged in her mind for descriptions of wanted fugitives, but that didn't mean a whole lot.

The clientele that had already arrived was another matter.

It looked like there were about a dozen players already in attendance, most of them men but a few women. Sinead recognized a player who had recently retired from the Leafs, and a current player for the Blue Jays. She also recognized a high-up aid in the Mayor's office, though only because she'd done some extra duty security shifts for a couple of Mayoral public appearances. The rest looked like an assortment of business folks - which made her worry a little about Marc getting recognized - and members of organized crime. There were two members of the *'Ndrangheta*, the Calabrian mafia that had a hand across most of Ontario, though she couldn't remember their specific names even if she recognized their faces. There was also a member of the Hell's Angels from the West Toronto chapter wearing his cut openly, along with what Sinead guessed were a pair of Vietnamese gangsters and at least two Eastern European gangsters that were staying well away from each other. And it looked like maybe half of them had brought

companions, whether those were members of their gangs or arm candy like Sinead was playing at.

The room was a fucking United Nations of crime and influence. No one was of major consequence thankfully - no heads of families or gangs - but it was still a little shocking that a middleman like Victor could have gotten such a group together and only just started to pop up on Police radar.

“The game will be Texas hold ’em in a winner-take-all, double shootout format,” Rachel said. “Players are currently free to mingle and approach the bar, but once the games commence please don’t leave your seat except during designated breaks. Your companion, or one of our staff, will be happy to fill your drink orders.”

“Thank you, Rachel,” Marc said with a smile for the woman, and she nodded and left to go wait out in the hallway for whoever else was arriving. Marc looked to Sinead. “Well, one thing is certain,” he said. “You are the most ravishing woman in the room.”

Sinead rolled her eyes - there were several women who looked like they were probably Instagram influencers here as guests. Still, she smiled. “Come on,” she said. “We should mingle a little. Are you recognizing anyone?”

“Unfortunately, yes,” Marc sighed. “One of the few men who can give me direct orders. A member of my company board.”

“Fuck,” Sinead hissed.

“Marc, you scallywag!” a man said as he was approaching.

“*Quand on parle du diable...On en voit la queue,*” Marc muttered.

Translation

- “*Quand on parle du diable...On en voit la queue,*” = “*When we talk about the devil... we see his tail.*” (A French version of ‘*Speak of the Devil and he appears.*’)

Chapter 65

“Gregory, a pleasant surprise,” Marc said, reaching out and shaking the older man’s hand. He was in his mid-sixties and Marc would never have thought he would catch the old financier at a poker game like this. Maybe at a VIP table where the buy-in was ten times the amount as Victor’s little game, surrounded by other men who had made their first millions during the Dot-Com boom and cashed in during the 2008 financial crisis by sheer luck of not being in the harder hit industries.

“What’s a man like you doing in a place like this?” Gregory asked.

“I was invited by a recent acquaintance,” Marc said truthfully. “And I am being joined by a much better friend this evening. Gregory, this is my dear friend Sinead. Sinead, my dear, this is Gregory Stanhope - a titan of industry.”

“Oh, lay off it, Marc,” Gregory chuckled, smiling slickly as he took Sinead’s hand lightly in a shake. “Charmed, dear.”

“The pleasure is mine,” Sinead answered, her smile saying one thing but the glint in her eye telling Marc that she was filing away every little fact for later perusal.

“Speaking of men finding themselves in places like this,” Marc said. “I’m here more as a courtesy to said acquaintance. What are *you* doing here, Gregory?”

“Well, I’m a guest,” the older man said. “My youngest daughter fancies herself as something of a poker player; wants to get herself into the big tournaments in Las Vegas and such. Turns out she was secretly using the allowance I was giving her to play. When she asked me to help her stake for one of those big games, I told her I needed to see her play when the stakes were real before I’d put up cash for that. She knew some people who knew some people, and got herself an invite to this game.”

“Ah,” Marc said, looking around the room. They had shifted a little way from the door and towards the bar. “This would be... Andrea? Wendy’s daughter?”

“Right, right,” Gregory nodded. He’d been divorced three times, having a kid or two with each wife. “She’s over... a, it looks like she’s making friends.”

Marc and Sinead both looked across the room to where a young brunette woman, maybe only nineteen at best, was talking with a couple of ladies who were in their mid-twenties and were likely strippers. All three of them were gorgeous, but where the strippers were dressed up, Andrea was dressed a little down compared to the other women in the room. She was wearing a button-down blouse and slacks, had minimal makeup and sunglasses up on her forehead. It looked like she was planning on giving away as little as possible during the game.

“Greg,” Marc said, lowering his voice a little as the main doors opened and Rachel ushered in a trio of men and a woman, all with dark skin and severe looks to them even if they were smiling. By their accents, he could tell they were Jamaicans. “I’m not looking to question your judgement here, but... this game seems like it’s a bit of a volatile crowd.”

“It’s about eighty per cent criminal,” Sinead added in.

“That’s exactly what she needs to prove herself capable of handling,” Gregory said. “If my daughter wants to be a professional gambler, of all things, I told her she should just go into the Stock Market but no - she wants to play cards for a living. If that’s the case, this is the sort of element she’ll be rubbing shoulders with. Better that happen with me here than not, I say.”

“You’re... a wonderful father,” Sinead said.

“Well, thank you,” Gregory nodded with a smile. “Though, Marc, I will say that the same question can fly right back in your face.”

“Very true,” Marc sighed. “Though, perhaps - ah, you may want to go check on your daughter, Greg.” Marc had cut off because Andrea’s little trio of women had been joined by a trio of men, and it was very clear that the youngest of them was making a pass at his daughter.

“Mm,” Gregory grunted, narrowing his eyes. “A father’s job is never done.”

“Enjoy your night,” Marc sighed, giving him a pat on the back as Gregory headed off across the room.

“Jesus Christ,” Sinead murmured, turning her back to most of the room so she could speak quietly to Marc. “This place is...”

“A hive of scum and villainy?” Marc asked with a little smile.

“Are you quoting Star Wars to me?” Sinead asked. “Really?”

“You recognized it,” Marc pointed out.

“Whatever,” Sinead said. “Yes. It’s a hive. Those guys that just came in? They are the same once who Victor meets with when making deals with the Jamaicans. Bad news. So is most of the room.”

“I had an idea of that,” Marc acknowledged. “Is it too much? Should we leave?”

Sinead hesitated but shook her head. “We just need to be careful.”

“Then the first step to that, *ma petite rebelle*, is to relax,” Marc said. “Which starts with us each having a drink.”

Marc and Sinead went to the bar, and Marc pursued the short list of wine that was available before ordering a glass for each of them. Sinead gave him a look that said she could order for herself, but Marc just gave her a little smile and put a hand on the small of her back. That seemed to dampen her verve to assert herself, which Marc noted. Physical touch, it seemed, was one of her receptive ‘love languages.’

They mingled a little, though Sinead purposefully took a back seat to remain less conspicuous, talking with some of the other obvious guests rather than the players. At the same time, Marc eased himself into his usual headspace of rubbing elbows at fundraisers and events - it really wasn't that much different, talking with ruthless corporate raiders or with a member of the Hells Angels. They were all people, they all appreciated a good conversation that respected boundaries.

More folks slowly filtered into the room, with Victor showing up a few minutes after a trio of Native Americans who looked pissed off to be there, but broke into smiles as a waitress brought their pre-prepared drinks to them.

“Hello, friends,” Victor said, raising a hand to catch the attention of the room. “We're just a little past the hour, so it's time to get our friendly game underway. Rachel will distribute your seat assignments for the first round, so once you have those please make your way to your seats.”

Chapter 66

Sinead watched carefully as Marc received his placement at the poker tables. Rachel, the hostess, was carefully guarded with the slip of paper the assignments were written on and Sinead wondered if Victor had actually randomized it like suggested, or if he'd made some specific placements to facilitate friendly, or maybe unfriendly, terms for different players.

She'd spent the time mingling settling into the character that she'd sort of created for herself that first time she and Marc had gone undercover at the bar with Barisha. She didn't have to play a stupid bimbo, thank God, but she did need to make sure she was checking her instincts to dig too hard into the little things the women and men around her were saying. Two of the women she'd spoken to were definitely escorts, but it wasn't clear if they were *working*, or if they worked *for* the person they came with. Either could have been the case. A few of the ladies around, she learned, actually were Instagram models, or working models who participated in Fashion Weeks and the like. Some of them were girlfriends, others were just guests.

Sinead had also been hit on a few times during the conversations, usually when Marc was engaged with someone else. No one had made a major pass, but one of the men who seemed to be in the entourage of the Calabrian mob was of Irish and she could tell he'd taken a worrying liking to her to the point that he'd actually interrupted the baseball player she'd been talking to so that he could make his opening pass.

He was all smiles and teeth but was an ass. Sinead smiled at his jokes but didn't bother to fake a chuckle, and then Marc had called her over to introduce her to the Hells Angel he was talking to and the guy had needed to back off.

"Good luck," Sinead murmured to Marc as they walked over to his assigned table.

"*Merci, ma petite rebelle,*" Marc murmured back, turning behind his chair and sliding his arm around her waist to plant a soft kiss on her forehead as he held her close. "Be careful, yes?"

"I'm always careful," Sinead said with a little smirk, looking up into his eyes.

"Ah, but you fell into *my* trap, didn't you?" Marc grinned.

"Maybe I feigned, just to get a shot at the trapper," Sinead answered, the glimmer of a smirk in her eyes.

Marc blinked in real surprise. "Now, did you just reference Dune?" he asked.

"You recognized it," she playfully replied, raising an eyebrow teasingly.

He let his hands fall down from her waist to her ass cheeks and give them a little squeeze. "*Cette superbe paire de fesses pourrait bien payer le prix de ton insolence, petite rebelle.*"

Sinead shook her head, her smirk reaching down to her lips. "Whatever it is you say," she said in exasperation at his use of French that she couldn't understand. Then her smirk quirked a little more. "My Duke."

Marc winked and turned back to his seat, though his hand drifted lower and brushed over her ass before pulling away. That feeling of him marking his territory like that should have made Sinead feel a little grossed out - any time her Ex, or ex-boyfriends before him, had done shit like that it had always been clumsy and annoying. The way Marc did it though was casual and secure. It wasn't a message to others, really. Just... enjoying the fact that he could.

Sinead decided to show him she appreciated it, and after he was sitting down she leaned around his chair and gave him a kiss on the cheek before backing off.

There were three tables, each supposed to sit nine players plus the dealer, though it looked like two of the participants hadn't shown up. Marc was sat at the only table with the full nine. Around the table, Sinead counted the retired hockey player and another guy who seemed to be a businessman of some sort in the 'not a danger' category. The businessman had come alone, while the hockey player's girlfriend was busy getting a drink at the bar and didn't seem thrilled to be there. That left six players in the 'danger' category however, including one of the Jamaicans, a Vietnamese man, one of the Natives, both of the Calabrian gangsters, and an older woman who looked like she should have been in the bingo hall instead of a poker game like this. She was being doted on by a pair of very large and very tough-looking Samoans, so it was hard to know *what* to think of her.

Andrea, Marc's associate's daughter, was over at a table with the baseball player and the Hells Angel that Marc and Sinead had talked to. Bikers, especially Hells Angels, were always a tough group to read - some of them were vile as shit and could hide it behind a veneer of civility when needed. Others operated by an intricate set of codes that led to very safe neighbourhoods where they operated. There were something like six different chapters of the Angels across the Greater Toronto Area and each had a different reputation. Sinead couldn't remember if the West Toronto chapter was better or worse than the others.

Victor gave a small speech as the dealers were cracking the fresh packs of cards open and running them through the shuffling machines. He reminded the players that this was a friendly game, was more about the social aspect of things, and that anyone who caused an issue would be handled and not invited back. He also noted that side-bets were allowed if it was on something other than the results of a hand, but needed to be witnessed by a dealer and at least two other players for the result to be considered enforceable by the house.

And that was it, the games began.

Sinead had never been to a backroom poker game before, as herself or undercover, so she wasn't really sure what to expect. It was a little... anti-climactic, really. There was no starter pistol, no ramp of adrenaline in the room. One moment Victor was making his little speech, the

next the blinds were being paid and the dealers were doing their thing. Sinead had backed off to stand behind Marc, so she couldn't even see his face, though she assumed he was at least OK at keeping a poker face.

The first hand at his table went quickly, and Marc had folded earlier. The second hand was much the same. The third went longer, but Marc wasn't in the action. Sinead was starting to remember why she got so bored when her ex had turned on poker on the TV in the background.

"Settle in," a woman said next to her. Sinead turned and saw it was the hockey player's girlfriend. "I can see it in the way you're standing, babe," she continued. "Believe me, these things can go all fucking night. Rest your feet, those shoes are cute as hell but can't be that comfortable. I'm Siobhan." She offered her hand.

"Sinead," she answered with a little smirk.

Siobhan laughed and shook her head. "Alright, babe," she said. "Let's get you a drink, and then we can talk about whether blonde or redheaded Irish women have more fun."

Sinead scrunched up her nose as she smiled and nodded. "That, Siobhan, sounds like a great idea."

Translation

- *"Cette superbe paire de fesses pourrait bien payer le prix de ton insolence, petite rebelle."* -
"This superb pair of buttocks could well pay the price for your insolence, little rebel."

Chapter 67

Marc stood for a moment, adjusting his stretching his legs as he took off his suit jacket in between hands. The game had been going on for over an hour and the room was starting to get a little warm. Other than some glances to double-check that the Detective was alright, he'd been focused on the game. With nine players around the table there was a lot of information to try and take in.

So far no one had gotten knocked out - the blinds had raised three times and had hit \$100 for the Big and \$50 for the small, which also meant the minimum bets were now \$100. The first half-dozen hands had been exploratory as everyone at the table settled in and started to get a read of those around them. Several knew each other already. The Italians started out bickering, shooting little playful verbal jabs across the table at each other. The Jamaican to Marc's right seemed to be cold towards the Vietnamese man, shooting him looks every once in a while, but was very respectful of the older woman to Marc's left.

The businessman, who introduced himself as Paul Crane, was enamoured with the fact that he was playing with the retired Hockey Player - the questions seemed to help the athlete settle in at first but had gotten a little annoying over time.

"Allow me, Mr Fornier," Rachel said as Marc took off his suit jacket, appearing beside and behind him as if from the ether.

"*Merci*, Miss Rachel," Marc said with a smile and a nod, handing over the jacket.

"Is there anything else I can get for you?" Rachel asked. "A drink, perhaps?"

"If you could just mention to my companion that I would like to speak to her for a moment," Marc said.

"Of course," Rachel nodded, carefully flattening his jacket before whisking it away to be hung up.

"She likes you," the older woman said as Marc sat back down.

"I don't know about that," Marc said with a little smile.

"I wouldn't be surprised if you found a card with her number on it when you get that coat back," she said, then offered Marc her hand to shake. "Susan Steinmeyer."

"Marc Fornier," Marc replied, shaking her hand. Her grip was strong despite her age, which had to be in the seventies. "It's lovely to play with you, Madame Steinmeyer. You are a very shrewd statistician, I think."

The older woman smirked a little. "I helped my husband run his jewellery store for forty years, and now my sons for ten. If I couldn't spot a tell, or do the math in my head, we would have been done for."

"A very impressive feat, Madame," Marc grinned. He wasn't actually sure *what* he thought about her - most jewellery businesses were legitimate enterprises, but some were fronts of laundering cash or other organisations. Not to mention the fact that there was a legitimate diamond cartel to deal with.

Marc got his cards for the next hand and quickly checked them. Four of Diamonds, Ace of Diamonds. On his turn, he called the minimum bet of \$100, then felt Sinead's hand touch his shoulder. He glanced back at her. "*Un moment, ma petite rebelle,*" he murmured. She nodded and withdrew her hand.

The betting finished and the dealer burned a card and laid out the flop. King of Hearts, King of Diamonds, Six of Spades. Paul Crane folded first, but the native man beside him raised three hundred - he likely had something to interact with the Kings. The hockey player folded, and the Italian next to him had folded after his first glance at his cards, so it came to the Jamaican. The dark-skinned man seemed to think carefully for a moment, looking across the table at the Native man, before raising another three hundred, spiking the bet to \$600 total.

That brought things to Marc, who had a decision to make. He didn't have anything to interact with the Kings in the river other than the King of Diamonds making a potential flush. That left another flush, a full house, four of a kind or a straight flush on the table *if* he could get there with two more diamonds on the turn and river. A \$600 bet was a good chunk of his chips to risk - he hadn't won a hand yet, so the little bets here and there had been nibbling at his holdings.

Still, he wasn't there to win, he was there to get information.

"Call," Marc said and put \$600 worth of chips in the pot.

Susan folded, as did the other Italian, which left the Vietnamese gangster tapping his cards as he glanced around the table until he finally called as well. That put \$2900 in the pot, and four players aiming for it, and the bet was back to the Native man who had to call or raise again. He narrowed his eyes slightly, eyes flicking from Marc, to the Vietnamese man, to the Jamaican, and he called, raising the pot to \$3200.

The dealer burned another card and laid out the turn - a five of spades. Useless for Marc, and the end of his run since it meant he couldn't make his flush. The Native man checked, sending the bet to the Jamaican, who checked as well. Marc folded, not wanting to try and bluff his way through the mess, and that sent the betting to the Vietnamese man. He bet another \$500, which could have been read as either a signal that he intended to bully his way into the pot since it was the largest bet made at the table in the first hour, or that he was baiting out some more cash.

The Native had to respond, and he called, raising the pot to \$4200. The Jamaican didn't seem to want to back down and he called as well, raising the pot to \$4700.

The dealer burned a card and put out the river - Queen of Diamonds. Marc had been so close to his flush. The betting went through checks again and landed on the Vietnamese man, who broke his poker face to purse his lips and cock his head to the side as he looked at the other two men's chip piles. "All in," he said, pushing his chips forward.

That put the other two men on the back foot. The Native was next up and he thought for a long minute before folding, flicking his cards forward. He'd gotten into the betting a few times early on and was down a little bit more than either of his opponents, so he'd need to go all-in as well.

The Jamaican, on the other hand, was up a little bit on the Vietnamese man, so he could call without going all in but it would mean he'd be fighting from a very, very low stack if he lost. The black man took his time, blinking several times as he seemed to be doing the math in his head of what he had versus what his opponent could be holding.

The tension was cut as a loud groan, and some half-hearted clapping, erupted at another table. One of the other businessmen stood up, looking flustered, and gestured in a throwaway gesture as he left his table. The first man had fallen, and from the looks of it, he'd gotten taken in by Gregory's daughter Andrea.

The fact that he wouldn't be the first to get knocked out seemed to steel the Jamaican, and he called the bet. The pot was a little over \$21,000. The Vietnamese man, for his part, didn't flinch.

The dealer called for the hands. The Jamaican revealed a full house, Kings over Queens. The Vietnamese man had two pairs, Kings and Aces.

The second man was knocked out as the Vietnamese gangster nodded in acceptance, then stood and nodded more firmly in recognition to the Jamaican and left the table.

With the tension, and the hand, over Marc turned and Sinead stepped up behind him again, leaning in. "Any problems?" he asked quietly.

"Not so far," Sinead whispered. "Nothing of interest though."

"There's still plenty of time," Marc said.

"I know," Sinead smirked. Then she kissed him lightly on the lips. "You know, it's kind of fun being your arm candy? Everyone is looking at me and wondering if we're in love, or if it's a show, or something else."

“Let’s keep them guessing,” Marc said, his lips brushing against hers as he said it. His hand touched the back of her thigh, and he kissed her a second time before pulling away. “Would you mind getting me a glass of wine, *ma cherie*?” he asked at a more normal volume.

“Of course,” Sinead said, trailing her fingers over his shoulder as she left. The dealer was done shuffling and was tossing out the next hand.

Chapter 68

Returning to the bar, Sinead smiled a little as she slipped back up onto her barstool next to Siobhan. The hockey player's girlfriend wasn't quite drunk, but she was definitely happy and had allowed Sinead to signal the bartender to cut her off. That didn't stop Siobhan from being a giggly mess as she talked about moving up to Canada from down in the States. She and her boyfriend had been dating for almost ten years while he'd been in the League, and most of that time had been spent in Dallas and California.

Toronto had been a big change, but the popularity of the Leafs compared to the more Southern US teams had made a big difference. She actually got recognized on the streets here sometimes.

It was actually sort of *fun* talking to Siobhan, where she felt like there wasn't any pressure to be more than what she looked like. She didn't need to prove anything to the blonde woman.

That didn't mean there weren't any issues going on, however. The bartender had just poured Sinead another pair of glasses of wine - one for Marc, and one for herself - when the Irishman from early squeezed into the space next to her at the bar.

"Yeah, I'll have a Guinness and a shot of that Grey Goose you got up there," he said, then turned and acted surprised like he hadn't known who he was going to be standing next to. "Well, hello, ladies. Can I entice you into taking a shot with me?"

"A shot sounds pretty good right now," Siobhan said with a grin.

"Not for me," Sinead said. "I'm good, thanks. And Siobhan, I thought you said water for the next hour was the right choice?"

"Vodka is as clear as water," the Irishman smirked.

"He's so right," Siobhan giggled.

"I think we'll both pass, thanks," Sinead said, making eye contact with the bartender and shaking her head. He acknowledged that and set just one shot on the bar next to the tall glass of Guinness. Sinead turned to Siobhan fully, putting her back to the walking cliché pointedly. "Hold my seat," she said. "I just need to bring my man his glass."

"Of course, babe," Siobhan grinned at her.

Sinead took her glass, and Marc's, and headed back for the table. She even managed not to hesitate when she heard the Irishman mutter, 'Flaming cunt' under his breath. She strutted to the poker table and leaned in, setting Marc's glass down on the lip designed to hold the drinks.

“Might have a problem with a pushy asshole,” she murmured softly into Marc’s ear.

She could see his jaw clench just slightly and he nodded once.

“I can handle it,” Sinead said.

“You shouldn’t need to,” Marc said. “I’ll keep my eye out.”

“Thank you,” Sinead said and kissed his cheek. “But I can handle myself.”

Marc caught her hand as she went to pull away, looking up into her eyes. “I know, *ma petite rebelle*,” he said. “But you don’t *need* to.”

Sinead wasn’t sure how she felt as she walked back towards the bar to make sure Siobhan didn’t get swept up by the low-tier gangster and make some mistakes.