

## Chapter One

Someone had either kidnapped the sun or decided screw the ransom and killed it dead.

For two glorious weeks, before its abduction or demise, it had blasted heat and light so the sea below the villa in Greece sparkled, diamonds on sapphire. It had baked every ounce of stress away and left generous room for sleep, sex, wine, basking, and more sex.

No better way, to her mind, to spend a slice of summer in 2061.

Lieutenant Eve Dallas, murder cop, hadn't thought about murder and mayhem for days. That alone equaled vacation. Add a villa of sunbaked gold stone, views of sea and hill, of olive groves and vineyards out every window, top it all off with lazy, private time with the man she loved, and you had it all.

It was a hell of a perfect way to celebrate their third anniversary.

Sometimes it still amazed her. How the cop and the criminal (former), two lost souls who'd pushed, punched, and kicked their way out of misery, somehow found each other. How they'd managed to build a good, strong life together.

Whatever changed, shifted, evolved, that remained constant.

They built together.

Now, after two weeks of ridiculous indulgence—not that Roarke would think it at all ridiculous—they'd arrived in Ireland under a sky of stacked clouds and dripping rain.

Maybe the Irish were sun killers.

And yet, the green shined so vivid here as the fields spread, the hills rose, the stone walls glistened in the wet. The skinny road they traveled snaked, and hedgerows dripping with bloodred fuchsia closed in like living walls.

She checked herself. Maybe a touch of stress but only because the Irish, in addition to being suspected sun killers, opted to drive on the wrong side of snaking, skinny roads, and Roarke drove as if he powered down a straightaway.

He was so damn happy, and his happiness rolled right through her. She didn't consider it a Marriage Rule to share such a cheerful mood, but it did stand as an advantage.

She studied him awhile—a more pleasant view than the breaks in the hedgerows that displayed sheep, cows, occasionally horses, and various other four-legged animals.

He had that face. Those wild Irish blue eyes, that perfectly sculpted mouth, and all that black silk hair to frame it.

Those lips curved, those eyes smiled—just for her—when he glanced at her.

“Not much farther.”

“I remember.”

The last time they'd visited his family's farm in Clare—a family he hadn't known existed during his nightmare childhood, or his very successful career as a thief, a smuggler, a (fairly) legitimate businessman who'd built an empire—they'd pursued a contract killer.

Lorcan Cobbe, the vicious boy from Roarke's childhood, became a vicious man, and one who'd wanted Roarke dead.

Tables turned, she thought. And now Cobbe sat in an off-planet concrete cage, and would for the rest of his vicious life.

"There's a break in the clouds ahead."

She peered at the leaden sky. Maybe, if she squinted, there was a slightly less gray patch.

"You call that a break?"

"I do, yes." Ireland, like the green, wove through his voice as he reached over to lay a hand on hers. "It means much to them for us to come like this, spend time with the family. It means everything to me that you're willing to."

"I'm happy to go. I like them, the whole insane mob of them. And it's nice to spend some time here when we're not with a bunch of cops."

"It is. And yet, that was a satisfying visit after all."

"Because I stood back and let you kick Cobbe's ass."

He smiled again at the "let you." "My cop understands me, and loves me anyway. And there now, see, there's a bright spot."

She couldn't deny what he'd called a break now showed hints of blue.

"*Bright's* a strong word."

He turned, turned again, and there she saw the field where she'd once landed in a jet-copter—with the damn cows—because he'd needed her. Where she'd first met Sinead Brody Lannigan, Roarke's mother's twin.

The stone-gray house, the barns and outbuildings, the thriving gardens.

Even as Roarke turned into the drive, the front door burst open. Sean, Sinead's freckle-faced grandson, ran out.

"You're here at last! We've been waiting forever, haven't we? And Nan and Ma made a welcome feast. I'm fair to starving, as they won't let me have so much as a nibble."

He stood, fair-haired and bright-eyed, in the dripping rain.

"I'll help with the bags."

"There's a good lad. And how's it all going, Sean?"

"Fine and well. Are you wearing your weapon then?" he asked Eve. "Can I see it?"

"No and no."

"Ah well." He shouldered a bag Roarke handed him. "Maybe later then. We've had no trouble, not even a bit, since last you came. But maybe now we'll have some."

"Bring that bag in," Sinead, honey-blond hair in a sleek tail, hands on narrow hips, called from the doorway. "And stop badgering your cousins. Welcome, welcome to you both. We've missed your faces. No, no, don't bother with the bags."

She embraced Roarke, held a moment, then turned to Eve to do the same. “We’ve enough able men to bring them in and up to your room.”

Inside, all color and movement, voices raised in greeting, more hugs. Eve figured she hugged more in five minutes at the Brody farm than she did in a couple of years—or more—otherwise.

Someone handed her a glass of wine.

Food covered the counters in the farmhouse kitchen that smelled of fresh-baked bread and roasted chicken.

The chicken might’ve been clucking out in the coop that morning, but Eve wasn’t going to think about it.

Someone handed her a plate piled with enough food for three starving people. A pair of dogs raced by, then a couple of kids.

Sinead drew her aside.

“I’ve the gift you had sent ahead tucked away. You’ll just let me know when you want it.”

“I guess after all this.”

“We’ll take it up to your room then?”

“Oh. No. He should have it here. Everyone’s here. At least I think they are.”

“Every mother’s son and daughter. I didn’t know if you’d want a private moment for it.”

“No, it’s . . . family. It’s a family thing.”

Green eyes soft, Sinead kissed her cheek. “I’m grateful for you, Eve. If I haven’t said so, know I’m grateful for you. Now, let’s get you a seat so you can eat. Make room there, Liam, our Eve has legs longer than yours.”

So she sat, the long-legged cop with her choppy brown hair and whiskey-colored eyes, in the middle of noise and confusion that could rival a New York traffic jam.

She hadn’t known family, only abuse and violence, and had forged a career founded on standing for the dead. She had family now—the family she’d made, often despite herself, in New York.

And family here, in an Irish farmhouse.

She caught Roarke’s eye in the melee. When he raised his glass to her in a quick toast, she did the same.”

\*\*\*

She hadn’t planned just how to give him his anniversary gift, hadn’t been entirely sure she could pull it off since she’d come up with the idea.

But when she’d considered giving it to him in Greece, alone, it hadn’t seemed the right way.

After the feast, with the family sprawled in the living room, dining room, and kitchen, with a dog snoring and a baby nursing, with Roarke's great-grandmother knitting something or other, seemed like the right way.

"Are you sure now?" Sinead asked when they went into a parlor, into a cupboard. "I haven't seen it or—at great cost, I'll add—given into the temptation to take a peek, but I know the idea of it, and there'll be tears. Some will be my own, I expect."

"I think it'll mean more to him this way."

She hoped so.

She carried the brown-wrapped gift to where Roarke and his uncle held a conversation having to do with sheep.

"A few days late—in case you thought I forgot."

She knew she'd surprised him—a rare thing—when she handed him the long, wide package.

"Tear it open, would you?" Sean demanded. "Nan wouldn't so much as give us a hint what it was."

"Then we'd best find out."

More family crowded in as Roarke removed the paper, the stabilizers.

And inside, found family.

The painting held the farmhouse, the hills, the fields in the background. And everyone stood together—the whole insane mob of them, young, old, babes in arms, Eve and Roarke centered.

Sinead stood behind Roarke's right shoulder. Roarke's mother, lost so long before, at his left.

"It's the lot of us. Is that my aunt Siobhan, Nan?"

"It is, aye. Aye, that's our Siobhan. Ah, it's beautiful. It's brilliant." Turning, she pressed her face to her husband's shoulder. "And here I go, Robbie."

"This is . . . Eve." Roarke looked up at her, his heart in those wild blue eyes. "I have no words." He reached for her hand. "You've put Summerset in it."

"Well." She shrugged at that. "Yancy painted it."

"I see the signature. It couldn't be more precious to me. How did you manage this?"

"Sinead sent photos, and Yancy figured it out."

"Hand it over, lad." Robbie took it from him. "And stand up and kiss your wife."

"That I will. I love you, beyond reason."

When he kissed her, the family cheered. Then crowded around to get closer looks at the gift."

\*\*\*

Young and old, the Irish partied well into the night. Music—which meant singing, dancing—plenty of beer, wine, whiskey, and yet more food. Since the patch of blue had spread its way over the sky, the revelers spilled outside to keep right at it under moon and starlight.

When Eve found a moment to sit—hopefully far away enough so no one would pull her into another dance—Sean settled beside her with a plate of the cookies they called biscuits.

“I liked the case about the girls taken, then locked into that terrible school place. Well now, I didn’t like how they were shut up in there,” he qualified, “but how you got them out again.”

“How do you know about that?”

“Oh, from the Internet,” he said easily, and bit into a cookie. “And there was talk of it all even in Tulla. I heard my own father saying how proud he was our own Eve freed those poor girls from a terrible fate, and saw those who harmed them got their comeuppance right enough.”

“I had some help with that.”

“Well now, of course. You’re the boss of the police, and wasn’t it fine meeting them when you came last? So, when you found the bad ones, did you stun any of them?”

What the hell, she thought, and took a cookie from the plate. “As a matter of fact.”

“Brilliant, as they deserved it and more. And did you have a chance to—” He punched a fist in the air. “And get in a good one.”

“Yeah, I got in some good ones.”

“As did Roarke, I’m sure, as they all say he fights like a demon.”

“He holds his own.”

“The one who came here in the spring meant to hurt my nan, and any of us he could.” Those bright eyes darkened with a hard fury she not only understood but respected. “He came to hurt Nan, as it would hurt Roarke.”

“He’ll never touch your nan, or any of you.”

“And that’s the truth of it because you locked him up. I think I’ll not be a farmer, even as I love the farm. When I think on it, I think I’ll lock people up—the bad ones, of course.”

“There’s more to it than that, kid.”

“Oh sure and there’s more. You have to train so you know how to protect people, and take an oath. It’s why I like reading about your cases. And I watched the vid about you and Roarke and the clones.”

He looked around at his family with those green Brody eyes.

“Tulla’s a quiet place, but still people need protection, don’t they then? I saw the dead girl last year, and she didn’t get protection in time. Things can happen here as well. So I think I’ll be a cop who loves to farm.”

“A good way to have it all.”

He gave her a quick nod as if that settled it. “That’s my thinking on it.”

When she mulled it over, she'd been his age, even younger, when she'd decided to be a cop. Different reasons, and thank Christ for that, but the same goal.

"Maybe when you come to New York for Thanksgiving, you can come into Central."

His face didn't light up. His whole being illuminated. "Do you mean it?"

"It'll depend on if I have an active case, and—"

"I won't be any trouble at all. I talked to the Captain Feeney when he was here, and maybe I can see the EDD as well? It all seemed so grand in the vid."

Too much wine, too much relaxation, she thought, and she'd backed herself right into a corner. "We'll try to work it out."

"I have to tell Da!"

When he barreled off, Roarke took his place.

"And what was all that? It looked like you brought his Christmas early."

"I somehow sort of offered to bring him into Central when they come for Thanksgiving."

When Roarke laughed, kissed her cheek, she shook her head.

"He's slippery. They're all slippery when you come down to it." She picked up her wine, again thought what the hell, and took another sip. "He reminded me of me—without the baggage. Anyway." This time she shrugged. "He's following my cases on the Internet."

"Ah, well of course. You're a hero to him."

"If he wants to be a cop, he'll have to learn the difference between a cop and a hero."

"From where I sit, they're one and the same." He took her hand. "The painting, Eve."

She smiled, smugly. "Nailed that one."

"You undid me. How did you think of such a thing?"

"You have to ask yourself what do you get for the man who if he doesn't have it already, it's because it hasn't been invented. Then he'll figure out how to invent it and have it anyway. Has to be personal. So, chronologically, Summerset found you, we found each other, you found all of them."

She tipped her head to his shoulder. "When you gave me my gift back at Central, magic vests for my bullpen? You undid me. We get each other. We get what's important to each other."

"You've time for mooning over each other later." Robbie strode up to pluck Eve off the wall. "I'm for another dance with my niece."

For a third time, Eve thought what the hell, and danced.

\* \* \*

She woke alone, and in a stream of pearly sunlight. A memo cube sat on the stand by the bed. Once activated, Roarke's voice streamed out.

It seems I'm off to the fields. There'll be coffee and breakfast down in the kitchen whenever you're up and ready.

If coffee was involved, she could be up, and she could get ready.

The shower didn't come close to the multi-jets and steam at home, or the luxury of the villa in Greece, but it did the job.

She dragged on pants, a shirt, and, with her mind still blurry, automatically reached for her weapon harness. It took her a second to remember she'd locked it away in her bag.

She walked out in the quiet—unless you counted the occasional mooing cow or baaing sheep (which she did, absolutely).

Down the creaky stairs and toward the kitchen. Already the air smelled like glory—with coffee a happy top note.

"Good morning to you, Eve. I heard you stirring, so there's coffee fresh and ready for you."

"Thanks." Eve grabbed a mug while Sinead, an apron over her own shirt and pants, her red-gold hair bundled up, heated a skillet on the stove.

"Roarke's own blend it is, so not to worry. He told me coffee was his first gift to you."

"Yeah. A sneaky way to get past my defenses."

"A cagey man is Roarke. And now, can you handle a full Irish for breakfast?"

"After last night I figured I was good for a week. But maybe."

"Danced it all off, as did I. Why don't you start with a bit of the soda bread—it's full of currants and baked just this morning."

"That's what I smelled. I remember it from when we were here last year."

Now the smell of frying meat joined the chorus.

Eve sat at the kitchen table. It seemed odd to just sit there while somebody cooked. No AutoChef for Sinead. But it seemed the right thing.

"Roarke's in the field?"

"Aye, didn't they drag him off—and his own fault for being an early riser. A Brody trait."

"Is it? He's up before dawn pretty much every day. 'Link meetings, holo-meetings with somebody on the other side of the world."

"It is, yes. The farmer in us, I suppose."

"It's hard to see farmer in Roarke."

Sinead sent a smile over her shoulder. "But he plows and plants and tends and harvests right enough."

"You could say that." Eve drank more coffee. "Yeah, you could say that."

"And you, you guard the fields and those who work them, and keep the predators at bay. It's a fine match you've made."

In short order, she put a plate in front of Eve.

"I see his face still, the first time he knocked on my door. The grief in his eyes—my sister's eyes. Sure Siobhan's were as green as mine, but the look in them, the shape of them. My sister's child. And I see his face as so much lifted from him when he saw you land in the near field. And I knew, as he looked at you, he'd found the love she never did."

She set aside a dish towel. "I wonder if I could speak to you about things on my mind."

"Sure. Is there a problem?"

"It's not the now, but the before. I'll have some tea and sit while you eat."

Sinead took her time about it, and Eve realized she sensed nerves.

"Sure I thought this a good time, with just the two of us, to say what so troubles me."

She sat, sighed. "We didn't fight for him, you see, for our Roarke. Just a babe, and with that bastard Patrick Roarke. My sister's child, and we didn't fight for him."

Because she thought it helped those nerves, Eve ate. "That's not what I heard. Patrick Roarke nearly killed your brother when he went to Dublin to try to find out what happened to your sister."

"He did, oh sweet Jesus, he did, and would see us all in the ground, he warned, if any of us came back. In those times, those hard times, Patrick Roarke had cops and more in both his hands and his back pocket. Still, we knew of the baby and let him go. We let Siobhan's son go. And as time went on, we thought—on my life, we believed—Roarke himself knew of us, of his mother. And more time went on, and we heard—some time after it happened—that Patrick Roarke was dead. I thought of my children, not much younger than my sister's child."

"You thought he knew," Eve said as Sinead stared into her tea. "And if he'd wanted contact, he'd reach out to his mother's family, since Patrick Roarke couldn't stop him. You thought—why wouldn't you?—Maybe he's his father's child, and I have my own to protect."

Tears swirled, but Sinead didn't shed them when she nodded. She sipped some tea as she gathered herself to say more.

"And that became a kind of comfort as more time passed. You'd hear of Roarke—the young man who made fortunes—you'd hear of deeds done in shadows—rumors of them. His life in New York City. A kind of empire, isn't it?"

"And not really 'kind of.'"

"I'd wonder, when I let myself wonder, what kind of man he was. Like his father? Ruthless, murderous, heartless? I might see a picture of him at some fancy place with some beautiful woman on his arm. I'd think: Where is Siobhan, where is my sister in this man? I couldn't find her in him, you see. I couldn't see her in him a'tall, so easier still to turn away, to let go."

She sighed again. "Then I saw a picture of him with you, this policewoman with serious eyes. Not so glamorous as others, but more memorable to my thinking. And when I looked at him standing with you, I thought: Ah, well now, oh aye, there she is, there's a bit of my sister after all. Who is this woman who brought Siobhan out in him?"



“She was always there, Sinead.”

Those tears shimmered over the Brody green. “I know that now. I think I knew that the moment I opened the door to him. But—”

“You opened the door to him,” Eve interrupted. “You let him in. You gave him family. Regrets aren’t just useless in this case, they’re just wrong.”

“We let him go.”

“You took him in,” Eve corrected, “when he needed you, and opened a door he hadn’t known existed. One he thought you’d shut in his face. His years in Dublin, with that fucker Patrick Roarke, and beyond that made him what he is. Who he is. Regret what you did or didn’t? You regret who he made himself.”

Blinking at the tears, Sinead sat back. “That’s very Irish of you.”

“Is it?” With a shrug, Eve polished off her breakfast. “Just strikes me as logic.”

“You love him, very much.”

“He’s a complicated, irritating, arrogant, fascinating, generous man. I love him, very much, even when he pisses me off. Which is fairly regularly. And yet. Do you know what he gave me for our anniversary?”

Now Sinead smiled, dashed away a tear that got through. “I was hoping you’d tell me, or show me. I imagine it’s blindingly gorgeous.”

“To me it is. He researched, developed, and is manufacturing what’s called Thin Shield. It’s a lightweight, flexible body armor that can be worn as a lining in a coat, jacket, vest, uniform. He gave them to my entire bullpen. He’s giving the next round of them to the NYPSPD.”

For a moment, Sinead said nothing. “He loves you, very much.”

“Yeah, how about that? I’ll never figure out why, so I’ve learned to take it. You’ll never figure out the what-ifs, the if-only, Sinead, so regrets are useless. And they disrespect the man he is. That’s Siobhan’s son.”

“You’ve lifted a weight off my heart. That’s pure truth.”

“Good, because it didn’t belong there.”

“Hearing you say so makes a difference. You trusted us with him.”

After a beat, Sinead’s eyes widened. She grinned as she ticked a finger in the air. “Ah. I see. You looked into us.”

“I’m a cop,” Eve said simply. “And watch out, because Sean’s heading in that direction.”

“So it seems. You . . . investigated us?”

“You better believe I checked you out. Every one of you. And there are a hell of a lot of you.” Eve nudged her plate aside. “You’re an exceptional family.”

“More exceptional now. I’ll say again.” Reaching out, she gripped one of Eve’s hands. “I’m grateful to you, and for you, Eve.”

“Roarke’s out in some field, probably stepping in cow shit in his five-thousand-dollar boots.”

“Oh Jaysus, not so dear as all that, surely.”

“Conservative estimate.” Rising, she helped herself to another mug of coffee. “And the idea of it really brightens up my day. So gratitude right back.”

“I’ve a mind to go out, cut some flowers. I feel light and happy thanks to our talk here. Will you walk with me?”

“Are you going near any cows?”

“Ah, we’ll keep a good distance there.”

“Then I’m game.”

\* \* \*

Maybe it surprised her how much she enjoyed several days on a farm in the Irish countryside, not far from the wild Irish coast. But the people brought the pleasure. She considered the many dogs and cats normal, even acceptable.

Cows and sheep within a stone’s throw of the house? Not so much. But she learned to sleep through the insistent call of the rooster, and kept her distance from the rest of the stock.

On the other hand, Roarke dived right in, tromping through fields in those five-thousand-dollar boots—they’d never be the same—riding on weird-looking machines.

She wondered, seriously, if he’d gone over the top when he milked a cow.

Machines did the real work, but you still had to get up close and personal. And because he wanted to see how it was done the old-fashioned way, his uncle obliged him.

So she stood, well back, in the doorway of the milking parlor, watching possibly the richest man in the known universe sit on a three-legged stool at the enormous back end of a cow who munched on a bunch of hay.

With his hair tied back in work mode, he used those clever and elegant hands to yank on a cow tit. A huge cow tit, the sort of tit she firmly believed had no place in a civilized world.

When milk squirted out of it and into a pail, she had to hold back a shudder. In contrast, Roarke grinned and kept on going.

“Will you have a go at it then, Eve? Our Gertie here’s gentle as a lamb.”

“Absolutely not. No. Never.” Plus, she’d heard the sounds lambs could make, and didn’t consider them gentle.

“It’s satisfying,” Roarke told her.

“Yeah, I bet. What man wouldn’t want to get his hands on a tit that big?”

When Robbie roared with laughter, she stepped back. “I’ll just leave the two of you to it.”

And when the three weeks away ended, she figured they’d done it all—and more. From the quiet of sun-soaked Greece to the quiet of green-soaked Ireland.

And cows aside, she’d enjoyed every second of it.

