

Example #1

The Legend of the Claddagh

As usual, Mimi Remington sang her heart out during the second set at the Cage, but even the patrons could sense that something was different. She looked out at them as usual when she performed the lyrics, but her eyes didn't seem to see anyone in the room. There was a sad distance that was strange, out of character and tragically endearing. With each new song, the room would grow still and silent; they were intrigued, that was for sure, and probably always would be when it came to this particular canary.

Mimi was, in fact, searching the room; wondering when he would return, where he had gone. Was it more business? It made her shudder to think of it. She had no idea how many men he had “taken care of” for the boss, and truthfully, she had no desire ever to know a number. Wherever he was, she hoped he would return soon—she hoped that all the truth he had discovered over that past month didn't drive him to do anything reckless. He had told her he was fearless—Father Will had confirmed it—and that was what frightened Mimi more than anything.

She didn't want to hang around after the second set to visit with any guests, and she certainly didn't want to run the risk of running into Danny. She didn't even want to sit and talk with Al about music or new arrangements. She didn't want to see anyone. All Mimi wanted right now was to go straight to her room, shut the door, and let the darkness hide her from everything.

After quickly wishing Al a good night, she slipped out the back door and made her way to Sully at the elevator. He read her well, and being of a quiet nature, simply nodded to her with a smile, and respected the silence around them. She stepped out of

the elevator and down the hall, not even allowing her eyes to flicker to his door. *Was he there? Had he managed somehow to sneak back in while she was singing downstairs?*

Or was he still out there somewhere in the city, engaged in a darkness of his own?

Turning the key in the lock, Mimi suddenly felt a chill all the way down her spine. It wasn't from fear or a sense of impending dread—it was something different. She paused for a moment in the threshold: it was a feeling that something new was descending all around her...that everything was about to change.

Like a train heading down one track...

So secure in its destination.

And then, without warning,

the track shifts...

She shut the door behind her and leaned her forehead against it for a moment, squeezing her eyes shut in gratitude for the silence—the darkness. *It had once frightened her so...now, it brought strange comfort—the only comfort she longed for and trusted.*

There was no eerie white glow to welcome her tonight; the storm was still roaring outside, silencing any evidence of the moon. She set her purse and wrap down on the small chaise in the entry room then made her way to the bedroom. She was about to click on the light, but then her eye caught the kerosene lamp that sat on her dressing table. It was far too dark to see right now, but the lamp seemed the less garish option: a compromise, of sorts.

She made her way over and opened the drawer to retrieve the matches and then lit the lamp, comforted by its soft glow. She removed her jewelry and the pins in her hair, then grabbed her brush, closing her eyes as she worked through the curls—every stroke

seeming to loosen a little bit of the tension that had her insides tied up into too many impossible knots.

“I would love to do that for you.”

She gasped at the sound of his voice; the hairbrush flew out of her hand, clattering down onto the wood floor. She brought her hand to her chest to quiet the pounding of her heart. Mimi was certain he could hear it now, even above the threatening rumble of thunder outside. He was sitting over in the shadows, on the bench—her window seat. She had the impression he had been waiting for her there awhile, watching the storm outside in the darkness.

His beloved darkness.

Her eyes met his and all fear seemed to melt away. His gaze was stormy, but such a deep, boundless blue—infinite—the pain, confusion, rage and sadness—there was no end. They were the most beautiful, frightening, dangerously provocative eyes she had ever seen, and they held her with their power now just as effectively as they had that first moment when they found her in the shadows of the barn. One glance, and it was as if the venom inside of them had completely overtaken her.

She was helpless.

He had her.

There would never be any hope of escape.

“How did you...” *No. Foolish question.* “You’re...here...I was...so worried...”

His lips turned up ever so slightly in a half smile; he was fully aware of the power he possessed over her—would always possess—yet he sat there, unmoving, holding her,

frozen in space and time. Was it seconds? Minutes? Hours? She could not be sure...nor did she care.

He was here.

That's all that mattered.

“There’s an Irish legend,” he said, his voice haunting and far away, “takes place long ago in the ancient village of Claddagh, just outside the walls of Galway on the western coast of Ireland—”

Mimi walked slowly, almost trance-like, over to the bed where she could sit down across from him to better listen to his story. His eyes tracked her like a predator, but he continued.

“A fishing boat from the village was captured by pirates and the crew was taken to lands far away to be sold into a life of slavery. One of the crew, his name was Richard Joyce, was supposed to marry his love the very week he was stolen away. During his captive years, he never forgot her, his girl back home. He’d been sold to a Turkish gold smith, and each day, as he learned the craft, he would steal a little bit of the gold, until finally, after many years, he had made a ring for her.”

“She was waiting for him, wasn’t she?” Mimi whispered her question to him.

He nodded slowly, his eyes still holding fast to hers. “After many, many years, Richard earned his freedom and returned the long way across the sea—back to Claddagh in Galway Bay. To his great joy, he found his girl had never given up hope.” Slowly, his eyes firmly fixed on hers, Mick slid off the window seat and down onto his knees. He reached into his jacket pocket, pulling out a black velvet box, and Mimi held her breath...

“So Richard knelt before her, right there in the rocks and sand of the bay, and he gave her the ring...the one that had taken him years to make...the one he had crafted as a slave.”

Mick’s eyes, which were, without a doubt, the color of the sea in those same waters faraway, held her prisoner. And now, she felt his hand taking hers so gently, and slipping something cold onto her finger.

“Tradition says the Claddagh ring, when worn on the left hand, crown turned outwards, means betrothal and promised loyalty. Then, on that day when two become one before the priest, the crown is turned inwards, and it becomes the symbol of a promise of a love that lives forever, between two hearts, never to be separated.”

She was stunned—unable to speak or move—but she watched in awe as he lifted her hand to his lips and softly kissed where he had placed the ring.

“Marry me, Margaret,” he whispered so softly she wasn’t sure if she heard him with her ears or her heart.

She looked down at the ring on her finger and gasped; the heart between the two hands was made of a diamond, so large and perfect, it possessed a light of its own. It was the most wondrous thing she had ever seen in her life. Her vision blurred, and she realized that her eyes had been filling with tears.

This wasn’t a dream, was it?

Was she dreaming?

She wiped her tears away, as if feeling their dampness on her face would verify that everything happening between them right now was real.

“Yes...” She smiled, laughing through her tears as she placed her hands on his face and sank down on the ground to kneel in front of him. “I will marry you, Mick. Of course I will.”

When his lips met hers, it seemed as if the whole world with all its pain and truth melted away. Deeper and deeper, she sank into him; he took her into his arms and held her close, and in that moment she was overwhelmed with that delicious sense of drowning. Life, hope, joy and sadness...it all just silently slipped away.

He had told her once that he didn't believe there was anything left of his soul, but if there was, it belonged to her. Right now, she knew that he had been wrong. His soul was there, always evident in his eyes—calm and deep, stormy and blue—and now she felt it joining with her own in his kiss: vast, warm, passionate and true.

As the storm continued to rage outside and the dim light of the lamp cast golden, flickering shadows on the walls, he slowly lifted her up off the ground, and held her tightly in his arms against his heart.

Example #2

Maggie Flynn

...She wanted desperately for him to take her into his arms and tell her he loved her; that all of this could be forgiven and forgotten. She wanted him to apologize for the past and promise that he would be her future. She wanted him to speak—to say anything—the silence was a wedge and it frightened her. Something was slipping away—the familiar cold and heavy cloak of loneliness was descending down around her once again.

Instead, Mick pulled himself away from her and walked back around his desk. He set his glass down decisively, and opened the drawer. His eyes fixed on something and for a moment, he froze; then he shifted his attention to something else, reached in, and pulled out a gun.

“Mick...w-what are you doing?” *Now it was time for panic.*

This was it; Mick was a killer. What did she expect? She had cornered him and now he would do to her what he had done to so many other traitors so many times before. She was fighting for breath and she felt a cold sweat pass over her from the top of her brow all the way down through her stomach.

He watched her with a look of genuine concern then his eyes clouded over with darkness again. “Me? Oh, well, I’m going to give you a little gift, Mimi; something you’ve been waiting for. Something you’ve no doubt dreamed of for almost seven years now.” He picked up the gun and walked back around the desk to where she stood, trying to find a breath. “This is a thirty-eight. My very first.” He looked down at it, cocking his head curiously as if he were examining a rare specimen. “Mr. Clancy gave it to me

when I got back from France—” his eyes grabbed hers, noting the confusion. “The war, Mimi.” He answered her silent questions. “Didn’t you know yours truly was a soldier? This Irishman sacrificed one year of service to America and lived to tell about it... not a scratch on me. You know why that is?”

Mimi shook her head. He smiled at her again; that dark, sinister smile that gave her chills.

“Because I’m not afraid of anything, remember? Not even death.” He was walking around her like a cat stalking a canary in a cage. Mimi swallowed hard. *God. This was real. This was really happening now...after so many years...so many nightmares...*

She felt him lean in close from behind. He brushed her hair out of the way so he could whisper in her ear. “And I am very, very good at what I do, Mimi. Did you know that? *Very good.*” He pulled away, walking back to pour another drink, leaving her trembling. “Some might even say it’s a God-given gift.”

Mimi squeezed her eyes shut and shook her head vehemently. “No, Mick,” she said quietly, “it’s not a gift. It’s a choice.”

He was silent for a moment. She raised her head to look at him, and was surprised to see that his eyes looked dazed; there was a sadness there that was so deep, so boundless, it almost stopped her heart.

“Mick...” she started again. He shook it away.

“I am giving this to you, Mimi.” He extended his hand with the gun out to her. “It’s yours.”

“I don’t want it.”

“Oh, but I think you do, love. I think it’s why you came home.”

Mimi’s eyes met his once again. He could see the spark of alarm. “This gun has quite a history. It’s the gun that killed your brother that night in the barn.” His voice was quiet—almost a whisper—but it made everything in her scream.

“Then what makes you think I would want it?” She could not conceal the tremor in her voice, and she no longer cared.

“Why, for your revenge, love.” He moved in close and she felt his lips gently brush against her temple in a kiss. He took her hand and placed the gun in it, wrapping her fingers around it with his own. It felt cold and hard...like death.

“No,” she whispered. “This isn’t what I wanted.” He did not release her hand. He kept her hand wrapped around the weapon. “I was angry and sickened, and I wanted answers, Mick, yes, but not this—not more death. I just wanted to know...to know why...”

“Why we snuffed your brother?” he verified.

Mimi squeezed her eyes shut at his disrespect. It was obviously intentional. *He was trying to make her hate him.* She took a moment to get control of her wild thoughts...and the trembling. She swallowed the lump forming in her throat and finally found words again. “I wanted to know why he was...taken from me that way. I want to know why a good man—a decent, hard working young man—was beaten and shot down like some kind of animal. Yes, I want to know why! Of course I did! What possible threat could he have been to you? To a powerful man like Clancy?”

Mimi could feel heat flooding her face. Her tone was simmering. She watched a slow smile spread across Mick’s face and it made her stomach lurch.

“A decent hard working man, huh? You think your brother was so righteous?”
He stifled a laugh. “*You* want to continue believing the lies, lass, that your brother was some kind of saint. Trust me. You don’t want the truth, so please, do yourself and me a favor and don’t ask me for it.”

“I’m asking. I need to know.”

He looked at her again, his hand still holding hers around the gun. “Alright, Mimi. Perhaps if you know, this will move things along.”

He paused, examining her face. His expression was unreadable at the moment. Mimi wasn’t sure if it was a look of disgusted anger, or wonder and regret. Maybe it was a mixture.

“Your brother was pilfering liquor with his friend, Aaron Foley. Did you know him?”

Mimi nodded her head slowly. “I remember Aaron, but you’re wrong. My brother is not a thief.”

“No?” Mick inquired with a half smile, his eyes gleaming. “Well, Miss Remington, I think I will respectfully have to agree to disagree with you on that. You see, Aaron worked for us. He was helping us get liquor across from Canada in unmarked crates. He would take the crates in the warehouse, mark them as inspected, and set them aside for pick-up.”

“That has nothing to do with my brother.”

Mick smiled again. “I’m getting there, love. Aaron had a brilliant idea to keep a crate or two for himself—and then he would undersell us to our clients. He made 100%

of the profit that way, and we didn't lose enough business or product to alert us...or so he thought. We kept excellent books, and I insisted on balancing everything to the penny."

"I don't see anything connecting James to this—"

"Your brother found out what Aaron was doing." Mick interrupted her. "He decided his paycheck at the warehouse would never be enough. He was right about that. He was making peanuts. He wanted in on it, or he'd expose Aaron's little scheme to the authorities. So Aaron cut him in, and surprise, surprise: James turned out to be the magical ingredient in their hot little scheme. He had great connections. And the clients liked and trusted him."

Mimi froze. *James had told her...he was going to tell the truth about something—something dangerous...* "He...he wouldn't...he's not a thief...my brother was good...he was honest..." Mimi couldn't seem to breathe. She felt like she was hyperventilating.

Mick leaned in. He knew what he had to say—exactly how to say it—to get her to act. He felt his heart breaking. Everything inside him was burning; standing this close to her—the only woman he had ever loved—knowing now that all of it, every bit, was a lie. *This* was killing him.

Now, he just needed to make it official.

"He was a thief, Mimi...and a very good one, too. He was helping Aaron and profiting quite a bit on the side."

"No! You have it wrong! It can't be...he told me..." her eyes were searching his. They were filled with confusion and denial, and then suddenly a glimmer of frantic hope. "Maybe he was working for them—the authorities?"

“He was working for greed, just like all of us.”

“He told me!” Mick could see her becoming more and more flustered. *This was working.* “He told me he was going to the authorities...he told me not to follow him anymore!”

If only she had listened, Mick mused to himself. “The only reason he went to the authorities, Mimi, is because he knew he’d been made. Trust me. I was watching him.”

Mick met her seething tone with one of his own effectively causing her eyes to light up in fear. “That’s right, Mimi. He was there in the warehouse when Danny offed Mr. Foley. Aaron squealed on your brother right before he died. Your brother heard the whole thing; he watched his friend beg and cry for his life, and then you know what he did? Your brave, righteous, saintly older brother? He ran. Your brother ran out of there from Danny to tell the authorities so he could save his own neck, Mimi, that’s what he did. That’s *his* truth!”

Suddenly, Mimi clutched the gun tightly and pulled away so that she was pointing it at Mick. Her face was crimson and her breathing as erratic as her heart. Mick could see it now in her face:

Hate.

“You...are...a...monster...” she whispered, her voice trembling. Tears were streaming freely down her face.

Mick felt his heart shatter into a million pieces at her words and then everything inside him went cold. He put up his hands and backed up slightly away from his desk, his steely blue eyes fixed on her dark brown ones. He picked up a pillow from a nearby couch and knelt down on the ground. Mimi followed him with the gun as he descended

to the ground. Her anger seemed to dissipate to confusion. She felt pure, liquid fire coursing through her with every beat of her heart. It was burning. *Everything in her was burning.*

“Come over closer, love,” Mick whispered. As if in a trance, Mimi did as she was told. “Now,” Mick reached out gently taking her hand with the gun. He felt her grip tighten around the weapon. “I’m not going to take it, love, I’m just going to help you do this right.” He urged the gun towards his temple. He heard a sharp intake of breath from her, but he couldn’t look at her. *Not now. Not like this.*

“Put the pillow against my temple, here, then the gun against the pillow. It will quiet the sound a bit—enough—since the band is practicing in the club.” Mimi’s hand was shaking and her grip on the gun was loosening. “Once you pull the trigger, you’ll need to be making your exit. Quickly.” He pointed towards the far window. “The fire escape out that window. It will take you to the street. You’ll need to hail a cab and head to the train station. Then, you’ll want to disappear.” He looked up at her assessing her reaction. Her eyes were unreadable to him. “There’s money in my desk,” he added softly. “It will get you far enough.” Then he closed his eyes. “Now...do it. End this. *Please.*”

Silence. It seemed like time, itself was suspended. She blinked looking down at him. He was there, eyes closed, on his knees in front of her, just as she had imagined. *This is what I thought I wanted—my punishment for running—a vengeance for James.*

It didn’t seem real. Even the air around her was heavy, and the grey glow of dusk settled around them like a fiery warning.

As she stood there, unable to move, Mick was pleading inside with a God he barely knew.

Do it. Please let her do it.

He couldn't live in darkness anymore. It was no longer a comfortable friend; it was cold. Suffocating. He couldn't live in a world like this—a world where Mimi wasn't his...

Example #3

Roeser's Café

They could not have asked for more perfect weather from the fickle Lady Chicago for a morning stroll in Lincoln Park. The sun was now shining overhead and the sky was dressed up in brilliant white; fat, frilly clouds floated leisurely above them as if floating down a tranquil river of blue. There was a lovely breeze that tousled the loose wisps of Mimi's hair playfully, and kissed her cheeks with jasmine-scented breath. The grass was a lush green in want of trimming, and the trees that towered alongside their path still wore their summer green. Their long, thick branches tangled up and over the path, joining hands with those on the opposite side, creating a shady canopy. Dapples of sunlight spotted the reddish gravel of the path in front of them, making Mimi feel as if they were walking right into a fairy tale. All around, she heard the sounds of children's laughter as they ran and played, intermingled with the songs of birds, as they called out to each other, the sunlight, and the blue in the sky. The tree lined path stretched out in front, beckoning them towards a large lake. The waters were rippling blissfully, occasionally capturing a twinkling sparkle from the sun that teased and taunted from above.

Mimi couldn't suppress her smile as they walked hand in hand, and she noticed Mick was grinning, lost somewhere deep in his own sense of self-satisfaction. "Well, Mick, I think it's pretty safe to say that you are a favorite customer at Roeser's bakery."

Mick laughed, releasing her hand to take her arm in his. "I guess maybe you could say that with a high degree of safety."

"Are you kidding? Ingrid hovering over you like a doting mother, waiting just to witness that precious moment when you took your first sip of coffee and your first bite of

marmalade smeared brotchen. One smile from you, and that was all they needed.” She laughed. “They love you in there, that’s for sure.”

Mick was quiet a moment, his smile shifting slightly to something else. “That’s not love, Mimi.”

“No?”

“No. That’s called respect.”

“Well,” she pressed, watching his face for any tell-tale change in expression “isn’t that a symptom of love?”

He smirked. “It’s also a symptom of fear.”

Mimi slowed her stride a bit so that he was forced to almost stop completely to accommodate her. “Fear? Why on earth would a kindly couple of German bakers be afraid of you?”

This brought a sardonic laugh. “You really are as naïve as you look, aren’t you? Why would they be afraid of me? Hmm, which of the dozens of reasons do you want me to name? For starters, I work for Charlie Clancy. That’s a whole slew of reasons in and of itself. A better question to ask is why wouldn’t they?”

“I suppose their customers all fear you, too.”

“I suppose they do.” He answered. His voice was casual, very matter of fact.

Mimi felt compelled to keep pressing. “I noticed how they grew quiet when we walked back through the kitchen. No one dared complain as the Roeser’s dropped everything to come back and wait on us.”

“That’s right.”

She looked away abruptly. “You sound like you’re proud of that.”

“Well, it beats the alternative.” The humor had left his voice.

Mimi looked up at him again, her eyes questioning. “The alternative?”

“Yeah, the alternative, you know, having *no one* fear you.”

She glanced up at him a moment. His eyes were fixed on the ground, cool and emotionless. “Sounds like wicked playground politics to me.”

“Yeah, well, Chicago is a tough town, and there’s a lot more than lunch money and a sandbox at stake, Mimi.”

“I would certainly hope so.”

Mick laughed away her concern. “Forget it, will ‘ya? I’m just trying to explain. That’s not love you saw in there, okay? Nobody in there will be shedding any tears at my funeral, that’s true enough. But until then, they will, as you so aptly put it, fuss all over me when I come into the joint.”

“How impressive. You inspire fear and respect wherever you go. You sure do know how to sweep a girl off her feet!”

She felt his arm tense a little. “Look. If it makes you feel better to think they genuinely love my company in their bakery, then by all means, go ahead.”

They walked in silence for a while, his cool words swirling around in her head, chilling her. “I’m not.” She said quietly.

He stopped walking to read her eyes. “You’re not what?”

She looked up at him decisively, trying to match his calm exterior. “Afraid of you. I’m not afraid of you, Michael Thomas O’Shaughnessy, and I never will be.”

Mick laughed out loud, incredulous. He shook his head, gently pulling her along again towards the water. “To be fair though, Mimi, there’s really no reason for you to be

afraid, is there? Your musical gifts and talents combined with your intoxicating charm are currently helping to line my pockets right now, so you, of all people have nothing to fear.”

“Even if I didn’t work for you, I still wouldn’t be afraid.”

“Ain’t you something!” A playful, devious smile spread across his face, melting into those dimples. She couldn’t help but smile back. “Well, you don’t strike me as a lass with bold ambitions to start your own distillery and moving in on any of Mr. Clancy’s business territory to undersell our clients either, so…”

Mimi felt something deep inside her clench. She tried to brush it away. “You never know!”

“So, tell me, then, Miss Margaret Remington,” his voice seemed to stroke her name, “I give up. Why is it you are not afraid of me?” He slowed to a stop to look at her again.

She felt her heart pounding in her chest. She took in a deep breath, finding her resolve. “Because you’re good.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“I said, you’re *good*.”

Mick responded with a positively insidious half smile. “I am, am I?”

“Yes,” she responded, hesitating. “Yes, you are.”

He moved in, closing the gap between them just slightly as they stood there on the path. “At what, exactly?”

Mimi blushed as she realized the innuendo. She turned away from his cocky smile, breaking their stare. “Well—I—I’m sure you are good at a great many things, but that’s not what I meant. *You* are good. Just you.”

Mick froze, his expression shifting from confidence to surprise and then to consternation. “What?” he muttered.

“You’re...well...you’re a good man. That’s what I’m trying to—that’s what I meant.” She sounded like a stammering child. She was fooling no one: there was definitely some fear in her words now as she stood there looking at him. She took a very careful step back.

Mick laughed out loud again, but his eyes were conflicted. “You think that just because I rescued you from that—that animal last night that I’m...that I...” He looked away, his eyes a storming fury with the memory of it. “Look, Mimi, I think you may have some overly romanticized, fairy tale notion of me in your head or somethin’.” He held her arm a little more firmly in his own, and started walking her along again.

She pulled away, indignant. Her cheeks were hot, but this time it was from anger and shame. “No I don’t. That’s not it at all. Believe me when I tell you. I don’t have any delusions about you, Mr. O’Shaughnessy.” She was speaking firmly, but then she added under her breath, “Not anymore.” She crossed her arms in front of him, her eyes flashing challenge. “I know I’m right about this, Mick. *You are good.*”

Mick’s tone changed from amused irritation to annoyance. “Based on what, exactly?”

His tone took her back a bit. She softened her stance and took another breath before continuing. “Your own words. Everything you told me back there in the bakery.

You protect people. Your mother, your little brother Rory—even Father Will—” his eyes were piercing her now as she spoke, making her tremble a little. “Yes. That’s right. He told me about that time you...you protected him.”

“Oh, he did, did he?”

“And me. You protected me.”

“This is just rich.” He huffed, turning away from her.

She reached out, grabbing his shoulder. *He was not going to walk away from this...not yet.* He stopped immediately, turning around to meet her eyes again. She held her breath. “I—I heard Danny that night at the bar...that night you offered me the job to sing for you. He was teasing you. He called *you* a palooka and you didn’t like it. You didn’t find it at all funny because you’re nothing like your father. You’re no palooka.” His expression fell a little as she spoke, and his eyes were clouding over with a relieved sort of confusion. *It was all the encouragement she needed.* “You don’t throw fights for the big boss because you’re scared, angry, drunk or just stupid. You took all the extra blows because you’re *good*.”

They stood there, frozen, his eyes gripping hers. She felt her breathing start to escalate and her heart felt like it was moving up to take permanent residence in her throat. Sounds of the birds and laughing park visitors settled between them, but nothing could break it...*his hold was fierce.* Finally, he spoke up, his tone quiet and more reserved. “So, what, now that makes me...so you think I’m one of the good guys?”

“I—I’m not sure anymore if there really is such a thing—that anything is that black and white, but...yes. In many ways, I think you are.”

His eyes seemed to fill with pain, forcing him to look away, somewhere off in the distance. “I see our car—over there on the other side. We should make our way.” He reached tentatively for her arm, and draped it softly over his, maneuvering her down to a winding path to the right, away from the flickering, sunlit lake that now seemed to laugh and dance in the stirring fingers of the breeze.

“That’s it then. You have nothing more to say to me?” Mimi whispered sadly. She felt his head turn to look at her. She was afraid to look up—afraid of the hurt in his eyes. *Where was it coming from? Why didn’t he want to hear these words from her?*

“You’re slayin’ me right now, you know that Mimi?” He growled. She looked up at him startled. His eyes held hers a moment, then traveled leisurely up and down her frame with the clear intention of making her uncomfortable. *It worked.* He gently tugged her arm in, bringing her closer.

Mimi’s gaze dropped and her breathing became more ragged as their bodies moved together, touching as they walked. Mick seemed to change his mind, and he backed off a little. “You know what? I’m going to do you a big favor right now, Miss Remington. Rather than capitalize on all this for my own selfish gains with you—and believe me, that is what I am most inclined to do—I’m going to set you straight. I’m no good guy. Not even a little bit. You don’t have the faintest idea who I am or what I’ve done, or you wouldn’t be sayin’ *any* of this right now.”

Mimi was struck by the irony: *She hadn’t the faintest idea?* They were almost to the car. Gathering every ounce of courage, Mimi wriggled out of his hold and moved in boldly between Mick and the handle of the car door, her hands on her hips. “I know

more than you think. Do you honestly believe there is a person alive who doesn't have regrets? Do you, Mick? Everyone does. Everyone! That doesn't mean they're all bad!"

Mick moved towards her until his face was just inches from hers. There was nowhere to go; he had her trapped between his body and the car. She gasped.

"Who said anything about regrets, Mimi? What makes you think I have any of those?"

She was breathing so fast her head was spinning. His eyes were fixed on her mouth. She tried unsuccessfully to swallow the lump that was forming in her throat. "You—you talk about fear—how everyone is—so—so afraid of you. What are you afraid of, Mick?" Her words came out in raspy, trembling breaths. She felt her will sinking as his arms reached forward to brace himself on either side of her against the car. *God! Those eyes! Those tortured blue eyes and the way they were looking at her right now!*

"Nothing." He whispered, the breath of his lips mingling with hers.

"You're lying."

He backed off a little, and Mimi let go of her breath. "Well, there you have it. I'm a liar, then. So—how is it, exactly, that a liar can be good? Make up your mind, Mimi!"

She blinked rapidly. "I have."

Her soft words seemed to puncture his heart. "Hear me now, loud and clear. I've never, in my whole life, ever been afraid of anyone or anything, not even my bastard of a father. Shit, I'm not even afraid of dying, which makes me something of a nightmare to all the other torpedoes on the street. Not even you and your dangerously stupid theories

and conjectures scare me, though God knows, they probably should.” He lurched forward trying to reach the car door handle, but Mimi stepped in, bringing them closer together again.

“You’re a good man, Mick...” she paused a moment to swallow hard. A lump was forming in her throat and it was nearly choking her. *Why was she saying this? Did she actually believe it?* She shook her hair back, regained her composure and started again. “If there is one thing I have learned in my limited years of life experience it’s that hurt people hurt others. It’s what they *know*.” Her voice was a breathy whisper. “Mick, you are, deep down, a good man who has gone and done some very bad things.”

For the first time in his own memory, Mick felt his knees go weak. “What’s the difference?” His eyes fixed on her mouth again.

“There’s a big difference.” He moved slowly towards her lips for just a fraction of a second, then just as quickly, he pushed himself back.

“We’re confusing the hell out of the driver right now.” His expression was unreadable. Mimi tried to smile. “Do you mind...moving over a little?” She stepped away so that he could reach the handle and open the door. His eyes flickered from her to the sky. The clouds seemed to be shifting again, exchanging their pretty white petticoats for dark grey ones. The sun was hiding. Had the sky changed so quickly, or had they just not been paying attention?

“It looks like rain,” he spoke, his tone void of all feeling. It was as if he were commanding rather than observing it. Mimi felt sure she could hear a distant rumbling of thunder in response. He looked back down at her, taking her hand to usher her into the

car. He made no motion to close the door yet. “You need to get back to the club, relax a little before your rehearsal.”

“Mick,” she pleaded, “you must listen to me, I—”

“No,” he interrupted, “just...please, Mimi,” his eyes were softening but he was fighting something. “Give it a rest, okay?” He tapped on the driver’s window, and it was rolled down immediately.

“Yes, sir?”

“Don’t take her back the same way we came. Go down some side streets—around the park. This is my car, and—well, you understand.”

“Gotcha, Mr. Mick.”

Mimi felt her heart flutter. “Wait, aren’t you coming, too?”

“No. I think maybe you’ve had enough of me for one morning, don’t you?” He offered her a weak smile. “Besides. I need to take a longer walk—get a few things done.”

“You said it looked like rain.”

“I’m Irish, Love,” Mick snickered, speaking with a soft, added brogue. “we don’t mind the rain. It’s what our souls are made of.” He shut her door, but she furiously cranked down her window as the driver started the engine. Mick leaned in, stroking the top of her hand that rested there. “Go back to the club. Take a nice, long bath. Relax. Stop spinning this.”

“I’m sorry if what I said upset you.”

He smiled. "Not even remotely possible." He nodded towards the driver. "Murph will see that you get home safe and sound. Now, do me a favor and roll up this window, huh?" She nodded, her eyes fixed on his as she cranked the window shut.

Mick tapped the side of the car, eyeing the driver with a warning glance, then his eyes flickered back to Mimi. As they drove away, she watched him as he stood there, staring after them. Then, when she could no longer distinguish his figure amongst the throng in the park, she gently lifted her hand and pressed it against the window where his reflection had just been.