

## Chapter One

Maeve had her eye on Sean O'Malley ever since she made her first communion at St. Patrick's. He was an altar boy a few years older than her, and while he had an angelic face, she knew there was more to the tall young man than met the eye. He had a reputation; at least that was what the older girls whispered about him. What that meant exactly she didn't quite grasp, but she was impressed just the same. Anything that caused the nuns to scowl in his direction was interesting. He always smiled back at them and spoke respectfully, but the nuns would tsk, frown and shake their heads as they walked away. It was almost as though they wished he would do something they could reprimand him for.

Her fascination didn't end when he turned fifteen and no longer lit the candles in church. Each Sunday she looked for him. He was absent more than he was present, but that didn't upset her. She knew in her heart he was a good boy, despite what others might say.

As she grew older, Sean always seemed to be in the vicinity when she got herself in hot water. He'd either whisk her away or plant his big body between her and whatever threat presented itself. Sometimes it was other boys bothering her for no reason she could determine and sometimes it was something foolish she'd done bringing trouble down on her own head.

The nuns weren't fond of make-up. Unfortunately, Maeve was very fond of Strawberry Kiss lipstick.

"Wipe that off," he'd hiss as he passed her in the hall. Or "don't think I can't tell you've rolled your skirt up." One day he herded her toward the row of lockers in the hall and whispered in her ear. "I could still smell that perfume in the gym an hour after you'd left it. Sooner or later you're goin' to be called to task about it. Go back to the sweet scent you used to wear," he demanded before walking away.

Affronted, Maeve sniffed her sweater. Well, maybe it was a bit much, but it was called Parisian Mist and wearing it made her feel grown up.

It was a sad day when he graduated. That summer, before he went off to college, she hardly saw him unless she happened to stroll by Woodies where he worked. Occasionally he was outside, loading a truck, his white tee-shirt straining across his chest, the muscles in his arms bulging.

It was the early seventies, and while her parents had a fit, she'd still managed to cajole them into letting her buy some of the latest fashions. Of course, they had no idea the skirts she bought could all be rolled up at the waist until they classified as miniskirts. Or that the shorts she bought were technically called 'hot pants'. Platform shoes added many inches to her height and, wearing them, she felt mature. Stopping outside the wire fence at Woodies, she sent her girlfriends on ahead and watched Sean working. He looked up and saw her. She smiled and waved. After wiping the sweat from his brow, he stared at her, his hands planted on his hips before his long-legged stride brought him to the fence.

"Jesus, Maeve, what the devil are ya doin'?" he demanded.

"Nothin'. My friends and I are goin' shoppin'. Why?"

"Dressed like that?"

"Aye, what's wrong with the way I'm dressed, not that it's any concern of yours?" she asked, slightly stung by his attitude.

“For one thing, you’re advertisin’ somethin’ that’s not available,” he snapped.

“How do you know what’s available and what isn’t?” she challenged, tossing her auburn hair over her shoulder.

“Because I know you’re not yet sixteen, darlin’,” he said softly, leaning closer.

Maeve’s heart raced. Tipping her head back she looked into his eyes.

“I also know that when it is available, tis mine. I’ll be leavin’ soon, so you’d better behave while I’m gone. If you don’t, when your Da gets done skelpin’ you, I’ll be waitin’ in line to give you the worst spankin’ of your young life. Do you understand?”

“No,” she breathed, her knees shaking.

“You will,” he assured her with a gentle smile. “Now go home and wash that muck off your face before I do it with that hose over there,” he insisted pointing to a big hose on the outside of the building. “And put some proper clothes on or I’ll give you a lickin’ right here. Those shorts don’t cover much, so I should be able to do a proper job of it.”

Maeve drew back and straightened her spine with a snap.

“I’ll do as I please, Sean O’Malley, and you can go straight to the devil,” she hissed, taking a step back when his face darkened.

“Aye, that may be where I’m headed, darlin’,” he conceded with a grin, “but you’re headin’ home to change,” he insisted, pointing in the direction she’d come from.

“No I’m not,” she said, stomping her foot. “I’m goin’ with my friends!”

“Martin, is it lunch time yet?” he called to a man behind him working on loading another truck. “I find I’ve got an errand to run,” he continued, taking off his leather gloves.

“Sure, Sean, go ahead. I’ll cover for you” the man replied with a grunt.

Maeve shivered and took another step back from the fence. There was no doubt he meant exactly as he said. With a huff she glared at him, pivoted on her platform sandals and stomped off in the direction he’d indicated.

Sean laughed. “You can use a little of the strawberry lip paint,” he called after her. “I fancy that one.”

“Kiss my arse, O’Malley,” she yelled over her shoulder.

“Oh I will, with my lips and my hand if you don’t have a care and mind me,” he whispered watching her bottom swing. “Someday.”

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Maeve spent the next three years as a typical teenager. She went to parties, dances and got decent grades in school. Her first kiss was disappointing, as was smoking a joint. Instead of feeling all happy as she expected, she got a little paranoid, wondering if somehow, someday he’d find out. For some reason, Sean’s threat stuck like glue, and although she only saw him once in a while at Mass when he was home for a school holiday, she often wondered what he knew and what he didn’t.

He’d clearly said he intended to be first in line when she became available, and at seventeen, it seemed he might be a little late. As her eighteenth birthday neared, she determined he was full of crap. There’d been plenty of times he could have approached her after church and he hadn’t. There was also the telephone and any idiot could write a note, if not a letter.

No, he’d been playing with her that day, teasing the naive young girl who obviously had a crush on him. She blushed, knowing she’d been transparent and decided strolling by his place of employment dressed as a South Street hooker hadn’t been her finest hour. At the time, she hadn’t even realized how much she worshiped him. Then the big jerk threatened her. That cooled

her ardor. How dare he act like he could intimidate her? Well, actually he had intimidated her, she admitted. The thought of being on the receiving end of a spanking from Sean O'Malley was not something to joke about. The man had muscles on his muscles and an attitude to match. She'd never seen him back down from a fight; he had a 'don't mess with me assertiveness' and the reputation to back it up.

On the other hand, he'd always looked out for her, coming between her and disaster many times. He could be kind, gentle and thoughtful. On her seventeenth birthday, she'd received a dozen yellow roses with a card that said 'Enjoy your birthday, but not too much'. It wasn't signed, so they could have been from anyone, and she refused to believe they were from him.

Maeve dated a few boys, but nothing serious developed. She didn't like being pawed, and for some reason, that seemed to be their main objective. "What are you saving it for?" was a nasty question she heard more than once and that was usually the last date. In truth, she wasn't sure herself. Most of her girlfriends had given it up long ago. She tried to convince herself she remained 'a good girl' because of her religious beliefs, but part of her suspected it had something to do with The O'Malley's warning, which was just stupid. He was nowhere around and would probably never know nor care what she did after all this time. It was a silly school girl infatuation, and it was over.

A few days before her eighteenth birthday, she joined some friends to hang out in the field behind the school. They built a campfire and someone brought along a boom box. Soon they were partying and attracted another group of kids from a nearby public school. A cute boy visiting his cousins from the States named Tony singled her out immediately, and Maeve was flattered as her girlfriends looked at her with envy. From his pack, he produced several bottles of wine which began to make the rounds. Handing Maeve an unopened bottle called Tickle Pink, he announced it was hers alone in honor of her birthday.

Smiling, he opened it and handed it to her. Taking a small sip, she was surprised how good it was. It did tickle her nose and tasted a bit like carbonated fruit juice, not at all like the heavy communion wine she was used to. She shared her bottle with Tony who only took a few sips, and all too soon, she was holding it upside down with a pout on her face.

"Aw, tis all gone," she giggled.

"That's okay, babe," he assured her. "I've got something else." Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out a packet of pills and held out his hand to her.

Maeve shook her head.

"Come on, babe," he pleaded. "These are nothing, just a few ludes. Have a couple. They'll make you feel great."

Cautiously, Maeve took one pill and looked it over. It was small, how much harm could it do she thought? Popping it in her mouth she glanced around and saw that most of the kids had paired off and moved beyond the light of the fire. Her world was beginning to spin when Tony eased her onto her back.

His kisses were sweet, she sighed. If another man's face appeared in her mind, so what. This boyo was here now. She hardly felt his fingers sliding under her sweater. It wasn't until she heard the snap of her jeans pop open that she tried to stop him. That tiny noise sounded as loud as a shotgun.

"No, Tony, stop," she said faintly, reaching to capture his hand as it slid down the front of her jeans.

“Come on, it will be fun,” he promised, lowering his face to her breasts.

“No, I don’t want to.” Trying to push him away, she found her arms were about as strong as noodles. A tear slipped into her hair as she realized what she’d done. O’Malley was going to kill her.

As though she’d conjured him, he suddenly appeared between her and the stars, his big body blocking out the light from the fire. His face was completely in shadow, but there was no mistaking his sheer size, or the growl that came from his throat. He picked Tony up by the scruff of the neck, shaking him as though he were a puppy.

“What did you give her?” he demanded in a voice Maeve had never heard before.

“Nothing, man,” Tony squealed, struggling to get away. “She just had a little cheap wine.”

“What did you give her?” Sean repeated, tightening his grip on the boy’s throat.

“A lude, man,” Tony whined as his hand clawed at Sean’s. “Shit, she only took one. It’s no big deal. She’ll be fine.”

“How long ago?”

“I don’t know, maybe ten minutes. She’s just drunk.”

Maeve lay sprawled on the ground watching the scene unfold between the boy and O’Malley. She hoped when he killed her he did it quickly because there was a very good chance she was going to throw up. If that happened, she’d have to lay in it because she sure as hell couldn’t get up.

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Sean tossed the kid away, enjoying his yelp when he hit the ground. Looking at Maeve, he went down on one knee, gently tucked her breast back into her bra, and pulled down her sweater. He tried not to notice her lacey underwear as he zipped her jeans and snapped them.

Her expression was curious, but she neither moved nor spoke, something that worried him.

“Come on, darlin’,” he said, taking her under her arms. “Let’s get you up.” He held her by her waist once he had her upright. Her legs seemed to be useless. Moving her toward the light of the fire, he was just getting ready to stick his big finger down her throat when she began to vomit. Supporting her with one arm, he gathered her long auburn hair in his other fist.

It was over in a few minutes. When she looked up at him, she was white as a ghost and sweating profusely.

“Can you walk?” he asked after she wiped her mouth on the sleeve of her sweater.

She nodded, but when he took her arm to lead her away, she didn’t get three steps before she went to her knees. Scooping her into his arms, he carried her away into the dark, her head resting weakly on his shoulder.

“We’re not goin’ to discuss this tonight, darlin’,” he told her as he drove her home. She looked both terrible and terrified as she leaned against her door with the window open and let the cool night air sweep over her. “Tell your Ma you must have eaten somethin’ bad and that when you started gettin’ sick, you called me for a lift.”

“I didn’t even know you were home.”

“They don’t know that.”

“So you want me to lie? To my own parents?” she asked with a touch of sarcasm in her voice.

“No, don’t lie. Tell them their daughter went off with some friends, met up with strangers and got good and drunk on cheap wine. Then she took an illegal drug from one of them and almost got raped. Don’t forget the possibility that you could be presentin’ ‘em with their first grandbabe in nine months if things had turned out differently,” he snapped. “Aye, you sassy little bit, I want you to lie.”

“Okay, I’m sorry,” she sniffed, a sob escaping.

“Don’t cry, darlin’,” he advised her. “There’ll be plenty of time for that later.”

“What do you mean?” she whispered.

“I think you know exactly what I mean, Maeve my girl,” he replied calmly.

“No, no I don’t,” she insisted, turning to face him.

“Well if you don’t, you should. I told you three years ago how things stood between us and don’t go tryin’ to deny it. I warned you not to be givin’ somethin’ away that belongs to me.”

“And just what do you think belongs to you, O’Malley? You haven’t called me, haven’t written and barely spoken to me when we saw each other at Mass. And from this I’m supposed to know I somehow belong to you?” she demanded.

“No, you’re supposed to know because I told you, right out and proper like. And don’t think I haven’t been keepin’ an eye on you, darlin’, because I have. The way I see it, you have quite a few things to atone for.”

“Oh, I do, do I?”

“Aye, you certainly do.”

“Like what?”

“Like the way you let Kelly Rourke kiss you in the sanctuary after choir practice.”

“How do you know about that?” she gasped. “And I didn’t let him kiss me, he just did it.”

“You should have slapped his face. I haven’t even kissed you yet, and I’m going to wed you.”

“Who says? What makes you think I’d marry you anyway?”

“I don’t think, I know,” he replied confidently.

Maeve snorted as Sean pulled up in front of her house.

“I’ll pick you up after school tomorrow,” he stated, turning to face her as he shut the car off.

“Don’t bother,” she shot back, opening the door.

“Little lass, you’re playin’ with fire and you’re goin’ to get burnt in more ways than one. You’ve loved me since you were seven so don’t try to deny it, and I’ve loved you too. I’ve been waitin’ for you to grow up, but it’s come to me that you might need a man’s firm hand in order to do that. After tonight, I’m more convinced than ever. I need to marry you before you get yourself into trouble you can’t get out of. Now get up the yard before I forget you’re not feelin’ well. I’ll be waitin’ for you tomorrow.”

“There’s no law against waitin’, O’Malley,” she said with a smile. “I’ve been waitin’ for three years.” Slamming the door, she ran up the steps to her house.

## Chapter Two

As soon as the last bell rang signaling dismissal, Maeve hurried to the girl's room. Hanging her bag on the back of the stall door, she removed a pair of thigh high stockings, navy heels and her make-up bag. Quickly, she stripped her loafers and knee socks off and replaced them. After stuffing her original items in her bag, she peeked out the door, thankful to find the bathroom empty. Most of the girls scattered as fast as they could once the bell rang and the nuns never used this bathroom. Exiting the stall, she went to the mirror and applied eyeliner, shadow, a heavy dose of mascara and frosted lipstick. Taking a brush out of her bag she pulled her ponytail free and bent upside down, brushing her hair until it was full and fluffy before flipping her head back and arranging it in a tousled style.

Turning this way and that, she was satisfied with her appearance. Now she had to decide whether she wanted to tie her shirt under her breasts or roll her skirt up. It could only be one way, but which was best suited to pissing O'Malley off? The shirt she finally decided. Unbuttoning it, she tied the ends together, exposing her midriff.

Carefully, she tiptoed to the door. Clicking heels could draw attention and that was the last thing she wanted, at least from the nuns. She opened the door the tiniest bit, saw Sister Margaret and Sister Beatrice walking down the hall and quietly let it close. It was all she could do not to tap her foot while she waited, and it suddenly occurred to her she should have a breath mint. Digging through her bag, she found them and popped two into her mouth.

After several very long minutes, she looked again and found the coast clear. As quietly as she could, she let herself out the door and skated to the stairs leading to the front door. Long ago she'd learned sliding feet made less noise.

She could see him at the curb, leaning against his car wearing a white tee-shirt and dark jeans. His arms were folded across his chest as he glanced at his watch and looked up and down the sidewalk. He seemed impatient. That was a good sign, maybe.

Maeve hadn't allowed herself to give much thought to why she was doing what she was doing. On one hand, she knew he needed to see her as a woman and not a silly young girl in need of supervision. What better way to make him want her? She wanted him on fire with the need of her, panting with the kind of lust she'd only read about.

She also wasn't opposed to really, really pissing him off. After all, she'd been mad at him for more than three years. Well, not just mad, hurt too. She felt deserted, abandoned, and it wasn't right for him to treat her that way and then show up and act like he owned her or something.

This wasn't the 1800s. They weren't betrothed by some ancient decree or agreement between their families. There was no throne to protect. Hell, if he really wanted to marry her, he should get down on his knees and thank her for being oh so good these last three years. Keeping herself pure and all that!

Taking a deep breath, she opened the door and sauntered down the stone steps much like a contestant in the Miss Universe Pageant. She barely managed to stop herself from giving the royal wave. Sean's eyes never left her, and her head swelled right along with her heart, at which point she reminded herself vanity was a sin.

Uncertain which way things were going to progress, she figured there were two options. Either he would be so taken by her stunning beauty and raw sexuality he would drop to his knees, profess his undying love and affection and beg her to marry him, or he would explode. On the other hand, he could be furious both for being kept waiting and by the blatant, somewhat slutty way she was dressed. If the second scenario happened, she planned to whack him with her bag, kick off her heels and run like hell. Going cross lots, she could make it home before he could drive to her house.

Unfortunately, what ultimately happened was neither of these things. As she stepped off the last step and approached him with the sultriest expression she could drum up, he began to laugh. Oh, not a snort or two, great big belly whoppers that crippled him as he held his stomach.

Maeve's bag dropped from her hand as she stood there completely stunned. Tears were running down his cheeks as he roared. He mumbled words like 'priceless' and 'hysterical' as he ended up bent over the hood of his car, howling.

Her embarrassment knew no bounds. She was mortified, furious, crushed, and she took the opportunity that presented itself and kicked him right in the arse with her pointy toed shoe.

For some reason, although he yelled, he kept laughing, maybe harder, so she snatched up her bag, hit him with it and stomped away.

"Darlin', wait," he called after her, but she was beyond hearing anything he wanted to say, if he could form an intelligible sentence, which he couldn't.

"Kiss my arse, O'Malley. I hate you. I'll never marry you, never!" she screamed over her shoulder. Tears streamed down her cheeks, taking copious amounts of mascara with them. When she scrubbed at her eyes, a fierce burning began that blurred her vision, causing her to trip on an uneven sidewalk. Screaming, she kicked off her shoes, picked them up and hurled those at him too. She thought she heard a 'damn' but she didn't wait around to see. She would literally die if one of her friends saw her in this condition. Cutting behind the parsonage, she took the alley and was almost home when she realized she still had her other shoes and could have stopped to put them on. Her stockings were shredded and her feet were bleeding from several cuts. Hobbling into the house, she called out to her mother.

"Ma, I'm goin' to have a long soak in the tub. If anyone calls for me, tell them I'm not at home."

"Tis lying," her mother pointed out as she called back from the kitchen

"Then just tell them I'm not available," she yelled as she nearly crawled up the stairs.

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The tub helped, but that damn long lash mascara should come with a removal kit, Maeve thought as she put the last Band-Aid on her foot and looked in the mirror. She had a striking resemblance to a raccoon, and no matter what she used, it only smudged and made it look worse. Pulling on a pair of jeans, a sweatshirt and her softest slippers, she went downstairs.

"Maeve, lass," her father remarked as he sat in his chair and listened to the news. "I don't know why you have to wear that awful eye stuff. You look like a raccoon."

"I know, Da," she sighed, rolling her eyes and flopping on the couch.

"You missed dinner," her mother remarked, as though Maeve didn't know it. "Are you ill?"

"No. What can I use to get this stuff off?"

“I’m not sure. You know your Da doesn’t fancy me wearin’ such things. I can’t for the life of me figure out how you get away with it,” she said, pausing in her knitting. “Perhaps some baby oil would help.”

“Thanks, I’ll try that,” Maeve said rising from the couch and walking slowly to the bathroom. A little on a cotton swab did help, but it didn’t take it all off. Going into the kitchen, Maeve got a tall neck cola from the fridge and used the can opener on the side of the cupboard to open it. Just as she dropped back down on the couch, the doorbell rang.

“Sean,” her father sang out after opening the door. “It’s good to see you, son.”

“Thank you, sir,” Sean replied, shaking the older man’s hand. In his left hand he held a bottle of single malt scotch which he handed Mr. Murphy as he removed a box of chocolates from under his arm. “These are for the missus.”

“Why, tis thoughtful of you to bring us such fine gifts, Sean. What brings you here tonight? How are you doin’ in school? Come in, sit down.”

“Thank you,” Sean replied, wiping his feet and moving to the couch to sit.

“Maeve, look, tis Sean O’Malley come to visit,” her father pointed out with a scowl in her direction.

“So it tis,” was all she replied, her eyes fixed on the game show on TV.

“Turn that off,” her father barked. “Tis rude when we have company.”

“Yes, Da,” she sighed as she walked slowly to the set and switched it off.

“So, as I was sayin’, how is school goin’, Sean? Your folks are very proud of you.”

“Actually, Mr. Murphy, I’m done with my schoolin’. I doubled up and got my degree early.”

“Did you now? That’s fine, lad, fine. So what are you now?” her Da asked, leaning back in his chair and lighting his pipe.

“I have a degree in Civil Engineerin’. As a matter of fact, I have an interview next week. I hope to be workin’ for the government.”

“The government? Now that’s really somethin’ isn’t it, Margaret?”

“Aye,” her mother replied.

Maeve snorted.

“Maeve, offer Sean somethin’ to drink?” her Da ordered with a frown.

“Want one?” she asked blandly, holding up her cola.

“No, thank you. Why I really came here tonight is... well I’d like to have a word in private with you, Mr. Murphy.”

“In private, you say?” Leaning forward in his chair, her father acted like O’Malley was about to impart a bit of highly confidential, top secret, information.

“Anythin’ you have to say can be said right here,” Maeve snapped, glaring at Sean.

“Lass,” her father protested. “What’s gotten into you? I swear you’re as prickly as a porcupine. Now mind your manners. If Mr. O’Malley desires a private conversation, that’s what he shall have, and I’ll not hear any more of your sass,” he warned sharply.

“Yes, Da,” Maeve said, lowering her eyes so she didn’t have to see the satisfaction in Sean’s.

“Margaret, get us two glasses and we’ll adjourn to my study. We can talk there without bein’ disturbed,” he continued, staring meaningfully at Maeve.

“One of you is already disturbed,” she mumbled. “I’ll get the glasses, Ma.” She thought she heard Sean snort as she left the room.



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Two hours later, Sean and her father came out of the study, her father obviously having trouble walking straight.

"I've given your hand in marriage to young Sean here," he announced heartily.

"What?" she and her mother demanded in unison.

"Did I mumble?"

"Well, aye, actually you did," Maeve replied, her hands on her hips.

"I said I've given my permission for Sean O'Malley to marry you," he informed them with a huge grin as he staggered to his chair.

"How much whiskey did you have to pour down his throat to get him to agree to that?" she demanded, looking at Sean.

"When a man gifts another man with a bottle of whiskey, tis not his place to tell him how to drink it," Sean answered with a grin.

Maeve rolled her eyes and sank to her knees before her father, taking his hands in hers.

"Da, I can't marry him," she said earnestly.

"Canna or wilna?" he asked, slipping heavily into the brogue as he always did when drinking.

"Both."

"You'd shame me in front of the entire town?" he demanded. "What's wrong with O'Malley anyway? He seems a fine young lad with a good head on his shoulders."

"He's too bossy and arrogant," Maeve insisted, glaring at Sean who stood leaning against the door casing, grinning.

"Ach, so is your mother and I married her," her father cried, waving off her objections.

Maeve sighed and put her head down, waiting for the outburst. It wasn't long coming and after her Ma had given her Da quite a large piece of her mind, she stormed from the room.

"I should have taken a stick to her years ago," her father said sadly.

"It's never too late," Sean offered helpfully.

"Shut up, O'Malley," Maeve said under her breath. "Don't encourage him when he's in this condition. She's likely to clock him a good one. Come on, Da. Let Sean help you up to bed and then he and I will hash everythin' out."

"You won't shame me, not after I've given me word?" he asked, narrowing his eyes.

"I won't shame you, Da. Now go up to bed and don't worry about a thin'."

"Aye, you're a good daughter," he said, trying to rise and falling back into his chair, "even if you are a sassy lass. I have no doubt Sean here will know what to do about that."

"Come on, lad, help me up. Maybe I can fall asleep before her Ma decides she's speakin' to me again. Now that t'would be a blessin'," he sighed, patting Maeve's cheek.

Sean easily pulled him to his feet and helped him upstairs to his room. Maeve sat back down on the couch, indicating Sean should have a seat too when he returned. A few minutes later, her Ma stormed through the room and stomped upstairs.

"Is that the end of it?" he asked.

"For tonight. She won't speak to him for several days, and she'll walk around the house with a wounded air performin' her 'wifely duties', all but one. Then he'll get sick of it and go out and buy her a gift."

"What kind of gift?"

“Oh a piece of jewelry she’s been covetin’ or a pretty nightgown. He’ll beg her forgiveness, and she’ll grant it, until the next time.”

“How often does this happen?” Sean asked curiously. His own Da would put a stop to the silent treatment in an entirely different, and in Sean’s mind, a more appropriate way.

“Three or four times a year, usually when he’s had a few too many with another bloke who makes him feel less manly. Then he spouts and sputters about how a man should be in charge of his own home, king of his castle and other nonsense. He can never quite pull it off, but he does try.”

“Maeve, did you mean what you said about not shamin’ your da?”

“Aye.”

“So you’ll marry me?”

“Unless I can figure a way out of it without embarrassin’ Da,” she informed him. “Give me a legitimate reason to break it off and you’re gone, O’Malley. Can I show you out?”

Rising, he let her lead him to the door and open it.

“Good night, darlin’,” he said, taking her hand and kissing it. “I’ll be by tomorrow night to pick you up and we’ll go to a movie or somethin’.”

“Tomorrow night I have choir practice,” she drawled, pulling her hand away.

“Then I’ll pick you up after practice. It will be a good time for us to give the Father the news.”

“Suit yourself,” she said, trying to close the door.

“One more thing,” he drawled with a smile. “The ‘pulling it off’ thing you mentioned, a man bein’ the boss of his own home?”

“Aye?”

“I can and will pull it off,” he assured her.

“I see, well good luck with that, O’Malley,” she smiled, planting her hand in the middle of his chest and backing him up.

Before he could reply, his nose was mere inches from the door knocker.