

*Patrick is stepping into the spotlight. Allie is finally free. But as their lives begin looking up, the past is circling—and this time, the fall could be deadly.*

**The O'Donnell Brothers: Looking Up**  
By Cahill Richards

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**The O'Donnell Brothers**



# Looking Up

**CAHILL RICHARDS**

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Print ISBN: 978-1-961265-18-9

Ebook ISBN: 979-8-88532-172-3

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Trenton, Georgia.

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Richards, Cahill

The O'Donnell Brothers: Looking Up by Cahill Richards

Library of Congress Control Number: 2026906692

BookLocker.com, Inc.

2026

First Edition

## CHAPTER ONE

### Amber Meadows

Amber opened her eyes and looked around, trying to figure out where she was. As wakefulness came to her in tiny increments, she realized she was in Tim's bed in his apartment, but she didn't really remember how she got there. She tried to turn over and reach for her phone on the nightstand, but a sharp pain in her side impeded her movement, sending her entire back into one huge spasm as she struggled to take a breath. She felt like she'd been run over by a Mack truck, or kicked by a mule, or whatever colorful expression people used to describe the feeling of absolute pain, and she brought her hand up to her neck in an attempt to ease the stinging sensation there.

As her fingers touched the deep gouges that had begun to scab in the tender flesh just above her collarbone, complete cognizance filled her mind and memories flooded back to her like a dam had burst. She'd been there alone while Tim had gone to a meeting, and his sister Morgan had come in. After a few words between them, Morgan had attacked her and dug her fingernails into her arms and neck before yanking a chunk of her hair out and hitting her in the face with her fists. And then Morgan's boyfriend Richie had grabbed her from behind, and a couple of his friends kicked her hard in the ribs as she'd tried to fight them all off before she'd finally crumpled to the floor.

She'd been spared a sexual assault by any of the three men, but as soon as they'd all left, she'd gotten her things together and fled to her hotel, unwilling to admit to Tim that his own sister had lost her fucking mind, and that Richie and his buddies had kicked the crap out of her. She was, after all, a bodyguard, just like Tim, and nobody got the upper hand in a fight with her since she was tough, fierce, and highly trained. She hadn't fought back against Morgan because the woman was not

only Tim's flesh and blood, but pregnant as well, and she couldn't bring herself to hurt Tim's sister.

Tim had come looking for her, and she'd finally relented and let him into her hotel room after he'd shouted through the door for an eternity, and then he'd insisted on taking her to the emergency room for a chest x-ray. She thought she remembered the doctor saying several of her ribs were badly bruised and that one had a fracture, but at the moment she felt like her entire body was broken. How the hell she was going to get out of bed and get dressed, much less go to work, was beyond her, but she had to be on duty tonight. Or at least she assumed it was tonight, but she wasn't entirely sure what day it was.

Tonight Meghan Jameson, Matt and Maggie's eldest daughter, was having her combination bridal shower/bachelorette party at an exclusive restaurant nearby, and Amber was supposed to be one of the security detail going along. Allie Nolan was attending, and she'd been hired specifically by Matt Jameson to guard Allie from her psychopathic ex-boyfriend, Jonathan Vandemore, a task she was thoroughly committed to.

She'd just freed Allie from her father's house and Bill Nolan's attempts to strong arm Allie into marrying Jonathan to further his career. And Allie had narrowly escaped being violated by Jonathan for a second time the morning she'd helped to rescue her. She couldn't let Allie down now that she'd finally been reunited with Patrick after a month without him, so she'd have to push through the pain and convince Tim she felt better and was perfectly capable of doing her job.

Amber pulled herself to the side of the bed, wincing at the stabbing pain in her ribs, but not daring to cry out in case Tim was close by and could hear her. By the time she managed to sit up and swing her legs over the edge of the mattress she was puffing and panting like she'd run twenty miles, but she had to keep going. She carefully eased

herself off the bed, pushing up with her hands and rising very slowly, but her twenty-eight-year-old body responded like she was ninety-eight and wouldn't allow her to stand erect.

The bedroom door flew open just as she stood up, wobbly and stooped over like a great-grandma, and she heard Tim exclaim, "What the fuck are you doing, Amber?"

"I'm...gonna...take...a shower," she gasped out. "I have to...get ready for work. It's Thursday, right?"

"You're not going anywhere, woman," he said as he rushed to her side and gently maneuvered her back into a sitting position. "And yes, it's Thursday, but I've already redone the schedules for tonight and you're not on them."

"But I feel fine, and I need to go," she said, trying to hide her breathlessness. "Allie's depending on me, and I was hired to protect her. Matt will fire me if I don't do my job."

"I had a long conversation with Matt a little while ago. He sends his best wishes and hopes you'll feel better soon," Tim said, putting an arm around her shoulders very carefully. "Damn, woman, you look like you got into a dog fight. Hmm, make that a cat fight," he said with a teasing grin. "Let's get you back in bed and we'll put some more ice on your ribs, and then I want to clean your wounds again."

"I don't remember getting back here," she said. "Did you kidnap me or something?"

Tim laughed and gave her a kiss on her nose, then stood up and took hold of her feet. "I'm gonna bring your legs up onto the bed, so brace yourself," he said. "And no, I didn't kidnap you. You came willingly, and I'm a little hurt that you don't remember our passionate night of lovemaking. It was one of my finest performances to date, I have to say."

She groaned, not only from the pain resuming a reclined position caused her, but from the fact that she wished they'd had a passionate

night together before she'd awoken. "I think you're confusing last night with the night before," she corrected. "And I hate to admit it, but you did do a very thorough job of pleasing me, Tim Green."

"Woman, if you weren't in so much pain, I'd give you an encore right this minute," he said with a lusty expression on his handsome face. "Just don't call me Green Eyes again or I might not be able to control myself."

"Green eyes?" she said, feeling her cheeks get hot. "When did I call you green eyes?"

"Yesterday, before I left to go to my meeting with Frank, and again on the way back here after the emergency room. You don't remember?" he asked with a grin.

"Uh, no," she stammered. "It must've been the painkiller talking."

"You told me you've been calling me Tim Green Eyes in your head since you first met me because, and I quote, you couldn't get my gorgeous green eyes out of your head," he said. "And you hadn't had that dose of painkiller the first time you called me that. I think you're really, really into me, Amber Meadows. So, tell me, have you dreamed about me at night over the past month, or do you just picture my eyes in your head all day long?"

"You're such a jerk," she said, sure she was red as a beet.

Tim let out a laugh at her embarrassment, then leaned down to kiss her lips gently. "But I'm your jerk, you spectacular redheaded pain in the ass. And damn, I'm looking forward to that encore."

"I think that'd be the end of me," she said with another groan. "One good happy ending would probably land me back in the ER."

"Well, we can't have that," Tim said, giving her another gentle kiss. "I'll just have to take a lot of cold showers for the next week or so, but I promise to look into those beautiful gray eyes of yours so you won't have to just imagine mine."

“What time do you have to be on duty for Aidan’s bachelor party?” she asked, ignoring his teasing.

“I have to leave here at six,” he said, caressing her cheek softly. “But my mom is coming over to stay with you while I’m gone. She’s been a nurse for more than thirty years, so she’ll take good care of you.”

“Your mother is coming here?” she said, feeling panicked at the thought. “But I don’t want to meet your mother when I’m like this. And what’s she gonna say when she finds out I moved in with you?”

“She’ll absolutely adore you,” Tim tried to assure her. “And I already told her you moved in when I talked to her earlier. She’s thrilled. I’ve mentioned you to her before, you know.”

“Oh, God, what did you say about me?” she said, feeling her mouth go dry from anxiety.

“I told her about your red hair and your gray eyes and how badass you are. And I also told her how easy you are to be with, and how much I wanted you to be my girlfriend,” he said. “Don’t worry, she’s nothing like Morgan. She’s very chill, and she’ll love your sharp wit as much as I do, so don’t hold back. Just be yourself.”

“Oh, right, like I’m gonna tell your mother she’s a jerk,” she said, and she brought a hand up over her eyes and moaned.

“It’ll be okay, I promise,” he said. “I don’t think Matt, Taylor, and the O’Donnell boys plan on staying out all night or anything, so I’ll be home as quickly as I can.”

“And I assume you’re going to a strip club?” she said, moving her hand to uncover one eye. “Just don’t come back here all covered in glitter and charged up with testosterone after you’ve watched some redheaded stripper take her clothes off because I’ll probably have a headache... if I’m still alive, that is, which, judging by the way I feel right now is doubtful.”

“Ooh, I detect a touch of jealousy, plus you threw in a guilt trip all in one statement,” Tim said with a chuckle. “You’re on a roll, woman, and I think it must mean you have genuine feelings for me. Do you want to tell me about them?”

“No,” she said firmly, covering her exposed eye again. “How could I have feelings for such an egotistical jerk as you?”

Tim laughed again and said, “Damn, I love your sass. I’m gonna go get you some ice, and then we’ll clean your scratches and get you dressed.”

“My clothes are all dirty, Tim,” she said, peeking at him from under her hand. “You packed dirty clothes into my suitcase, remember?”

“Correction, your clothes are all clean and currently residing in that dresser right there,” he said, pointing across the room. “And your hang-up stuff is in the closet.”

“How could you have washed all my clothes already?” she asked, but touched that he had. “Did you get up before the sun or something?”

“Amber, it’s almost noon,” he informed her. “You’ve been in a painkiller coma for hours, which is good, because even in your sleep you were moaning and crying from the pain. I washed most of your clothes last night and did the rest this morning, and I kept coming in and checking on you every half hour or so to make sure you were still breathing. I’m just glad you’re awake now so I can spend some time with you before I have to go.”

“I think you’re the one who’s really, really into me, Tim Green Eyes,” she said. “And you fell right into my diabolical trap to get my clothes washed and be waited on hand and foot. Sucker.”

“I’ve fallen alright,” he said, peeling her hand off her eyes and staring deeply into them. “And are you a hundred percent sure you can’t handle a happy ending?”

## CHAPTER TWO

### Patrick

Thursday passed in a flurry of activity for Patrick O'Donnell. He and Allie snuck off to City Hall to get their marriage license and to make an appointment with a judge for the following day before they returned home from taking the four youngest Jameson girls to school. Afterwards, Allie went with Mara, the second eldest Jameson daughter, to pick up shower gifts and last-minute wedding necessities for Meghan and Aidan's nuptials, and Patrick met his brother Liam to buy a wedding gift, as well as gag gifts for their brother Aidan's bachelor party.

After making the purchases they needed, Patrick left Liam in a music shop and snuck over to The Little Flower Shoppe to have a bouquet and a boutonniere made for his and Allie's secret elopement. Once he'd ordered the flowers, he ran into a men's store and bought himself a white button-down shirt, black trousers, and a tie in Allie's favorite shade of blue. As an afterthought, he picked up a new pair of pajama pants to replace the ones that were falling apart, figuring they'd also serve as a cover story in case Liam asked him what was in his bag.

After stopping off to buy some candles and a bottle of champagne for his and Allie's wedding night, his final stop was at the shop of Gerald Kelly, a kindly old jewelry maker who ran the business with his wife Cathleen. Mr. Kelly looked up from his work as he came through the door and greeted him like an old friend as he said, "Well, hello, Patrick. Back again so soon?"

"Hello, Mr. Kelly. Nice to see you again. I've come to see if you have any simple wedding bands."

"Ah, but she must've said yes then," Mr. Kelly said, grinning. "Did she like our creation?"

“She loved it,” he said, beaming at the elderly man. “You did a wonderful job on her engagement ring.”

“Excellent. That’s what I like to hear. Step over here, my boy, and I’ll show you what we’ve got.”

Mr. Kelly began taking trays with wedding bands out of a glass case, and Patrick spotted what he was after right away. He chose two white gold bands, etched with a Celtic love knot pattern, that were simple, yet classically elegant. Patrick tried one on and it fit perfectly, and he asked Mr. Kelly about the size of the woman’s ring. “Would you believe it’s the same size as the ring I made for her?” Mr. Kelly replied, as he studied the tiny tag through his bifocals. “Assuming that ring fit, I’d say this is just her size. How serendipitous.”

“It is, yeah. I’ll have them, please,” he said, taking out his wallet. “Do you think you could engrave them, Mr. Kelly? I’ll need them by tomorrow though.”

“Are you getting married tomorrow? You do work fast, don’t you?” Mr. Kelly said with a chuckle.

“We are, but that’s our secret, alright? We’re eloping,” he said, giving a wink and a grin.

“Mum’s the word, my boy, and I hope you’ll be as happy as Cathleen and I have been.”

“Thanks very much, Mr. Kelly,” Patrick said as he wrote out what he wanted engraved inside each ring, and then paid the man. “Can I pick them up tomorrow morning?” he asked. “Oh, and my brother Aidan asked me to pick up his wedding bands today.”

“I’ll do the engraving right away so they’ll be ready for you first thing in the morning. And let me go get your brother’s rings,” Mr. Kelly said. “He phoned to say someone would come for them today.”

Mr. Kelly disappeared into the back room for a moment and came back carrying two tiny black velvet boxes. He opened each box to show Patrick the contents, then slipped them into a bag and handed it

to him. "Congratulations to all of you, and I wish you many years of happiness," Mr. Kelly proclaimed.

"Thanks, Mr. Kelly, and please say hello to your wife for me. See you in the morning."

Patrick turned to leave, giving a wave goodbye as he reached the door, excited that he'd accomplished so much in such a short amount of time. As soon as he'd left the shop and crossed the street, he ran into Liam, Mara, and Allie coming towards him on the sidewalk. Allie was carrying a shopping bag from a dress store in town, and her face lit up when she saw him.

"Hello, Beautiful," he said as she came into his arms. "Fancy meeting you here. Did you get everything you needed?"

"Almost everything," she said, and then she whispered into his ear, "I was going to buy another box of your favorite brand, but I ran into a friend of my father's in the drugstore."

"Good thinking," he said, knowing they needed to replenish their supply of condoms. "I'll go get them. Why don't you wait here with Mara and Li. I'll be right back."

He glanced around and noticed that Adam, one of the members of the Jameson family's security detail, was only yards away, dressed in a black suit and acting like a businessman making a phone call. Allie nodded and gave Patrick a kiss before she took a seat on a sidewalk bench with Mara beside her.

"I just have to run into the pharmacy, Li," he told his brother. "I'll only be a minute."

"I'll come with you," Liam offered, so Patrick left his bag with the girls, and Liam followed him into the drugstore. "Where'd you get off to anyway?" Liam asked him.

"I stopped in the men's shop to have a look around, and then I went to get A's rings for him. He asked me to pick them up today," he replied, praying Liam wouldn't badger him for any more details.

Patrick found the aisle and began searching the shelf for his brand. Once he'd spotted them, he picked up two economy-sized boxes and tucked them under his arm.

"Big plans?" Liam asked, snickering.

"Just don't want to run out at an inopportune time," he said with a lopsided smile.

"I can give you what I have left. I don't need them anymore," Liam divulged.

"Are you and Mara trying to have a baby then?" he asked with raised eyebrows as he made his way to the checkout.

"Nah, not yet," Liam said. "Matt would murder us if that happened before we're married. Mara went on birth control pills. You should get Allie on them. It sure makes life easier."

"It would, yeah, but that's up to her," he said as the young female clerk behind the counter began to scan his purchases. Just then Patrick spied a tiny stuffed horse among the impulse buys and thought fondly of little Mellie, the youngest of Matt's girls, and how much she loved it when he acted like her horsey, so he added it to his items. The clerk appeared a tad embarrassed as she put the two boxes of condoms and the stuffed toy into a bag and gave him his total, but she looked him right in the face, hesitating a moment before she blurted out, "Aren't you the drummer for Taser?"

"Uh, I am, yeah," he said, stunned she'd recognized him. "Just filling in for their drummer actually."

"Oh. My. God. I knew it. I saw your show the other night. You were awesome," she gushed. "And your accent is amazing. Are you from England?"

"Ireland," he answered, handing her a fifty-dollar bill. The young clerk held the money in her hand and gawked at him with an awestruck expression until another customer came up behind him, and Patrick began to feel very awkward.

“Em, I’m sorry, but I’m in a bit of a hurry,” he said, glancing behind him at the customer who’d just joined the line. Suddenly, the uneasiness he felt was replaced by a sense of urgency as he realized the new customer was none other than Jonathan Vandemore, Allie’s ex-boyfriend and current stalker. Jonathan’s nose had a bandage across it, both of his eyes were ringed with purple, and he had his head down looking at his phone. Patrick knew he needed to get out of there and back to Allie pronto before Jonathan saw her on the sidewalk.

He quickly leaned over to Liam and whispered, “Text your *puisín* to go inside a shop with me wan,” and he motioned with his head in Jonathan’s direction. Liam glanced sideways and took out his phone to send Mara the message, but the clerk still stared at him, motionless. Patrick glanced back at Jonathan again and she followed his eyes and saw the new customer in line.

“Hi, Jonathan,” she said breezily. “I get off in ten minutes, if that’s why you’re here. We can go over to my house tonight. My parents won’t be home until at least midnight.”

She finally began to make change, and then slowly counted it back, and she gave Patrick a sly smile as she handed him the bag. “Have fun,” she said with a giggle. “And I’ve already got tickets to your next show.”

He nodded and took the bag from her, then hurried towards the door, but before he made his exit, he heard the clerk ask Jonathan, “Do you know who that was? And he just bought like fifty rubbers. Somebody’s getting lucky tonight.”

Out on the sidewalk, Liam said, “Jaysus, Trick, did you do that to the pompous arsehole?”

“I did, yeah, and he deserves worse. Did ya text Mara?” he asked anxiously as they walked back towards the vacant bench where they’d left their girls.

“I did, but I’ve no idea which shop they went into,” Liam said, looking around at the stores that lined the street. “I reckon our best bet is to sit here and wait.”

“I don’t want Jonathan to see Allie,” Patrick said apprehensively, and he quickly sent Allie a text telling her to stay where she was, but didn’t get a reply. “I hope he’s gone before the girls come back out. From here we ought to be able to see him though.”

“Was it my imagination or did it sound like he had a date with that young girl in the pharmacy?” Liam asked with a conspiratorial look.

“I got the same impression,” he said with a nod. “Which is interesting seeing as how he’s supposed to be marrying another girl next month who’s expecting his baby. That one goes to school with Branna.”

“Fuck’s sake, he could be a Banger band member with his thing for the young ones,” Liam exclaimed, a disgusted look on his face.

“Li, go back in the shop and see if he’s still in there with her. Buy some sweets or something,” he said, handing Liam a couple of dollars. “And have your phone out in case you get a photo op.”

Liam stood up and walked back to the pharmacy, and when he returned a few minutes later he was grinning broadly and holding a pack of gum. Liam reclaimed his spot on the bench and held his phone out to show him what he’d gotten, and Patrick looked down at it to see a photo of Jonathan leaning over the counter French kissing the clerk.

“Fair play, Li,” he exclaimed. “Now we’ve even more dirt on that scumbag.”

He looked back at the pharmacy just as Jonathan was emerging from it, heading towards him with the young clerk in tow. Patrick watched him closely, his hands balled into fists, ready for a confrontation. At that exact moment, Allie and Mara came out of a shop, chatting and laughing with each other, right between the bench and the spot on the sidewalk where Jonathan and the clerk were.

Patrick watched the scene unfold as if it was in slow motion, and he jumped off the bench to get to Allie just as the security man, Adam, rushed in from the other direction. But they were both seconds too late. Jonathan threw an arm around Allie's neck, yanking her towards the wall of a shop, and Patrick dove at him as Allie's left side slammed into the building, knocking her off balance. He glimpsed Adam catching Allie as she fell while he and Jonathan grappled on the ground. Patrick jabbed at Jonathan with his fists, infuriated by his attack on Allie and ready to kill Jonathan with his bare hands.

Jonathan tried to punch him in the nose, but Patrick got a firm grip on Jonathan's upper arms and overpowered him, rolling him onto his back and pinning him to the ground. In his fury, he brought his fist down time and again to belt Jonathan in the face until he felt arms grabbing him from behind.

Patrick heard a car screech up next to the sidewalk as he struggled against the arms trying to pull him off Mr. Pompous, intent as he was on delivering more blows to the man who'd been bothering Allie. But there were two sets of arms restraining him, and he suddenly became aware of the fact that they belonged to his brother and a second security man named Chris. He stopped resisting, and as soon as they pulled him to his feet, Chris said, "Patrick, Liam, go right now," as a siren sounded a few streets away. And then Liam grabbed his arm and dragged him up an alley and across a side street away from the sound of the siren at a frantic pace, and Patrick's thoughts turned away from murdering Jonathan and back to Allie.

"I have to find Allie!" he half yelled, stopping in his tracks to head back from where they'd just come.

"Just calm down and act normal. We'll double back around to the car, but you have to act like you didn't just beat seven shades of shite out of that prick," Liam said as quietly and calmly as he could.

“But where is she?” Patrick asked, his heart still racing from the adrenaline flowing through his veins.

“Adam got her to his car. I’m sure they’re nearly back home by now,” Liam said, tugging on his arm again.

Hearing this calmed him down considerably, and he blindly followed Liam as he led him up streets and down alleyways. When they got to a secluded spot where no one was around, Liam stopped for a minute and looked him over, shaking his head. “Follow me,” Liam said as he walked around a corner and ducked into Mr. Kelly’s shop.

“Hello, Liam. And hello again, Patrick,” Mr. Kelly called, glancing up from his work. “Did you forget something?”

“Hello, Mr. Kelly,” Liam said. “Em, there was a bit of a tussle in the street a few minutes ago. Someone was trying to hurt Patrick’s fiancée, and, well, em, I was hoping my brother might be able to wash up a bit in here if you don’t mind.”

“Of course,” Mr. Kelly said, eyeing Patrick with a look of astonishment. “The washroom is just in the back. Cathleen,” he called. “Could you show our young Irish lad to the jacks, love?”

Cathleen Kelly popped her head out from the doorway of the back room and audibly gasped when she saw him. “Look at the cut of ya,” she said. “What’s happened to ya, boy?”

“He got into a bit of a scrap,” Gerald Kelly replied. “Some lout was trying to hurt his girl.” And then he noticed Mr. Kelly’s eyes grow wide as he gazed out the shop window. “Get him back there now, my love. I’ll handle the rest.”

Mr. Kelly quickly questioned Liam about the details of what had happened as Cathleen took Patrick into the back and began cleaning him up, wetting a towel and wiping him down to get the road dust off him. “Take this and wipe your shirt and jeans. I’m going to take a peek out front,” Cathleen said as Liam slipped in to join him.

Patrick did as he was told and got most of the grime off his pants, but his T-shirt was stretched and ripped. His elbows were skinned raw from the pavement, and he had a pretty good idea that his knees had fared about the same. He glanced at his right hand and noticed his knuckles were red from punching Jonathan, but he hadn't seemed to have broken anything, even if they were sore. The only comfort he had was his certainty that Jonathan Vandemore looked a lot worse than he did.

Cathleen returned in less than a minute and began putting antiseptic on his wounds with a cotton ball, blowing gently on his skin to ease the sting. She put a finger to her lips as they heard the bells on the front door ring out, and then a new voice in the shop.

"Hello, Officer," they heard Mr. Kelly say loudly. "And what can I do for you on this fine day?"

"Just wondering if you saw what happened across the street a short time ago, Mr. Kelly. Did you see a fight break out?"

"You know, I certainly did," replied Mr. Kelly. "Would you like to know what I saw?"

"Yes, that would be very helpful, Mr. Kelly," the officer said.

"Well, there were a couple of young fellas sitting on that bench over there, and two pretty girls came out of George's shop to meet them. All of a sudden, this other lad comes rushing up the sidewalk and grabs the dark-haired girl around the neck and shoves her into the wall. Then a man in a suit ran over to help the girl, and one of the fellas from the bench did, too, and the lad who'd grabbed the girl started swinging at the fella from the bench. The boy had no choice but to defend himself, and the man in the suit helped the girls into a car. Then another man, along with the other young fella from the bench, pulled the fighting boys apart, and it was all over."

"Would you recognize these boys you're talking about?" the officer asked.

“Well, I think the boy who hurt the girl is named Jonathan. I’ve seen him around town plenty, but I don’t think I’ve ever seen any of the others. I can keep an eye out for them if you’d like and let you know if I see them. Is the girl hurt?”

“We haven’t located her,” the officer answered. “No one got the make or model of the car she got into, and everyone who saw the fight told me the same thing. If you see the young men who helped her or the girls, please tell them to contact us.”

“Are the poor lads in trouble for defending the girl?” Mr. Kelly asked.

“It sounds like it was self-defense on their part,” the officer replied. “But we’d still like to get a statement. They really should press charges against the attacker.”

Patrick heard a loud chime right next to him and looked over at his brother to see him silencing his phone with a horrified expression.

“What was that?” the officer asked. “Is someone else here?”

“My wife is in the back, but that was a timer I set to remind myself to make a phone call. My memory’s not as good as it used to be,” Mr. Kelly said with a chuckle. “If you don’t have any other questions, I’d better make that call.”

“Thanks for your help, Mr. Kelly. Please let us know if you remember anything else, or if you see the boys, okay?” the officer said.

“I surely will, officer,” Mr. Kelly said cordially. “You stay safe now.”

Once Patrick heard the bells on the front door jingle again, he let out a deep breath. “Jaysus, when your phone went off I thought we were done for, Li,” he said as relief swept over him.

“Sorry about that. It was Mara texting. She’s got the Land Rover and she’ll come and get us. Where should we have her meet us, do ya reckon?” Liam queried.

“Tell her to pull into the alley behind the shop and you can go out the back door. I’ll pretend I’m taking something out to the rubbish bin to see if the coast is clear when she gets here,” Cathleen offered.

Liam sent a reply to Mara, who texted right back saying she’d be there in two minutes, just as Mr. Kelly walked into the back room. “I don’t know how to thank you, Mr. and Mrs. Kelly,” Patrick said.

“Oh, it was nothing,” Mr. Kelly said with a wave of his hand, his mouth turned up in a smile, and Patrick got the distinct impression that the old man had found this whole ordeal good fun. “I don’t think you did anything I wouldn’t have done myself when I was your age, and from what the officer said, you boys shouldn’t be in any trouble, so I’m sure it will all be fine. I do hope your fiancée wasn’t hurt, my boy, but you can fill me in after you see her.”

Patrick wanted nothing more than to get back home to ensure Allie hadn’t been injured, but then he realized that the fight in the street was going to make picking up the rings the next day more difficult. “Em, I’m not sure I’ll be able to stop in tomorrow morning, Mr. Kelly. Would you just hold on to those things for me?” he asked quietly, hoping Liam wasn’t paying attention to what he’d just said.

“Or you could just take them now,” Mr. Kelly said, a twinkle in his eyes. “I’d just finished them when you came back in. Give me a moment.” And with that he ambled back up front into the shop and returned a moment later with a bag for Patrick. “Wear them well,” he grinned.

Liam’s phone vibrated just as they heard the sound of a car out back, and Liam announced, “Mara’s here. So sorry for the bother, Mr. and Mrs. Kelly, and thanks for your help. Ready, Trick?”

“Thank you, Mr. Kelly. You’re a lifesaver,” Patrick said, giving the old man a hug. “And you as well, Mrs. Kelly,” he said as Cathleen embraced him, then gave Liam a hug, too.

“See you soon, boys,” she whispered as she slipped out the door to check that no one else was near. She came back seconds later and waved them out the door, and Patrick and Liam hurled themselves into the Land Rover, sinking down low in the back seat.

Once they’d gotten out of town and were closer to home, he and Liam sat up, and Mara looked at them both in the rear-view mirror. “Well, that was crazy,” she said. “Are you guys okay?”

“I may need to change my pants from nearly shiting myself, but otherwise we are,” Liam replied.

**The O'Donnell Brothers series**

*Logic Aside*

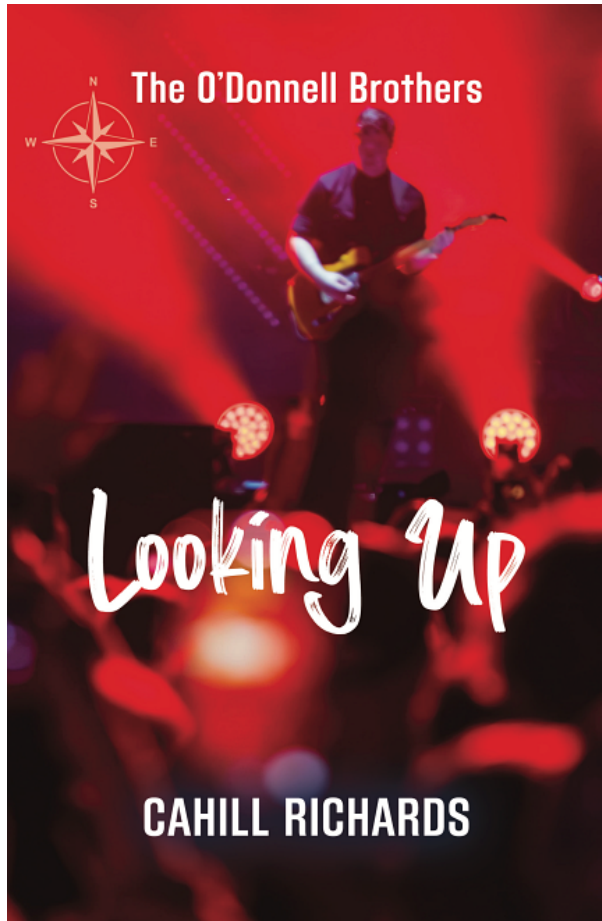
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