

## Fade Away

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# Fade Away

by [Karios](#)

## Summary

Tag to episode 6x04. It was a long drive to the Everglades. Michael hated this much time to think. Fiona was losing hope, and Anson wasn't the only threat. She's not eating enough: the one thought that just wouldn't leave him alone.

## Notes

For Leah, who may not be my Fiona but whom I love every bit as much. Your strength and courage inspire me always. Happy two months of recovery.

The dialogue between Mike and Maddie is shamelessly ripped from the opening minutes of "Under the Gun" provided for context and because it's beautiful.

“You went to see Fiona, what, yesterday afternoon, and you never bothered to call me afterwards?”

My mom had been angry at me for a number of things over the years, most of them trivial, many unjustified. This was neither. *Not now*. But I didn't have time for this now. Fiona didn't need me to call my mom. She needed me in action; she needed these guns in the car.

I turned away and tried not to focus on the images of Fiona in that too big jumpsuit.

*Pack, focus on packing.* “I’ve been a little busy.”

I was glad my back was to her as Mom shrieked out: “Well, how is she?”

“She’s, uh,” I paused for the satisfying sound of the gun’s click, “holding up.”

“That may be the most evasive answer you have ever given me, and you’ve been pretty evasive.”

I was too distracted by the cold hatred in my mom's tone to even hear Sam’s attempt at redirecting her as he hauled gear outside. I would have been grateful, if he hadn't left me alone to deal with it.

I tried to calculate just how much information it would take to blow her off and get back to envisioning something productive like how many pieces to carve that bastard in the Everglades into, and whether to stop once I had what I needed to know. Fiona had rubbed off me.

At a whisper my mom cut through my thoughts and my usual defenses.

“She's important to me too, Michael,” she said, as if I didn't know that that Fi was her family now. Ma loved her as much or more than I could.

“She's tired,” I began, and decided for once honesty was the answer. I turned around.

“She's scared. And she's not eating enough.” I swallowed down the lump in my throat and forged on. About the death threat, the dirty guard, and the trip to the Everglades. I shouldered my bag and headed out the door before I realized my mom didn't even flinch at the clear threat. *When did she get so used to all of this?*

We slid into our seats and were barely on the road before Sam asked, “What's our plan Mike?”

“Whatever it takes Sam. Improvise,” I replied. There wasn't a lecture about not taking things too far, and I assumed it meant Sam was as eager to get this guy as I was. From there the car went quiet, until a woman cut in front of me in a bad lane change and I swerved a bit sharper than normal.

“Hey! What gives?” griped Sam from the back seat, furiously dabbing at whatever I sloshed into his lap.

“Sorry Sam. If anyone in the state of Florida could drive.”

“You’re getting to be as bad as Fiona.”

I said nothing though my grip tightened on the steering wheel, and the car lurched forward.

“Sorry. Look, I know you're scared Mike. But this is Fiona. She'll be fine.”

“Not if we don't get to her before....”

“Don't talk like that,” chastized Jesse. “We’re gonna do this thing.”

“You guys didn't see her,” I defended, irritated now. *You don't know.*

“It’s prison Mike. It doesn't come with a five-star buffet and a spa. I seem to recall dragging you out of a place or two looking a little worse for wear.”

“Yeah, Sam, yeah.”

My posture relaxed and they let it go. I was glad Jesse was there as he laid down inconsequential chatter like coverfire. I didn't know even a tenth of what he or Sam said as the drive wound on. I chimed in with only the occasional “yeah.” They didn't push it again my mind was free to wander.

Apparently they were convinced my head was sufficiently back on the job. I wasn’t worried about the guard, or stopping the death threat. I wasn't even that worried about taking on Anson. Not when I’d already lost her. The dirty guard I could interrogate, assassins I could flush out, Anson I would take down, but Fiona’s inner voice I was powerless against.

Fi, who if asked would tell you she hadn't been scared since childhood. Fi with terror in her eyes. Fi who’d had gun runners and bail jumpers to a Christmas party. Fi on her own.

Fiona hated being alone.

I understood why Sam tried to talk me out of worrying. I’d used all the same arguments on myself. Fiona was tired and scared because she was vigilant. Only those who don't expect to make it back out could be comfortable in prison.

It was easy for him to ignore the signs she was losing hope. Sam hadn't been in those dusty little pubs in Dublin. He hadn’t watched her as she swirled food round and round a plate, lifting the fork to her mouth without ever taking a bite. Sam hadn't run his fingers down over each rib and up every indent in her spine.

\*

I clearly remembered the first time I’d asked her about it, even though I hadn't intended the moment to be significant. It was the dull observation of a spy watching an asset. It was proof

I was paying attention, a lead into possible mission-critical information.

I had taken her somewhere nice on the Agency's dime. Plush booths, tables with flickering candles, and it smelled like something other than rain. I watched her swallow wine and stir, mildly irritated. At the time, I was not looking forward to justifying the waste of funds at a briefing. I blurted out, "you don't eat much."

She laughed it off, and grinned at me, a little too brightly. "Most men don't mind."

"Aye. But I'm not very average then, am I? A'neither are ye."

"Let it go, Mr. McBride," she said, a hint of dangerous warning in her voice, steady and strong, even as the hand holding her fork shook.

I wrapped one hand around her wrist to steady it. I hadn't yet started comparing whether I could feel her bones too easily through my fingers.

"Take your hand off me," she whispered, and a man from the bar got up and walked towards us.

I complied, one Glenanne fist connected with my jaw, the man sat back down, in that order. I rubbed my sore chin and added one more piece of vital information to my mission parameters.

I learned the truth in snatches filed away over time. During a fight, or in bed, over next morning eggs, under gunfire, huddled together while running for our lives. Never a complete explanation but enough.

"I can't eat when I'm...emotional" was her first confession, hurled at me in a shout. I learned that meant too stressed or too sad, equally. She doesn't eat on the day Claire died, or the day they took her dad away. I was privvy to more than a dozen of her rules and by the time I was dragged away from the mission and from her, I wasn't sure I even still had them all.

Each memory led to another, and I found myself back at the night I'd tried to figure out where it started. Tangled together in our bed. I was unable to keep my mind off it as I traced the hollows of her stomach and ran my tongue and lips along the too-sharp jut of her hips.

"Why do this to yourself?"

"Michael, dammit, not now." She tangled one hand in my hair.

My kisses stopped and I fixed her with a look. "Fi."

"Oh, Michael, I don't know. There got to be tight times a girl, you know. Not quite enough for such a large clan. It was part of being a brave little angel. Stay quiet. Stay out of sight. Pray. Never complain. Then in the army it was a skill."

I nodded because that much made sense. The qualities we needed as a good resistance soldier and spy were nearly identical. Ignoring human instincts on command was a marketable skill. I told myself I couldn't relate. As a kid, if I'd needed food I stole, and when I could no longer

stand my mom's pathetic attempts at cooking, I took over. In the field my body was my most important tool. Bodies were mechanical things to be maintained, every bit as important as disassembling and cleaning your gun or making repairs to your dad's old Charger.

I remember my reply being half-hearted, the confusion in my thoughts obvious enough that she tried again.

"Have you ever taken pride in something you shouldn't? Just because it's yours. Because somehow it makes the day a little easier to get through, right now?" she asked, her voice so soft I nearly missed it.

Every smacked-around little boy knew it felt like to want to fade away and disappear. Though I'd never felt the pride in one skipped meal, I could liken it to the first time I was able to take a belt to the mouth and still smile in my old man's face. Not so very different after all.

"Yeah, yeah I have."

"It's like that," she told me, and I tried my best to understand.

\*

A car horn jarred me back to the present day and I straightened up. We're nearly to the Everglades.

"Mike do you want me to drive?" asked Jesse for what I gathered wasn't the first time.

"No Jess, I got it."

"Are you sure, just cause that's the second accident we've nearly gotten in today? And I kinda value my head on my shoulders, and my ribs unbroken if you know what I'm saying."

"I need something to do right now, Jess."

"Okay just eyes on the road, alright?"

I shot him a glare that took my eyes very deliberately off the traffic, and once again, my friends were smart enough to drop the subject.

\*

I slipped back into one last memory. This time, it was more recent, shortly after she found me again in Miami.

"You look good, Fi."

"Wish I could say the same about you," she teased, running a manicured nail along a few of my still healing bruises.

"No, I mean..." I trailed off.

“I know, Michael. Little tip. That's not helpful.”

“Oh. Sorry. What would be?”

“Have breakfast with me?”

“Done.” I turned at the doorway. “Spanish omelet?”

“Egg-white only.” She flashed me a smile.

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I shook off the past as we pulled up, my mind now on the guard. It was time to get answers. Once Fi was home we could figure it out together. One meal, one minute at a time.

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