

USA Today Bestselling Author
CHARLOTTE BYRD

One 
Puck
Night



PALM SPRINGS RAPTORS NOVELLA

ONE PUCKING NIGHT

A WHY CHOOSE HOCKEY NOVELLA

CHARLOTTE BYRD

CHARLOTTE BYRD

dangerously addictive

CONTENTS

Want to be the first to know about my upcoming sales, new releases and exclusive giveaways?

About Charlotte Byrd

Also by Charlotte Byrd

About One Pucking Night

1. Harlow

2. Harlow

3. Harlow

4. Harlow

5. Ash

6. Soren

7. Harlow

8. Harlow

9. Ash

10. Harlow

About Charlotte Byrd

Also by Charlotte Byrd

Copyright © 2023 by Byrd Books, LLC.

All rights reserved.

Proofreaders:

Renee Waring, Guardian Proofreading Services, <https://www.facebook.com/GuardianProofreadingServices>

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental. The author acknowledges the trademarked status and trademark owners of various products referenced in this work of fiction, which have been used without permission. The publication/use of these trademarks is not authorized, associated with, or sponsored by the trademark owners.

Visit my website at www.charlotte-byrd.com

✿ Created with Vellum

PRAISE FOR CHARLOTTE BYRD

“Twisted, gripping story full of heat, tension and action. Once again we are caught up in this phenomenal , dark passionate love story that is full of mystery, secrets, suspense and intrigue that continues to keep you on edge!”
(Goodreads) ☆☆☆☆☆

“Must read!” (Goodreads) ☆☆☆☆☆

“Charlotte will keep you in suspense!” (Goodreads) ☆☆☆☆☆

“Twisted love story full of power and control!” (Goodreads)
☆☆☆☆☆

“Just WOW...no one can weave a story quite like Charlotte. This series has me enthralled, with such great story lines and characters.” (Goodreads)
☆☆☆☆☆

“Charlotte Byrd is one of the best authors I have had the pleasure of reading, she spins her storylines around believable characters, and keeps you on the edge of your seat. Five star rating does not do this book/series justice.”
(Goodreads) ☆☆☆☆☆

“Suspenseful romance!” (Goodreads) ☆☆☆☆☆

“Amazing. Scintillating. Drama times 10. Love and heartbreak. They say what you don’t know can’t hurt you, but that’s not true in this book.”
(Goodreads) ☆☆☆☆☆

“I loved this book, it is fast paced on the crime plot, and super-hot on the drama, I would say the perfect mix. This suspense will have your heart racing and your blood pumping. I am happy to recommend this thrilling and exciting book, that I just could not stop reading once I started. This story will keep

you glued to the pages and you will find yourself cheering this couple on to finding their happiness. This book is filled with energy, intensity and heat. I loved this book so much. It was super easy to get swept up into and once there, I was very happy to stay.” (*Goodreads*) ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

“BEST AUTHOR YET! Charlotte has done it again! There is a reason she is an amazing author and she continues to prove it! I was definitely not disappointed in this series!!” (*Goodreads*) ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

“LOVE!!! I loved this book and the whole series!!! I just wish it didn't have to end. I am definitely a fan for life!!!” (*Goodreads*) ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

“Extremely captivating, sexy, steamy, intriguing, and intense!” (*Goodreads*) ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

“Addictive and impossible to put down.” (*Goodreads*) ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

“What a magnificent story from the 1st book through book 6 it never slowed down always surprising the reader in one way or the other. Nicholas and Olive's paths crossed in a most unorthodox way and that's how their story begins it's exhilarating with that nail biting suspense that keeps you riding on the edge the whole series. You'll love it!” (*Goodreads*) ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

“What is Love Worth. This is a great epic ending to this series. Nicholas and Olive have a deep connection and the mystery surrounding the deaths of the people he is accused of murdering is to be read. Olive is one strong woman with deep convictions. The twists, angst, confusion is all put together to make this worthwhile read.” (*Goodreads*) ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

“Fast-paced romantic suspense filled with twists and turns, danger, betrayal, and so much more.” (*Goodreads*) ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

“Decadent, delicious, & dangerously addictive!” (*Goodreads*) ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

“Titillation so masterfully woven, no reader can resist its pull. A MUST-BUY!” (*Goodreads*) ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

“Captivating!” (*Goodreads*) ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

“Sexy, secretive, pulsating chemistry...” (*Goodreads*) ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

“Charlotte Byrd is a brilliant writer. I've read loads and I've laughed and cried. She writes a balanced book with brilliant characters. Well done!” (*Goodreads*) ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

“Hot, steamy, and a great storyline.” (*Goodreads*) ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

“My oh my....Charlotte has made me a fan for life.” (*Goodreads*)
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

“Wow. Just wow. Charlotte Byrd leaves me speechless and humble... It definitely kept me on the edge of my seat. Once you pick it up, you won't put it down.” (*Goodreads*) ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

“Intrigue, lust, and great characters...what more could you ask for?!” (*Goodreads*) ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

**WANT TO BE THE FIRST TO KNOW
ABOUT MY UPCOMING SALES, NEW
RELEASES AND EXCLUSIVE
GIVEAWAYS?**



Sign up for my newsletter and get a FREE book: <https://dl.bookfunnel.com/gp3o8yvmd>

Join my Facebook Group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/276340079439433/>

Bonus Points: Follow me on [BookBub](#) and [Goodreads](#)!

ABOUT CHARLOTTE BYRD

Charlotte Byrd is the bestselling author of romantic suspense novels. She has sold over 1.5 Million books and has been translated into five languages.

She lives near Palm Springs, California with her husband, son, a toy Australian Shepherd and a Ragdoll cat. Charlotte is addicted to books and Netflix and she loves hot weather and crystal blue water.

Write her here:

charlotte@charlotte-byrd.com

Check out her books here:

www.charlotte-byrd.com

Connect with her here:

www.tiktok.com/charlottebyrdbooks

www.facebook.com/charlottebyrdbooks

www.instagram.com/charlottebyrdbooks



Sign up for my newsletter: <https://www.subscribepage.com/byrdVIPList>

Join my Facebook Group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/276340079439433/>

Bonus Points: Follow me on [BookBub](#) and [Goodreads](#)!



ALSO BY CHARLOTTE BYRD

**All books are available at ALL major retailers! If you can't find it,
please email me at charlotte@charlotte-byrd.com**

Somerset Harbor

[Hate Mate \(Cargill Brothers 1\)](#)
[Best Laid Plans \(Cargill Brothers 2\)](#)
[Picture Perfect \(Cargill Brothers 3\)](#)
[Always Never \(Cargill Brothers 4\)](#)

Tell me Series

[Tell Me to Stop](#)
[Tell Me to Go](#)
[Tell Me to Stay](#)
[Tell Me to Run](#)
[Tell Me to Fight](#)
[Tell Me to Lie](#)

[Tell Me to Stop Box Set Books 1-6](#)

Black Series

[Black Edge](#)
[Black Rules](#)
[Black Bounds](#)
[Black Contract](#)

Black Limit

Black Edge Box Set Books 1-5

Dark Intentions Series

Dark Intentions

Dark Redemption

Dark Sins

Dark Temptations

Dark Inheritance

Dark Intentions Box Set Books 1-5

Tangled Series

Tangled up in Ice

Tangled up in Pain

Tangled up in Lace

Tangled up in Hate

Tangled up in Love

Tangled up in Ice Box Set Books 1-5

The Perfect Stranger Series

The Perfect Stranger

The Perfect Cover

The Perfect Lie

The Perfect Life

The Perfect Getaway

The Perfect Stranger Box Set Books 1-5

Wedlocked Trilogy

Dangerous Engagement

Lethal Wedding

Fatal Wedding

Dangerous Engagement Box Set Books 1-3

Lavish Trilogy

Lavish Lies

Lavish Betrayal

Lavish Obsession

Lavish Lies Box Set Books 1-3

All the Lies Series

All the Lies

All the Secrets

All the Doubts

All the Lies Box Set Books 1-3

Not into you Duet

Not into you

Still not into you

Standalone Novels

Dressing Mr. Dalton

Debt

Offer

Unknown

ABOUT ONE PUCKING NIGHT

Steamy one night stand with two hot strangers...what can go wrong?

My life always had a plan. After graduate school in sports psychology, I will have my dream wedding to the perfect guy and start my career in Los Angeles. Then reality blindsides me—I walk into our apartment and find my fiancé in bed with someone else.

I dump the cheater but I'm broken. In an attempt to drown my sorrows, I find myself at a bar flirting with two captivating strangers.

Ash and Soren are magnetic, charming and irresistible. Oh yeah, they're also HOT. They say and do all the right things, drawing me in until I throw caution to the wind and give into everything.

The three of us spend the night together.

This is my first and only one-night stand.

I like them a lot, but I can never see them again. It's only going to be a one-time thing, nothing more. I even throw away their numbers to not be tempted.

Little do I know that destiny has other plans.

Ash and Soren are the star players of the Palm Springs Raptors' hockey team, and I am going to be their new sports psychologist.

Things are about to get complicated...

tropes:

- hockey romance
- why choose
- MFM
- new adult
- angsty/steamy
- workplace romance

HARLOW

“I swear, if you check your phone one more time, I'm going to drop it in my drink.” My best friend holds up her Long Island iced tea, which we've both agreed is a terrible idea to drink but it's been a long week for both of us, and Ruby is looking to get drunk as efficiently as possible. I can't argue with that logic.

“I know, I know.” I set the phone aside, then turn it face down in hopes that it will stop tempting me. “I'm sorry. I've been looking forward to hanging out with you tonight and I've been so distracted. That's rude.”

“You're lucky best friends are hard to come by, or I would drop your ass.”

“Please. We both know you would be lost without me.”

“What are you so worried about, anyway? Do you want to talk about it?”

That's a loaded question. Nobody wants to admit they're having problems in their relationship—at least, I don't. I can't shake the feeling that I'm weak for knowing Kyle must be up to something, but not having the guts to confront him about it.

I can't shake the feeling that there must be something wrong with me if I'm not enough for him after four years together. Call it hubris, but I can't help it.

“Out with it,” she insists, nudging me under the table with one of her platform sandals. “What's happening in your life? I notice you didn't say much about Kyle when I asked how he's doing.”

Because I made it a point to change the subject. She knows me too well. “You're just going to say I told you so,” I mumble, sipping my dirty martini. The cold, crisp vodka doesn't do much to cool the burning in my chest.

“You know I would never say that.” She lowers her brow, hitting me with a stern look. “Come on. You should know me better. I might think it silently, to myself, because I'm a very mature person. But I wouldn't say it to you.”

She's right. Nobody's harder on me than I am on myself. And the truth is, I'm embarrassed at how much I've already let him get away with.

“I'm starting to think Kyle is cheating on me.”

She absorbs this in a split second before giving me a firm nod. “Let me finish my drink, then we're going after him.” The thing is, I'm pretty sure she means it, picking up her glass and acting like she's about to bolt the entire contents.

“Okay, try not to kill yourself,” I urge, laughing. “I don't need your alcohol poisoned ass on my hands tonight.”

“Why do you think this? What has he done this time?”

It feels strange, having a conversation like this in the middle of a crowded bar. I have to wonder how many such conversations have taken place under this roof. Drunk people pouring their hearts out to each other, or to a bartender who only wants to go home at the end of a busy shift.

But this is my second martini, and my tongue feels a little looser than it did when I first arrived. “He's been pulling away. You know what I mean? Distant. Distracted.”

“Okay...” She lifts her eyebrows expectantly.

“Lately, he's had a lot of late showings.” I use finger quotes around the term, rolling my eyes. “I mean, every once in a while, I expect that. Late showings, all day open houses—it's his job. I'm not going to get in the way of him trying to sell a house. But it's never been like this before. He's always got an excuse why we can't get together.”

I grimace while staring down into my drink, swirling the skewered olives while chewing my lip. “Monday night, he never came home at all.”

“And then you changed the locks after throwing all of his things out, right?”

“I'm not as extreme as you.” Though I considered it. Strongly.

“And what was his lame ass excuse?” When my eyes widen, she shrugs.

“Call me psychic.”

“He said he was out with people from the office and it was so late, he figured it would be better for me if he stayed at one of his friend's places rather than waking me up.”

“That is... not even creative.” She tips her head to the side, scowling.

“Though *juuuust* reasonable enough to be plausible coming from anybody else.”

“I know, right? He wouldn't even tell me which of them he stayed with.”

“He was probably afraid you would check up on his story.”

“I feel like such an idiot for letting him get away with it.” Saying it out loud doesn't make me feel any better, as true as it is.

“Why did you let him get away with it?”

“Because... I don't know. It didn't seem worth fighting about at the time. I was too overwhelmed. And all week, it's been festering in me.”

“Of course, it has!” She finishes her drink and slams the glass on the table, getting the attention of a few people nearby. Then again, she's always an attention grabber with red hair that goes perfectly with her name and a much more vibrant, outgoing personality than I've ever possessed as a boring, bookish blonde. Ever since we met as undergrads, I've wished I could be more like her. Daring and ballsy.

She grabs for my phone, snatching it up before I can stop her. “Did you install Find My Phone like I told you to the last time you were worried about him?”

My stomach churns at the idea. “I mean, yeah, I put it on his phone, but I've never actually tracked him using it.”

“Why the hell not? Damn it, if he's cheating on you, you deserve to know.”

“But that's the thing.” I gently but firmly work the phone out of her grip. “I don't want to know. At least, I didn't. It's one thing to suspect, but it's different when the evidence is right in front of your face.”

Her expression softens and the anger drains from her intense gaze. “You're right. I'm sorry. It's easy for me to get all worked up when you're the one going through it. But I still think you should activate that damn app and see where he is, just for your own peace of mind.”

The rest of my martini goes down so smoothly, I might consider a third. “Well, he's supposed to be in Huntington Beach right now. At least, that's what he told me he was doing tonight.”

“It's obviously going to bug you if you don't check up on him.”

“It's already bugging me,” I admit.

She holds her hands up in surrender. “No judgment here. Do whatever feels best to you.”

What feels best to me? Getting answers. Knowing whether I'm right to be suspicious. I've done enough doubting myself and my judgment. “I better not regret this,” I mutter, opening the app so it can help me spy on my boyfriend.

“Well? What does it say? Huntington Beach?”

Not quite. At first, I'm confused, thinking there's a malfunction—the blinking, blue dot is located close to where I am now. Too close.

When I spot the second dot, I understand. And my heart sinks.

I hand the phone over for Ruby to see the truth: he's only a few blocks away from where we're sitting.

“That son of a bitch,” she whispers, glaring at the phone. “He's at another bar.”

“He's supposed to be at some kind of meet and greet with a bunch of other agents.”

“There's a reason this is happening.” She grabs her purse and slings the strap over her shoulder. “I mean, he is within walking distance.”

My blood just about turns to ice. “No. I don't think this is a good idea.”

“He needs to know he can't do this to you. If he knows he can get away with it, he's not going to stop.” When I still hesitate, she gives me another one of those intense glares. She's good at those. “Do you respect yourself, or don't you? Because you know he lied to you. Nobody's saying you have to cause a scene, but I think you should at least let him know he can't get away with it anymore.”

That's what does it. “You're very persuasive.”

“I know. Maybe I should be the sports psychologist instead of you, since I'm so good at getting into people's heads.”

“Okay. Let's go, before I lose my nerve.” We hurry through the process of paying for our drinks, then weave our way through the increasingly crowded bar before stepping outside. The night air does nothing to clear my head when I know that just a few blocks away, my boyfriend is more than likely hitting on some random girl who doesn't know he's hinted at us getting engaged sometime soon. Just the thought of it makes my stomach churn until I'm afraid I'm going to lose my drinks all over the sidewalk.

No. I'm not going to do that. It's not like any of this is a shock. I've known for a long time there was something wrong—I didn't want to admit it, was all. And Ruby's right. I need to respect myself a little more, which means facing the truth.

With that in mind, I walk with my head high.

This could end up being the first night of the rest of my Kyle-less life.

HARLOW

“Ugh.” Ruby wrinkles her nose while we linger close to the entrance, looking around. “I feel like I need a shower just being in here. The whole place reeks of cheap cologne and desperation.”

She's not wrong—this isn't my kind of bar, too flashy and sleek. I'd much rather kick back someplace fun and have a few overpriced drinks than spend the night in a jam-packed club, surrounded by men who practically lick their lips like hungry wolves while they scan the room, searching for their prey.

Or maybe I'm just in a bad mood, all things considered.

“What are you going to do when we find him?” Ruby shouts over the almost deafening cacophony of overlapping voices before she's just about knocked on her ass by a guy who I doubt noticed. Her petite body is easily jostled around, but I'm taller and harder to overlook.

“I don't know,” I admit, leaning in close to speak into her ear. “I'm not trying to start a fight in public.” After all, I'm looking for a job, and people tend to record things like that. I don't need a prospective employer finding a video of me ripping out a girl's extensions or kicking Kyle in the balls. Besides, public things like that aren't my style.

All of that flies out the window when I spot him. He's standing at the bar, casually leaning against it and wearing a wide, shit eating grin I know too well. He's being charming, or thinks he is. I can't pretend I haven't fallen for it more times than I can count.

Ruby notices the direction of my gaze and follows it, and whatever she says is swallowed by the noise around us. The way she squeezes my hand says more than words could, anyway.

It's not enough that he lied to me about where he would be tonight. He had to find a willing girl to cheat on me with, a girl whose smooth, toned arm he's now stroking as he leans in to whisper something in her ear. She tosses her long, black locks over her shoulder, giggling before nuzzling his neck.

I shouldn't watch this. It's like torture, remembering all the times we've been together like that. Those moments when you're out in public with somebody, but you might as well be in your own little world. Just the two of you. Those memories mix with what's unfolding in front of me until the room spins. How could he do this to me? Why doesn't he care?

Everything around them goes blurry and dark as I stare, transfixed, unable to tear my gaze away as they lean closer, closer, until finally their lips touch. A shockwave ripples through me and the illusion pops like a bubble before reality comes rushing back in. They're just two people kissing in a crowded bar now, one of whom supposedly loves me.

“What are you going to do?” Ruby shouts.

“I'm going to rip out her extensions and kick him in the balls.”

Before I can make a mistake, she grabs me and holds me in place. “Wait. Look.” They're not kissing anymore. The girl's getting up from her stool while Kyle pays the bartender. “They're leaving. Wanna see where they go?”

Even though I know it could hurt—a lot—I nod before we fight our way outside again. The shock of finding Kyle has totally killed my buzz, so it's my car we head for, parked in a lot a block away. The app makes it possible for us to track their location to an apartment building ten minutes away.

“Look!” Ruby grabs my arm and points up to one of the windows on the second floor. I park the car in time to see Kyle standing there, gazing out while unbuttoning his dark blue shirt. It's not another three seconds before the girl from the bar steps up beside him—naked—and winds her arms around his neck.

I'd like to wrap my hands around his neck, instead.

He buries his hands in her hair and kisses her deeply, running his hands over her bare ass. “This bitch,” Ruby whispers. “Doesn’t even care the blinds are open.”

Right. Like that’s the worst thing happening right now. I’m a little more concerned with the way she’s rubbing his crotch while he cups her breasts. She breaks their kiss and throws her head back, which he clearly takes as an invite to kiss his way down her throat.

“We should go,” Ruby sounds like she wishes we had never done this by the time they stumble out of sight, still wrapped up in each other. “Now you know, and that’s what matters.”

“No.” I can’t tear my eyes away from the windows. I can hardly blink. From where we’re sitting, the shadows of two people are visible on one of the walls. There’s no question about what they’re doing. From the looks of it, she’s on her hands and knees on the bed while he takes her from behind.

How long has this been going on? How many times has he come home to me after screwing some other girl? And how many times did I not even notice? “I feel so stupid right now.”

“You shouldn’t. You’re not the first girl whose shithead boyfriend cheated on her.”

“Yeah, but I thought I loved that shithead. I thought...” Emotion cuts me off but I push through. I have to get it out. “I thought he loved me. He was supposed to love me.”

“He doesn’t love anybody but himself.”

Yes. I see what she means. He’s always been out for himself. He never cared about me. All that mattered was what I could do for him. Whether I was there for him. Available to him.

“What are you doing?” Ruby scrambles out of the car, following me up to the building. What am I doing? I’m not sure. It could be something crazy. I might end up regretting it. But there’s no way I could regret this any worse than I regret overlooking so many red flags.

My anger grows with every footstep. Resentment. Bitterness. How dare he?

He's pitiful. A liar. Scum.

Ruby shifts her weight from one foot to the other while I glare at the front door to the apartment. A dozen ugly scenarios run through my head all at once. I settle for jamming my finger against the doorbell, letting it ring for a count of five before releasing it.

"Don't do anything you're going to regret." How unusual, Ruby warning me. It's usually the other way around. I settle for ringing the bell again, longer this time.

"Go away!" the girl shouts from inside.

"Kyle!" I shout back while Ruby winces. I know how this looks. I've become the girl who screams for her boyfriend and makes a big scene in the middle of an apartment building. The neighbors will probably hear. I can't bring myself to care. "I know you're in there, damn it!"

There's a lot of shuffling and banging in there before the door swings open and the girl appears, wrapped in a sheet, eyes bulging. Her hair is tousled and her lipstick smudged. She even has a hickey on her neck. "What the hell do you want?" she demands, breathless and flushed.

"Sorry to interrupt while you were fucking my boyfriend." In an act completely unlike me, I push my way into the apartment and through the open bedroom door. The bed is messy and there are clothes all over the floor.

And gathering his things is none other than Kyle, gripping the sheet wrapped around his waist and looking like he'd rather be anywhere else than where he is now. "You piece of shit," I whisper, shaking.

"Harlow—"

"Do not speak to me. We're finished. I'll let you know when to come get your things—show up when I'm there and I'll call the cops." He's sputtering as I turn away and march out again, almost blinded by pain and the knowledge that I was stupid enough to let him get away with it until now.

That's much easier than thinking about my broken heart.

HARLOW

I'm pretty sure a truck hit me at some point in the middle of the night. I can barely pry my eyes open when I wake up sprawled out on my bed, lying on my stomach with dried drool on my cheek. My face feels like I fell asleep wearing a mud mask—my skin is dry, stiff. I'm sure all the crying I did until I finally fell asleep is the reason for that. I cried until it hurt, until I couldn't breathe, until I was sure my head would crack open from all the pressure in it. Or the pain.

The piles of balled-up tissues lying around me are a monument to all the wasted emotion.

All that wasted time. Four years of it. Time that was supposed to lead to something better than this.

Here I am, supposedly moving into the best part of my life. Everything was supposed to go more smoothly now that I've finished defending my thesis and earned my PsyD. All that work paid off, and it was finally time to reap the rewards. Interviews all over the place with teams looking for a sports psychologist—the Dodgers, the Trail Blazers, San Diego State. There was a sense of excitement and anticipation. I couldn't wait to move on to the next step.

And we were supposed to be taking that step together, damn it.

Now, here I am, trying my hardest to keep the morning sunlight out of my eyes because that's easier than trying to muster up the strength to get out of

bed. I can't believe I let him do this to me. How many women has he slept with in the four years we've been together? I don't even want to know. I can't believe I even have to think about it.

The funniest thing happens when my phone rings. On one hand, my heart stops for a second because I'm sure it has to be him. If anything, I'm surprised he waited this long. I don't want to hear his voice, but at the same time I want him to hear mine. I want him to know what he's done. What he's done to me, to my sense of self, to the way I look back on the years we spent together.

On the other hand, my stomach pretty much flips over, since the idea of hearing his voice makes me sick. I don't think I can handle his excuses, which I'm sure he has plenty of. I've heard them all before, anyway. He's stressed, tired, busy with work, feeling neglected, on and on and on. He had a new excuse for every day of the week.

Finally, after the third ring I check the screen to find not Kyle, but my mother. And for some reason, I sort of wish it were Kyle, instead. I don't have it in me to tell her the truth right now—we'd be on the phone all day, and I'm still barely conscious as it is. I'm going to need all of my energy to sound awake and alert and reasonably happy, the way I should.

Her chipper voice might as well be an ice pick in my ear. "Hello, my doctor daughter."

There I was, thinking I didn't have a drop of moisture left in my body, but the sound of her happy greeting brings tears to my eyes. I wish I were a little girl again, and I could curl up in her lap while she strokes my hair and tells me everything will be all right.

"How long do you think it will be before you get tired of that?" I ask with as much energy as I can muster.

"Are you kidding? I never will. And if I were you, I would demand people greet me that way. What you did was a true achievement."

I'm not going to argue with that. I can't count the number of times I told myself to quit during undergrad and grad school, pulling every extra night shift I could to support myself while taking classes during the day. Then came my internship and all the late hours and weekends I spent there while

working on my thesis every night, all weekend long.

“What can I do for you?” I have to stifle a groan as I sit up, my muscles stiff after so many hours spent in the same position. I must really have passed out cold after all that crying—I don't think I moved once.

“I wanted to talk about your graduation party.”

“Oh. Right.” Because I needed another reason to feel lousy. The last thing I feel like doing now is partying, even if the party is for me and especially because I know Mom is going to want me to be happy and cheerful and as full of hope for the future as somebody in my position should be. I have everything in the world to live for, everything to be happy about. At least, as far as she knows.

I should tell her. I should really tell her everything, get it all off my chest. I might even feel better. She always knows the right thing to say, even if it's not as easy anymore as pulling me into her lap and stroking my hair and suggesting we get ice cream once I've finished pouring my heart out.

“Do you think ending the party at four o'clock would give you guys enough time to get to the airport? I'm worried. Maybe you should plan on leaving earlier, even if you are the guest of honor.”

She has no idea how she's driving the knife deeper into my chest. “I... think four should be fine.”

“Because nobody would mind if you two left early. I hate to think of you missing your flight because traffic is heavy or there's a long line at security.”

“I'm not worried about it.” Because there's no chance of flying to Puerta Vallarta with Kyle after the party. Not anymore. No trip, no days spent on the beach. No getting engaged there, the way I've imagined doing a hundred times since he started dropping hints about rings a few months ago. When he suggested we take this vacation to celebrate my graduation, I was sure he had something up his sleeve. How could I have been so blind?

“Sweetie?”

“Hmm?” She's been talking and I haven't heard a word of it. “Sorry. I had a late night and you caught me before my coffee.”

“I said, I have a few phone calls to make. Everything okay with you, though? You don’t sound quite like yourself.”

Probably because I watched the man I thought I’d be engaged to by this time two weeks from now cheat on me. I don’t want to kill the woman, so I won’t drop that sort of shocker on her. It’s going to upset her—she loved Kyle and already thought of him as a son-in-law. He betrayed both of us.

“I’m tired. I think now that the adrenaline rush has passed and I’m on the other side of the mountain, exhaustion is setting in.” Boy, I can cook up a quick lie when I have to. I can even sound convincing.

“Well, that’s more than understandable. Get your rest—you’ll be plenty busy once you start working. And possibly making big plans,” she adds in a knowing sing-song sort of voice.

There go the tears again. I close my eyes tight and wish I’d never told her about Kyle’s hints at a proposal. The impulse to blurt the whole thing out is almost too much to fight, but somehow I manage.

“I’ll get my rest. Don’t worry too much about the party, either. It’ll be great, and I’m so grateful for it.” At least that part, I mean. I’m lucky to have such a supportive family. And as the shock of the breakup starts working its way through me, I’ll need them.

For now, I need to figure things out. Where to go from here. Should I move, make a new start? I suppose that depends on the result of my interviews. Maybe I should expand my radius. Or maybe I shouldn’t make any big decisions at a time like this. I learned that in high school when I gave myself bangs after a break-up. Not a wise decision.

Instead of getting out of bed once the call’s over, I flop down and burrow under my comforter. The world can wait for a little while. I have more crying to do.

HARLOW

“**Y**ou need this. Don’t act like you couldn’t use a night out.”

I can only frown at Ruby in my bedroom mirror where she stands behind me with her hands on her hips. “You know I’m right.”

“I’m not in a great mood. I’m too... pissed off.” Because now that the sadness and betrayal have passed over the last few days, I’ve moved into anger. Rage even. How dare he? I gave him everything. I was nothing but good to him. I would never have done to him what he did to me.

“Which is why you should go out, have a few drinks, and dance it off. You’ll feel tons better.” I know what she’s thinking when she winks. “And who knows? You might find somebody who’ll make you forget all about what’s-his-name.”

I wish it were that easy. I really do.

Running my hands down the length of the short, black dress Ruby picked out, I can’t help but frown at my reflection. Is she right? Sitting around for days and marinating in my feelings sure hasn’t helped anything. “So long as you don’t expect me to hook up with some random guy just to make a point.”

“You know I would never expect that. Not from you. Little Miss Good Girl.”

“You make it sound like that’s a bad thing.”

For once, she drops the humor and steps up behind me, wrapping her arms around my waist to give me a squeeze. “You do whatever feels right for you.”

You know I would never judge, either way. But you should at least try, for your own sake, to get out and have a good time. You owe that to yourself.”

I can't argue with that.

Which is why we end up at exactly the sort of club I would normally pass up the opportunity to visit; chock full of people, bodies pressed together, everybody shouting into each other's ears to be heard. Though tonight, I sort of like it. I can forget who I am here, blend into the crowd, dance like nobody's watching, or something like that.

And that's what we do, Ruby and me. There's no attempt at attracting anybody, no flirting, and the few times guys have tried to dance up on us we've both politely declined. It's a girl's night.

And there is something to be said for getting sweaty, which I definitely am after a couple of hours of dancing wildly between trips to the bar for drinks. But it's good exercise—the last thing I felt like doing lately is moving. I was too busy being miserable, but this is exactly what I needed. A few martinis don't hurt, either.

For once, I don't care what anybody thinks. So what if I'm not even the best dancer in the world? “You look great!” Ruby insists, squealing when I turn in a circle with my arms over my head. “I should get you to come dancing more often!”

“I have the time now!” I remind her, and not only because of Kyle either. So much of my time has been taken up by my thesis, my internship, all of that. I finally have control of my time again, with the added bonus of not having a boyfriend demanding my every free moment.

For the first time in years I'm free. I can do whatever I want, go wherever I want. I haven't heard back from any of the organizations I interviewed with yet, but that's bound to happen any day. As much as I would love to work with them, I don't exactly mind the feeling of having the whole world laid out in front of me. Maybe all I needed was dropping roughly a hundred-seventy-five pounds of dead weight in the form of a boyfriend who I'm better off without. Who knows?

“I'm beat!” Ruby waves her hands once the latest bass-heavy song ends.

“And I don't know why I wore these shoes!” She hobbles off toward the bar, elbowing her way through the crowd to find a free stool which she works her way onto with a grimace.

“We can go,” I offer, even if I was actually enjoying myself and looking forward to dancing a little more.

She shakes her head hard, wearing a stubborn expression I know too well. “I'm just going to go home and soak my feet and maybe cut them off if they don't stop hurting. You're having fun, you should stay.”

I feel bad since, after all, this was her idea, but I would rather hang out for a little while longer. For the first time in days, I feel like myself. Going home to an empty, quiet apartment would be too depressing after having so much fun.

There's something about anonymity. Knowing I won't see a single one of these people after tonight—and then, even if I do, neither of us will remember each other. Nobody actually looks at each other in a place like this, not really. You might check somebody out, think they're hot, even hook up with them. For the most part though, it's just a sea of faces and bodies moving around, occasionally bumping into each other before carving a new path through the crowd.

I can lose myself here. I can let the music flow through me and wash away everything I've struggled with this week. I can connect with my body, let it move, throw my arms over my head. I can close my eyes and give myself over to the driving beat. I've never felt so alive, so completely me. I almost wish Ruby were here to see it after I dance through at least another ten songs before my body practically screams for a drink.

“Just a water, please!” I call out to the bartender, since water is what I need most right now. While I wait, I casually observe the people around me. They're doing the age-old mating dance, chatting and flirting, casually brushing against each other. I could be an anthropologist in the wild right now, taking notes in my head.

There's a long mirror attached to the wall behind the rows of liquor bottles lined up and sparkling under blue and purple lights. I almost don't recognize my reflection, and not because of the heavier makeup Ruby insisted I wear

tonight. I could be anybody at all, and I suppose there's something empowering in that. Almost like I'm wearing a costume.

The cold water is a welcome shock to my system, and I relish the sensation of it after being overheated. Maybe it's time for me to call it a night, all things considered—now that I've stopped dancing and there's no ignoring it, fatigue is starting to knock at the back of my mind. I haven't had a workout like this in a long time. There's no denying I needed it, but I don't necessarily need to dance myself to death, either.

I'm about to close out my tab when my glance brushes across the gaze of a certifiably drop dead gorgeous guy standing not twenty feet away. He isn't alone, either. With him is another ridiculously gorgeous hunk of man. They're both well over six feet tall, and one of them is dark and sort of broody looking while the other boasts golden blond hair and blue eyes that pierce me, pinning me in place. Immediately, heat blooms in my core and a familiar fluttery feeling sets off in my stomach.

This is crazy. I didn't come here for this, and I'm not in any position to flirt—or anything beyond that. I might be having fun tonight, letting loose, feeling free, but my heart is still way too sore.

Still... The weight of their combined gaze on me is proof of something I'm only just now figuring out. It has been a long time since Kyle looked at me the way they are now. That happens, of course. Four years is a long time, and some of the lust or magic or whatever you want to call it is bound to quiet down. I didn't realize how much I missed it until now, as my skin tingles and my body lights up at their attention.

They exchange a glance that I catch from the corner of my eye, then murmur to each other. Somewhere in there they must make the decision to move in on me. I have the funniest sense of being a fawn eyed by a pair of hunters, but as they close in, I don't have the urge to move. No, just the opposite, in fact. I want them to approach. I want to meet them.

Why not? I'm as single as a girl can get, and it's been a long time since I've felt wanted.

And Ruby called me a good girl earlier tonight. If she could only see me now.

This night just got a lot more interesting.

ASH

I'm starting to think it was a shit idea, coming out tonight. There's not much that can pull me out of a mood as dark as the one I'm currently wrestling with. No amount of drinking or checking out hot, available women has been enough to ease the deep sense of unrest that's been churning in me since earlier today, when my team's chances of reaching the playoffs officially came to an end.

To think, getting signed by the Palm Springs Raptors was supposed to be a stepping stone. The experience I was going to need to get called up to the majors, to finally play for an NHL team like I've been dreaming of doing ever since I was old enough to follow the sport. So many nights spent in front of the TV with my dad and my brothers, watching the games and imagining myself as one of the players. I could practically hear the roar of the crowd in my ears, could hear my blades hitting the ice.

And here I am. Stuck. Frozen like the ice I skated on earlier. This is the third year in a row the Raptors haven't even touched the playoffs. At this rate, I'll never get called up. I'm going to be stuck in the minors until I age out. In most careers, twenty-three is considered young. It means you've got plenty of time to go, years of learning and experience to get under your belt before you can move on to bigger and better things.

Not so when it comes to sports. The eighteen-year-old phenomenon I was coming out of high school has turned into who I am now; helpless, increasingly hopeless, and with the ticking of a clock always ringing in my ears. How many seasons do I have left before the dream dies?

I grit my teeth and raise my hand to signal the bartender for another whiskey. When I turn to Soren, eyebrows raised, he nods in agreement. “Another lager, too please,” I add when the bartender slides a drink my way. The girl is cute in a vague, basic sort of way. That's the same with most of the girls around here tonight. We figured heading to West Hollywood to blow off some steam might mean getting laid, but I haven't seen much of anything to warrant the effort. I'm just in a shitty mood in general, frustrated, bitter. The two of us have practically been carrying the team on our backs with the exception of another few players, but it's not enough.

And even if we won the rest of the games on the schedule, it still wouldn't be enough to move on to the postseason. Yet we still have to give it our all, at least trying to improve our record in these last couple of weeks of regular season play. Somehow that hurts worst of all. Having to expend the effort when I know it doesn't fucking matter. Nobody's watching for the next big thing on a team that couldn't make the playoffs.

“Maybe this wasn't such a great idea,” Soren offers. He's in roughly the same mood I'm in. Neither of us wants to be stuck in the minor leagues for the rest of our career—nobody does, though it seems a few of the older players have gotten used to the idea. That's probably why they play like third rate nobodies half the time. Just coasting through, collecting their checks. Their chance has passed, so why put in any effort to help somebody else achieve their dreams?

I'm being unfair, but right now I don't give a shit about fairness. I want to win. I want to move on. I don't want my dream to die.

“If you want to get your dick wet, there's plenty of opportunity.” We don't attract the sort of attention major league players do, though in some ways that's not a bad thing. I don't know if I'd want to be mobbed by people wherever I go. There's something to be said for a degree of anonymity, especially when you're in the mood to have a good time.

He lifts a shoulder. “I don't know. I'm thinking maybe I should save the energy for surfing in the morning.” That's something I'm looking forward to, as well. I don't get a lot of opportunities to surf, and I'm craving the chance to clear my head. There's nothing like the feeling of taming the waves themselves, the rush of watching a swell build and paddling the board out to it, trusting that it will lift me up and carry me to shore.

“We can try another place,” I offer, but my heart's not in it. This is the third club we've been to, and I'm as bored here as I was before. I would be bored anywhere now, the mood I'm in.

“Nah. It's a shame I didn't think to bring the Xbox with me.” Video games are one of the things we first bonded over when we ended up being signed by the Raptors at the same time. Now I sort of wish we hadn't left Palm Springs and gotten a hotel room out here for the night. It might have been a better idea to blow off steam over Call of Duty or something like that.

I'm mulling over the idea of heading back to the hotel when she catches my eye. I've noticed her dancing—it would be impossible not to. She's tall, willowy, and likes to throw her arms over her head a lot. She's also fucking hot, with long blonde hair she sweeps over one shoulder while blowing out a heavy sigh, like she's worn herself out on the floor. She heads straight to the bar, signaling the girl pouring drinks before folding her arms on the polished surface and rolling her head back and forth like she's loosening her muscles.

“Oh. I know that look.” Soren is smirking once he notices the direction my gaze has traveled in. “You've spotted someone.”

At first I shrug it off, watching her. I thought I noticed another girl with her earlier, though I wasn't paying strict attention. A cute, petite little redhead who would probably fuck me senseless. She had that energy about her, something I can't put into words. I just know it when I see it.

The redhead is nowhere to be found, though, as I scan the room. Granted, there's a ton of people here and it might be easy to overlook her, but after a minute or so of the blonde standing by herself and nursing a bottle of water, I'm starting to get the idea she's here alone now.

“She's fucking hot,” Soren decides. “She must be single.”

“What makes you think that?”

“She's got that look like she has no interest in hooking up with anyone,” he gives me a wink.

The black dress she's wearing doesn't leave too much to the imagination even though it keeps all of her most interesting bits covered. Still, it reveals enough of her long, lean legs to make hunger stir in my gut. She's got a ripe,

firm ass, and the top of the dress is cut just low enough to reveal the tops of her creamy tits.

I don't know what it is about her, but I can't take my eyes off her. She doesn't look like she's in the mood to be approached. You can always tell, especially in a place like this where most people show up to see and be seen. She's not looking around, trying to casually note whether anyone has noticed her.

Until she is. Until her gaze happens to swing around until our eyes meet.

A flush comes up on her cheeks before her gaze darts away and hits Soren. She's interested, that much is obvious, even if she soon looks away. Some deep, instinctive wisdom tells me I'll regret it forever if I don't at least introduce myself.

“Come on. I want to meet her,” I tell Soren.

He points to himself, frowning. “What about me?”

“You can meet her, too,” I grumble, pushing away from the bar before I begin my approach. Something about the way her posture changes tells me she knows we're headed her way...but she doesn't make a move to leave, does she? She stays right where she is, her gaze averted, like she's waiting.

Maybe this night wasn't such a waste, after all.

SOREN

I would feel better about this if she had somebody with her so we could both get laid tonight, but Ash is a good friend. He would do the same for me if I saw a girl I was interested in. I can't count the number of times we've been the other's wingman over the years we've played for the Raptors together.

The thing is, if I had seen her first, I would probably want him to be my wingman instead. I think it's that lack of self-consciousness she has. She's not putting herself on display, going out of her way to look casual when she's anything but. She seems to genuinely want to have a good time. Sure, that sort of makes us assholes for approaching her and breaking into it, but she's welcome to tell us to fuck off if she wants to. Neither of us are the type to force ourselves on a woman. Neither of us needs to.

It's Ash who makes the first move, while I round the stool she's perched on and close in on the other side. "Hey," he calls out with a grin. "How are you? You looked good out there." He jerks a thumb toward the dance floor, which is just as packed as ever.

"Thanks. I figured I would try that whole dancing like nobody's watching thing." She offers us both a crooked smile, and I can't pretend even for Ash's sake that there's not something about it that turns me on. There's something about a woman who can laugh at herself, who doesn't take herself too seriously all the time. I've always had a weakness for that.

Ash's face falls. "Oh, I'm sorry."

“Why?”

“I was watching.” She laughs, and the two of us exchange a look over the top of her head that says neither of us is going anywhere anytime soon.

“This is my friend Soren,” he says, gesturing toward me with one hand. She turns, and her brilliant smile sets off something in me. I don't know what it is. All of a sudden, I want to know more about her. I want to know everything.

“And this is my friend, Ash,” I continue, gesturing toward him. “Don't tell me you're here all alone.”

“What, a girl can't be on her own at a club?” She lifts her eyebrows, offering a silent, playful challenge.

“No, it's just unusual. I thought girls as pretty as you traveled in packs to keep each other safe.”

“My best friend abandoned me.” She shrugs. “But it's okay. I wanted to stick around.”

“I'm glad you did.” Ash eyes her water bottle. “Can I buy you a drink?”

“Actually, I think I'm finished drinking for the night, but I'd love another bottle of water.” I like that. She's intelligent, obviously, and she wants to keep her wits about her with two strangers flanking her.

“So, what do you do?” I ask her while Ash orders the water.

She hesitates at first, brows pulling together over the bridge of her nose like she's debating whether to tell the truth. “I just finished defending my doctoral thesis in psychology.”

I can't hide my admiration—she could be lying, but somehow I doubt it. She strikes me as the type. “Congratulations! That's a huge accomplishment.”

“Yeah, that's what my mom keeps telling me,” she says with a laugh. “It's a huge load off my mind.”

“That's great. It must feel really good.”

“What about you guys?”

We exchange another look over her head. “A little bit of everything,” I settle for replying, and Ash nods in agreement. Usually, you tell a girl you play hockey, and all of a sudden dollar signs dance in their eyes. It doesn't take long for them to be disappointed once they find out we're in the AHL and not exactly pulling down those awesome salaries. That's not what I want tonight to be about, anyway, and I'm pretty sure he feels the same. Neither of us is at a point in our career where we feel particularly thrilled, anyway, not after today's loss. It's not like we really had a chance at the playoffs, but still. That nail in the coffin is hard to deal with. My pride is still stinging a little.

She seems to accept this easily enough, sipping her water. “What are you into?” Ash asks. “Obviously, you're a great dancer.”

She rolls her eyes. “I'm not going to quit my day job anytime soon. Now that I've got a little more free time, it would be nice to get back into the world and pay attention to things. I'm looking forward to watching the Lakers make a run for the playoffs.”

Interesting. I can't remember the last time I met a woman who brought up sports without me mentioning them first. I can see from Ash's wide eyes he's thinking along the same lines. “What do you think about their chances?” I ask.

“I think if they can take that energy they had at the trade deadline and carry it through, they've got a good chance. I mean, the way they're now supporting LeBron? On paper, it's a done deal.”

Damn. “I have to say, and I'm not trying to be chauvinist, but it's rare to find a woman who follows these things closely.”

“I have a few tricks up my sleeve,” she teases. The light dancing in her eyes is downright hypnotic.

“Maybe you should have gotten a job in sports, instead,” Ash suggests with a grin.

“I don't know if I would want to do that. A bunch of temperamental athletes demanding things?” She scrunches up her nose and shakes her head, and I honestly can't remember the last time I met a woman this adorable and intelligent. If Ash thinks she's all his, he has another think coming.

By the time she's finished her water, though, she chews her lip, her eyes darting back and forth between us. I can't believe how much I want to reach out and touch her, but for once I exercise a little self-control. It's never been so difficult. I have never had to concentrate so hard on keeping my hands to myself.

"I was actually about to head out when you guys came over," she confesses, her blue eyes locking with mine for an instant. That's all the time it takes for my heart to sink. No, I don't want her to go. This is insane. Since when do I get this way over some random woman?

"Let us walk you to your car," Ash offers.

"Actually, I didn't drive. I only live a couple of blocks from here, so I was going to walk home."

"Then we have to escort you," I point out, shrugging. "We can't have you walking alone at night."

Her mouth opens like she's going to argue, but instead she merely shrugs. "Okay. I appreciate it, though I'm not trying to take you out of your way." Is she kidding? I would walk all the way back to Palm Springs with her.

It's nice to be outside, where we don't have to shout to hear each other. On the way, she tells us about the graduation party her mother's throwing for her in another couple of days. It's obvious from the warmth in her voice and the way she smiles that she's got a good relationship with her family.

It's also obvious from her lack of mentioning anything about a boyfriend that she's single. Granted, I would think she would have mentioned something about it before now, like maybe when we first approached her.

We walk with her between us, taking our time. There are moments when her hand brushes mine, and even that brief contact stirs desire deep in me. By the time we reach a small apartment building and she leads us up the steps to her second floor unit, there's an electricity in the air. I can't put my finger on it. I only know something has changed.

She comes to a stop in front of a door and turns to us, offering a shy smile that's unlike the brilliant, flirtatious smile she wore earlier. "Well, this is me," she murmurs. "Thank you both for walking me home. It might sound cheesy,

but it's nice to meet a couple of gentlemen.”

Funny, but acting like a gentleman is the last thing on my mind right now.

“It was nice to meet you,” I reach for her. She offers a hug, and I take a moment to savor the scent of her light, floral perfume mixed with the perspiration from a night of dancing. It's all I can do to keep from growling and clutching her to me. Mine, all mine. Instead, I release her so she can hug Ash.

When she pulls away from him, he maintains a grip on her left hand. I take her right, running my thumb over her knuckles. What are we doing here? I'm not sure, but I would like to know more. I would like very much to see where this goes, in fact. There's this unspoken chemistry and yes, maybe it's insane, but I know Ash is thinking along the same lines I am. I don't want to let her go, not just yet.

And that's why I take the chance of leaning in and brushing my lips against hers. Sweet, firm, they part slightly to allow my tongue inside. She sighs softly and melts against me, and by the time I pull away she's leaning against her door like she can't stay upright otherwise. She's dazed, breathless, and I know the feeling.

Ash is quick to take my place, taking her jaw in his hand and turning her head for his tongue to probe the seam of her lips before he works his way inside, kissing her until she moans. The desire that was already stirring expands, gets hotter, until the only thing that makes sense is for us to take turns indulging in her sweet, lingering kisses.

I'm not sure where this is going, but I'm glad to find out. I don't care if it takes all night.

HARLOW

What am I doing? It's like I'm a different person all of a sudden. This is entirely unlike me, but I can't bring myself to stop it. Not when it feels so good. So wrong, but so good.

And they're both into it—big time, judging by what's poking at me now that their bodies are so close to mine, pinning me against my door. What would happen if somebody stepped out of their apartment right now and saw us like this? What would they think of me?

Why do I care?

The three of us are breathless, questions and yearnings hanging in the air. I guess it's because neither of them tries to make another move—they're not demanding, they don't try to force anything on me—so I feel safe murmuring, “Would you like to come in for another drink? Just a nightcap, you know?”
Smooth. Very seductive, Harlow.

Yet it seems to work, since they both smile, their heads bobbing up and down before I turn to unlock the door. I'm so glad I picked up the place before Ruby came by. She's my best friend, but I didn't want her to stage an intervention over the terrible state of my apartment.

What am I doing? I can't believe this. When I think of the times Kyle tried to convince me to have a threesome and how adamant I was about not doing it, I almost feel like a hypocrite. Then again, he wanted it to be us and another girl. Obviously, it was all supposed to be for his pleasure. This is completely

different. Besides the fact that there are two men involved, there's nobody pressuring me. I actually want to do this.

My knees are shaky and there's a definite throbbing between my legs as I set my purse down near the front door, stepping aside to allow the men inside. My body is humming with anticipation. How far are they going to want to go?

Forget them. How far do *I* want to go?

Ash, Mr. Tall, Dark, and Dangerous, looks around while wearing a smile. "This is a nice place."

"Thank you." What do I do now? How do I get things started? Who do I think I am, inviting two men into my apartment at once?

"Can I get you your drinks? You can make yourselves comfortable on the couch."

Soren turns away from the window and rakes his fingers through his blond hair. It's so thick, so soft looking. "What do you have?"

"There's vodka, bourbon, rum. I have some soda and juice in the fridge, lemons, and limes as well."

Both men ask for bourbon on the rocks, so I go to the kitchen and practically shove my head into the freezer to cool off for a second before grabbing the ice.

Let's look at the pros in this situation. One, they are both insanely hot. More than that, they seem like nice guys. Funny, friendly, able to talk without every word out of their mouths having a double meaning. I don't feel unsafe with them. And considering how wet and aching I am as I pour bourbon into two glasses, there's obviously a physical connection here. I would never have imagined responding so strongly, so suddenly, so soon after having my heart broken.

Maybe this is what I need. Maybe it was meant to be this way. Ruby was meant to leave early so I would have a chance to meet these two. I was meant to meet them so I could get over Kyle and his bullshit. I deserve a night of feeling wanted, craved.

It doesn't have to be more than a single night, either. I never have to talk to either of them again. I don't even know their last names. This can be a one-time thing, something fun and crazy to get Kyle out of my system and help me move on.

I can do this. I want to do this. I just wish I knew where to start. Being cheated on is not exactly a surefire way to feel sexy and desired. Do I undress them first? Maybe I should ask them what they want me to do... or should I take control and tell them what I want from them?

Maybe this was all a big mistake.

I hear footsteps an instant before Ash appears in the kitchen doorway. "I was wondering if you maybe needed a little help."

God, he is so hot, I can hardly breathe when he approaches and finally comes to a stop at my side. He smells incredible—musky, masculine, and that paired with the light touch of his hand against my lower back is practically enough to curl my toes.

"I think I can handle pouring liquor over ice," I murmur with a breathless giggle. *Relax, already. Enjoy it.*

My breath catches when he leans in and his lips brush my neck. A shiver runs through me and I close my eyes at the touch, at the gentle, soft kisses he trails down to my shoulder and back up again. He kisses me like a man with all the time in the world and nowhere else he'd rather be. I have to lean against him when my legs go weak, but he wraps an arm around my waist and holds me against him, keeping me on my feet so I can turn and touch my lips to his.

All at once a wave of pure, throbbing lust makes me wrap my arms around his neck and pull him down, suddenly ravenous for him. For his touch, his kisses, his soft grunts. His tongue slides against mine while the obvious erection threatening to burst out of his pants presses against me. He's big, and thick, and he sighs when I move my hips to grind against him.

Who cares about drinks now? When Ash pulls me in close with both arms around me and lifts me off my feet I go with him, giving myself over to him, knowing I won't regret it. I let him carry me into the living room, where he sets me on the couch next to Soren before taking his place at my other side.

Right away, Soren runs his hand up my left leg, playing with the hem of my dress before lifting it ever so slowly while nuzzling my neck. Ash continues what we started in the kitchen, burying his hand in my hair and holding my head still while he kisses me deeply, thoroughly, until there's nothing I can do but part my thighs in hopes that one of them will make the almost painful ache go away. Nothing matters more now than relief. I've never been this wet, my clit swollen and aching, my heart ready to pound out of my chest.

I run a hand up Soren's leg which he takes and places over his bulging crotch. The boldness of that move thrills me more than ever, and the sound of his needy, almost desperate grunts while I massage him through his jeans only leaves me wanting more. So much more.

It's Soren who finally delves under my dress, and I moan into Ash's mouth when he cups my mound. "So wet," he growls in my ear as my tongue dances against Ash's. He laps at my earlobe before whispering, "Can I touch you there?"

Oh, God, if he doesn't I'll die. I pull my mouth away from Ash, turning my head. "Yes," I whisper before he catches my mouth and begins his own slow, deliberate, passionate exploration with his tongue while his fingers do the same to the lacy hem of my panties. Panties that are now soaked, plastered to my bare mound.

Soren pries the lace-covered satin away and I moan in ecstasy when he strokes my slick skin. "You want this?" Ash murmurs, while his hand dips into the top of my dress so he can brush his fingers against my nipples. They tighten almost painfully and he flicks them, pinching them between his fingers. My body's on fire, my consciousness focused on nothing but the pleasure rolling through me in delicious waves.

Do I want this? I need it. I've never needed anything more.

"Yes," I moan before Soren captures my mouth again, flicking his tongue over my lips before dipping inside. Yes, yes, more. All I want is more.

I want all they can give me.

HARLOW

I can't think. I only want to feel.
I want to feel their hands on me.

I want to feel their kisses.

I want to feel the tingling, the aching, the breathless excitement.

And that's exactly what they give me, both of them, and there's nothing I can do but sink deeper into pleasure with every kiss. Every touch. Every moment these two work my body into a frenzy.

Soren eases himself off the couch until he's on his knees between my legs. Without a word, I lift my hips so he can push the dress up to my hips, then peel the wet panties away from my skin and lower them slowly. I want to beg him to hurry, to make the ache go away, but no. It's better this way. Drawing things out, taking our time.

Since Soren is out of my reach, I massage Ash's crotch instead while our tongues probe and lick. He pulls back with a guttural groan. "I'm going to come in my pants if this keeps going," he rasps. "You are so goddamn hot."

He leans back to unbuckle his belt, then opens his fly. I don't know which is more exciting, watching him pull his dick free so he can stroke it, or the touch of Soren's lips against my inner thighs. The higher he goes, the more my attention focuses on those kisses. They might as well be fire burning my flesh. I want to burn. I want it so badly I expose myself to him by spreading

my thighs wide.

“So pretty.” His icy blue eyes meet mine for an instant before he turns his gaze back to my soaked, throbbing pussy. “So pretty. I can smell how excited you are, too.”

He grins at Ash, who’s stroking himself while watching. “You’re going to love this.” Then, without warning, he plunges his head down and runs his flattened tongue between my lips.

My eyes close and my head falls back as a moan works its way out of me. My God, yes, this is what I’ve been missing. He eats me eagerly, like he’s starving, and even if he weren’t skilled that eagerness would be enough. But he knows what he’s doing, too, focusing his attention on my clit while probing my quivering entrance with the tip of one finger.

My hips lift, grinding against his face in a desperate fight to ease the tension building in my core. “Kiss me,” I gasp, turning my head toward Ash. He leans over and kisses me deeply, working his tongue in and out in time with the finger Soren works in and out of me.

For the first time since we started, he’s suddenly rough, yanking down the front of my dress to free my breasts. Even that’s a thrill, and my sharp gasp of surprise is cut off by a moan once he closes his lips around my nipple. “Yes... yes, just like that...” I whimper to both of them at once.

Soren’s hair is just as soft as it looks. I run the fingers of my left hand through it while with my right, I reach for Ash’s swaying erection. He grunts around my nipple, sucking harder once I close my hand around him and begin stroking. So big, so thick..

It’s all too much. Soren’s tongue is working my most sensitive places, his finger pumping hard, fast. The feel of his hair, the sound of his grunts—and Ash’s, both of them taking pleasure from me as they give it. I can’t remember the last time my heart raced like this, the last time I felt so free. I feel free. No shame, no guilt. Just pleasure.

Pleasure that has me in its grip, my body clenching once the tension becomes unbearable. Soren groans against me when my muscles begin to tighten around his finger and the motion of his tongue quickens until he’s flicking me

in rapid strokes that bring everything to a sudden, shattering end.

“Yes! Yes, oh, God!” My head falls back and my body goes still for a second before it all comes crashing down and bliss radiates from my quivering core through my limbs. Soren doesn’t stop, either, dragging out the aftershocks with every sweep of his tongue until I have to beg him to let up on me. I can’t take much more.

Ash releases my nipple with a soft popping sound, lifting his head and grinning at me. “Let’s see if I can make you scream louder,” he suggests with a wicked gleam in his eyes. Soren is already standing, pulling me to my feet. My legs are shaking and my head is spinning and I hope this never, ever ends. I want to see how far we can go. How far they can take me.

Ash stands behind me, kicking off his shoes and stepping out of his jeans and shorts while Soren lowers the zipper on my dress. It falls to the floor, pooling around my feet, leaving me bare. Goosebumps pebble my skin while I shiver, but that doesn’t stop me from unbuttoning his shirt and opening it, revealing his chiseled muscles. “You’re beautiful,” I whisper as I slide the shirt over his thick shoulders.

Ash steps up behind me, his dick sliding between my ass cheeks. I don’t think that’s an accident, and I don’t care. “Where can we take this?” he breathes into my ear while slowly, gently working himself up and down. Soren presses himself against me once his pants are off, trapping his slightly longer dick between us. How am I supposed to handle both of them?

I don’t know, but that’s not going to stop me from finding out.

“Bedroom,” I manage to gasp, taking them by the hands and leading them across the living room to the queen-sized bed. As soon as I reach it, I turn and sit on the edge, staring up at them. I’m not sure what I did to lead to this, but I’m glad I did when I take in the sight of these two gorgeous, perfect men. I slide one hand down Soren’s abs and the other down Ash’s, noticing the way the muscles jump and flutter beneath my fingers before wrapping those fingers around their waiting dicks. I stroke them in tandem, then lean in to swipe my tongue over their heads. Back and forth, licking them like lollipops.

“I want more,” I whisper and part my lips and allow Soren inside, savoring his deep groan like I savor the salty taste of his precum on my tongue. I can’t

take all of him, but what my mouth can't handle my hand covers. Up and down my head bobs, and I can't pretend the feeling of controlling his pleasure while I stroke Ash isn't a thrill. Both of them. I'm with both of them at once.

When Ash starts jerking his hips, working himself in and out of my closed fist, I lift my head to take him in my mouth, instead.

Soren strokes my hair while I suck on Ash's thick member. "Why don't you stretch out?" he suggests. "On your back." Ash follows me, climbing onto the bed, sitting up on his knees near my head while Soren lifts my legs, placing them against his chest and probing my slit with his head.

"Wait a second. There are condoms in the drawer," I murmur, gesturing toward the nightstand. One thing I could say for Kyle, he was well endowed, so they shouldn't have a problem with what he left behind. Soren grabs for one of them while I take Ash in my hand and direct him to my waiting mouth. Our eyes meet long enough for a sizzle of anticipation to pass between us before I begin slowly running my tongue in circles around the ridge of his head.

Soren props my legs against him again, this time pressing against my entrance. At first I tense, holding my breath, but the delicious pressure once he pushes forward and begins to fill me wipes away every last bit of worry. This is happening, this is real, and it's what I want.

"So tight," he groans, easing his way inside me until his balls tap my ass. "So wet, so tight."

All I can do is moan, which seems to drive Ash crazy. He pumps into my mouth just as Soren pumps into my pussy, the two of them working in tandem, and the sounds of their pleasure mix with my own, heightening it, adding to it. It's when Soren starts to grind, when the friction starts to build against my clit, that I feel myself tightening again. The tension is too much, and before I know it the wave is building again, building, and growing until there's nothing in the world but the need to come.

"That's right," Soren grunts. "Come for me. Come on my dick."

And I do, I come hard enough that I have to let Ash fall from my mouth so I can cry out the pleasure and relief.

But when I come to, it's to find Ash gazing down at me, stroking himself while wearing a look of anticipation. "It's my turn," he growls, making me shudder with fresh desire.

The night's not over yet.

ASH

This might be the wildest thing we've done together, Soren and me, but somehow it feels right. Like the time we've spent together before now has led up to this, the ultimate connection. Switching places, with him stripping off his condom while I unroll one over my straining shaft. It seems natural.

I turn Harlow over and she moves with me, just as ready to take what we have to give. She doesn't hesitate a bit when I grab her by the hips and pull back, bearing her ass and pussy to me. Before I get a feel for the tightness Soren couldn't stop moaning about, I crouch, then run my tongue along the length of her slit.

She gasps, looking back at me. "What are you doing?" Her voice is sort of fuzzy, raspy thanks to all the shouting she's already done.

"Finding out if this tastes as good as it's supposed to. It does," I confirm while Soren laughs. My tongue is coated with her sweet nectar by the time I stand again and lick her off my lips while this time, I run my head through her wetness.

And as I do, I watch Soren take his place in front of her, kneeling on the bed with his dick in one hand. I can't shake the feeling that we'll be connected again, both of us working her body, a body that soon grips us both when I enter her at the same time he does.

She's still fluttering and spasming, coming down from her last orgasm, and I

have to grit my teeth against her greedy muscles as they try to milk me. That's not happening yet, not until she screams again. I look down and watch my dick disappear inside her before appearing again, slick with her juices. In and out I work my length, my fingers digging into her flesh as I hold her hips in place.

Soren's grunts draw my attention and I look up, watching as he fucks her mouth. His abs flex with every stroke. I can't tear my eyes away for some reason. It's the sight of him taking so much pleasure in her while I take pleasure, too. It's like watching porn I'm a part of a completely surreal yet totally exciting experience. I couldn't have imagined how satisfying it would be, the two of us taking her together.

And when he opens his eyes to find me watching, he doesn't look away. No, in fact, he stares into my eyes from across the length of her body, his hands buried deep in her hair to hold her head in place. Her strangled little choking noises only add to it, and I know from the way she grips me and coats me with wave after wave of slick juice that she's loving this just as much as we are.

"So good," he grunts, his skin as damp with perspiration as mine now is. "You suck me so good, baby. Show me how much you love it."

It isn't only him she shows. Once she begins pushing back against me, I almost want to laugh at her enthusiasm. It's refreshing, really, finding someone this enthusiastic. We are all in this together, the three of us, and there's nowhere I'd rather be.

"That's right." I don't know how much longer I'll be able to last between her tight tunnel and Soren's pleased grunts. I want to make her come again before I let go. "Fuck yourself on my dick. Make yourself come for me."

All she can do is moan her agreement, pushing harder, her body slamming against mine. She's that greedy to come again. I want to give it to her, I want to give her every ounce of pleasure she can handle. That's why I wind an arm around her, my fingers finding her clit and working it in time with our combined strokes.

"Yeah," Soren grunts, breathless. "Fuck us both. Show us how you love it." She's not the only one left groaning. I don't know what's happening to me,

why the sound of his voice and the sight of his chiseled body makes this so different. So much better than any experience I've ever had—and I've had plenty. I already know I'm not going to forget this, and we haven't finished yet.

“You were right,” I groan. “She is tight. So fucking tight.”

“Is she gonna come again? Is she going to come for you like she did for me?” he asks, staring at me like he did before. There’s an unspoken challenge in that stare. Like he’s daring me to look away, to deny whatever it is that’s suddenly sprung up between us.

“I think so. What do you think, Harlow?” I strum her clit, savoring her muffled moans, the way they get louder, the way they rise in pitch.

“Let's come together,” Soren whispers. There’s desperation in it. Like he’s on the edge and barely holding back. “Let's all come together. What do you think?” I nod, lost for words, and the familiar sensation begins building at the base of my spine. I don't think I could keep from coming if I tried. My balls lift and pleasure begins to spread, to expand, until there’s nothing else in the world.

“Oh, fuck,” I gasp, closing my eyes, giving myself over to the euphoric rush that always proceeds release. Soren lets out one long roar before sighing, but I can barely hear that over the rush of blood in my ears. She's coming, milking me, and I fill the condom before pulling out with a groan of sheer relief. Oh my God. What a fucking rush.

What a confusing fucking rush. I don't know if Soren has ever done anything like that before. He's European, and sometimes they're little more relaxed about these things than us prudish Americans. None of it seems to have affected him beyond his dazed smile as he wipes cum from Harlow's chin.

Then she collapses on her side, her body heaving as she struggles to catch her breath. A wave of tenderness washes over me. This woman is special, no doubt about that. I already can't wait for us to do this again if she’s up for it. I could get used to it.

“Are you alright?” Soren sits next to her, stroking her hair, and I stretch out behind her to place gentle kisses against her shoulder, her neck. Slowly, she

calms down, until finally she sighs deeply and goes limp.

“I'm pretty sure you killed me,” she mumbles, making us both laugh. I can relate.

“But what a way to go, right?” I ask with a chuckle.

There's never a discussion of what to do next. Whether we should go, whether she wants us here. None of us ever asks the question, instead moving silently to pull back the blankets. Without a word she crawls beneath them, positioning herself in the center of the bed and curling up on her side. Soren and I exchange a look before finally, he shrugs. *Might as well.*

Yes, this feels as right as anything else tonight, the three of us sleeping here together. I slide in behind her, spooning her smaller body against mine, while he faces her from the other side. She buries her face in his neck while snuggling close to me.

It's good. Very good. So good, in fact, that I fall asleep with a smile on my face.

HARLOW

I'm in bed with two men. Two men I've had sex with. Two men who made me feel worshiped and wanted. Two men who have left me feeling sore and tired but in the best way possible.

Two men I sort of hope I never see again. Not that they aren't great, but last night was a one-time thing. This isn't me. This isn't my life, my lifestyle. It will make a great story to tell Ruby, but that's as far as it can go.

“Good morning.” Soren's hair is tousled, and the sleepy smile he gives me as he lifts his head from the pillow makes me yearn for him again. How is it possible for anyone to be so damn sexy?

One-time thing. Last night. It ends there. Right. I can't go back on what I've told myself. No matter how clear the memories are. No matter how much I would like to relive every steamy second.

“Good morning.” I offer him a smile, then turn to find Ash now rousing from sleep. There's not so much as a stitch of clothing among the three of us, and the sensation of bare skin touching bare skin is nice. The burning desire that immediately leapt to life in me last night isn't here now, but that's alright. The sure, easy warmth of our shared intimacy is somehow even better.

“I'm sorry if I kicked either of you,” I whisper. “I'm not used to having someone on either side of me.”

“I didn't feel a thing, but then I don't think I would have heard a murder taking place outside the window—somebody wore me out last night.” Soren

grins, brushing his lips against my cheek. “Thank you. That was a lot of fun.”

“That’s an understatement,” Ash agrees.

There’s a silent question running through my head on a loop. What now? I’m not even the one-night stand type of girl, so having two men hanging around is twice the confusion. What am I supposed to say? Don’t let the door hit you on the way out? Here’s a few bucks for an Uber?

Thankfully, they both roll out of bed without being asked to, then take turns getting dressed and using the bathroom while I grab my robe. Just last night, I stared at myself in the mirror on the back of the bedroom door and wondered if I should even go out. I might as well be on a different planet from that girl. It’s amazing how suddenly everything can change.

Last night, they taught me *not* to settle for just anyone. That I’m worth so much more than what I forced myself to put up with. Someone might think that they had used me, but instead it feels a little bit like I was the one who used them.

I’m about to ask if either of them wants some coffee for lack of anything better to say when Ash clears his throat in the middle of buttoning his shirt. “We need to get going. We were hoping to get a little surfing in today.”

“Oh, that sounds fun.” Really, I’m practically trembling with relief. I doubt he understands the favor he just did me.

Soren emerges from the bathroom, tucking his shirt into his pants while wearing a sheepish grin. “Sorry to fuck and run.”

“It’s okay,” I assure him. “And it’s not like that, really, You spent the night.”

“You know...” They exchange a quick look that makes my pulse pick up speed. “It would be great if we could get together again sometime.”

“Oh. Um, I’m not sure when I’ll be free,” I say. I don’t know why, but everything in me rears up in refusal at the idea of continuing this. A single night was fun—more than fun, it was amazing. But I can’t imagine making a habit of this.

“That’s okay.” Soren pulls a cell from his pocket, and Ash soon follows suit.

Shit. I guess this is happening.

I reluctantly program their numbers into my contacts one at a time, then look up from my phone to find them watching me expectantly. What should I do? The only thing that comes to mind; I give them a fake number, reversing the last two digits before gasping in fake dismay. “I was supposed to meet a friend for brunch in less than half an hour. I need to get moving.”

“This was really fun.” They both give me a kiss on the cheek before I show them to the door. One last wave, then I close the door and lean against it with a sigh. To keep myself from getting weak and changing my mind, I delete their numbers from my contacts. There. It's done, and I can put it away in the past.

Of course, I'm not really supposed to meet anybody for brunch. Instead, I take a shower, smiling at the memories from last night. I still feel the evidence of what we did in the gentle ache between my thighs, but it feels unreal. Like it was somebody else having sex with two men at once. Not me. It couldn't be shy ol' me.

After changing the sheets, I pour myself a cup of coffee and sit down, opening my laptop to find a bunch of emails. For once, not all of them are junk or spam.

My heart lurches, then starts to race when I recognize the domains that some of the messages came from. My interviews. I lean in, chewing my lip, and click on the first message from the Dodgers office.

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us. Unfortunately...

Okay. The Dodgers weren't my first choice. I scroll through my inbox until I find an email from San Diego State. An email very much like the first one.

We've decided to go in another direction.

Is this how life is always going to be? I go from feeling amazing, empowered, in charge of things to having reality slap me in the face? Nobody wants me. It's like everybody got together and decided to reject me. What am I supposed to do now? Well, there's always the option of looking somewhere else, outside of Southern California. I can move to Denver, Phoenix, Dallas—there are so many options, so many areas where both major league and

college teams thrive. There's bound to be a team in need of a sports psychologist. I know I could do a good job for them.

I'm about to close the laptop and reconsider every decision I've ever made when another email comes through. I click on it, not expecting much—but my eyes widen in surprise when the message starts out differently from the others.

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us. We would be happy to offer you a contract with our organization.

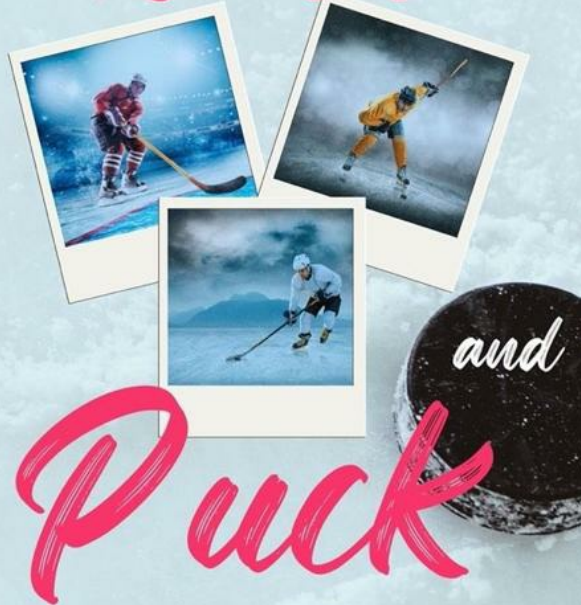
Just like that, everything is bright again. I'm not the problem. Somebody does want me, and I won't even have to leave the area to take the job. They're a minor league hockey team, but I don't need to start at the top.

The Palm Springs Raptors.

THANK you for reading One Pucking Night! Harlow's adventures are just getting started, though, and this one-night-stand isn't going to remain just a memory. Things are about to get way more complicated for Harlow in the [first full novel - Kiss and Puck!](#)

USA Today Bestselling Author
CHARLOTTE BYRD

Kiss 



Puck

PALM SPRINGS RAPTORS BOOK 1

ABOUT CHARLOTTE BYRD

Charlotte Byrd is the bestselling author of romantic suspense novels. She has sold over 1.5 Million books and has been translated into five languages.

She lives near Palm Springs, California with her husband, son, a toy Australian Shepherd and a Ragdoll cat. Charlotte is addicted to books and Netflix and she loves hot weather and crystal blue water.

Write her here:

charlotte@charlotte-byrd.com

Check out her books here:

www.charlotte-byrd.com

Connect with her here:

www.tiktok.com/charlottebyrdbooks

www.facebook.com/charlottebyrdbooks

www.instagram.com/charlottebyrdbooks



Sign up for my newsletter: <https://www.subscribepage.com/byrdVIPList>

Join my Facebook Group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/276340079439433/>

Bonus Points: Follow me on [BookBub](#) and [Goodreads](#)!



ALSO BY CHARLOTTE BYRD

**All books are available at ALL major retailers! If you can't find it,
please email me at charlotte@charlotte-byrd.com**

Somerset Harbor

[Hate Mate \(Cargill Brothers 1\)](#)
[Best Laid Plans \(Cargill Brothers 2\)](#)
[Picture Perfect \(Cargill Brothers 3\)](#)
[Always Never \(Cargill Brothers 4\)](#)

Tell me Series

[Tell Me to Stop](#)
[Tell Me to Go](#)
[Tell Me to Stay](#)
[Tell Me to Run](#)
[Tell Me to Fight](#)
[Tell Me to Lie](#)

[Tell Me to Stop Box Set Books 1-6](#)

Black Series

[Black Edge](#)
[Black Rules](#)
[Black Bounds](#)
[Black Contract](#)

Black Limit

Black Edge Box Set Books 1-5

Dark Intentions Series

Dark Intentions

Dark Redemption

Dark Sins

Dark Temptations

Dark Inheritance

Dark Intentions Box Set Books 1-5

Tangled Series

Tangled up in Ice

Tangled up in Pain

Tangled up in Lace

Tangled up in Hate

Tangled up in Love

Tangled up in Ice Box Set Books 1-5

The Perfect Stranger Series

The Perfect Stranger

The Perfect Cover

The Perfect Lie

The Perfect Life

The Perfect Getaway

The Perfect Stranger Box Set Books 1-5

Wedlocked Trilogy

Dangerous Engagement

Lethal Wedding

Fatal Wedding

Dangerous Engagement Box Set Books 1-3

Lavish Trilogy

Lavish Lies

Lavish Betrayal

Lavish Obsession

Lavish Lies Box Set Books 1-3

All the Lies Series

All the Lies

All the Secrets

All the Doubts

All the Lies Box Set Books 1-3

Not into you Duet

Not into you

Still not into you

Standalone Novels

Dressing Mr. Dalton

Debt

Offer

Unknown