



Aloha
LOVE

VIRGINIA MAY

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Aloha Love

Seducing the best man might be every maid of honor's fantasy, but it never really happens – does it?

Shay looks for two things in a man: height, and decency. Still smarting from a break-up from her asshole ex, she's not looking for a relationship, but when Noah walks into her best friend's wedding, Shay is knocked right off her high heels.

Noah might just be the one to restore her faith in men.

Noah is looking forward to a weekend in Hawaii to celebrate his brother's wedding. Friends might joke about kissing the bridesmaids, but Noah isn't interested – until he sets eyes on Shay.

But can he persuade Shay to trust him with her bruised heart?

1 – Shay

I never wear heels. At 5' 10" I already tower over most people; there's no need to make it worse.

But Katie insisted. It's her wedding, and I'd do anything for my BFF, so heels it is. I've practiced with the pair I'm going to wear for the wedding, and now that we're at the venue, I plan to wear them all the time to ensure I won't wobble as I follow Katie down the aisle. Heck, I might even sleep in them.

The venue is gorgeous. I mean, I live in Hawaii, I know it's paradise, but this place is straight-up the most beautiful spot I've ever visited in my life. Golden sand, blue sky, green trees and beautiful flowers whose scent fills the air, so it's a pleasure just to breathe. It's not so much of a pleasure to try and walk along the narrow paths that follow the dips and curves of the terrain.

I tried to talk Katie into a beach ceremony, hoping I could revert to bare feet. But no, she's never wavered from her flowery-grotto idea and the heels she adores.

So I'm practicing walking like it's a new skill, my hips swinging the way that simply fits when you're wearing high heels.

I'm starting to like it, actually. I feel like a goddess, someone kickass from the Norse pantheon, probably, able to rip mortals apart with my bare hands. As I sashay around the corner to the front of the hotel and head toward the reception lobby, I stand straight, shaking my hair back over my shoulders as I stride out.

That's my mistake. I step off the path, one heel sinks into the ground and doesn't let go when I try to step forward. I'm falling before I realize it, slamming onto my ass. I check my shoes anxiously; Katie will kill me if I snap a heel the day before the wedding. They're fine.

“Need some help?”

Ugh. My embarrassment is complete; I have an audience. A guy getting out of a cab at the lobby leaves his bags and heads to assist fallen me.

“I’m fine, really.” Chances are it’s a guest for the wedding, and I’ll be in close proximity with this guy for the next forty-eight hours while he sniggers at my misfortune. He gets closer, and I swallow. He’s tall. Really tall. Deliciously so. I hope that’s not perspective and he’s still going to tower over me once I’m standing. He has a strong jaw and brown hair cropped close to his head. And a wide, friendly smile.

“Let me give you a hand up.” He holds a strong, square hand out, but I hesitate, squinting at him. Best to crush my hopes now rather than later.

“Are you an asshole?” It’s abrupt, I know, but I’m done wasting time on men who don’t deserve it.

He laughs. “I don’t think so, but I’d hardly say if I was. Perhaps you should ask my brother to vouch for me. I’m sure he wouldn’t be over-generous.”

I look back at his face, the penny dropping. “You’re David’s brother?”

“For my sins.”

“You’re probably not an asshole, then. He speaks very highly of you.” A warm glow starts in my stomach. Tall, and one of the good guys. This could be my lucky day.

“I think you should make up your own mind.” He grasps my hand firmly. I enjoy the warmth as he pulls me to my feet. I put my injured foot down gingerly, keeping hold of his hand. It’s a very nice hand; I’m tempted keep it.

“Gently,” he counsels. “Are you hurt?”

I wince as I try to put weight on my foot. “Damn. Looks like it.”

“Lean on me.”

I hide my grin. That’s an unexpected benefit.

“If we can get you to the lobby, there must be a nurse who can check you out. Do you think it’s broken?”

He watches me anxiously, chocolate brown eyes so close to mine. It takes a moment for his words to sink in. I shake my head hard enough to make myself dizzy. “Nope. Not broken. Not even sprained.” I try to put weight on it again, gritting my teeth. “Nothing to worry about whatsoever. I’ll be fine in a minute.”

Those beautiful brown eyes sparkle brighter than the sea, and I want to drown in them. “Ah, you’re medically trained?”

“Nothing of the sort,” I admit. “But I am *not* allowed a serious injury today. Or tomorrow. I can’t follow Katie down the aisle with a cast on my foot; she’ll kill me.”

His voice turns teasing. “If your ankle were broken, I think she’d understand.”

I widen my eyes. “Have you *met* Katie? *Nothing* is spoiling her wedding day.”

He glances down. “Let’s see if we can manage without an ambulance, shall we?”

Before I can respond, he releases my hand and ducks down, crouching at my feet and lifting the damaged one into his thigh. “Let’s get you out of this object of torture,” he murmurs, his fingers finding the strap around my ankle.

“Oh.”

His nimble fingers unfasten the strap, and I can’t help the sigh of relief that escapes me when he slips my shoe off. Firm fingers move over my foot and ankle, checking for tenderness. There are a couple of sore spots, but heck, I’m feeling better already. “Don’t stop,” I murmur.

He laughs, and I could curl up in his lap and let him stroke my foot all day while he laughs. What a kink to learn I suddenly possess!

“Is that better?”

“Yes,” I admit mournfully, because it is. Reluctantly, I put my bare foot on the ground. There’s a slight ache, but I don’t

think I'll need a visit to the ER. I remember my manners. "Thank you." I regard my rescuer as he gets to his feet. My gaze starts at his feet and works up. And up. I almost sigh with the pleasure of finding a man I have to look up to, biting back the gesture before a sound can escape me. "I think I can manage," I tell him.

"That's a shame." His eyes sparkle again. "I was enjoying rescuing a damsel in distress."

"Enjoy away. I promise, it doesn't happen often."

"Now, that is a shame," he murmurs, voice low.

His gaze is on my face. Heat rises through my cheeks at his tone and his expression. A shiver runs down my spine, and heat radiates through me. I'm of the same mind as David's brother - he could rescue me any day of the week. I hold out my hand, wanting us back in contact. "I'm Shay. Pleased to meet you."

He smiles, sliding his hand into mine. "Noah. The pleasure is all mine."

I shiver again at his tone. Noah is David's best man, which means we'll be spending plenty of time together over the next couple of days. This wedding is revealing all kinds of upsides.

He brings his other hand forward, presenting my shoe to me. "Do you want this back?"

"I guess." I take it from him, pushing a Cinderella fantasy of being swept into his arms and carried into the hotel to the back of my mind.

"Can I escort you to the lobby?" he offers. He seems as reluctant as me for us to part, which makes me smile all over again. If I can't be swept, then walking side by side will do. "Was that your destination?" he continues.

"I didn't really have a destination," I admit. "I was just getting used to my shoes."

He raises his brows and folds his arms. "And how is that going for you?"

I laugh. “I think we could call it a draw.” I rest my hand on his shoulder, hoping he won’t object while I lift my foot and push my shoe back on. I may have fallen, but it’s straight back on the horse for me. Katie can’t say I’m not trying. Far from objecting, Noah’s arm goes around my waist to hold me steady, the movement utterly natural. “Thank you.”

I put my foot down, testing my weight. “It’s all good.” I take my hand off his shoulder because I can’t stand there fondling him all day. Worst luck.

“Noah!”

A shout comes from the entrance. David’s there, grinning to find his brother has arrived. He heads toward us. I take a step away to give them room and yelp as my ankle gives way again.

As I buckle, Noah’s arms go around me. “Here. Let me help.” He sweeps me up in his arms. I squeal in shock, then bite my lip, enjoying the warmth of his chest against my side and the strength of his arms around me. It’s every bit as enjoyable as I fantasized.

2 – Noah

“Shay, are you all right?” David’s face creases with concern as he nears, his focus on the girl in my arms rather than me.

“Fine, fine. Nothing to worry about.” Shay waves off his concern. She grins. “I’m just giving Noah the chance to play rescuer.”

David’s eyebrows lift. “I don’t have to ask if you two have been introduced, then?”

“I think we’ve broken the ice,” she tells him merrily.

David folds his arms. “Mr. Smooth,” he says, lips twitching.

I grin. “If the name fits...” My amusement fades. “Could we get Shay inside to a chair?” I ask.

“Of course. We were just waiting for you to start lunch.”

Inside the lobby, fans waft cool air over our faces. David’s fiancée walks through a door as we arrive, her expression changing when she sees us. “Shay! What’s the matter?” She runs to us, no problem with *her* heels.

I put Shay down so the friends can embrace. “I’m fine,” Shay promises for about the fifth time. “I turned my ankle, but there’s no need to cancel the wedding.”

“There better not be.” Katie speaks ferociously, but then her expression softens. “Are you sure you’re alright?”

“I’m great, but I might take these things off.” Shay drops onto a chair and removes her shoes. Katie says hello to me with a hug.

“My baby brother getting married,” I murmur with a glance at him. I lean closer to Katie. “Not too late to change your mind, you know.”

She swats me, while David looks indignant. “I wouldn’t dream of changing my mind,” Katie tells me, her eyes glowing

as they settle on her fiancé. The expression makes my chest tight, and I swallow. I've been busy with business. A personal life has largely passed me by. But perhaps that ought to change. David's jibe was ironic. I created The Smoothie Shack, and my business has branches all over Illinois. It's been hard work, but perhaps it's time to ease off working so hard and stop to smell the roses. Or the leis, as the case may be.

Shay stands between us. The straps of her shoes dangle from one hand. She pushes the other through my arm. A tingle of awareness passes through me. "You don't mind if I lean on you, do you?"

I grin. "I'd be honored." We go through to a private dining room. I see Shay settled, then greet my folks and Katie's parents. I'm pleased when the duty is done to find that the only spare seat at the table is beside Shay. She gives me a knowing smile as I walk toward her. She's smoother than me.

3 – Shay

“Sizzle!”

Katie grabs my arm as lunch finishes and the party breaks up.

I try to straighten my expression, which is full of the grin a lunch-worth of banter with Noah has planted on my face.

“David’s brother seems like a nice guy,” I say, as off-hand as I can manage.

“Time for you to get back on the horse, girl,” Katie says, and she’s only half-teasing.

My gaze fastens on Noah, talking to his brother. My heart speeds. Katie’s words paint a picture that’s a bit too vivid for company – Noah on his back while I ride him like a cowgirl. I swallow. “We’ll see.” I don’t know how I’m going to get through the dull rehearsal this afternoon when I want to slam Noah against a wall and kiss his face off.

The hotel wedding planner arrives then. I think she’s going to get us started on the rehearsal, but she makes a beeline for David who, then waves Katie over.

Released by his brother, Noah drifts in my direction.

The wedding planner straightens. “We’ll start the rehearsal at three sharp, thank you, everyone.” She whisks out of the room, followed by David and Katie.

Noah looks at me, quirking a brow. “Half an hour to entertain ourselves.” My mouth dries, those fantasies bouncing back into my head. “You’re the local – would you show me around?”

A broad grin splits my face. “I’d be delighted.”

We head outside. The warm air is freshened by a breeze blowing in off the ocean. Noah stands still and takes a deep breath. I smile at the expression on his face. I love it when people love my home, and Noah clearly does.

“You’ve never been to Hawaii before?” I guess.

“That’s right.”

We start to walk. I know just where I’m going to take him. “Kauai is the most beautiful and all-round best of the islands,” I state in my best tour-guide voice. We pass along a path that’s surrounded by greenery. “They call this the garden island for very good reasons.”

“It’s beautiful,” he states.

I glance back at Noah, and his eyes are on me rather than the scenery. I smile. “You are a dreadful flirt.”

His face falls. “I thought I was quite good at it.”

I tuck my arm through his to tow him onward. “Come on. If you want beauty, I have beauty for you.”

“Oh, I know that,” he says intently.

We walk in silence for a minute – well, apart from the sound of the wind in the trees, the birds flitting overhead, and the background shush of the sea. Noah speaks first. “So, best man and maid of honor. You know what that means, don’t you?”

Oh my word, I just want to *eat* this man. I feign innocence. “What *does* that mean?”

He smiles, and I can’t take my eyes off his lips. “You must know – we’re the most important people at the wedding.”

“Really? I think David and Katie might argue the toss on that one.”

His grin widens. “Nope. It’s definitely us. We have the responsibility of getting the bride and groom to the right place at the right time, minister in front of them and rings at hand.”

“See, now I know Katie could manage perfectly well on her own. I’m there for emotional support and to ensure that the bridesmaids stay in line. Cousins, eight and five,” I confide. “Are you seriously telling me David might go to the wrong place if you’re not here?”

He spreads his hands. “He’s nothing without his big brother; sad but true.”

I laugh. “Thank heavens you’re here, then. Katie might be able to do for herself, but I’m not sure I’d be able to shepherd two bridesmaids *and* a helpless groom.”

He pats my arm, and the warmth stays there longer than he does. “We’re in this together,” he promises. “Between us, we’ll make this wedding a success.”

“Agreed. I’ll keep the bridesmaids in order – and not drop the bouquet – while you keep an eye on David and keep the rings safe. Do we have a deal?”

He frowns, blinking deliberately. “Rings? I was supposed to do something with some rings?”

I swat his arm, any excuse to keep in contact. I don’t want this moment to end.

The path takes a twist and opens up to the vista I wanted Noah to see. A cliff rises ahead of us, with a waterfall bouncing down it to a pool hollowed out below our feet. Lush greenery bursts all around. The air’s filled with the scent of plumeria and gardenia, and in the trees on the far side of the pool, I can see specks of yellow and dark red flitting through the leaves, the tiny forms of ‘anianiau, ‘i‘iwi and ‘apapane birds .

“Welcome to Kauai,” I say, turning to face Noah.

My breath stills at the expression on his face. Up until now we’ve been flirting, light and fun. But now we’re alone, and it only takes a glance at Noah’s face to know it’s about to become more than just fun. I swallow. Is that what I want?

My heart beats hard against my ribs. It’s what I *want*. It’s only for a weekend, I tell myself; what could go wrong?

“I’m delighted to be here.” He steps closer. I lift my chin, our gazes locked. He’s so close now, the heat of his chest reaches mine. My breasts tighten. “With you,” he continues.

One hand settles on my waist while the fingers of his other hand touch my jaw, the tiniest pressure angling my face to his. It’s a clear statement of his intentions. This is the moment I

should back away, tell him he's got the wrong impression, state that I need more time.

I don't move, or speak. I want this man every bit as much as he wants me. I give an infinitesimal nod, and his lips curve before he leans in for our kiss.

When Noah's lips touch mine, I come alive. It's like stepping out of cold, damp fog into glorious sunshine. His arms go around me, his chest solid against me. I feel warmth and safety; sensations I've been deprived of for far too long. My hands slide up his back over his neat shirt, reveling in the smooth strength of his muscles. He growls deep in his throat and deepens the kiss, his lips parting mine. Our tongues touch and electricity fires through me, holding me in place while every nerve ending in my body flares to life, demanding more of his touch.

My knees buckle at the intensity of feelings coursing through me, but there's no chance of falling when Noah is holding me so tightly. Heat burns between us where we meet, a flare of emotion that takes me by surprise. A voice at the back of my head screams at me to draw away, protect myself, run a mile from Noah and everything he represents.

Another part of me knows it's far too late to run away. That part isn't scared, though. That part of me feels like it's found its way home after wandering far too long in the wilderness. That part of me would like to climb right under Noah's skin.

As our tongues tangle and our bodies mold together, time itself ebbs away. There's only Noah and me, and the wind tugging at our hair as though it's testing our focus on each other. The dappled light of the sun touches my closed eyelids, and I know with a certainty that fills me from my breath to my bones that this moment is perfection.

It's then that Noah pulls away from me, his lips leaving mine reluctantly, a moan of remorse torn from him, his breaths short and jerky, his eyes gleaming like stars as he watches my face, searching for my reaction.

My tongue darts nervously across my lips, holding the taste of him for as long as I can. I'm not quite sure what he's seeing

in my face. I try to drop my gaze, but Noah's fingers catch my chin, nudging me up to face him.

"I've never felt anything like this," he tells me, his low voice a caress as gentle as the wind that plays around us.

"Me neither," I admit.

"I'd like to take things further," he says. "Tonight—"

"Noah! Shay!"

We both mutter as he's cut off by a shout from the direction of the hotel. I glance at my watch. "I guess we need to head back."

Noah brushes a strand of hair off my face. "But we aren't done – right?"

I smile, my gaze drowning in his. "We definitely aren't done."

4 – Noah

The wedding rehearsal is a form of slow torture. I move from place to place and then stand around while the minister and David and Katie and the hotel wedding planner talk things through. I glance at Shay during one of the talky intervals. She smiles, her lips parting to reveal the white of her teeth. A thrill runs through me, settling into a throbbing at my groin. I want this woman. I need her. I love my brother dearly, but the wedding could go to hell for all I care. All I want is to be alone with Shay, preferably in a bed, with plenty of time for me to familiarize myself with every inch of her beautiful body.

There's a brief moment of connection when the wedding planner fetches the rings from the hotel safe. David frowns as he hands them over. "Do not lose them."

"I won't." I grin. "I know the penalty if I do."

"What's the penalty?" Shay whispers from across the aisle, where she's sitting behind Katie.

"He'll throw me into Diamond Head volcano."

"That's just ridiculous," she hisses.

"I know! As though I'd lose them!"

She grins, shaking her head. "Not that. Aside from the fact that Diamond Head is on a different island, it's extinct, so you'd just land on your ass and then get back up again."

"He lied to me?" I feign shock. "Maybe I should lose them deliberately – for revenge."

Shay shakes her head and nods toward the bridal pair. "Best not get on Katie's bad side. She'd do much worse than throw you into a volcano."

"She would?"

"Oh, yeah. The stories I could tell you!"

My lips curve. I want to hear *all* her stories, but the minister calls for me then, and there's no more chance to talk.

By the time the rehearsal is over, the first of the guests have started to arrive. The wedding isn't until tomorrow, but many of the guests have come early to ensure they won't get delayed – especially if they've travelled from the mainland. I get caught up in exchanging greetings with aunts and uncles I haven't seen for years.

It's after dinner when things start to calm down.

"I'm going out for a walk." Shay stands and stretches. "Then I'll head to bed. See you in the morning, everyone." It sounds like a general announcement, but I see the heat in her eyes when they meet mine. Shay won't be going to bed alone.

My pulse spikes. It's the hardest thing I've ever done not to run straight after her. But if she wants discrete, I can do discrete.

I finish my drink slowly, then stand and stretch. "I'm going to get some fresh air before bed," I tell no one in particular.

It's lucky that the arrival of new guests has taken David and Katie's attention. I don't think they connect the dots – not that I care especially if they do – and nobody even glances my way as I stride out of the hotel.

Outside in the fresh, cool air, I pause. Shay isn't hanging around at the entrance, and I can't be sure exactly where she's gone. Back to the grotto from earlier? The path is almost pitch dark now, with the trees crowding in and the sun close to setting. I think of Shay's twisted ankle. No, there's no way she'd risk that now. I follow a solid path around the side of the hotel. From the sound, I think it must lead toward the sea.

There. It leads to a veranda that sits on a high point, with the lush ground falling away beneath it. The edges are crowded with trees, leaves waving in the breeze, while the center gives a perfect view, leading the eye down and forward across rolling green hills to the sea far below. But I barely glance at that, because leaning on the railing is Shay, staring

out to sea. Her hair is loose, falling around her face, tugged by the wind.

And the way she's standing — leaning forward, arms braced — sticks her ass out in the most delicious way.

I smile. The sound of the sea means she doesn't realize I'm there. I step forward soundlessly, keeping out of sight until I'm just behind her. I slide a hand over the glorious curve of her ass.

“What-!” She spins, furious, hand raised as though to ward me off.

“Sorry, sorry, I should have called out.” I take a step back, hands up to pacify her.

“Oh, crap, I'm sorry. I thought it was – I didn't realize it was you,” she corrects, her eyes dropping to the ground.

“Do you not want me to join you?”

“Oh, god, yes. I'm sorry – I guess I was lost in thought.”

She turns back to the sea but doesn't make a move to touch me. I stand beside her, trying to understand what just happened. “I never asked...” I remember her first words to me, and instinct tells me they're important. “Who was the asshole?”

Shay stiffens, then relaxes with a deliberate effort. I put a hand on her arm, hoping my strength can combat her confusion. She looks up and stills when our gazes meet. “My ex. He seemed like a nice guy, but then he turned out to be an utter asshat. Jealous, controlling, petty, selfish. It took a while for him to get the message when I ditched him.” Her gaze drops to the ground.

Fury roars inside me at the idea of anyone abusing Shay.

“He put me off dating for a while,” she says in a small voice. I cup her shoulders, holding us close but giving her the chance to pull away if that's what will make her comfortable. I'm glad when she leans closer until her forehead touches my chin. “But I'm over it.”

I crook a finger under her chin, lifting her up so our eyes meet. “I’m sorry that happened. I’m sorry some of us should have tattoos on our foreheads that say *stay away*.” I track over her face, reading her mood as closely as I can. “Is there anything I can do to help make it better?”

She inspects my face as minutely as I did hers. I think she likes what she finds, since she smiles. “Actually, there is.”

“Anything,” I vow. And I mean it. I’d fight wolves for this woman if she needed me to.

She curls a hand around my neck. “You could kiss me.” She boosts onto her tiptoes to press her lips to mine, and the roar of lust in my veins drowns out everything else.

5 – Shay

His lips are soft, but his tongue is firm. A thrill travels down my spine and a pulse beats in my sex, my libido wide-awake after a sleep that's been too long. My fingers splay into Noah's soft, silken hair. His tongue explores my mouth with delicious, confident thoroughness. My legs weaken and his arms strengthen around my waist.

I've been longing for a kiss like this. For a man like this. As I press against him and my fingers sink into his hair, it's as though my very soul unwinds and stretches around him, drawing the two of us together, as close as any two people can be. I feel his heartbeat as a thud against my own chest, and my pulse races at his proximity. Noah deepens the kiss, and my hands slide down his back to his ass. He groans as I knead his flesh, and the vibration sends a thrill straight through me to settle at my sex. I need this man more than I've ever needed anything before.

I'm panting as we break apart.

"More?" Noah asks.

"Yes. I want everything." And it's true. As though Noah has triggered a tidal wave, my libido is stronger than I've ever known before. I feel as though I might die without this man. I want his hands on me, everywhere. I want him inside me.

"Good," he murmurs. His voice is low with satisfaction. I expect him to hurry us back to the hotel and one or the other of our rooms. But, holding me tight, he simply walks us into the corner of the balcony, where the overhanging trees hide us from view. His kisses become more urgent. Our tongues ask and tell, giving up our secrets to each other. I may never have met this man before, but I feel as though I know him on a soul level. There's nothing to be scared of with Noah, only pleasure gathering at his hands.

While his tongue sends delight cascading through me, those hands caress me through my clothes, goosebumps lifting

in pleasure as his fingers slide over my shoulders and down my arms, then move to my back, warmth pooling in my belly as his fingertips tease my spine through my blouse. I want more of him, and I'm glad when his fingers find my waistband and pry the fabric up to give his hands access to my skin. I shudder and moan into his mouth as his fingers dance up my spine for real, shivers of delight radiating from where we touch. I press against him. My breasts ache for his touch, but so does my ass, while between my legs has become molten while we've been kissing.

One of Noah's hands moves down, slipping beneath my waistband and then inside my panties, moulding my ass, pressing me to him so firmly I can feel the solid strength of his erection pressing into my belly. The rock-hard proof of how much he wants me inflames me further. My nerve endings feel as though they're on fire, my skin so sensitive I simply melt where he touches me. I break apart long enough to pant, "So good. This is so good."

His eyes shine in the dusk light, a smile curving his beautiful lips. "I want to give you everything," he says, his tone low and intense. "May I?"

I curl my arms around his neck. I feel like a young girl discovering everything that's between a man and a woman for the first time. "Please," is all I can manage.

Noah makes a sound that's half a groan and half a growl. The sound sends a thrill of lust through me that's so strong, I close my eyes to withstand it. I don't open them again, because Noah's lips are fastened to mine once more. He backs me into the corner so my spine hits the solidity of a tree trunk, while his soft lips trace the curve of my jaw, then travel on down my throat. I tip my head back. His fingers make quick work of my buttons, freeing a path for his lips to travel down my chest, reaching my breasts as he unfastens my bra and lifts my breasts into the air with a growl of satisfaction. I moan as his lips find my nipple, sucking on my aching flesh. A shaft of lust fires down the center of me, holding me in place while Noah continues to kiss and suck and tease and drive me halfway out of my mind.

I'm already panting when his hands slip past my waistband, curving around to stroke down the front of my panties and slip between my legs. I shift my stance to give him better access. I can't think, only react. I don't even register my wanton actions. I just do what feels right; whatever Noah wants me to do. Ecstasy lies in his hands, and he can put them any place he likes.

"Mmm, that's so good," he murmurs against my skin as his fingers tease, trailing back and forth over the gusset of my panties that's now soaking with my own juices.

"I want you inside me," I whisper. It should be wrong, out here almost in the open, where anyone could walk in on us. But I don't care. Noah's touch makes me desperate, and I'll do anything to be sated.

"Uh-huh." Noah acknowledges my words but acts like he hasn't heard them, continuing his teasing touch as his lips nibble kisses over my collarbone. I jerk my hips, and he chuckles against my skin. His fingers stroke my skin at the very edge of my panties, the softest part of my thighs. "You like that?" he teases, his voice barely louder than the breeze in the leaves overhead.

"Yeah." My voice is soft, too. I can barely speak, wanting only to enjoy the sensations he's bringing to life.

And then his fingers slip inside my panties and I groan aloud, biting my tongue. His firm fingers send heat sparking through me. He delves between my pussy lips and strokes my soaking flesh. I gasp when he nudges my clit, and then his fingers continue their quest to touch and tease every inch of my body. His fingers circle my entrance, then two fingers slide into me and I groan at the heat and the strength and the delicious strangeness of him inside me.

"There. I'm inside you now," he teases, his fingers slipping in and out, teasing my aroused flesh and then sliding back in.

"That's not what I meant," I gasp, although it's hard to make myself care. If Noah is such a gentleman that he wants me to come before he finds his own pleasure, then who am I to argue?

“Oh.” His tone is steady, just like his fingers. He knows exactly what he’s doing. “Sorry.” He sounds anything but. “Do you want me to stop?”

“No!” I gasp.

“Okay, then. Just enjoy it.” His short hair tickles my chin as he kisses my throat. I lean against the tree behind me for strength. His fingers go on and on, touching, teasing, taunting, slipping inside then tracing over my lips, sliding around my clit until I moan. When I do, he returns to push inside, filling me so I clench around him, and he chuckles and slips out again.

Lights sparkle behind my eyelids as the pleasure goes on and on. I bite down moan after moan. The pressure of an orgasm builds inside me, desire coiling tight, desperate for release. And yet I don’t want this tender torture to ever stop. My hands clutch at his shoulders. I’m not sure if I’m trying to hurry him on or slow him down. Perhaps I just want us to be touching in as many places as we can, connected on a level that’s deeper than simply flesh and blood.

“You are so beautiful, Shay,” Noah murmurs, his breath hot on my neck. “I want to make you come. I want you to come harder than you ever have before. I want to give you pleasure like you’ve never felt in your life.”

I make a barely coherent sound, because those words combined with his clever fingers have pushed me closer still to the boiling heat tensing at the core of me. Any moment now I’m going to fall over the edge of the waterfall and tumble to the pool below. His lips travel down my chest, and he sucks a nipple into his mouth while two fingers thrust into me and his thumb caresses my clit. Finally, the world explodes around me.

A deep moan breaks from me as everything tenses. Heat drenches me, and I cling to Noah as the waves of ecstasy crash over me, barely able to hold myself up as pleasure tenses like a fist around me, squeezing so tightly I forget to breathe. I open my eyes and I can barely focus on Noah, even though

he's right there in front of me. "That was ... the most amazing thing ever."

"Good." His voice is soft. And then it changes, becoming puzzled as he strokes my cheek in a deliberate motion. "So why are you crying?"

6 – Noah

She turns her head away, pushing the remaining tears off her face as though she's embarrassed for crying. The satisfaction that slid over me when I made her come has balled up into anxiety that sits on my chest as I watch her. "Did I hurt you?"

"No! God, the exact opposite." She laughs, the sound unnaturally high. "Doesn't everyone cry when they come?"

"Not in my experience." I stroke her cheek, reassured when she leans her face into my hand. I don't want to quiz her when she's clearly uncomfortable, but I don't want this to come between us ... whatever this is. "Is there anything you want to tell me?"

"No." She sighs. "I'm just a bit overwrought, it seems. Too many emotions to deal with at once, probably." She straightens and looks me in the eye. "My relationship with ... the asshole ... wasn't really much fun. I haven't..." She clears her throat and changes her mind about what she wants to confide to me. "Let's just say I needed that."

Conflicting emotions war in my chest. I'm pleased I made her come and made her happy, but a shard of jealousy pushes its way into my heart at the idea of what we do together being compared to whatever happened with him. I want this woman for myself, free and clear of the shadows of the past. A voice inside me says that's not fair when we only have a couple of days together, but I ignore it. In my heart, I know I won't let this end when the wedding is over. I know I'm not going to just walk away from this amazing woman. I need her in my life forever, even if that means turning my own life upside down.

I clear my throat, finding words for what I want to say. "Do you want a drink? Should I just escort you back to your room?" I trail off. Disappointment has turned my stomach into a bowl of snakes. I want her more than I've wanted anything before – soul as well as body. But I won't pressure her.

She looks at the ground, and I wish she'd look at me so I could guess her mood. "I thought we were just getting started," she says quietly.

Does that mean she wants more, or does she just need reassurance that I'm not going to demand more? Jeez, the asshole did a real job on her.

I step forward, tilting her chin so she has to look at me. I'm pleased when her gaze holds mine without sliding away. "I want more, just so we're clear. I think someone mentioned 'everything' and that's sure fine by me. But I don't want to ask you for more than you're able to give."

She nods, taking in my words. "And I won't offer you more than I feel able to give. I've had enough of making myself feel bad in order to make a man feel good. That won't be happening again, I promise you. But I do want more. With you." She steps forward boldly, cupping her hand over my crotch. I can't even try to hide how much making her come has aroused me. "And I'm pretty sure you want more, too. Can you deny it?"

"Of course not." I can't think when she's touching me. I step back, hating the cold that rushes in where her heat was a moment before, but at least that gives my brain a slightly fairer fight against the hormones rushing through me, demanding I sink into her and claim her for my own like a caveman. "I just don't want to push you into anything."

"You're not pushing. I'm jumping. If you'll only jump with me."

I bite back a groan. I want nothing more. "Are you sure you're up to it?"

She gives an annoyed growl. "Okay, so my last relationship was shitty. But it's over. And what it did leave me with is a strong understanding of what I want from any future relationship."

My heart pounds against my chest. Is she going to ask for something I can give her – or for something impossibly out of

my reach? And ... ‘any’ – I don’t like the idea of being ‘any’. I want to be everything to Shay.

She looks at me straight on, her eyes sparkling in the near-dark. “Turns out I’m a pretty simple sort of a girl. I don’t want to be treated as though I’m fragile. I just want to be treated with respect.” She steps closer, and that wretched cold is vanquished when she presses deliberately against me. “The kind of respect you just showed when you made me come without worrying about your own pleasure. You’re my ideal kind of man, Noah. I don’t want tonight to end yet. But I don’t want to pressure you, either. So, I guess it’s over to you.”

“I want to spend the night with you,” I tell her, with absolute sincerity. “But you can change your mind any time you like.” I stroke her cheek again, glad to find it’s dry. “You don’t need me to tell you that, but what I am telling you is that if you change your mind, I will hear you and accept your choice.”

“Understood.” She leans forward and rubs her cheek against mine. I think – hope – she’s smiling. Then she straightens. “That got more intense than I intended. Do you think we could go to my room, and perhaps get on with some fucking?”

7 – Shay

He laughs, and the tension in the air vanishes. “I’m all yours,” he promises.

We hurry through the hotel to my room, nodding good night when the receptionist greets us. I’m glad we don’t bump into anyone else on our way. It’s not that I’m worried people might disapprove, or that Katie would continue with her ‘sizzle’ nonsense; it’s more that I don’t want anything to destroy the mood. I nearly managed that myself when my eyes started leaking. I still don’t know quite how to explain it – too much emotion, like I said to Noah. A new relationship is always a confusing time, so let’s strip it down to the basics.

Which is what I do to myself as soon as we reach my room and I twist the lock behind us. I’m down to my underwear, my clothes in a tangled heap, when I turn to see Noah watching me with a smile and a gleam in his eye.

I raise my brows and strut toward him, letting my hips swing from side to side as I go. “What are you waiting for, mister?” I demand.

“I was just enjoying the view,” he tells me, reaching for me. I stop a step away from him and reach behind me to unfasten my bra.

“Wait.” He closes the gap between us, sliding his hands around my back, covering my hands with his. “Let me?”

I drop my hands, giving him permission.

Noah sighs with pleasure and slips his hands back to rest on my waist. He leans forward and takes my bra strap in his teeth, pulling it off my shoulder. Then he kisses over the revealed skin. I shudder with pleasure. This man does everything so slowly and thoroughly. It’s utterly ... sumptuous.

His fingers tighten on my waist as his lips follow the path of my strap down to the rise of my breast, kissing alongside

the seam of the fabric as it curves over the fullness of my breast. "This is an especially delicious parcel to unwrap," he murmurs. His thumbs splay over my belly as he turns his attention to the other side, tugging down my other bra strap and repeating his attentions to my other breast.

My nipples feel like chips of rock, straining toward him in their need for his ministrations. He takes no notice, though, continuing his exploration of my flesh with slow deliberation.

I squeal when he spins me suddenly, so my back is to him. His hands slide up my back, pausing where my strap fastens. It's undone in a moment, but Noah holds the ends together, leaning forward and planting a kiss on my spine just above the hooks. His hands edge apart bit by agonising bit, and he kisses lavishly over the skin he reveals inch by inch until his hands are at my sides, the useless straps falling down my arms.

With a sigh, Noah lets the bra drop and replaces its support with his own hands, cupping my breasts from behind and giving a deep growl of pleasure as his thumbs stroke over my nipples.

I give a moan of my own, dropping my head back onto his shoulder, that insistent pulse striking up again between my legs. I know what Noah can give me now, and I'm hungry for more.

Although, not impatient. Never that. I shiver as I hope he'll take just as long as he wants. The whole night is ahead of us, and I'm not sure whether I care about getting any sleep at all.

Noah shifts so my head is tucked against the crook of his neck and shoulder, and growls again as his hands cover my breasts, teasing my skin with the lightest of touches, then rolling my nipples firmly between finger and thumb so I gasp with pleasure.

I arch back, pushing my ass against him until I feel his hard erection through his pants. "We seem a little ill-matched," I murmur, reaching back to tug at his shirt.

Noah's hands sweep downward, one warm palm cupping my pussy. "Do you mind going first?" he whispers, then

nibbles my ear. “I’m having too much fun to stop right now.”

I push my ass against him until he groans and bites my ear harder. “Don’t stop,” I encourage him.

His thumbs find the waistband of my panties. “Your wish is my command,” he breathes, pushing them down and following to kneel behind me as he pushes my lacy briefs to the floor and bares my ass completely.

His fingers slip over my skin, his featherlight touch making me shiver with anticipation. I shift my stance, opening my legs a little. I expect his hands to move down and reach between my legs to my sex, but he simply continues his worship of my ass, his restless fingers sending shudders of pleasure through me. I feel his breath on my skin a moment before he presses a kiss to the fullest part of my flesh and then bites, gently.

I gasp and reach out, needing something to hold me up. The wall’s close enough. My palm splays over it while I lean forward to rest my head against the cool surface. Noah grips the backs of my thighs, helping to keep me upright while his lips travel teasingly over my skin, dropping kisses and nibbles wherever he pleases. I’m so turned on I feel the newly-familiar dampness in my sex, and a trickle runs from me and down the inside of my thigh. I bite my tongue, holding back a plea. There’s no point in saying I want him inside me; I know that Noah will do everything in his own time, and all I have to do is enjoy every moment of it.

He presses closer to me, tracing kisses along the crease of my ass where it joins my legs. And then he turns me again, so swiftly I lose my breath. But he’s there to keep me steady again, kneeling before me while his hands grip my thighs. He leans close, blowing deliberately over the lips of my sex, making me shudder and moan. I lean back against the wall again, giving up all hope of standing on my own two feet until Noah’s done with me.

His fingers trace the sensitive skin of my thighs and he murmurs when his fingers find the trickle of moisture. Pushing my leg firmly aside so he can reach, he traces the bead of liquid with his tongue, up my skin until he reaches my pussy.

With a sigh of delight, he licks over my pussy lips, finding and nudging my clit with the tip of his tongue. “Oh! Noah!” I reach for him, my hands tensing to fists in his hair. Every time I think this man has done all he can, there’s another layer of pleasure that he rolls over me.

He nudges my thighs apart and I shift, eager to accommodate him as his hot tongue makes heat fire through me, a volcano preparing to erupt once more. His fingers join the fun, tracing my hot, sodden flesh and swirling over my nerve-endings until I’m panting, gasping with delight as he pushes me steadily closer and closer to the cliff edge I long to fall over.

“You taste so good,” he murmurs. His tongue dips into me, then returns to swirl around my clit. My legs are shaking. Even with Noah right there, I know I’m going to fall if I have to take much more of this.

Perhaps he knows that as well as I do. His hands cup my ass firmly as his tongue focuses on my clit, swirling and whirling until the ecstasy inside me curls into a peak of joy. Two fingers enter me and he sucks my clit hard between his lips and I scream, shattering against him. His tongue presses against my convulsing clit, keeping me in that white, swirling light as orgasm grips me for longer than I would have thought possible.

“Too much, too much.” I try to push him away when the pleasure becomes so intense it tips into pain.

Noah surges to his feet, freeing his cock from his pants and thrusting into me in a single, smooth movement. I scream again at the feel of him, hot and hard, filling up every inch of me, pushing against different parts of me, but feeling every bit as glorious as before.

I claw at his back, pulling at his shirt until I manage to pull it over his head and we’re skin-to-skin. His chest is hot against mine, his breaths coming in panting gasps. I hitch a leg over his hip, gasping and urging him on. I want to give him even a fraction of the pleasure he just gave me.

“This is so good,” I tell him breathlessly, thrusting my fingers into his hair. “You feel so damned good.”

“Uh.” His breath is hot against my shoulder. He slams into me, heedless now of anything but his own pleasure. That makes me even hotter than before. I tilt my hips, loving the way he nudges something wild inside me. And the white light coils inside me, taking me by surprise.

“I’m going to come.”

Noah groans again, and a thrill surges through me as his thrusts grow ever more urgent. It only takes half a dozen thrusts and orgasm bursts over me for the third time, my pussy tightening around him as he groans my name and a hot tide of his cum blooms inside me. He staggers back, half-carrying me until we drop back onto the bed.

“Dear god, I’ve never...” He’s breathless, his bare chest covered in a sheen of sweat. “That was sensational, Shay.”

I curl over him, enjoying the moment. “You can say that again,” I tell him, satisfaction vibrating in every word.

8 – Noah

My heart is beating so fast, I feel like it's in danger of exploding. I'm not sure I'd mind if it did. Fucked to death by the sexiest woman on the planet. What a way to go.

As my racing pulse slowly starts to ebb, my hands run over Shay's naked body. I can't get enough of her. She tucks her head against the crook of my shoulder and watches me while her hand returns the favor, stroking my chest. If I were a cat, I'd be purring.

Then her hand moves lower, her fingers curl around my cock – which stiffens instantly – and I want to growl rather than purring.

“Ready for round two?”

Before I can answer, Shay wriggles down the bed. A moment later her mouth replaces her hand, and I groan. Her hot, wet mouth sucks me deep inside, and she moans as though I'm the tastiest thing she's ever found. I was worn out, but I'm rock-hard again, surges of delight flowing through me, settling in a pool of urgent need in my loins.

Her fingers stroke my balls, the light touches making my toes flex with need. I want to be inside this woman, but then she takes me deep in her mouth and sucks and I nearly buck off the bed. She chuckles and pulls back, her fingers replacing her mouth, her fist tight around me while her fingertips are light and teasing. I feel like I'm floating in a pool of ecstasy, just her and me in a universe all our own.

She kisses me, then trails her tongue slowly down my chest, darting aside to lick my nipples before continuing on her way. I groan and bury a hand in her hair, enjoying the silken softness of the strands against my skin. One hand slides over my thigh and her mouth reaches my cock again, her tongue flicking over the tip while her other hand keeps me hard as rock.

“I want you inside me,” she whispers. “Is that okay with you?”

I manage a barely coherent agreement. She doesn't need to ask my permission. This woman could do anything she liked to me right now. I wouldn't even try to change her mind.

Because there's no way I want to.

She kneels astride and lowers herself onto me, the delicious heat of her pussy clamping tightly around me. When she's as deep as she can go, she simply sits. Her eyes are closed, a slight smile playing around her lips. Just the sight of her makes me harder, my cock steel inside her velvet cover. She tightens her muscles and I groan again, holding her hips and bucking against her.

“You're driving me wild,” I bite out.

She leans closer, licking up my neck and pressing a kiss to the side of my mouth. “Then go wild, bucko.” She tilts her hips, drawing me deeper.

I groan and let loose all the passion inside me. If she wants wild, I'll give her wild. I thrust, reveling in the warmth and the tightness and the simple rightness of being with this woman. My fingers are tight on her hips, her head's thrown back, her gasping cries split the air, mingling with my groans as I push as deep as I can get, over and over. Passion coils through every cell of my body. I run my hands up her belly, cupping her breasts as she bounces on top of me. She moans when my thumbs find her nipples. She's giving me everything, and still I want more.

I roll us over so she's on her back on the bed. She wraps her legs around my waist, opening herself to me, inviting me to possess her. I thrust harder still, nailing her to the bed, my hands grasping at her thighs. I bend my head to suck a nipple into my mouth, making her arch against me, molding her other breast with my hand.

“Oh, god!” she cries out and I suck harder, slipping a hand between her to find her clit, slippery from our combined juices and standing proud as though it knows to expect my attention.

“Noah!” She shouts my name as she shudders, her pussy muscles clenching tighter than before. I roar my own ecstasy as my orgasm crashes over me, my cum pouring into her as the wave of pleasure holds me tight for long, long minutes.

I collapse onto her, then shift aside, sliding off her onto the bed. I don't want to crush her, but I have no power left in my muscles to do anything that takes more than the bare minimum of effort. I just want to lie here in a sated heap for the next year or two.

Or maybe just until she sucks me like that again.

“Mmm.” Shay gives a contented murmur and curls against my side.

I take a deep breath as my heartrate returns to normal, loving the feeling of Shay snuggled against me. This woman is something special. I know all the jokes about the best man and the maid of honor, but this is more than that.

It's not just a fling. I want this woman always and forever. I didn't think I wanted a relationship, but a certainty deep in my heart tells me I can't let this woman slip through my fingers. It's taken less than a day to discover the truth: she's more important than anything else in my life. Shay is my one and only.

I squint, trying to make my scattered thoughts assemble into the words I need to say to her, but she's fast asleep, her face relaxed and gorgeous against my shoulder. Our conversation will have to wait for the morning.

I yawn. I need to get back to my room. I can just imagine how David will react if he finds me here. But I can't tear myself away, and I can't bear to disturb her. Just a minute, then I'll get up. I reach for Shay, fitting into the curve of her body so we're spooning.

Just a minute.

9 – Shay

I'm right in the middle of a rather delicious dream when a knocking sound rouses me. I squint through my dim hotel room and try to understand what's going on. I appear to be trapped by something warm and heavy.

I move and find that it's Noah's leg, slung over mine in sleep, pinning me down. My lips curve. That wasn't just a dream.

The knock sounds again. "Shay!" Katie's voice hisses through the wood. "Are you in there? Are you awake? Did you and Noah run off together in the night?!"

Reality drenches me like a bucket of cold water. Noah and I are in bed together, and from a squint at the curtains it's morning already, and the bride has had to come get me instead of me running around after her on her wedding day. Crap. I'm in so much trouble.

"I'm here," I call in a hissing tone, trying to reassure Katie without waking Noah. He stirs as I slip out from under him, grabbing a towel to wrap around myself before cracking the door open. "I'm so sorry, Katie. Give me five minutes and I'll be fit for maid of honor duties."

"It's not you I'm worried about. David can't find Noah." Her brows lift as that cold-water sensation drenches me again. "Do you happen to know where he is?"

As she says the words, I hear the bed creak in the room behind me. Holding the door where I want it with my foot, I reach a hand behind me, flapping desperately at Noah, hoping he'll get the message. "I – um – I'm sure he'll turn up in five minutes, too," I tell Katie, a blush heating my face.

Katie smiles knowingly. "I'll tell David he doesn't need to panic."

"You do that."

I've nearly shut the door when Katie turns back. "Sizzle," she says with a wink before vanishing around the corner.

I close the door and collapse back against it, turning to face Noah. He's sitting on the edge of the bed looking ruffled and utterly adorable. I just want to climb back into the bed with him and re-run last night all over again.

"Wedding day," Noah says, running a hand through his disordered hair.

"Wedding day," I agree.

"I guess we can't play hooky."

Don't tempt me! I shake my head. "Not when we're the most important people," I tell him, teasing him with his own words.

He groans. "I wish I hadn't said that."

I reach a hand out, tugging him out of bed and trying not to look at all that tempting bare flesh. "You go be best man. We can keep our hands off each other for a day."

He lets me pull him up, but only to grab my waist and pull me into a blistering kiss, his fingers bands of warmth even through the towel. "I don't think I can."

"I'll have my bridesmaid bodyguards soon," I tell him. Right now, I feel like I need them. I've never been closer to saying to hell with my responsibilities and doing what I please. But I'd never do that to Katie. I push him away. "You go and guard those rings."

He grabs his clothes off the floor, holding the tangled items up with a helpless expression as though he's never seen clothing before. I grab the corner of my towel and hold it out to him. "Take this, it'll be quicker."

He stares at me as though he's never seen my naked body, either, his Adam's apple working up and down his throat. I stride to the door, standing behind it to hide myself as I swing it open. "Get out. We'll see each other later."

The towel slung around his hips, the remainder of his clothes bunched in front of his chest, he makes his way past

me, pausing to press a fierce kiss to my lips. “I’ll see you later. This isn’t over,” he tells me.

I close the door and head for the bathroom, my thoughts whirling. Why do those words strike me as a threat as much as a promise? I want Noah, of course I do. The man has done things for me that I didn’t think were possible. And yet... It’s only a weekend. What harm can that be?

I wrench the shower on and step into the warm water. I don’t want a relationship, and yet I don’t want to say goodbye to Noah. Perhaps it’s a good thing he’ll be heading back to the mainland after the wedding. That will make the decision for me.

~

We have a civilized breakfast of fresh peaches, croissants and champagne with Katie, her mom and mom-in-law. Then I have to get two over-excited girls into their dresses while timing matters so they’re ready in time for the ceremony, but not with so much time they become unmanageable. I’m delighted when I can hand them back to their parents and deal with my own preparations.

The hairdresser is just finishing up with Katie. I touch my BFF’s shoulder, not daring to try a kiss in case I smudge her immaculate makeup. “You look amazing. David is such a lucky man.”

She meets my eyes in the mirror while her hand moves to cover mine. “Thanks for being here.” She grins. “And don’t think you can avoid me forever. I want to know what’s going on with you and Noah.”

I widen my eyes innocently, even though I can see the flush in my cheeks. “I don’t know what you mean,” I protest.

“I mean the sizzle I can practically hear going on whenever the two of you are close. Oh – and maybe the way you looked thoroughly loved-up this morning.”

I pat her shoulder, “Projection,” I tell her. “You’re just looking forward to being loved-up yourself.”

In the mirror, her eyes narrow. “You will not escape me so easily.”

I force a shrug. “There’s nothing much to tell. He’s a fun guy, I enjoy being with him. But he’s going back to the mainland tomorrow night.”

Katie watches me, her gaze calm. “And you’ll be happy to wave him off?”

I try to keep my expression steady. “If it’s anything, it’s just a fling,” I tell her.

She tuts. “If you think it’s just a fling, you haven’t seen the expression in his eyes when he looks at you. I don’t think Noah is a casual kind of a man.” Her fingers squeeze mine. “And I’m sure you’re not a casual kind of a woman.”

I swallow and pull away, turning so she can’t see me. Katie is too perceptive at times. Sometimes, she knows me better than I want her to.

“You deserve someone special,” she tells me quietly.

“Sure, sure.” I don’t look up. I’m blinking hard, because I don’t want to spoil my own makeup now. Everyone wants someone special, but it doesn’t always happen, and there’s nothing wrong with that. You can’t force life to work out the way you want.

“Don’t let Freddie put you off every man,” Katie adds.

“Oh, he hasn’t, I promise you.” I grin, but a chill in my heart tells me Katie’s hit the nail on the head again. I’m cautious now, in a way I never was before I met Freddie.

Although that’s a good thing, if it keeps me out of a relationship like the one I had with him. I glance at the clock over the mirror. “And now, we’d better get you to the pavilion before David decides you aren’t coming.”

“He’d wait,” Katie says decisively, but she gets up and reaches for the bouquet on the table.

My heart aches as I look at my best friend. She’s so confident in the love of her man, and she has every right to that confidence. David would wait – forever, if needed. I hug

Katie, impulsively but carefully so I don't crease anything.
"The pair of you are so lucky, and so special, and I love you,"
I murmur against her ear.

"Don't make me cry!" Katie protests.

"I'm sorry. Come on."

Her father sticks his head around the door at that moment, and we're swept into the routine of the wedding. I collect the bridesmaids and we all walk out of the hotel to the pavilion, where the ceremony will take place on a bluff overlooking the sea.

10 – Noah

My heart nearly jumps out of my chest when the bridal party steps out of the hotel. My brother's bride looks beautiful, but I've got eyes only for Shay.

She walks a step behind the bride. Her dress is the palest shade of blue, echoing the bride's gown, her hair is wound about with gardenia, and she looks every inch as elegant and beautiful as the bride. Standing beside my brother next to the minister, it's hard not to indulge in the fantasy that Shay is walking toward me.

My chest fills with emotion as I realize how much I'd like this to be our wedding, Shay and me making vows to last a lifetime.

"Beautiful," David murmurs beside me.

"You're telling me," I mutter back.

He casts me a glance, but I can't take my eyes off Shay long enough to meet it. He chuckles, and then Katie is right there in front of us, with Shay a step behind. Katie gives her bouquet to Shay, who shepherds the young bridesmaids to sit in the front row of the congregation. Shay grins at me as she takes her seat, then nods at David, directing my attention to the bridegroom and reminding me of my best man duties.

I turn to the bridal couple in time to hear the minister start the service with the familiar words: "Dearly beloved..."

I stand in support for David until the rings are safely handed over to be blessed and exchanged, when I can finally take a seat myself. I'm on the other side of the aisle from Shay, which means there's no possibility of sneaking a hand-hold, but it's all the better to watch her. She takes the younger bridesmaid's hand in hers, recalling the child to the occasion when her attention wanders, and whispers something in reply to a question the older one asks.

When she stands up, I'm surprised to find the ceremony already at an end. David and Katie begin to walk down the aisle between the seats, Shay follows, and I fall into step after the bridesmaids. I should no doubt be thinking higher thoughts of love and commitment, but my gaze can't help but snag on Shay's sensational backside underneath the smooth column of her dress. My cock twitches, and I make myself calculate the Fibonacci sequence so I won't disgrace myself. Even though that an urgent pulse beats in my veins. I need to get this woman alone again. And soon.

~

David and Katie are the center of attention for the wedding breakfast that follows. Shay, unfortunately, sits on one side of them while I'm on the other. The afternoon turns into a torture as the meal drags on for course after course. And then there are the speeches. My pulse surges when it's my turn, but I've practiced and the words are almost automatic, needing no attention as my gaze keeps on returning to Shay while I tell childhood stories calculated to embarrass my brother and amuse our friends and relations.

Shay laughs in all the intended places, and my heart warms.

When it's finally over, I slip to Shay's side. "I *need* to spend some time with you. Can we sneak away?"

She glances around, her gaze finding Katie. Predictably, she's standing with David while they talk to some other guests. "I don't know if I can just leave Katie."

"She's got her husband to look after her now. You can take a break."

Her lips purse. "I don't know, the other bridesmaids..."

I scan the room. The kids can't still need her, surely? I see the smaller bridesmaid, she's been scooped up into a man's arms, who's now dancing around the edge of the room with her. "They've got family—"

I turn back to Shay to find her grinning at me. "You're a wicked woman," I tell her at the realization she's been teasing

me.

She holds her hand out. “Let’s take a walk, shall we?”

I glance down at her feet. “If you dare.”

She lifts her hem to show bare feet. “Already taken care of.” I laugh, even though a part of me is disappointed I don’t have the chance to swing her into my arms and carry her out of the room. “Outside,” she states, taking my hand and dragging me to the venue exit. I was planning to find our way back to the grotto she showed me yesterday, but when we reach the door, that idea flies out the window.

While it’s still warm, a misty rain is falling consistently. “Rain?” I pull a horrified face, although it’s more because I don’t get to run off to a secluded grotto with Shay like I’d planned than because of the actual weather. “I thought this place was supposed to be a tropical paradise?”

She laughs. “How do you think the island gets to be so green? And…” She twists me around with one hand while the other points, “Look.” A beautiful rainbow arcs across the sky overhead. “If you don’t have rain, you don’t get rainbows. I think that’s a price worth paying.”

She’s smiling and she looks so very beautiful, I can’t hold back any longer. My hands reach for her waist as I tip my face to hers and claim her lips with the kiss I’ve been dying to share with her all day.

The rain patters around us as we cling to each other, our lips crushed, tongues tangling. Shivers run down me. When we break apart, I smile down at her upturned face. “I guess we should get back inside.”

She grins. “I was planning to change out of my dress into something a bit more comfortable. Do you think you could give me a hand with the zipper, maybe?”

I lean close, nudging her nose with mine. “I’ll give you a hand with anything, darling.”

11 – Shay

We dash back inside, giggling when we reach my room. It's gotten to be a habit to be giggling and breathless when I step into the room.

“Here.” I turn away from Noah to present the back of my dress to him, tipping my head forward so any strands that have come loose from my updo don't get in the way.

Goosebumps lift when his fingers brush the nape of my neck, unfastening the clip and then sliding the zipper down. He moves slowly. I can almost hear each tooth of the zipper coming apart. I bite my lip, enjoying every moment. Noah groans when he reaches the middle of my back, where my bra ought to be, except that the dress is so fitted I'm not wearing one.

“You are a tease,” he tells me.

I twist to face him, pouting. “I couldn't spoil the lines of this dress.”

I'm sure he speeds up, opening the zipper right down to the bottom. He hisses a breath. I laugh. “Did you think I'd be entirely naked under the dress?” I demand.

It's his turn to pout as one of his fingers slips beneath the waistband of my thong. “I hoped,” he said. His finger moves restlessly to and fro. “Although... Perhaps this is just as good.”

His other hand eases my dress off my shoulders, and it slithers to the floor. I turn, stepping out of the dress. I cock a brow at Noah. “Once more, our states of dress appear to be wildly at variance.” I reach for his tie.

Noah takes a step back, nearly colliding with the door. “You hold that pose. I'll be with you in a moment.”

It's true; I've barely blinked before he's naked, a wolfish grin on his face while his cock stands proudly as though it's

straining to reach me.

I step toward him, boldly curling my hand around his erection. He groans and clutches at me, his hand stroking restlessly over the curve of my ass, finding the strip of fabric between my cheeks and stroking alongside, then underneath it. I find his mouth for an urgent kiss, then pull away to whisper against his ear, “If Katie has to come looking for us, you’re in trouble. I hope you know that.”

“This is all my fault?” he challenges breathlessly.

“It was your idea to duck out of the wedding.”

His fingers find the waistband of my thong and yank downwards. “Then I’d better make it worth your while.”

He pushes the scrap of fabric that’s my underwear down my legs, then walks me back until my back hits the wall. His hand slips between my legs, groaning when he finds me hot and wet already. “I want you,” I murmur.

“The feeling’s mutual.” He hitches my leg up, and my discarded thong drops to the floor. The fingers of his other hand teasing my pussy lips, Noah thrusts into me, filling me with delicious, hard warmth.

I bury my hands in his hair, pulling his face to mine. Our tongues meet and tangle as he thrusts into me. I wrap my leg around him, my heel pressing into his ass, urging him to keep pounding into me. The stretching fullness of him sends sparks firing through him.

He breaks our kiss with a gasp. “Oh, god,” he gasps against my shoulder. “I love you, Shay.”

I freeze, but his movements don’t slow. It was just words, I tell myself. A reflex, because this is fucking sensational. And then I can’t think any more. Noah lifts my other leg, and I cling to him. He thrusts deeper than before, triggering something inside me. A white-hot coil of ecstasy builds inside me. I feel like I’m close enough to touch heaven. I moan and orgasm shatters over me, and I take Noah with me, loving the sound of his moan and the sensation of him bursting hot inside me.

I love you, too. The words are right there on my tongue, but I know I won't speak them. They're true, I realize abruptly. This man ... completes me. But I can't do anything about the fact. It's too much to put onto another person. And we only have this weekend. I suck in gasping breaths, putting my legs tentatively to the floor. They're little better than jelly. I cling to Noah. Clinging is okay, but just for now. We have nothing after this weekend; that would make things complicated, and I don't like complicated. A mournful sensation grips my heart. I'm mourning something I haven't lost yet.

And that's foolish. I stroke Noah's crazed hair back into neatness. "That was amazing," I tell him, since that's a truth I'm happy to share.

"Agreed." He opens his mouth, and my stomach drops with the sudden certainty that he's going to mention the 'L' word again.

I pull away, sliding along the wall. "But we really do need to get back to the reception." I start toward the bathroom. "I'll take a quick shower and get changed."

Noah catches my arm before I can vanish entirely. "We need to talk."

The cold sensation in my stomach becomes a lump of misery. I nod, because it's true. "But not tonight," I say. "Tonight's the wedding, and fun."

He searches my eyes, then nods. "Tomorrow, then?"

"After breakfast." That'll be something to look forward to. I slip into the bathroom and lock the door behind me, closing my eyes and leaning back against the door. What have I gotten myself into?

And more importantly, how do I get myself back out?

~

A quick shower and a change into a dress that's comfortable to dance in, with flats, and I'm ready to face the wedding again. I swing out of my room, jumping when I find Noah leaning against the wall opposite.

“I didn’t want to join the dancing without you,” he explains simply, reaching out for my hand.

When I put my hand in his, he lifts it, pressing a kiss to my knuckles in a gesture that’s charmingly old-fashioned. My stomach clenches at the idea that he’s going to talk about us, but he simply tucks my hand into the crook of his arm and turns us in the direction of the ballroom.

I’m grinning as we stride across the lobby. I’m sure everyone will guess what we’ve been up to the moment they set eyes on us, but I can’t bring myself to care. I’ve only got a short time with Noah; I’d be crazy not to make the most of every single moment.

Noah’s hand in mine is warm and strong. I feel invincible. We nod to the receptionist, and I barely register that there’s someone on our side of the desk talking to her until the man turns. “Shay?”

My heart goes cold. I’d recognize that voice anywhere. I’ve heard it for long enough, telling me I was useless and pathetic and ugly and I should be grateful he bothered with me. My breath catches. My hand drops from Noah’s as I turn, finding the face I never wanted to see again.

12 – Noah

“Freddie?” Shay turns white. I cup a hand under her elbow before I register that I’ve moved. “Freddie, you can’t be here.”

My gaze narrows on the skinny man. *This is the asshole ex?*

Freddie’s eyes gleam with delight when he sees her. Shay shrinks from him. I draw myself up, using my height to stare him down. I see the moment when he registers that I’m there, confusion and jealousy warring in his expression. “Who’re you?” he demands, stepping forward with an aggressive swagger, chin jutting toward me.

“I’m the best man,” I tell him calmly, fighting the urge that’s curling my hands to fists and telling me to lay this guy out for what he did to Shay. “And I don’t believe you’re invited to this wedding.”

His lips curl. “You can’t keep me away.” His gaze slides past me to settle on Shay. “I knew you’d be here. We have to talk.” He takes a step toward her. Shay tenses, and so do I. “This separation has gone on long enough,” he tells her. “You’ve made your point.”

“We’re over, Freddie.” Her voice is a whisper. I step closer, one hand going around her waist. She stands taller. “I wasn’t making a point. I told you it was over, and it is.”

He frowns, his mouth twisting with fury and frustration. He glances at me, and my hands tense again. If I wasn’t there, would he try to grab Shay, force her to leave with him? It’s a ridiculous idea, but I’m not laughing. Malice rolls off him.

He snarls, spittle flying from his lips. “I gave you three years of my *life!* You *owe* me.”

“That’s enough.” I step between the two of them. I feel Shay’s hands settle on my shoulder blades. I’m fairly sure she’s shaking. Fury holds me rigid. “You’re not invited, I’m

not going to let you spoil the atmosphere at the wedding, and Shay doesn't want you here. Leave, or I'll make you."

He sneers. "'Shay'," he mocks my accent. "She's got you curled around her finger, hasn't she? Did the little whore spread her legs for you? She's quite—"

My right fist cracks his jaw and he falls back, unconscious before he hits the floor. Shay sobs and I turn, gathering her into my arms. "I'm sorry," I tell her. "I'm sorry. I couldn't let him talk about you like that."

I glance at the receptionist, who mouths that the police are on their way.

"Do you want to go and find Katie?" I offer to Shay. I'll need to stay and tell the police what happened, but I want her away, if I can persuade her to go.

She shakes her head, her face buried in my chest, both fists clutching at my shirt. "Just hold me," she mutters, over and over. I gather her in my arms, sinking onto one of the sofas in the lobby. She crawls into my lap, still clinging to my shirt. Her body shakes as sobs burst from her. I rub her back and make soothing noises. The receptionist calls a nurse, who makes sure that I haven't killed Freddie. I wish he was still conscious and on his feet, so I could knock him out again.

The police and a paramedic arrive. I tell the police what happened, and the receptionist gives her account, and Shay pushes away her tears and tells them about the previous incidents they've attended because of Freddie in a voice that shakes, but she stares at the wall and winds her fingers in my collar and talks until they have every detail.

I half-expect to be arrested. I did punch the guy, after all. But the officers say they'll get in touch if they need to. As they bundle a once-again-conscious Freddie outside and into the squad car, they wish us well for what remains of the night.

By then, everyone knows what's happened, the party breaking up as people spill out, discovering what's happened and expressing sympathy with Shay. The asshole spoiled the wedding after all.

13 – Shay

“I just want everything to go away.” Conversation buzzes overhead where I want there to be silence. Everyone’s sympathetic, but I don’t want that. I just want to be left alone.

“Let’s get you to your room.” Noah stands and helps me up, muttering our excuses as we work through the crowd.

When my room comes into sight, I sigh, sagging against Noah. Nearly there. Then I’ll be alone, and abruptly I don’t want that.

“It’s okay.” Noah mistakes my reluctance to go inside. “He’s locked up. He won’t come near you again.”

“I know. Thank you.” My voice is small. I feel small and helpless. Freddie has made me feel like that, again. My fingers curl to fists. I reach into my purse, but the stupid key is hiding. That tiny irritation is the trigger. It’s all too much. I turn to Noah with a sob.

“Shh.” His arms go around me, and he tucks my head against his shoulder. I can’t hold back my sobs any longer. I weep in Noah’s arms as he strokes my hair, the gesture calming and comforting me.

When I’m cried out and Noah’s shirt is soaked, I straighten, checking my purse and finding the key right there where it ought to be.

“Do you want me to stay? Until you’re sleeping?”

I want it so much, but I hate that Freddie’s made me weak again. I vowed never to rely on a man again. I should never have forgotten that now.

I shake my head. “No need. I’m fine now.” I try a smile, although it’s shaky. “Momentary weakness, that’s all. I’ll lock the door.”

“Shout if you need me. Room twelve.”

I nod, although I know I won't shout, whatever nightmares claw at me tonight. "Sure. I'll see you in the morning."

I can see he wants to argue, but he doesn't. The fact that he doesn't try to force me into what he wants makes my heart ache harder.

"Of course. Take care. I'll see you in the morning." He lifts my hand to his lips, and then waits for me to go inside and close the door to my room. I cover my hand with the other, the warmth of his lips seeming to glow on my skin. I don't even shrug out of my dress, just fall onto the bed, curl into a ball and let exhaustion claim me.

~

I'm a coward. I order room service for breakfast so I don't have to see anyone before I'm ready. I know I need to talk to Noah, and I can't do that until I'm back to my usual self, strong enough to face what has to be done.

Once I've eaten, showered and dressed, there's nothing for it. He has a flight later. I can't put things off any longer. I just wished I knew what to say. Goodbyes are the hardest.

When I walk into reception, he's there. He was reading a newspaper, but as though he sensed my arrival, he's already folding it up when I arrive. He stands with a smile, which straightens out when he sees my face. "Shall we take a walk?" he offers.

Mutely, I nod. We head through the exit and wander down one of the many paths that lead through the hotel grounds. It's not a path we've taken before. I don't want any reminders of places we've been before.

When we're alone with greenery surrounding us and yet another sensational view of the sea, Noah turns to me. "I can't bear for this to be all we get," he says, his voice low and sincere.

"The weekend has been too short, it's true." My voice falters. My thoughts are agitated, too unclear for me to know my own mind. I ought to tell him to leave, end things with such finality he knows there's no hope. But I don't *want* to

destroy all hope. I want there to be a way out of this, a happy ending. But hope isn't enough, and happy endings belong in fairytales that only children believe. I hoped for things to work out with Freddie, time and time again. I must be the biggest fool in the world to still hope I can take and hold something just because it's dangled before me.

Noah takes my hand. "It doesn't have to be over yet, Shay. I want to see you again." He takes a breath and drops to one knee. "I know we've only known each other a short time, but Shay, I have no doubt that you're the woman I want to spend my life with. Would you... could you possibly do me the great honor—"

"No!" My heart's beating hard, my throat dry. Marriage; the ultimate trap. I straighten, shaking my hair back as though I can throw off my fear just as easily. "We've only just met, Noah!" I try to infuse my tone with more confidence than I feel. "We can't jump from this to ... that."

"We can take it slowly," he offers, regrouping as though he barely notices my rejection.

"We can't take it slowly," I point out. "You're flying back to the mainland today." I sigh. "This was an amazing weekend, Noah. Let's keep it as that, shall we?"

"I don't want to just have a few happy memories. I can't shrug off what we have." His hand thumps his chest. "We belong together. We can't fit everything we feel into a weekend." He smiles, excited as he blurts his idea, "You can get on the plane with me, Shay. Come to Chicago."

"I can't go to Chicago!" Somehow, it's easier now that he's made such an outrageous suggestion. "My life is here. I have work tomorrow. I can't take off for a vacation with no notice."

"I didn't mean a vacation. You can hand in your notice. You don't understand." He's so pleased with himself; sure there are no barriers that he can't knock down. "I'm a wealthy man. You wouldn't have to *work*." He makes it sound like a dirty word. "You wouldn't have to do anything at all."

“Except keep you happy.” He frowns at my dull tone, and I try to explain. “If I follow you to Chicago, I’m dependent on you. I can’t leave my home and expect you to provide everything. I can’t throw away all that I have to go running after a man I barely know. What happens when we fall out, Noah? I’d have nothing you hadn’t given me, and no way to leave if I needed to.”

“You wouldn’t need to.” His gaze pleads with me, but I can’t give him what he wants. Not without losing everything that makes me, *me*. “I don’t want to hem you in, Shay, I just want to be with you.” His tone falters. “Don’t you want that, too?”

I can’t answer immediately. I *do* want that. Every atom in my body is straining toward him, willing me to accept what he’s offering, to throw away caution and make him my everything. But my brain is a different matter. I want him, but I’m too scared. It’s too difficult. If he lived here, maybe, but travelling a thousand miles just for a man... I can’t let myself do that.

“I won’t leave Hawaii. I’m sorry, not even for you, Noah.”

He nods, but I don’t think he’s accepting my refusal. He’s just thinking of his next argument.

“Then I’ll come here,” he declares.

“No!”

He shakes his head like a dog shaking off water, not understanding my objections. “I can run my business from anywhere on earth. I can run it from here as easily as Chicago.” He looks around with a smile on his face, casting a hand wide to take in the whole island, or perhaps the whole of Hawaii. “I’d love to live here. With you.”

I swallow and say the words that are the hardest thing I’ve ever said in my life. “I don’t want you here with me.”

His Adam’s apple bobs. His tone is empty. “You don’t want me?”

“I don’t want you to come here because of me.” I sigh. “I know you mean the best, Noah, but that’s almost as bad as

dragging me to Chicago. If you're here for my sake, then you rely on me instead of me relying on you. Once again, what happens if things go wrong? You've lost everything, and then you'll hate me for it."

"I'll never hate you, Shay." He pauses, then speaks again. "Nothing will go wrong, I swear to you. Please, please trust me on this."

But I can't trust him. My throat closes with misery. I can barely get the words out. "Things always go wrong."

"They don't always go wrong." He frowns. "You just stood as maid of honor for your best friend. Do you think it's going to go wrong for her and David? Pretty hypocritical to support her marriage if you think that, isn't it?"

"I wasn't thinking of Katie."

"And I'm not that asshole," Noah tells me, his tone stiff.

"It's not just Freddie. My parents divorced when I was twelve. After three years of being unable to speak to each other without screaming." I shiver. "It always goes wrong."

"The past doesn't predict the future. I'd never do anything to hurt you, Shay."

I shake my head. I can't look at him for fear I'll weaken. "Please, don't spoil what we had by trying to force me to accept more."

"I wouldn't dream of forcing you to accept anything you didn't want." His tone is stiff, distanced. I should be glad, but I want to cry. "That's despicable behavior. I'm sorry if you felt like any of this was pressurizing you. That wasn't my intention. This has been the most magical weekend of my life, Shay. Thank you. I won't say goodbye, because I hope we'll meet again." He presses a gentle kiss to my cheek and strides into the hotel. He doesn't look back.

I sink onto a rock, covering my face with my hands. I've done the right thing; I know I have. But a big hole has opened up in my chest at knowing I'm never going to see Noah again. Things always go wrong, but this time I have to face the fact that it's my fault they've gone wrong.

14 – Noah

What do you do when your life turns to crap?

It's not a rhetorical question. I hope Alex will have some answers. I'm grasping at straws. I feel like I've been drowning since I got back from Hawaii. My brain gives that same involuntary flinch the way it does every time I remember what I've lost.

These are not the words I was expecting to hear from a man who's just back from a weekend in paradise. What gives?

My lips twitch. Even via Messenger, I can hear Alex's sardonic tone. *I met someone.* My heart clenches. I don't even have to name her for the ache to bite deep into me.

Again, usually a cause for celebration.

It didn't work out.

And that sucks. Why am I being treated to this tale of woe?

I want her back. The words sit there, blinking at me. That's the truth. *I need her in my life.*

Stalker, much?

My lips twitch. You don't go to Alex for sympathy. I wonder if he was this hard on himself when he split with his girlfriend. *It's not like that. I just need more time with her, so she can see how good we are together.*

Er, aren't you a millionaire? Get back on a plane. Make a grand gesture. Girls love that crap.

I shake my head. Perhaps I shouldn't ask Alex for advice; he clearly knows less than I do about wooing women. *She doesn't want me to chase after her. That's putting too much pressure on her. And she won't come here, either.*

Looks like you're screwed, mate.

I laugh, because it's either that or cry and I haven't cried over a girl since kindergarten. *That's not the help I was looking for.*

How about this? Try to be philosophical about it – if it didn't work out, then it wasn't meant to work out.

My fingers hover a moment before I type: *Is that what you believe?*

Yeah. If there's such a thing as 'the one', then she's still out there for me. She's still out there for you, too.

My chest aches. Alex is a genius, but this time he's wrong. Shay is the one. I know it. When I think that thought, everything inside me stills, as though my body – my soul – is acknowledging the truth. I might not know much, but I know that. We belong together. Shay is just too scared to let herself see it. And I don't know how to change her mind without scaring her more.

What do I do?

I recommend you focus on what you can control and let go what you can't. It's only when Alex replies that I realize all my thinking was only in my head. He thinks I want advice on how to get over my romantic disappointment. *What's the next step for the business? Have you thought more about my franchise suggestion? You've got stores all over Illinois, but if you franchise you could go further, faster.*

I start typing, then stop. *You're brilliant.*

Agreed. Er, you're going to run with the franchise idea?

I'll get the team started on it. It's the perfect solution. I should have thought of it myself. But perhaps I needed someone to bounce ideas off. *I have a new goal for the business. I want a Smoothie Shack in every state.*

And I know which state I plan to start with.

15 – Shay

The week after Noah leaves, I operate on autopilot. I get up, go to work, do laundry, clean the house, but my mind is wherever Noah is. In Chicago, where I sent him. I'm miserable without him. I find myself checking the price of plane tickets and checking out hotels there. Perhaps I could take a vacation and just have a look around the city.

Except I know I'm fooling myself. It's over between Noah and me. I pushed him away, too afraid to take a chance on what we had. When I get too sad, I remind myself that what I've actually done is let Freddie spoil the best thing that ever happened to me, and then I get angry instead. I prefer the energy to the listlessness. I was an idiot. What would it matter if things went wrong with each other after a while? We'd still have the good times. And things went spectacularly wrong with Freddie, and I still survived. I'm a strong woman. Leaning on a man doesn't make me weak.

I'll get in touch, I decide. When Katie and David are back from their honeymoon, I'll ask for the phone number I should have swapped while he was here. There's no harm in getting in touch, seeing if he'd still like to host me around his home city for a week while we see if there's anything to rekindle between us.

The phone call takes me by surprise. "Good afternoon. It's the Seascape Resort here. Housekeeping found some lost property in your room after the wedding. Would you be able to pop by and collect it?"

I left something at the hotel? I agree absent-mindedly as I wrack my brains to try and work out what it might be.

I drive up straight after work. My heart jumps as I near. It was a mistake to come. I should have told the hotel to mail it to me, even though I'm only a few minutes away. I'm hit by a wave of emotion, remembering everything I had with Noah that weekend. Everything I've lost.

My heart's heavy as I walk into the lobby, remembering when I walked in here and Noah was there, offering me everything that I was too scared to accept. Would my answers be different now, now that I know how miserable I am without him? It was only a weekend, but Noah crawled right into the heart of me. His absence has left an aching hole.

I take two steps inside and stop dead.

It's a mirage. My thoughts have conjured him up. Standing against the reception desk is Noah, turning to face me as though, once again, some sixth sense has told him I'm there.

"Noah?" I want to run to him, but shock holds me rigid.

He stays where he is, too, his hands open at his side, as though he feels he needs to pacify me. I remember that the last time we spoke, I told him to leave in no uncertain terms.

I know I ought to tell him the same thing again, but I wouldn't be such a fool. He's here again, come for me, and I don't have the strength to turn him away. I swallow and find words from somewhere. "Lost property? Is that you?"

A faint smile dances around his lips, although his beautiful brown eyes are clouded with uncertainty. "I'm lost without you, Shay."

"You came back?" It's a question that doesn't need an answer. Of course he came back; I'm just struggling to persuade myself that what my eyes are seeing is really happening. He came back for me? He's turned his life upside down for me?

He walks toward me at long last, but he doesn't draw me into the hug I'm longing for. Instead he guides me to the sofas by the window. I drop, my legs barely able to hold me up. He takes the seat opposite and leans forward, elbows on his knees. His expression is sober, his forehead slightly creased. Then his lips part in a smile. It's not the biggest smile I've ever seen, but it still makes my heart jump with hope that everything's going to be alright.

"You won't believe this, but I've been sent here for work."

“Work? I thought you ran the business.” Mr. Smoothie, in charge of the whole operation.

He smiles. “I do. I sent myself here. I’ve decided to open a branch in Hawaii, so I’m here for six months to make it happen. I’ll be busy most of the time, but I hoped you might let me take you on a date or two? No pressure, Shay, I just want to give us the chance to find out if we want to take things further.”

But I already know I do. I was a fool before, and I can hardly believe life is giving me a second chance. I should have trusted Noah. I should have trusted myself and my own feelings. He’s nothing like Freddie, nothing at all. Noah is everything I’ve ever wanted, and I want to tell him so, but hope and fear have tied my tongue in a firm knot.

Because I don’t answer, Noah clears his throat, his expression sobering. “No pressure. Not even a date, if you don’t want that.” He looks up, and I see hope shining in his eyes. “But the thing is, the only other people I know on the island are currently on a honeymoon, so perhaps you might be willing to show me around, help me settle in, tell me the best places to eat and such?”

“You’ve come because of me.” I don’t know whether it’s an accusation, or a question. Fear grips me at the thought that perhaps he’s telling the bare truth, and this is all business, not pleasure in the least.

He shakes his head. “Not because of you.” A frown v’s between his brows. “Yes, because of you. But not *just* because of you.” He’s too honest to tell an outright lie. My heart begins to thaw. Honesty, the foundation for trust. Perhaps we can have a future together after all.

“I’m glad you came back.” If Noah can be truthful, then so can I.

He smiles, his eyes dancing. “You are?”

I bite down the desperate *I missed you* that wants to burst from my mouth and keep my voice level. “Yes, you could help me out, actually.”

He clears his throat. "I'll do anything for you, Shay, you know that. What do you need?"

I smile. "It's a funny coincidence, but my roomie just got married. I was going to post an ad for a replacement, but I guess I could take in a lodger instead."

His smile is wider than the sky. "You'll let me stay?"

I shrug. "I can't stand in the way of the people of Hawaii having the chance to discover the delights found at a Smoothie Shack, can I?"

"That's very selfless of you," Noah tells me. He leans forward so we're nearly touching, so close I can smell his scent and feel the warmth radiating from him.

I grin. "Oh, it's not entirely selfless. I want to discover the delights of Mr. Smoothie, too."

His arms go around me and it feels so right, like coming home. "Oh, I'll make sure you have first-hand experience of every one of those," he promises. Then he presses his lips to mine and reminds me of the first delight we ever shared.

Epilogue – Noah

I'm in the grotto.

I smile, crumpling Shay's note in my fist and heading out to the yard. Past the patio, the garden turns wild, a deliberate echo of the grotto we first kissed. My lips curve as I push past leaves and ferns, breathing in the scent of oleander.

The trickling sound of water fills the air. I turn a corner, and the artificial waterfall comes into view.

As does Shay.

My smile turns into a grin. Two years, and just the sight of her makes my heart stop. I adore this woman. Always have, always will. I glance past her, taking in the beautiful grotto. It's probably about time I proposed to her again. I do it now and again. Shay has said no each and every time, but I'm still optimistic that one day she'll accept my ring on her finger. It's a balance – I don't want to pressure her, but I don't want her ever to think that I'm taking her for granted. I want her to be my wife, but girlfriend is enough for me if it's enough for her.

"Hey, honey. How was your day?" Shay teases, her hand splaying over my chest, settling where my heartbeat bounces against her fingers.

"It's better now that I'm here with you," I tell her, my hand curving around the back of her neck, bringing us together for a long, luscious kiss that sends a thrill of pleasure racing through me. My hand tightens on her waist as my tongue tastes her mouth, reveling in the touch and the taste of her. When she pulls away, her eyes are sparkling. I can't put my finger on it, but there's something different about her. Hope jumps in my heart. Has she changed her mind?

Before I can think better of it, I drop to one knee in front of her, taking one of her hands in mine. "Shay, I hope you know how very, *very* much I love you. I knew it from the very first

moment I set eyes on you, although I know it took a while for you to feel the same.”

“It didn’t take a while,” she protests. “I loved you right away. A while for me to accept it, maybe.”

I pull a face. “I have a speech prepared,” I grumble at her. “Don’t you want to hear it?”

Her lips twitch. “Sorry, I interrupted you in mid-flow. This one sounds good, please continue.”

It’s then that I know she isn’t going to accept, not this time. I try not to feel too disappointed as I cut my speech short. “You know I love you dearly and I’d marry you tomorrow, Shay. If that’s ever what you want, I hope you know that you only have to say the word.” I force a smile. “I have to believe that one day, the answer will be yes.”

“Ye-es.”

My heart jumps. Did I mistake her? “Yes? Yes to what, Shay?”

She straightens and clears her throat. “Yes, I think that maybe, one day, the answer will be yes.”

There’s a piston in my chest. An overworked one. “That sounds like your militant stance against marriage might be softening.”

“It might be.” Her gaze drifts away from me, venturing up to the trees. “I’ve been thinking a lot about commitment recently, and what it might mean.”

“And?” I prompt. I take her hand.

Finally, she turns back so I can see her eyes again. “And,” she licks her lips. “I think I might be ready to make a commitment, to us.”

“But not get married?”

She bites her lip. “How do you feel about children, Noah?”

“Our children?” The piston’s moved from my chest. It’s trying to choke me now. “You want to have a baby?” I glance at her belly. “Are you—?”

She shakes her head emphatically. “I’m too careful for that, Noah, too afraid to take a risk. But I want more. I’d like to have a baby – if you’d like that, too.”

“Yes!” I pick her up, whirling her around. “Yes, I’d like that more than anything in the world.” I press a kiss to her lips. “You just made me the happiest man alive.”

She strokes my face. “I’m glad. And you can put me down now.”

“Oh, no.” I stride back toward the house with her in my arms. “I think we should get started on those babies right now. There isn’t a moment to lose.”

Epilogue – Shay

“Put on your best dress,” Noah calls before the door’s even closed behind him. “We’re celebrating!”

My heart skips a beat. Does he know? “Celebrating?”

“We just cracked double figures. As of midday today, there are Smoothie Shacks in eleven different states.”

He doesn’t know. “That’s great news.”

Noah strides into the room, bringing his energy and happiness with him. We kiss, and when he would pull away, I cling to him. “I’d rather stay in tonight, though.”

He looks surprised, and I almost see the adjustment going on inside his head. “Well, sure. If that’s what you want. Takeout?”

I lift a shoulder. “I wasn’t thinking about food, so much as some hot sex, if that’s okay with you?”

I don’t get a spoken answer. Noah simply growls, lifts me bodily and walks me into our bedroom. He lowers me to the bed and kisses me again while his hands rove over my clothes, finding the fastenings and pulling garments off me. I climb onto my knees, dragging off his tie and yanking his shirt out of his pants. He’s already half-hard, and when I palm him through his underwear, his cock twitches against my hand.

He groans. “Oh, Shay. I can’t get enough of you. I’ll never get enough of you.” He yanks off my panties and pushes me back on the bed. His hands stroke up my thighs and my legs fall apart, already trembling just at the thought of what’s to come.

He kisses across my thighs, making his way slowly to my pussy, which is quivering in anticipation. When his tongue touches my pussy lips, I groan, my back tensing while my hands fist in the sheets. White heat centers at my core while

his touch echoes across every inch of my body. It's even better than always – is this because...

Two fingers enter me while Noah's tongue finds my clit. I scream his name, arching off the bed as orgasm smashes into me harder and faster than I would have believed possible.

I'm still coming, hard, when Noah thrusts into me, groaning as he pulls my hips toward him, angling deep inside me where my muscles are still wracked with my unstoppable orgasm.

"Shay, this is out of this world," he mutters, and then there's no time for words. My orgasm doesn't seem to want to stop, waves of ecstasy washing over me with every thrust. I writhe and moan. Noah swears my name, groaning. His thrusts grow stronger and harder, then stop with a final groan as he pushes high into me, a surge of his cum sending a final burst of heat through me.

I shudder, clutching at Noah, feeling as though I'll fall without him to save me, even though we're both lying down.

"Jesus, that was sensational," Noah mutters, pressing kisses against my shoulder. He rolls to one side, slipping out of me. I give a sigh of regret.

"That was the best yet," I say, feeling Noah's nod against my shoulder. Is it going to be like that all the time...?

"I love you, Shay," Noah tells me.

I set a hand on his chest. "I love you, too, Noah."

His hand covers mine. "You're enough," he tells me. "Always know that. I don't care if I never marry you, I don't care if children never happen, I'm happy to spend my life with you any way you want."

I blink, wondering what I did to deserve this wonderful man. There's a pause. It's quiet until I give the game away with a sob that won't stay just a thought. Noah rears up to look at me. "Are you ... crying?" His thumbs push the wetness off my cheeks. "Is something wrong?"

"I – I guess I'm a bit emotional."

He pulls me into his arms, all concern. “What happened?” His lips quirk. “Was your orgasm that good?” he teases.

“I guess you could say that.” I sigh. “The thing is, you might have to get used to me being more emotional than usual.”

He watches me, his brown eyes concerned, although he gives every impression that he’ll wait forever for me to start talking sense. My smile widens. “The thing is, I think I might be a tiny bit pregnant.”

He blinks. His mouth opens, and then closes. A smile spreads slowly across his face. “Truly?”

I nod.

“That’s wonderful, Shay!” He gathers me into a hug, cradling me against his chest. “That’s the best thing that’s ever happened to me. Thank you, thank you, thank you!”

There’s so much sincerity in his tone and his expression that I can’t help it; I burst into tears again. “Oh, lord, I hate this!” I wipe my cheeks. “I feel so stupid.”

Noah takes my hand, drying the last of my tears with his fingertips. “Not stupid, never that. You’ve signed on for quite a rollercoaster. There are bound to be ups and downs. Just know that I’ll be by your side for every one of them.”

“I know you will.” I look into eyes that shine with all the love he holds for me. “I love you, Noah. I love you more than I can say.”

“You don’t have to say. I already know.” His lips touch mine and then open, our tongues speaking without words, reinforcing all the promises we owe to one another.

When Noah finally pulls away, his eyes are shining. He rests a hand on my belly, still flat. For now. “I’m so pleased we’re going to be parents, Shay. We’ll do a great job. Together.” He leans close, his hand warm on my abdomen, his breath tickling my skin. “Aloha, baby!”

I smile and lean into him for another kiss. Goodbye to all my doubts, aloha to our baby – and aloha to love.

Do you want more?

Get hot and flirty with more of the guys who made the Millionaire Pact.

The Millionaire Pact friends are a group of entrepreneurs who all vowed to become millionaires by the age of thirty. They set up a Facebook group to ensure they'd be accountable for their goals. Well, that deadline is looming and some of them are actively seeking to move on from their business success to more personal targets such as love and family – while some of them find love lands in their laps when it's the last thing they're looking for!

Check out a few of the stories (with more to come):

[Finding Macy](#)

Macy fled four thousand miles to escape her controlling father and the marriage he wants to push her into. People-finder Travis is the best in the business. If he's looking for Macy, there's no place to hide. Travis finds Macy easily enough, but giving her up to her father is a whole different matter when every fiber of his being is urging him to keep her for himself!

[Stay with Me](#)

Carly has loved Max from afar for years. But her childish crush stops now. She's moving out of state for a new job and Max will just be a memory. Max has adored Carly forever. He's made a success of his business with the aim of providing her with the kind of life she deserves – but when she says she's leaving, can he persuade her to stay?

And if you want to find out how Alex (sure that “the one” is out there somewhere) gets his own happy ending, you can find out in [*Crazy for You*](#).

“I might have – slightly – said I was married. To you.”

Jordan has been in the shadow of her older sister all her life. In one unguarded moment she makes a rash boast – that she's married. But then her sister announces a visit and it's up to Jordan to make the lie at least appear true.

Alex is tired of friends describing him as “Mr. Beige”, so when Jordan throws herself on his mercy, he decides this is the perfect moment to do something crazy.

Except a weekend of pretence might not be enough – for either of them.

Details on my website: virginiamayromance.com

While you're there, you can sign up to get all my news with my email newsletter – and you'll get exclusive freebie *Poolside* as a thank you.

About Virginia

Virginia May is a divorced mom who got fed up waiting for Mr. Right to step into her life, so she made one up – and then another and another!

When not writing or dreaming up new heroes, Vee likes to cuddle her two cats and grow flowers to encourage bees into her yard.

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