

Heart
THROB



TAMRIN BANKS

HEART THROB

WILDWOOD CONSTRUCTION



TAMRIN BANKS


 Tamrin
Banks

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*For my honey bunny and my fans out there! Hope you love it
and thanks for reading!*

Love ya, honey bunny!



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ASTER



*M*y head is throbbing like an anvil repeating over and over. *Think think. Ugh!*

“I’m telling you. I don’t care what you think, Christy. I need a break. I cannot do this movie right now. If I don’t get some time to myself, I’m gonna lose my mind.”

My agent growls. “You’re a hot commodity right now. You need to take advantage of that and grab onto the brass ring here. This movie is gonna be big. It could launch your career into the stratosphere. You know your mother wants you to take it,” she wheedles.

And there’s the rub. I’m twenty-six years old. I want to live my life on my own terms. But everyone around me is always looking out for their own job, their own money and lives. They don’t give a damn about me. And that includes my lovely mother.

“I don’t care. I’m done and if you keep pushing on this, you’re gonna be looking for a new client. My mother is not your client. I am. And I am not doing this damn movie. So stop bothering me!” I click to hang up my cell phone and just for a moment wish that I had an old-fashioned rotary phone that I could slam the receiver down to make me feel better.

I call my friend, Fern. She picks up and I hear her giggling while she shushes someone in the background.

“Am I interrupting something?” I ask, amused. My cheeks flush though. I have a feeling I know just what I interrupted.

“*Aster!*” she squeals. “Where have you been, girlfriend? I’ve been trying to get in touch with you for over a month. It’s not like you to disappear like that.”

“I just found out that you called. My assistant didn’t think it was important enough to bother me.”

Fern huffs. “I should meet this person. I guess I need to make more of an impression. Be more like a dragon lady. Then maybe they’ll actually pass along my messages.”

“Don’t worry about it. I fired her. I’ve actually fired half my people. I just want to be left alone. They’re all driving me nuts. I just told my agent that I was taking at least the next six months off. I need a break. Need to recharge. She’s had me going flat-out since I was sixteen.”

“You know that’s because your mother hired her. I assume she still thinks that your mother is the client and not you.”

“How did you know?”

“I know your mother for one thing. For another, it’s hard for someone who took you on as a kid to realize that you’re not a kid anymore. I know she’s a good agent but you might need to look elsewhere if you want to be taken seriously.”

I sigh and run my hand through my long brown hair. “Logically I know that. I’m pretty close to doing it. I just hate to get into that argument with my mother. We’ve had an armed truce for awhile and I like the peace and quiet!”

Fern laughs. “I get that! So what are you doing for the next six months if you’re not working.”

“I don’t know. I guess I could just sit on my couch and veg. Eat chips and stuff. Just be a couch potato for the first time in my life.”

“You can do that anywhere. Didn’t you tell me that you wanted a place to get away from it all?”

I nod my head and then remember she can’t see me. “Yeah. I need a home base that isn’t accessible to every damn tom, dick and harry. I’ve been looking around but I haven’t found

anything I like well enough yet. I just don't know where I want to move."

"How about Wildwood, Colorado?"

"I don't know anybody there."

"That's the best part. There's a nice cabin for sale up here on the mountain and I know just the men to fix it up for you. It needs a little work. I mean, it's not bad but I assume you want the amenities you're used to."

"Hmmm. How many bedrooms, bathrooms?"

"It's a four bedroom, three bathroom cabin. Beautiful log cabin with a view of the mountain to die for."

I can picture it in my head and my body aches to spend time away. Just to hear nothing but the wind whistling in the pines. Nobody pounding the door asking me if I'm ready to go on set. Or to some stupid party that I don't even want to go to.

It sounds like heaven.

"It sounds nice, Fern. But I don't know anyone. That might be a bit much to start out with. To go from everyone is bugging me to nobody knows where I'm at."

"I'm staying here and setting up shop. So I'll be here if you need someone to meet up with for coffee."

"When did that happen?" I gasp.

"Well, it's a funny story. You remember that guy from college?"

"I do. You said you hated his guts and wanted him to get boils on his perfect ass."

"Hey! Stop poking me, dammit! I promise you, I don't want boils on your ass now!"

I choke on a laugh. "I take it that's him."

"Yeah. We're moving in together."

I whistle. "That was fast! Are you sure about this?"

"Stop that!" She growls. "Yes. Even though he's currently being a pain in my ass, I am sure. I love the damn idiot."

“I’m really happy for you.” I am. Even if I am a little jealous. I’ve never even had a real date. They’ve all been studio set-ups. To promote a movie or something. My social life is non-existent.

“I know you are. I really wish you could be as happy as me, Aster. As a matter of fact, Jameson has a younger brother. He’s a couple of years younger than you but I think you two would hit it off really well. You’ve got a lot in common.”

I snort. “I don’t think so. There is no way in hell I’m gonna let anybody else fix me up. I’ve had enough of those disasters.”

“I’m not just anybody. I’m your bestie. The woman who knows you better than anybody.”

“Uh-huh. Still...I don’t want to be fixed up. I just want some peace and quiet.”

“Fine,” she huffs. “Kill my dreams of being my sister in law.”

“You’ll survive.”

“When do you want to come see this place?”

“Have you seen all of it?”

“I have.”

“And you think it’s a good deal?”

“I do. It’s gonna be spectacular. Max has some great ideas.”

“I don’t want anyone else to decide how to decorate it. I’ve never had free rein on my own property. I want to make it mine.”

“Okay. I’ll let Max know.”

“Do you know anyone that can do the deal for me? I want to buy the place?”

“Sight unseen?”

“I trust you.”

“Okay, Aster. I’ll have Jameson get in touch with the realtor and we’ll get this thing rolling.”

“Sounds good. And Fern?”

“Yeah?”

“Thank you for helping me figure this out. I kinda didn’t really know what I wanted to do. I’m not used to making my own decisions.”

“Well, now’s the time to spread your wings! You got this. I’ll talk to you later!”

“Yeah. I can’t wait to see you!”

“Me too! It seems like forever since we were sneaking out in the middle of the night to go running around.”

“See. That right there is what’s wrong with old friends. They know all your dirty secrets!”

“I’ll never tell anyone. I’ll get this taken care of for you. You just get out here.”

“Yep! You’re the best!”

I hang up the phone and a grin tilts my lips. I can’t wait to see my bestie. And this mountain sounds like my idea of paradise.

There’s a little niggler of doubt in the back of my mind when I think about the man Fern mentioned. I have my doubts about this man and his qualifications.

But I trust Fern. And if she says this guy will do justice to my new house, then I’m all for it.

But there’s no fucking way I’m going to go out with some guy. Even if he is the brother of my best friend’s future hubby.

I’ve been burned one too many times by men that people said were perfect for me. I’d rather be alone than deal with another disappointment on the dating front.

No matter how lonely I get.

MAX



“*I*’m begging you. You deal with this woman. She sounds like a nightmare to work for. You’re good at schmoozing the ladies.”

Jameson grumbles at me as he works on paperwork. “I already have a woman to schmooze and she keeps me plenty busy. She’s the one that suggested you.”

I change tactics. “So you’re just going to let some woman you barely know tell you what to do? What about me? Your favorite brother.”

“You’re not my favorite. That’s Eli. He’s a lot less work than you.”

“Cold, man. That’s cold.”

“Just start working on some ideas for her space.”

“It won’t do any good. You know what these fancy women are like. She’s a celebrity. She’s gonna want a bunch of glass and velvet and all kinds of stuff that doesn’t belong in a cabin on a mountain,” I scoff.

“It’s her house. She can do what she wants with it.”

“Did she already buy it? Maybe I should put in an offer on the house myself.”

That makes his head pop up and he glares at me. “Why the hell would you want to do that? You’ve already got a house.”

“I could use a rental. Buying property is a sure-fire way to increase your portfolio for retirement.”

“You can’t manage your time now! I shudder to think what you would be like with a rental property to manage. And your work with Wildwood Construction.”

“I’m very organized and I keep up just fine with my work.” Now I’m fucking insulted. I work just as hard as the rest of the guys.

“You’re great at what you do, brother. But you’re also usually behind and the crew has to wait on you.”

“I don’t even think so,” I growl.

“Never mind. Just get out to that house. Here’s the key.” He holds out a key to me. “Don’t fuck this up. I know you don’t like demanding women but this woman could be great for our company. If she likes what we do to her house, she could let all her friends know about it.”

“And all of a sudden the mountain’s covered with mini mansions attempting to look like a mountain home. Great,” I grouse, unimpressed with his logic.

He shoots me another glare. “Just fucking do it and quit whining. Jesus! I’ve never seen you so pissy. Oh and by the way, you and I are doing the shoots today along with Finn. He’s already down there with Fern and we need to get down there as well.”

“Ugh! I seriously can’t believe that you agreed to this crazy plan of Fern’s! Not to mention that it’s a little creepy to have your girlfriend staring at all the men while we’re practically naked.”

Jameson laughs. “Trust me. She’s not interested in any of you assholes. I trust her. She came up with this idea to help our massively over-extended company. It’s not something I would ever have thought of.”

I snort. “For obvious reasons.”

He cocks his head and grins. “Yeah. But if it saves the company, and I’ve seen prospective paperwork on what we may be looking at, I’m all for it.”

“Fine,” I growl. “But let me tell you, I’m not enthused with all these changes in the company.”

Jameson frowns. “I don’t really care what your feelings are. I’m in charge and if you came up with a better idea, I’d look at it. But you haven’t. All you’ve done is whine and complain. So kindly get on board. I’m stuck between a rock and a hard place unless we went to go out of business.”

“You’re right. I’m sorry. You know how crabby I get about change though.”

“I do. But it’s what we have to do. Now that we’ve hashed all this out, we might as well head to the temporary studio that has been set up in the building.”

“Yeah, yeah. Let’s go.”

We head to the elevator and Jameson hits the button. “Just behave yourself when we get down there. Fern is very proud of this idea of hers. I don’t want you squashing her excitement.”

“I promise. I won’t squash your girlfriend.” I grin at him and he growls.

“You are fucking incorrigible. Don’t make me kill you. I don’t care if you’re my brother, if you hit on Fern, I’ll take you down.”

I throw back my head and laugh. “You are so damn easy to rile since you met Fern.”

“Bastard,” he grunts good-naturedly.

The room is set up and I bust out laughing when I see Finn. He glares at me, his green eyes furious. “I swear to god, he’s blushing. Hey, Finn! What’s with the tiny hat, man?” I pretend to search for something. “Are you hiding something?”

Fern groans. “Seriously? As soon as you walk in the door you have to try and start trouble. Behave yourself, Max!”

“I can’t help it. What the hell is with that hat?”

Fern laughs. “The green brings out the green in his eyes.”

“If it was up on his head maybe. But that is not where the hat is,” I chortle wildly.

“By the way, Max. Did you get a chance to look at the pictures of the house yet? Aster should be here soon. I know she’s looking to get started right away.”

“Oh god! No, I haven’t had time to take a look yet. I’m pretty busy with other projects.”

“And besides that he’s too busy whining about working for your friend.” I glare at Jameson.

“Dude, I told you that in confidence.”

“I’m not a priest and I’m not hiding anything from Fern.”

Fern stares at me, curiosity in her dark eyes. “What’s the problem? Aster is one of the sweetest people I’ve ever met.”

“As long as she’s getting what she wants, right? That’s how those spoiled princesses usually work. As long as they get everything exactly the way they want it, it’s all good. Say one thing about something they can’t have and it’s a crime. Don’t worry though. I’ll make sure she gets what she wants.”

“And fuck you very much!” A low, husky voice drawls with a savage bite to it.

I turn and almost fall over when I see the woman. She’s tiny. Barely five foot two with mouth-watering curves and a beautiful face currently flushed with anger. Her eyes sparkle and I lose myself in the indigo pools.

Jameson laughs. “I think you might win this one, babe. “

“Huh?” I ask, not really listening. Instead, my eyes are still locked on the curvy woman in front of me.

“Fern!” She squeals, running to hug my future sister in law.

“Aster!” She giggles. “It’s been so long.” She holds her friend away from her and groans. “You look so good. I swear it’s been forever since I saw you.”

“I’m glad you got here early. I know Max has been looking forward to working with you.”

I can't stop my grin when she looks over at me. She smirks.

There's a lot going on behind those deep midnight eyes and I want to know every last bit of it. I know it's too soon. I know I've never believed in love at first sight.

But just the sight of this woman is blowing all my preconceived ideas right out the window.

I have a feeling that she'll be doing this to me for the next fifty or so years. Or maybe forever.

ASTER



*A*nger and something else, something stronger and more primal, buzzes in my body. The man in front of me with wide, dark eyes and black eyelashes framing the smoky, whiskey color has me rethinking my plans. Should I be moving to this place?

I don't know. I feel more right this second than I've felt in years. I can feel my blood whooshing through my veins. Feel my heartbeat pounding in my chest, echoing in my ears like thunderclaps. My fingertips buzz with the need to touch him.

Yanking at my fraying self-control, I glare at the bastard. "Who the hell do you think you are? You think you know me?" My eyes glide up and down his body, trying to keep from letting him know how much he's affecting me. I snort.

"You don't know me at all! Maybe you could stop being such a judgmental dickhead."

I hear Fern snort with barely-concealed laughter behind me. All of my focus is on the jerk standing there with his mouth hanging open. A perfect mouth surrounded by the sexiest scruff of a beard that my fingers want to run through and I want to feel how it feels. My belly clenches when I wonder what it would do to my sensitive skin. Would it be soft or rough? Would it leave ragged tracks of red on my thighs as he tore into me like a man possessed?

I jerk myself up short. What the hell? I know it's been awhile since I've been with a man but I've never been so needy and wanton for a total stranger!

“You are Fern’s friend?” he asks me.

I nod my head sharply, once. “I am.”

His dark eyes trail up and down my body and it feels like fire singes my skin wherever they land. “You’re not what I expected,” he says lamely.

“Shocking. Since you don’t know a damn thing about me. Or my life or my wants and needs.” I flush when I say the words. If he knew what I was thinking....oh my god!

A smirk tilts his lips and my stomach free-falls.

“I’d love to know all about your needs and wants! Can I take you to lunch and we’ll talk about it?”

My mouth drops open and his dark eyes heat to molten lava. “You’re a cocky bastard, aren’t you?”

Fern giggles behind me and I hear a deep voice chuckle. “You have no idea.”

I turn to face Fern and she rushes at me, throwing herself into my body. My arms wrap around her and I giggle.

“It is so good to see you, Aster! God, I’ve missed you. What’s going on with you? How have you been? Why are you taking a break? Did something happen?”

My breath huffs out. “I can’t answer all those questions at once. And you’re starting to sound like one of those voices on helium!” I laugh when she groans.

“Fine, fine. So talk. What’s going on?”

My eyes slide over to the man watching us. “Do you mind if we talk about this later?” I don’t want to broadcast my uneasy thoughts about my own life in front of perfect strangers.

“Sure.” She leans back and looks at me. “You look good, girl. I can’t believe you’re really here. And you’re staying, right?”

I nod my head. “I am.”

“Fantastic! The guys here are about to get their pictures taken so I’d go if you don’t want to see these two in their birthday suits!”

My eyes immediately dart to the other man in the room and he grins as he begins to unbutton his red flannel shirt.

I squeak and turn away. “Do you want to go to lunch with me?”

“I would love to go,” she says, but then her lip pouts out. “But I want to watch Jameson’s photo shoot. I gotta make sure they get his good side.”

“And that they don’t get an eyeful,” I snicker under my breath.

“Yeah, that too,” she grumbles. “I know this is a great idea for their company but right now...I’m wanting to mark my territory like a cat in heat.”

I throw my head back and laugh. “Fine. I’ll manage on my own.”

“Wait! I’ve got the perfect idea. The guys’ little sister Maggie is in town. She just finished college so she’s kind of at loose ends right now. I’ll give her a call and she can show you around. Maybe she’ll take you up to your house and you can get an in-person look.”

“No!” The controlled shout makes both of us jump. We turn to stare at him. “I mean...I’ve got the keys. I’ll show it to her after I’m done with this.”

“It’s not a big deal, Max. Just give me the key and Aster can take it with her. It’s her key anyway.”

Max seems to have some kind of internal dialogue with himself and then he grunts and pulls the key out.

“Fine. But as soon as I’m done here, I’m going to come to the house and we’ll go over what you want.”

“Ah yes...” I nod. “You want to find out exactly how much glass and chrome I want. Maybe some animal furs and onyx? Ooh. I’m sure I can come up with something good.”

The quick flash of disgust in his eyes makes me laugh out loud. “I’m kidding. I have ideas...yes. But not those.”

“Oh...ha ha. Glad to hear it. I’ll see you later. I think I need to go get oiled up.” He nods his dark head to the other man in the room. “And so do you, Jameson. You’re up before me.”

Fern shoots me a wicked grin. “That’s my cue. Jameson promised me that I get to oil him up. I’ve been looking forward to this all week.”

“Ugh! Seriously, man. Tell your girl to stop sharing that kind of shit!” Everyone laughs at the disgusted look on Max’s face.

Jameson just shrugs his broad shoulders and slips out of his suit jacket. “I’m not ashamed that my girl likes to touch me. Maybe one of these days you’ll manage to find a woman that feels the same about you.”

My eyes fly to his dark, heated gaze. I can’t breathe. Can’t do anything but picture my hands rubbing oil all over his broad, muscular chest. Heat climbs into my cheeks and I struggle not to cover my face with my hands.

My lower belly rolls and the unmistakable tug of lust slams into me.

Need slams into me and my breath hisses in and out, sharp and wild.

One single look and I know he knows what I’m feeling. It’s there in his own eyes. Smoke coils in their dark depths. Fire combusts all around us and it feels like the air crackles with a frenetic energy.

An energy that may well burn both of us if we get too close. I’ve never felt the urge to play with fire so much in my life.

MAX



“*T*hanks, Max! You did great!” Fern says. Her eyes are still locked on my brother though. He wraps an arm around her waist and yanks her close to him.

You can practically feel the lightning in the air all around us. The air super-charged with their desire.

A crazy, stupid thought runs through my head. *I want that.* I want to have those insane feelings for a woman. I want to know that she’s mine and I’m hers until death do us part.

I’ve never wanted to have more than one night with a woman. Footloose and fancy free. Free to leave and not have to adjust my life for anyone else.

I look back on that and grimace. I sound like a selfish asshole. A spoiled brat of a man just trying never to grow up.

As soon as I looked at Aster, I could see what she thought of me and it hurt. To know that she thought less of me. It was all there in the disgust and anger in her eyes.

I wanted to take back all those women I slept with. I mean, it’s not hundreds. But even one was too much. I should have waited for her. She’s the woman who’s meant for me.

It shakes me to my core and I can’t think about anything but finding her. Talking to her again. Getting to know the woman who holds my heart.

“Hey!” Jameson yells. I jerk back to myself and glare at him.

“What the hell, man!”

“We’ve been talking to you for the last couple of minutes, trying to pull you out of whatever has your attention. Are you okay? Do you need us to drive you home?”

“What! I’m not a child. I can drive myself.”

“Humph!” he snorts. “You can’t even carry on a decent conversation.”

“I’m not in the mood to chat.”

Fern trades glances with Jameson. Then she comes to me, patting my arm. “Really, Max. We just want to know if you’re okay. You seem a little out of it.”

Staring down into Fern’s sympathetic eyes, I groan. “I met the woman I’m going to marry. That’s all. And I’m not sure but I think she kinda hates me right now. Maybe because I was acting like a judgmental dick. It’s not me. I don’t know why I was acting like that.”

Fern’s lush mouth turns down. “Oh my gosh. I knew it! I knew she was perfect for you.”

“Why do you look like you’re sucking on lemons then?”

“Because...Aster is nothing like what you thought and she’s dealing with a lot of pressure right now. You kinda started off on the wrong foot with her and I’m afraid that it’s gonna be hard to win her over.”

“Yeah. I had a feeling.” I whirl and pace around the oversized studio. “Maybe you could tell me some stuff about her. Give me a clue what I’m working against.”

“I can’t do that. If you want to get to know her, you’re gonna have to do it on her terms. All I’ll tell you is that she’s got a lot of stuff in her past that drives how she reacts to things. So step carefully.”

Nodding, I reach over and hug her, chuckling when my brother growls at me. I stare at him over her dark head. “Gimme a break. I’ve got my own girl I need to win. I’m not interested in Fern.”

He pulls her out of my arms and both of us laugh at his grouchy face. “And I trust both of you. But still....don’t touch

her.”

Fern rolls her dark eyes, patting his arm. “You’re just a big teddy bear. Stop trying to be all alpha.”

He leans over and unfortunately for me, I hear what he says. “I’ll show you alpha as soon as we get home.”

“Ugh! Please. Go home and never say shit like that in front of me again.”

Fern giggles but Jameson picks her up and throws her over his shoulder, stomping out of the room. “That’s it! I’m done. See ya later, brother!”

“Right. Yeah. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

I grab the address for the cabin off my phone and head out to my truck, plugging it into my GPS. I know this mountain like the back of my hand but that doesn’t mean I’ve seen all of the newer cabins.

The drive is relatively quick in my big truck but I’ve still got time to think about the woman I’m looking for.

Aster. I don’t even know her last name. Surely, I’m not in love with a woman who is so different from any woman I’ve ever met. I don’t even know her favorite flavor of ice cream. Don’t know if she’s a vegan like half those women out in California.

I know better than to ask her that one, though. California doesn’t seem to make her happy. Which is great for me. It shouldn’t take too much to convince her to stay.

My head is a mess. I want to get to know her. I feel like I need her. My body is electrified.

Her dark blue eyes. Lord, I’ve never seen eyes that color. Like rich sapphires. The deepest blue. Sprinkled with little sparks of gold.

“Get yourself together, man.”

I pull up to the cabin and study it, grabbing my clipboard. My eyes narrow while I take inventory. The roof looks good and solid. The chimney might need a little rehab. It looks to be

leaning a bit. The log cabin exterior is solid. No work there. But the trees are too close to the house and they're gonna have to be cut back.

I stomp onto the porch and knock on the door, waiting. Finally, the door swings open and all my idiotic thoughts slam to a halt.

My heart dances a jig in my chest. I reach up a hand and rub it.

Her lips part and those deep blue eyes widen, her smoky eyelashes fluttering like butterfly wings.

I glance down and her curves are poured into a pair of blue jeans that frame every single inch like I want to do with my hands. Wide hips, thick thighs and a trim waist that melts into full breasts that beg for my hands. She gasps and I see her straighten, her back like a ramrod.

“Can I help you? I was just getting settled for the night.”

“You can't stay here,” I blurt out.

“I damn sure can. I paid for the place.” Her full pink lips tighten and then her tongue darts out to lick her lips and my mind drifts. I want to feel that tongue on my skin. Want her mouth wrapped around my dick.

“No, you can't. We haven't done the inspection on this place yet. It might not be habitable. We haven't checked the fireplace, the heating. Looked for raccoons in the rafters. Who the hell knows? This place has been empty forever.”

“Raccoons? Really?” Her eyes dart up to the ceiling and I cross my fingers behind my back. I can't have her here while I'm trying to work. I might accidentally kill myself. Or wander off to check on her and walk into her coming out of the bathroom naked.

Jesus! My cock stiffens until I can feel the metal teeth of the zipper digging into it painfully. I grit my teeth.

“I'll take you to Fern's. You can stay there.”

I turn and she grabs my arm. Both of us still and stare at where her pale hand is wrapped around my red flannel. Her

eyes widen and she lets go one finger at a time.

“I’m sorry. But you’re not listening to me. I’m not going anywhere. This is my new home.”

“It’s not fucking safe,” I growl. For both of us.

“It’s safe enough. I’m sick and tired of people telling me what’s good for me and what I should do. This is my life and I’m gonna do what I want to for once. So if all you want is to convince me to leave, you might as well just turn around and drive back down that mountain. I’m not going anywhere.”

She crosses her arms over her chest and my brain short-circuits when I see her plump breasts pushed up on the shelf of her arms.

“Fuck!” I groan.

“And you can stop cursing at me. I don’t appreciate it, mister!” Her slim finger pokes me in the chest. I grab her finger and once again, it’s like we’re alone in a miasma of swirling need and hunger.

“Let go of me,” she whispers, tugging at her hand.

But I don’t. Instead I pull her closer. “You know, woman. I swear you’re a fucking menace.” I breathe in her scent, my other hand coming up to cup her cheek, my finger slipping into the soft fall of her hair.

Her lips part and it’s like a chorus of angels fires up behind me. My mouth slams down on hers, catching her moan and matching it with mine. Her hand curls in mine and she stops struggling. Her tongue darts out and dances with my own in a tangling duel for supremacy. But there is no winner, no loser.

My hands slip around her cheeks and I cup her face gently, my lips slowing to a soft, sensual slide. I want this woman. Her taste is tattooed on me. So sweet. So damn sweet.

She jerks back, her fingers coming up to cover her swollen mouth. She shakes her head. “You shouldn’t have done that.”

I run my hands through my hair and groan. “I know. Dammit. I know. But I don’t fucking regret it. Not one fucking bit. I know you think I’m a dick because of how I talked about

you earlier...but there's something going on here. Something big and crazy. And I can't stop it."

She whirls and stomps away. "Well, try. I'm not interested in you. I don't need any man, dammit! I'm not okay with someone telling me what to do all the time."

"I don't want to do that."

She snorts and turns back to glare at me, her sharp eyes flashing with blue fire. "Are you kidding me? That's all you've done so far!"

I hold up my hands. "I know. And I'm sorry. I shouldn't do that. But I just want what's best for you. I want you safe."

Tears spring up in her sparkling eyes and they spill over. My heart jerks and I swear I want to kick my own ass for making her cry.

"You think I haven't heard that before. *I want what's best for you, dear! This movie will make your career! I know you're tired but you have to keep pushing. I know you don't want to go out with that guy but the studio thinks it will be good for both your careers to be seen together. Just for awhile.*" Her voice breaks. "I don't want to hear it anymore. I'm done."

"What fucking guy did you go out with?" Rage wells up in me. Who is this guy? I should break his face. Did he touch her? I'm gonna rip his arms off.

"That's what you focus on?" She laughs.

That's the only thing that matters. The rest of it, I understand. She's used to people controlling every aspect of her life and she wants to live. Wants to spread her wings and fly. I want that too. As long as she doesn't fly away from me.

ASTER



The big guy grunts as he checks the fireplace. He sits back on his haunches and I try not to notice how it pulls his jeans across his thighs. His very thick thighs.

I can see the outline of his dick in his jeans and he's fucking huge. My mouth waters and I stand up and move away.

Get a grip! He's your contractor. Not your boyfriend. You don't need to know what he's packing.

It's pretty obvious though, in those tight jeans.

I backpedal even more when he stands up and cleans out the grate of the fireplace. Then he sets it up and pulls out a match. He leans over and his jeans stretch across his ass. The guy is solid muscle.

"How old are you?" I ask. It slips out and I want to slap my face. I don't need to know how old he is. We're not dating and we never will be.

"I'm 24." His eyebrow quirks up and he smirks. "What about you, princess?"

"I'm not a princess," I grumble. "And I'm 26. So I'm older than you."

"That's okay. I like mature women."

My forehead crinkles. "You don't know much about women, do you? I guess it's good that you like 'mature' women since you're so very immature."

He guffaws loudly. “I guess I deserved that, spitfire. I know enough not to say anything about a woman’s age. I just meant that the fact that you’re older than me doesn’t bother me.”

“Good to know. But it doesn’t matter. I’m not here for a hook-up. Or for forever. I’m here to get a little peace and quiet. That’s all,” I stress the words.

“I can wait until you’re ready.”

Glaring at him, I growl. “You are worse than a dog with a bone.”

“A very beautiful bone.” His eyes take the tour down my body again and that treacherous burn slides along my nerve endings. Why does this man affect me this way? He’s not my type. I’ve always dated suave men that know the way my world works. We keep each other company for awhile and then we move on. On to the next movie, on to the next conquest.

The fire starts to burn merrily and he nods. “Well, your fireplace is good. Still might want to have it cleaned. I’ll take care of setting that up for you. It’s still cold up here so you’re gonna need it. The house has baseboard heating in the bedrooms but it can get pricey so they didn’t put it in the main part of the cabin. So you’ll need to run that and the fireplace when it’s cold or you’ll freeze your ass off.”

I eye the old-fashioned thing in the corner. I’ve never seen one of them before. “Can you show me how to use that thing?”

“Of course.” He runs through the same steps that he did with the fireplace adding a few steps.

I nod when he’s done. “Fine. I’ve got it.”

“You know it would be best if you stayed with Fern for awhile.”

“No. I get that you’re concerned for some damn reason but this is my home now. And I need to start living my life for me. I want this.”

“Fine. But I’ll check out a few more things and then I want you to lock the door and don’t open it for anybody. And if you hear something outside, don’t go out there.”

“You’re afraid it might be a prowler? Out here?” I didn’t expect that.

“No. I’m afraid it might be a bear. Or maybe a mountain lion.”

My heart drops and I squeak out a sound that makes him laugh. “Are you serious?”

“This is the mountains, honey. The predators out here are on four legs not two. Just keep that door shut once I leave. And lock it behind me. I’m gonna give you my cell phone number and you can call me at any time if you get scared or you think there’s a problem. With anything.”

I nod my head, too stunned to argue with him for once. Wild animals. I never considered that at all. I huff under my breath. I’m an idiot.

I stalk over to the window and stare out at the darkness that’s already overtaken my cabin.

“Are you going to be okay driving down that trail?” I ask him, worried.

He smirks at me. That wicked curve to his full lips makes my belly turn again. Being near him is like riding a roller coaster. Ups and downs that turn my hair and keep bringing me to my knees.

“Worried about me, baby girl?”

“No, I’m not. And I’m older than you. You can’t call me that.”

“Doesn’t matter. It’s not an age thing.”

“I’m more mature than you too,” I argue. I know what he’s saying but I’m not admitting it.

He stalks closer and there’s a look in his eyes I don’t trust. I like it but I don’t trust it.

I back away until I hit the wall. His hands come up alongside my head, effectively caging me in. I can smell him and my head reels. The scent of him is overwhelming. Pine, leather, sweat and something that I just know I'll never be able to name. It's uniquely him.

My eyes drift up, my eyelids heavy with the need to close. To just feel him. To let him feel me.

“You are my baby girl. You can fight it. But I'll win you over. You think that I want to control you and you're right about that.”

I start to open my mouth but he lifts a finger and closes my mouth. Heat coils in my belly and flares out to my legs, making them heavy and hard to move.

“I don't want to control you in the way you think, though. I just want to make sure that you're safe. That's why I'm gonna finish checking this place out and then I'm gonna walk out that damn door even though it's the last thing I want to do. It's gonna kill me.”

“But you need this. You need to know that I'm only here to keep you safe. I'm not gonna clip your wings. I want you to fly. I just want to be the safety net that keeps you from falling to the ground and hurting yourself.”

He presses closer and I feel the iron bar of his cock against my belly. I gasp in a breath and fight the urge to reach up and touch him. To see if his dark hair is as soft as it looks. To feel his soft lips against mine again.

I desperately want to wrap my legs around his waist and feel him moving inside me.

He groans and his eyes darken, a fury of desire heating them. He leans over and runs his nose along the side of my throat, his teeth scraping, making me jump and lean closer. My head falls back to the wall and I arch into him, feeling all those hard muscles and ridges melding with my soft curves like they're made for each other.

I yelp when he drags his teeth harder, then sucks and nibbles until I'm shaking, my legs giving out.

Then he steps back and I open my eyes slowly, drugged with lust. He groans and steps even further away.

“Jesus! You’re killing me, baby girl. If you keep looking at me like that, I’m gonna rip those clothes off and fuck you against this wall. And you deserve so much more than that.”

It sounds fucking amazing though. He’s so rugged and wild. I can’t help but imagine how he’d make love. He’d own me. I mean...he’d own the woman he was with. Who is not me.

He says all the right words but I’ve heard them before. Can I trust that he means what he says? He wants me. But he doesn’t want to take over.

That’s too much to hope for from any man. Hell, I can’t even find that with my agent or my mother.

“You’re not quite ready for what’s happening here, baby girl. But when you are...I’ll be here for you. No matter how long I have to wait.”

Then he stalks off and out of my sight. And for the first time in my life, I miss someone. So much it fucking hurts.

Which is stupid because he’s still in the same house. He’s still here. But it feels like there’s something between us and that’s the part that hurts.

MAX



The next morning I slam my hand down on my alarm and grab a quick shower, picking out my favorite green flannel that some ladies have said brings out the green in my brown eyes.

I pull a face. Then I throw it aside. I can't wear that. I need something new. Something no other woman has seen me in. Aster deserves to get all of me. Not the pieces that belong to my past. She deserves the new me. The guy who's devoted to her. That wants to make sure she has everything her little heart desires. Especially me.

She doesn't want to want me. She keeps pushing me away. But I see it in her eyes. It's only lust and desire right now. But it's something to start with. An emotion to build on.

A place to start.

It only takes me ten minutes to head out the door, my heart kicking wildly in my chest when I think of seeing her.

What does she look like first thing in the morning? Does she wear cute pajamas or a big t-shirt? Is her skin caressed by silk or flannel?

My mouth waters and I drag my hand across it, cursing my own lack of control.

I need to watch what I do.

I drive to my brother's and pull in behind their vehicles. Nobody seems to be moving and I groan. I look at the dashboard and realize it's only six o' clock. Too early. Right?

But I shove it aside and step out, stalking up the path to bang on the door. Nothing. I pound again and this time I hear shuffling steps coming to the door. Then I hear a curse on the other side of the door.

“Have you lost your mind?” The door swings open quickly and I’m faced with my furious, half-naked brother. “Why are you here at this ungodly hour of the morning?”

“I need to talk to Fern.”

“I ought to pound you into dust. Asshole. Come back later. Better yet call.”

Fern steps up behind him. “Max? What’s up? Are you alright? What do you need?”

Jameson grumbles and opens the door. “Fine. Now that you woke us up...come on in.”

I step through quickly and then plant myself on the wall, my hands in my pockets.

“I’m sorry to bug you so early but I wanted to stop and get Aster some breakfast. But I don’t know what she likes.”

Jameson’s mouth drops open and his scruffy cheeks flush. “Are you fucking kidding me? You want to know her breakfast preferences.”

He stalks closer and Fern darts between us, her hand on his bare chest, curling into his chest hair. It’s almost too much to watch. Too personal.

“Now, Jameson. Why don’t you go get some coffee going? I’ve got this.”

He glares at me one last time and then stalks away. I can still hear him grumbling under his breath although I can’t tell what he’s saying.

She shakes her head and then turns to me. “You are a mess, Max. Aster likes bear claws. And cinnamon rolls. And plain black coffee with two sugars.”

Nodding my head, I memorize what she says.

“Got it.”

She opens the door and shoves me out. “Now, you better run while you can. You should know that your brother is not a morning person.”

“Oh yeah. I forgot.”

“Uh-huh. I’ll try to sweeten him up so he doesn’t hunt you down and kill you. *Call* me if you need anything else.” She slams the door behind me and I groan. At this rate, I’m gonna be a dead man before I win my Aster.

I stop at the bakery and then drive up the mountain, my eyes still blurry from sleep, sipping on my own black coffee.

I pull in and turn to grab the bag and coffees. The house and surrounding woods is silent and just barely turning golden with the dawn.

I knock on the door and wait. But after two minutes, there’s nothing. So I knock again and wait. Nothing.

After the third time, it feels like my heart is strangling me. I pull out the spare key and unlock the door, pushing the misgivings aside.

She couldn’t miss my knocks. There’s something wrong. Maybe she slipped and fell after I left. Maybe she fell asleep in the tub before bed.

Dropping the bag and coffee on the table, I jog up the stairs. The master bedroom door slams into the wall and the woman wearing a sleep mask in the bed screams and sits up, the sheets falling down to her waist.

My mouth goes dry and I can’t look away. I’ve got one of my answers. She sleeps naked. Her breasts are perfect globes tipped with rosy nipples that are diamond-hard in the cool air of the morning.

She rips the mask off and screams at me. “Have you lost your mind? Get the hell out, Max!” Then she yanks the sheets up and glares at me.

“I-I’m sorry. I thought maybe something happened to you. I knocked three times and you didn’t answer so I was worried.”

Her head whips around, topped with wildly tousled dark hair that floats around her shoulders. She finds the alarm clock beside the bed and throws it at my head.

I duck and slam the door shut. “I’ll just be out here. I’m really sorry, Aster.”

But I’m lying. I’m not fucking sorry at all. I saw her beautiful breasts. Saw her barely awake.

Saw her in all her morning glory and it’s every damn fantasy I’ve ever had.

I jog down the steps, a smile tilting my lips. There’s a word whispering through my head right now. Only one word and I never thought I’d think it. Hear that call to my heart and head.

I grab my coffee and a bear claw, shoving it in my mouth. *Mine*. That sweet, beautiful, cautious woman upstairs is mine. Right now, she’s probably cursing me under her breath and she’s embarrassed as hell but she’s got nothing to be ashamed of. Her smooth, pale skin is flawless. Her long hair looks just-fucked and makes my dick hard as a damn rock.

Her sleepy, angry eyes flashing blue flames at me? That’s a wet dream come true. That and her incredible breasts that are round and full and perfect for my hands.

“What the hell are you doing here so early, Max!” She stomps down the stairs, her cheeks pink with her emotions.

“I brought you breakfast. I figured we’d get an early start on planning so that I can get a crew out here this week. You want your home done as quick as you can, right?”

She nods and I see her blue eyes light up when they land on the bear claw in my mouth. I grab a second out of the bag and hold it out to her silently.

She grabs it and takes a big bite, a moan breaking free from her soft lips. Her eyes close and she moans with another bite.

My dick is throbbing wildly. Thumping, throbbing and jerking behind my zipper. It needs to be inside her. Needs to

feel her under me, around me, over me. My body needs her like it needs air to breathe.

But I shove all that shit down and take another bite of my bear claw before I scare the shit out of her. She's wearing another tight pair of jeans and a soft, midnight blue sweater that brings out the color of her magnificent eyes.

"You look beautiful," I say, unable to resist telling her that.

She rolls her eyes. "Please. It's just clothes."

I stalk over to her and lift her fingers to my mouth, sucking on them lightly. She tastes like pastry and sugar and delectable skin. Her soft gasp makes me smile.

"It's not just clothes." My eyes drift down her curves. "You look even better with no clothes on."

She growls and pulls away. "You have no manners, Max."

"Because I tell the truth? I won't sugarcoat things for you or anybody else. I told you that I'm gonna have you. You're mine. Every beautiful, curvy inch of you. Nothing you do or say is going to change my mind. I'll be around until you realize the truth. We're meant to be. Not for a month or two. Forever. I know I shouldn't say that. That I'll probably scare the hell out of you. But it's the fucking truth and I'm not gonna lie to you."

Then he turns and pulls out a clipboard and takes another bite out of the bear claw he dropped to the counter.

"Now. Let's go over some plans. I want this place to be perfect for you."

And that's the god's honest truth. This is going to be her dream home and one day soon, I'll be living here with my angel.

ASTER



“*T*hat man is crazy! He’s at my door every day with some new gift for me. Just a little something that he thought I’d like. Pfft!” I stalk around Fern’s office, unable to sit still. “Between him and my mother I’m going out of my mind.”

“What about your mother?” Fern asks, setting down her pen and leaning back in her cushy desk chair.

“She’s calling me every day, trying to convince me to come back for that damn movie. I don’t want to be in that movie! The stupid thing isn’t something I’d even watch. And it’s got nudity. You know I’ve never been okay with nudity.”

“I do know that.” She shakes her head. “So just tell her that you’re not interested.”

“I have done that,” I wail. “Many fucking times. But she just won’t listen. I swear I’m done with that life. I don’t know what I want to do with myself but it’s not movies anymore. She just doesn’t get it.”

“All you can do is keep telling her that. And as for Max... why don’t you go out with him? It’s been a month and he hasn’t given up. That means something.”

“It means he wants a conquest,” I huff.

“Oh, Aster. Max isn’t like that. I won’t say that he’s never been with a woman. But he has never chased one like he’s chasing you.”

“I know that you’ve never really dated except for the two guys you went out with that the studio fixed you up with. I know that you think there’s always some kind of alternative reason that someone would want to be with you. But I don’t think that’s the case. I’ve talked with Max. He’s really into you. A lot. Just give him a chance. I wouldn’t let anyone use you. You know I’ve got your back.”

I sigh and slump into the chair. “I’m scared, Fern,” I whisper. “I think I really like him. Which means I think he can really hurt me. And that scares the hell out of me.”

Fern stands up and comes around to hug me. “I’m gonna tell you something and I want you to listen good. I don’t think that Max will hurt you. I think it’s more likely that you can hurt him. I trust you not to though. Because I know the two of you and I had plans to fix you up with Max. I knew that you would be perfect for each other. Give yourself a chance. Go out with Max.”

“Fine.” I sigh into her shoulder. “I’ll go out with him. But if this doesn’t go well, I’m gonna smack you.”

She laughs and hugs me harder. “I promise it will go fine. But if it doesn’t, I’ll give you one good shot.”

“That’s all I can ask for.” I stand up, sigh and stretch my arms out. “I better get going. They’re finishing up the house today and handing it over to me.”

“Yay! Housewarming soon?”

“You know it!”

“Alright. Enjoy your new house. I can’t wait to see it.” She smirks. “Tell Max I said hello.”

Glaring at her, I stalk to the door. “Don’t push it, girlfriend.”

She throws back her dark head and roars with laughter. “I would never.”

“I’ll talk to you later. Love ya!”

“Love you, too! I’m so happy you’re here. And I can’t wait to be your sister-in-law.”

“Ugh! Behave. I’ll see you later.”

I walk out to my new jeep. I didn’t want a truck but Fern soon talked me into getting a four-wheel drive jeep.

I slide in and head back to my house. When I pull in, I’m just in time to see most of the crew saying good-bye to Max. Finn is the last one to go and I see him eyeing me and talking to Max. Max smacks him on the back and pushes him away.

“Get out of here, dude.”

Finn smiles as he walks by me and I swear I hear Max growling under his breath. My head pops up and I stare at him.

“Max?” I ask.

He runs his big hands through his dark hair. “It’s fine, princess. You ready to get your place back?”

Nodding, I chuckle. “I’m not sure what I’m going to do without a houseful of big, hunky guys.”

He stalks after me and backs me into the wall of the cabin. I can feel the chill from the logs on my backside and shiver.

“Max?” I whisper.

“Damn, you’re killing me. I’ve tried being good, Aster, but I’m really struggling. I need you.”

There’s a little kick in my belly at the hoarse, raspy need in his deep voice. It washes over me and sizzles along my nerves like lightning in a bottle.

He sounds like he’s in pain and it matches the hunger that I’m feeling.

“I came home to tell you that I’ll go out with you,” I blurt out.

He backs away, stunned. “You’re kidding me?”

“No.” I shake my head. “I’m serious. I just hope this isn’t some kind of trick on your part, Max. Because I’m not feeling very sure of myself yet and you could really hurt me.”

He leans over and kisses me, laughing wildly. “I’m dead serious, baby girl.” He practically throws my spare keys at me.

“I’ve got to go home and get ready,” he says, whirling on his feet and then turning back to hug me until I squeak. “I am so fucking happy, Aster. I promise you won’t regret this. I’m gonna go home and I’ll be back in two hours to pick you up.”

“It doesn’t have to be tonight,” I gasp.

He wags his finger in my face. “Not gonna give you time to change your mind, little one. I’ll be back.”

One more quick peck on my lips and he darts to his truck like an over-eager puppy.

I stand there like I’m locked in quicksand, shocked off my ass. I’ve never seen a man so happy in my life. I just hope I don’t live to regret this and somehow we manage to crush each other under the weight of our own expectations.

MAX



I slam the truck into park in her driveway and grip the steering wheel, trying to slow down my racing heart.

Then I see Aster step out of her door and lock it behind her and my tongue feels like it doubles in my mouth. I can't breathe. Can't talk. She's fucking gorgeous.

She's wearing a deep red dress that brings out the auburn highlights in her long hair. Her lips are painted a deep, crimson red. The dress clings to her curves like a lover's hand. Her dainty feet are encased in strappy nude sandals that make her legs look miles long.

I step out of my truck and reach out a hand to her which she takes. I reel her in and tuck her head under my chin, holding her like the precious flower she is.

"You look stunning, baby girl. I don't think I've ever seen a more beautiful woman than you."

She flushes as she pulls back. "You don't have to say stuff like that to me. I know that I need to lose a few pounds to be back to my fighting weight for the movies. I'm sure it's unhealthy to have gained this much weight."

I shake my head. "Don't ever say something like that again. You are a vision." My eyes roll down her body, taking in the lush curves and the dip in her waist, accented by the red belt on her dress. "You're perfect just the way you are and nobody should ever tell you that you're not."

She nods her sleek head and smiles at me. "I don't know what to make of you sometimes, Max. You're sweet one

minute and fucking sexy as hell the next. You act like I'm a precious doll and then you turn around and admit that you want to fuck me in the next breath. It's a little unnerving."

I help her into the truck and settle her in the seat, pulling the seatbelt across her ample chest, mentally chastising myself when my fingers linger.

"Don't you think that every woman deserves both? To be treated like the diamond you are and also like a sexy, beautiful woman in bed. One that drives a man to his knees but yet makes him want it so bad that he's willing to walk over hot coals for just a touch from your little hands?"

She stares at me and I can see her gulp. "I've never thought of it that way."

"I know. But that's how I feel about you."

He starts the truck but I hold up my hand and cover his on the gear shift. He glances at me with a questioning lift of his brow and I almost change my mind. Almost.

"I don't want to go out to eat, Max."

Disappointment shadows his lean cheeks and he sighs, turning the truck off. Then he turns to me. "Was it something I said? Did I scare you away?"

She shakes her head. "No. I want something else. Not food."

Then she reaches across and tugs me over. I can feel her breath touch my lips and then she kisses me. It's soft and sweet and shy.

Her full lips cling to mine and then move, just a slight little move. Her lips part and she moans into my mouth and it's like all hell breaks loose in my head and my heart.

"Please, Max. I want to know what it's like to be with a man who wants me as much as you do. A man who's dying for just one touch, one taste."

"Are you sure?" I ask her again. "I need to know for sure. We've been together almost every day for a month but if you feel like you need more time, I'm okay with that."

“I don’t. Come inside with me and make love to me.”

I nod and take one more sip from her lips. “Alright. But at any time if you change your mind, just tell me. It will be damn hard, but I will always respect your wishes.”

“I think that’s one of the things I love about you the most.”

My head whips back. “You love me?”

“I-I don’t know that yet. But there are definitely things I love about you.”

His lips curve up in a satisfied smile. “That’s good then since there are a helluva lot of things I love about you too. Like everything.”

She pushes the truck door open and hops down. “I doubt that. I’ve got a temper and a smart mouth.”

“I like your temper. It’s hot. And the smart mouth just makes me wanna paddle your ass. But in a good way!” He laughs and I groan.

“You are so damn bad, Max. Don’t make me wait anymore. I need you.”

I hop out of the truck and run around to throw her over my shoulder. She yelps and her head hits the middle of my back.

“Max! What the hell! Put me down! You’ll hurt yourself.”

“Nope. I’m good and you are light as a feather, princess.”

He grabs the key and slams through the door and then sprints up the stairs. Before I can catch my breath, I’m falling to the bed, my hair flying into my face so that I can’t see him.

“Oof!” I push my hair out of my eyes just in time to see him yanking at his shirt after toeing his boots off. Clothing flies off around us and then he’s standing there naked and my jaw drops. Miles of tanned, toned, muscular skin gleams like copper in the harsh bedroom light. He’s got a tattoo of a moon and stars on his right pectoral and my eyes widen. I reach up a hand and touch his chest. He takes a deep breath and shivers when my fingers touch him.

“Don’t stop,” he whispers.

“I won’t. I’m just stunned. I mean...you’re the most perfect man I’ve ever seen. Your body fat must be almost zero.”

I laugh at her and then crawl up her body. “Trust me. I’m just a normal man who really wants a woman.” My eyes drift down and it feels like I’ve swallowed my tongue. He’s rock solid and ready. His cock is even perfect. Thick and veiny and smooth as velvet. The mushroom head of his cock is dripping wet and he groans when I reach out to touch him.

“Damn, baby girl. Warn a guy before you do something like that. I almost had a heart attack. It feels too damn good.”

Another smile tilts her lips, this one full of her own feminine power. “I like that you want me that much, Max.”

“I want you way more than that.” I pull her to the edge of the bed and stand up, pulling her up. “Strip,” I order, watching her cheeks flush pink and her eyes dance.

But she obeys me. She reaches to a little clasp at the waist and begins to peel the wraparound dress open. My breath catches. It’s like Christmas morning, watching her reveal her curves.

Then she drops the fabric to the bed and I realize she’s not wearing a bra under the dress. Just a red lace thong that barely covers the lushness of her hips. I groan and turn her around, my eyes caressing the round globes of her cheeks. I reach down and slap her right cheek playfully, enchanted by the bounce and the pink imprint of my palm on her pale skin.

She gasps and her head whips around, but she doesn’t tell me to stop. Instead she pushes her ass back into my hand, silently begging for more.

“Oh, baby girl. You really are the most perfect thing I’ve ever seen.”

I push her back to the bed and she falls, her thighs attempting to close.

I shake my head and push my body between her long legs. “You don’t get to hide from me. I want to see every last bit of

you. You can start by opening those pretty legs and showing me that pussy.”

Her eyes darken and the pupils dilate until only a sliver of midnight blue is left. She shivers but her legs open and I get my first look at her little kitty.

Barely covered by fire-engine red lace that’s soaked with arousal. My mouth waters and I lean in to run my tongue along the seam of her thong, smelling her arousal and feeling it wrap around me like a damn drug.

Rich and sweet and so damn perfect. My mouth drifts down and my fingers push the lace aside. She’s bare and dripping with her honey, glistening like a diamond under spotlights. I can’t resist and my mouth suction onto her weeping lower lips, drinking in the sweet nectar that’s coating her thighs and pussy lips.

She arches her back and groans, her hands dropping to my head and wrapping tight in my hair, jerking at the strands. The sting feels so good, little sparks of electricity firing up in my scalp, tingling like I’ve been electrocuted.

“Max,” she growls. It’s primal, sexy and wild. That voice is nothing like anything I’ve ever heard before.

My tongue darts inside her weeping hole and licks up every last drop of her sweetness. Her hips try to bounce up into my face but I push her down, keeping her right where I want her as I eat her out, devouring her essence like a man who hasn’t had a drink for a month.

She moans and thrashes wildly, her fingers tearing at my shoulders and my chest, raking her nails into my skin.

I don’t stop. I want it all. I want to drive her wild, want her screaming my name. I can feel tiny pulses on my tongue and I redouble my efforts until she’s sobbing, begging and pleading.

“Max, please, please. Stop! Don’t stop! Oh god, I’m coming!” She screams it all at the top of her lungs as her whole body spasms jerkily. Her muscles lock and she wails out her release.

Licking and sucking, I drink all of it down, not wanting to waste a precious drop.

My tongue rasps over her sensitive skin until she stiffens again and another spasm jerks at her body.

“Yes, yes, yes!” She cries out.

I jerk her up the bed and then line my aching cock up with her glistening slit. With one quick, hungry thrust I’m buried inside her body, her pulsing drawing me deeper inside.

“You’re so fucking hot and tight. Oh my god, I don’t think I’m gonna last long.”

ASTER



*M*y breath whooshes out when he thrusts inside me. I'm still seeing stars when he starts to bang into me quickly. It feels like the most delicious pressure is building in my belly and spreading fire out into every piece of my body. My fingers tingle and my toes curl. It's the most exquisite torture I've ever felt.

In and out, he pounds me. So hard and fast that the air is literally forced out of my lungs every time he enters me, driving all the way up to the root.

Over and over again, he thrusts and twists his hips until that glowing, pulsating feeling starts to overwhelm me again.

One more deep thrust and he twists his lean hips, hitting a spot that makes me scream and thrash under him.

My release washes over me with the power of a massive cyclone taking me and throwing me around the room until nothing feels like it's real anymore. Nothing but the way he makes me feel.

I can feel his thick rod swelling inside me, thickening until he can barely move. But he pushes my legs back and continues to drive into me harder and faster and then his big body stiffens over top of me and I feel his cock jerking. His seed splashes inside me and my body erupts in another round of shivering ecstasy.

He drops to the bed beside me but I don't even have the energy to open my eyes when his softening cock slips out of me and I feel his seed dripping onto the sheets.

I hear him get up and he's murmuring to me as he wipes me off and I swear he tries to push his release back inside me but I can't open my eyes to care. A smile tilts my lips and I drift off to sleep, completely drained but yet more relaxed than I've ever been in my life.

I feel him climb in behind me and mold his body to mine and I push back into his hips, feeling his cock slip between my ass cheeks.

Then it's all gone and there's just black. And the best dreams I've ever had. A man who loves me and two children who look just like him with dark hair and eyes and quick smiles.

But it all comes crashing down around me when I'm jerked awake the next morning. "What the hell, Aster! Who is that man and what do you think you're doing?"

I shoot up, blinking the sleep from my eyes and pulling the sheet up over me.

"Mother! What the hell are you doing here and how did you get in?"

"I called at the old caretaker's house and got the spare key."

"You shouldn't have done that," I say, my voice gritty and harsh with sleep.

"Why the hell not? I can't have you ruining your life out here in the sticks. You need to get up and get dressed. I've got the private jet waiting for us and they're holding that movie that you agreed to do on you. They're waiting to start filming but you need to get a move on, lazy girl!"

She studies me closer. "Did you gain more weight? Well, we'll get rid of that quickly and they can just film around it until you look more yourself."

She throws the red dress from the floor at me. "Let's go, Aster! You can't keep the director waiting forever!"

"I didn't agree to do that movie. I specifically said that I was not doing it. So I'm not sure how they got the idea that I

was doing it but I'll call and let them know that that's not the case."

"I told them that you would do it. You were just on a little break. But it's time to go back to real life now."

I shake my head and push my tousled hair out of my eyes, looking over and not really surprised when I see Max's dark eyes are open and he's watching me. *Do you need help?* he mouths to me.

I shake my head again. "Well then you can call them and tell them I'm not doing it. I've retired, Mother. And as for the real world? That's what I'm living now. I'm sick and tired of fake, shallow people using me for their own gains. I want my own life on my own terms. That's not going to happen in California."

"You're just a little burnt out. You get this movie done and I'll let you take a vacation."

"That is not your decision anymore. I'm not sixteen and you can't make decisions for me. I'm an adult. And I'm through being your meal ticket. I've already changed all the accounts to my own name and made sure that anything that you and my agent were allowed to agree to for me, it's all gone. Neither of you have any hold over me anymore."

"Fancy words," she snorts. "I'm sure that's what comes from sleeping with some backwoods neanderthal, Aster Petrov. But this is how you make money. You can't just give it up."

"I can and I already have. I've fired my agent and I've dropped out of the guild. I am no longer an actor. I'm just me. Aster. The woman who's in love with the man beside me."

"Ugh! I'm going into town and I'll give you an hour to get to the diner before I leave."

"You might as well not wait. I'm not coming. I'm already home."

She stomps out and slams the door behind me.

Max sits up in bed and rolls me underneath him. I giggle at the fiery light in his eyes. “Did you mean it? You love me?”

I nod my head, my eyes glistening with tears. The love I feel for him overwhelms me. “I do. I never thought I’d fall in love with a man like you, rough and rugged and sexy as hell. But you’re it for me. I’m never leaving you again. This can be our home. Unless you want to live somewhere else?” I ask, my belly fluttering with nerves.

“No. I don’t want to live anywhere else. I want to live with you. Where doesn’t matter. But I put my heart and soul into this place because I could see us raising our future kids here. Living as a family and raising our own little happy brood.”

I smile up at him, my heart in my eyes. His own glow with happiness and maybe just one unshed tear.

“I love you, Aster. I want to marry you as soon as humanly possible. I want to make love to you every night until I fill this pretty belly with our baby. I want it all with you and only you, sweetness.”

“I want that too, Max.” I pause, my eyes drifting down. “But there’s actually one thing that I’d like right now.

He grunts and then smirks. “And what would that be?” His cocky smile makes me grin.

“I would really love another one of those bear claws. I’ve been dreaming about them since you got me the last one.”

“I will buy you as many bear claws as you want. Later. Right now, I’m hungry for something else.”

He grinds against me and my mouth goes dry. “I think I might be good with whatever you’re having,” I whisper into his lips as they descend to cover mine.

He rakes his mouth over mine and before long, we’re lost, thrashing wildly among the sheets. I feel him thrust inside me and then his lips wrap around my nipple, nipping at it as he grinds inside me. Over and over we melt together until we stiffen as one, our souls flying into the ether of lovers.

“I love you, Max!” I scream as he takes me over the edge into ecstasy like I’ve never known before.

He falls down across my body and his lips caress my cheek gently. “I love you so much, baby girl. I promise you that no woman will ever be as loved as you. I’m gonna spend my life making you happy and keeping you safe while you spread your wings and fly.”

It’s all I’ve ever wanted. A man who loves me to distraction. A man who’s sexy as hell and gives me multiple orgasms until I pass out from pleasure.

A man devoted to only me and our family. Our lives.

A man like Max Wilde. My forever man.

EPILOGUE: ASTER



“*M*ax! Come on, we’re going to be late!”

“I’m coming. I still can’t believe Fern talked us into doing this interview,” he grumbles.

“It’s to promote the calendar. You need all the publicity you can get. And it’s only a local paper. So just answer a few questions, smile pretty and then we’ll come home and you can defile me any way you want to!” I laugh.

“Any way I want?” I can see the devilish glint in his eyes and I know tonight’s gonna be special.

I lean over and kiss his firm lips. “Absolutely. Now let’s go.”

When we walk in the door, it takes every bit of my control not to laugh at all the men standing around in various uncomfortable poses. But the worst of the bunch is Finn. His bright green eyes are dark with distress and he’s pacing in a corner, muttering to himself.

“I hope Finn is alright. I’ve never seen him so nervous.”

“Humph!” Max snorts. “None of us want to be here.”

“I know. But he looks like he’s about to run out the door.”

I’m just about to go over and see if I can calm him down when I see his shamrock green eyes dart to the doorway and he stands up straight, his eyes widening.

The blond in the doorway grimaces but then walks in with her head held high.

“Hello, everyone. I’m Candace Anderson. I’m just going to ask you guys some quick questions and then we’ll snap a few group photos and we’re done. Everyone good with that?”

Finn strides over and stands in front of her, his eyes locked on her until she glances up and up. She looks like a little terrier next to a Great Dane.

“It’s been a long time, Candy.”

She pales and then licks her lips and his eyes follow the movement, tracking it.

“Finn. I didn’t know you were going to be here.”

“Where have you been hiding yourself, Candy? Because I’ve been looking for you everywhere. You didn’t answer my calls or texts. We need to talk.”

“Not now, Finn. I’m working.”

“Now,” the usually good-natured man growls and then he drags the blond out of the room.

“What the hell was that?” I ask Max.

“I don’t know. But do you think we should go rescue her or something. He looked pissed.”

I shake my head. “He’s not going to hurt her. But I wish I could be a fly on the wall for that conversation!”

Max leans over and kisses me. “Don’t start matchmaking, sweetheart. We’re planning our own wedding.”

“I don’t think it’s gonna take much for those two. I could feel the heat from here.”

Max sighs and shakes his head. “Between you and Fern, you’re going to have the whole crew married by the end of the year.”

I grin at him. “Maybe. We’ll see how it goes.”

Shaking his head, he kisses me hard and fast. “Just don’t remember what you promised me when we get home.”

“I’ve got just the thing for it. It came in the mail today. And it’s red!”

He grins and dips me for a stage kiss with a loud smack on the ass to finish.

“Good. I can’t wait to see it.”

And later that night, he rips the red lace teddy off my body and then settles me on his dick, grinding up into me as I ride him to heaven. Both of us losing ourselves in the mindless pleasure as our bodies give way to our release. Joined together in a wild, all-consuming love that will last our whole lifetimes.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I'm a mother of three who works for a school district as a cafeteria aide but I've also had a lot of different hats over the years. Divorced single mom fresh out of the military working nights in a plastics factory all the way to teaching cardio kickboxing and zumba at the YMCA.

I am a crazy person that stacks too much on her plate and then does it all no matter what. Even if it drives everyone nuts! But that's just me. So if you meet me some day and I seem like I'm crazy...I absolutely am!

Find your crazy and live it! Love ya!



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