

Thanks To You



BESTSELLING AUTHORS
**CHASHIREE M.
& M.K. MOORE**

THANKS TO YOU

LOVE IS IN THE AIR

BOOK 1

CHASHIREE M

M.K. MOORE

BREEDING NATION PUBLISHING

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BLURB

Hope

I have always seen love everywhere, including in all the relationships I had, but they never worked, and I was always the one left heartbroken. Now, I don't want it. I just want to build my career and spend time with my friends and family. Then, I had a share a cab with the sexiest man I have ever met, and he makes me want things I thought I stopped wanting. And now, I am running. Form him, from what we share and from my own pleading heart. Of course, like every Hallmark movie I have ever seen, he follows me. Maybe this time, I will squeeze him and never let go.

Ayerton

I was all business. I worked overtime to make sure my client's dreams come true. I wasn't looking for forever until I found her. A chance encounter in a cab, and I'm hooked. She's quickly become my everything, but she runs away every time. Pinned down and cuffed, I make her mine in every way imaginable. She's the very best thing that has ever happened to me. Thanks to her, I'm a better man.

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CHAPTER 1

HOPE MALONE



SHIT, shit, shit, I chant as I hop around my apartment trying to zip my boot up. I'm half-dressed and brushing my teeth at the same time. It would be funny, but I'm so late for work. I should have been in at nine, but it's already nine-thirty. I'm never late, but I really didn't want to get out my warm bed this morning. I have to be on the floor at eleven and if I don't leave now, I won't make it all the way downtown. I drop my coffee cup into the sink and grab my briefcase, rushing out the door. I hail a cab and tell the driver where to go. I pull my phone out and answer a few emails, before checking the texts I got over night. Our group chat, the Super Squad Badass Bitches, blew up overnight. We are definitely dorks, but you know cool dorks. The kind of dorks you'd want to be friends with. We used to get into some shit, but man, did we have fun.

My best friends, Jinny Spruce, Scarlet Moonblood, Cheryl Bow, Rose Gillium, Candie Flicks, Summer Frost, and I all met in college. It's been a five years since we met at Freshman Orientation at the University of Maine. We then pledged and joined the same sorority, Upsilon Upsilon Chi Tau. We've all gone our separate ways in the year since we graduated, but we talk or text every single day. Scarlet and Jinny are going back in forth about the new superhero movie that features nudity. The chat is complete with gif's and memes and lots of peen. I fire off a quick reply as the cab pulls up in front of the building. I've worked here for eleven months and three days and in that time that feeling of awe and importance I felt that very first day hasn't gone away. Things happen here, and I get

to be a part of it. Things that affect the entire world. It's amazing.

I slide my badge to get in the door and make my way up to my tiny office where I drop my stuff off and rush over to the floor. People are gathering but my lateness won't be noticed, thank God. I move to my place at the back of the room with the other translators. I sit at my desk and get my headset ready, making sure it's plugged in. The lights overhead flash like when intermission is over on Broadway. It's a universal signal that we are about to begin. I put my headset on and listen to the private conversations of the Frenchmen I'm assigned to. I smile when they talk about the basketball game they went to last night at my suggestion. When they are here, I am very much a part of their lives, inside the building and out of it. They each remind me of my grandfathers in different ways. Every other word is cheerleader, so I know they had a good time. I smile. These guys are the life of the party, just like Grandpa Mike.

“Messieurs les délégués, veuillez prendre place. Nous allons commencer,” I interrupt, asking the delegates to take their seats. Did I mention that I love my job?

“Merci, Hope,” Henri Declan answers and I see the five Frenchmen begin to take their seats. I smile and take a deep breath. I worked so hard to get where I am. Eighteen years of French lessons, in school and out of it, French Literature, and Political Science degrees. I worked two jobs and got scholarships. I did it all myself. I wasn't a burden on anyone. It means more to me this way. My parents, Chris and Tasha, the best parents a girl could ask for. I couldn't bankrupt them for my dreams. I grew up in Brooklyn, in Sheepshead Bay. I made the move to Manhattan when I got this job, which I got right out of college. There is always a need for interpreters. Why French? When I was a little girl, I heard French being spoken in *Beauty and the Beast* and I fell in love with it. I begged my parents for lessons until they relented. Learning it was hard, but it was so worth it.

“Bonjour! Bienvenue au Sommet du G-15 sur la réforme nucléaire. Cette réunion durera quatre jours, suivie d'une fête

le quatrième soir. Passons aux choses sérieuses,” I repeat the Secretary General’s words in French for the French delegation. This is my job. This is what I went to school for, though this is just a steppingstone. The end goal is working for the federal government, maybe the State Department, but for now, there is nowhere else I’d rather be. The days run late all the time, which is why I was late this morning. I got two hours of sleep, a hot shower, and a half a cup of coffee. I wish I had taken two minutes to eat something, because who knows when they will break for lunch. A drink of water later, and we are off. I translate everything for my guys, including the questions they email me to ask on their behalf. The day goes by quickly and before I know the Secretary-General calls the day to a close. The dinner provided for delegates isn’t for me, so I grab my bags and head out to grab a bite to eat before heading home.

My phone rings and I answer it. “Hey Jinny, what’s up?”

“When are you going to come to see me?” she asks. She lives in Gatlinburg and is still in school. I am proud of her for going after what she wants.

“When I get a chance, girl. But soon,” I promise.

“I’m going to hold you to that, Hope. I miss you. I miss everyone.”

“We have to get together soon,” I tell her.

“Ooh, I’ll plan something,” Jinny says.

“Well, let me know. I’m about to walk into a restaurant,” I tell her, and we end the call. I can’t help noticing the long line of limos parked across the street from the sushi place but ignore them. Limos are a dime a dozen in the city. I’m used to eating alone because I have a problem. I fall in love with the wrong men all the time, but I fall out it just a quickly. It’s a problem because all I want is to be loved, really loved but I ruin that by falling too fast for straight up douche bags. I’ve promised myself that in the future, I’ll use more discretion when it comes to men. Pessimism in my new motto.

It has to be.

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CHAPTER 2

AYERTON LOTUS



I HATE SHIT LIKE THIS. My gaze sweeps the room and I see people smiling, bottles being popped, and champagne being poured like its water. Never mind the fact that I put this shindig together to welcome my new VP of Marketing. Hell, it was the least I could do. I was fucking lucky to steal him from Swanson and Lake investments.

I met Esteban Jimenez last year when he was just a grunt. A low-level investment baby, clawing his way to the top, being overlooked in a sea of nepotism. He had no idea he was hitching his wagon to the wrong horse. Hell, Jasper Swanson knows his son is a piece of shit and is going to run his business into the ground. That's the reason I was at the damn meeting where I first met Esteban. Jasper and his partner Joey Lake called me in under the pretense of trying to bridge the gap but what they really wanted was me to bail them out. Again. I have this uncanny ability to know talent and potential when I see it. So, on my way out I handed him a card and told him when he was done getting nowhere, to come and see me.

Six weeks ago, he showed up at my office, frustrated and fed up with his job. He brought his portfolio with him, showing me the growth he helped his clients get. To say I was impressed was an understatement. He took one client's retirement fund and doubled it in sixteen weeks with investments alone. That is brilliant. I asked him about his non-compete clause he told me something that fucking shocked me. They didn't make him sign one. I found this unbelievable. No company in this industry in their right mind would leave

that out. But then he told me JJ, Jasper's son, was the one who gave him his employee contract. Yeah. Makes sense now. Right then and there I stood, shook his hand, offered him a job and sent him to HR.

I called and gave his notice to Jasper. I listened to him stutter, wax on about how unprofessional it was to poach his employees. He then tried selling me on the non-compete. When I informed him he didn't sign one thanks to his son, I damn near laughed out loud at the way his voice changed. Dumb fuck.

Now here I am, throwing a welcome cocktail party, looking for a way to escape. I have never been one for crowds and loud places. "You look like you're ready to bolt." I turn and look at Val, my HR person. Of all the people here, she has been with me the longest and knows me the best.

"No shit," I grumble and turn back to the room.

"Then leave, A." I grimace at her when she calls by the nickname only she could get away with. At the mere suggestion of leaving my shoulders begin to relax. "You already did the speech, stayed longer than anyone expected and paid for all this. You are free to leave. Hell, most will be happy when you do because they will really let their hair down." I mentally shutter as my mind conjures the ways that will happen.

"If I go you have to stay and make sure nothing that happens turns into an HR nightmare tomorrow." She rolls her eyes at me and puts her hand on her hips.

"What do you take me for? Get out of here," she says before walking away to go babysit.

"Are you leaving?" Esteban asks as he walks towards me.

"Yeah. This is not my type of scene."

"I don't blame you. If I had a woman like Lexi Marsh at home waiting I wouldn't stay either." He chuckles and hits me on the back of my shoulder. I know this is how normal men talk to one another and 'bond' if you will, but I have never had

time for juvenile conversations like this. Especially when they are not true.

“There is no woman at home waiting. I don’t have time for relationships.” I tell him matter of factly. He looks a little taken aback, but then recovers. When I met him I saw an asshole inside of him and right now I am hoping I wasn’t wrong.

“My apologies, Mr. Lotus. I read it in Finance Guru and...”

“If it’s in a magazine it has to be true.” Not bothering to keep the annoyance from my voice, I turn to him. “In our line of work and with the amount of wealth you are about to amass, it would be prudent of you to be more discerning and wearier of everything and everyone.” His demeanor immediately changes, and it would appear I hit a nerve. Good. That chip I noticed on his shoulder will guard him and protect him like it has done me.

“Duly noted and trust me, I trust no one.” He spins on his soles and walks away. Sighing, happy I can finally leave, I hop on my private elevator and swipe my card so it will take me to the bottom floor. I am starting to regret letting my driver go home, but then again, a cab won’t kill. I might have to burn my clothes afterward and get in the shower for an hour to scrub the germs and who knows what off my body, but it won’t kill me.

I step outside and glance diagonally across the street at the U.N Building, wondering if my little sister is still there and a woman steps from the revolving door. I barely spare her a glance and look up as a cab starts driving this way. Holding out my hand, it stops, and I open the door, distracted as my phone begins to ping with a message from my mother.

I open the door and slide in. “Hey. Excuse me. This is my cab.” It’s then, as the voice penetrates the fog of texting, that the introduction of body heat that is not mine makes me look up.

“Fuck,” slips from my mouth before I can stop it.

“Are you just going to stare or are you going to get out?” Jesus, this woman is gorgeous. I use the term lightly, guessing she has to be between eighteen and twenty-two. Her caramel skin, glowing under the light filtering in from the street. Her eyes. Those big brown doe eyes currently shooting laser beams at me are beautiful. But her mouth. Christ those plump, collagen looking lips are begging for my cock to be stuffed between them before I stuff it between her legs. “Hello,” she says, snapping her fingers in my face. Blinking, I finally take note of the situation and realize what happened. Interesting. Smirking, I turn to my new focus and smile.

“Hello to you, beautiful. Seems we have ourselves a situation. I am sure two mature adults can solve this and make it work. Don’t you agree?” I pull one of her bouncy curls between my fingers and watch it move up and down when I release. Hell. Even her curls are erotic.

“What do you propose?” she asks, some of her irritation melting.

“How about we share this cab? I will let him drop you off first and in the meantime we simply relax and chat. No harm no foul.” She bites her lip as she thinks it over and the caveman in me demands she stop doing that, so I can have the privilege. But of course, he only growls it in my head. Something tells me she is a bit... skittish and I have to tread a little lightly.

“Fine. You may drive, mister,” she says ordering the cab driver. I smile.

She’s bossy.

I like it.

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CHAPTER 3

HOPE



I'VE NEVER SHARED a cab with a stranger before. In the enclosed space, his cologne is invading my senses, making me swoon a little bit. *Shit. Don't want that. Cool it, Hope. Cool it. It's no use. That's not going to work!* I try to warn myself, but it's no use. Might as well try to roll with it. Since I'm perpetually forgetting things at work, I rushed back inside after my sad dinner and grabbed my laptop off of my desk.

"We'll be dropping the lady off first," he tells the cab driver. His authoritative voice really, really does it for me. Absently, I run my fingers through my hair and then fix my glasses. I look over at him again in what I hope is a discrete way, but I'm pretty sure I'm openly ogling the man. He's gorgeous. I imagine that he's tall, if they way his legs are folded up against the back of the passenger seat. He's got a really great head of dark hair and expressive ocean-blue eyes.

"2100 50th Street," I tell him, and he takes off in that direction. I love that I live within walking distance to work, but I rarely walk anymore. The streets are way too crowded these days. We are talking about the city that never sleeps, to be fair.

"That's close by," the man says. I'm going to need something to call him when I rub my pussy to the thought him tonight. I want to do it right here, right now, but I refrain. Good girls don't rub their pussies in the backseat of taxi's, unless this an after dark episode on Skinamax. I know this isn't that. Unfortunately. God, what has gotten into me? It's

him. He's making it hard to think and that never happens to me. Sure, I make a fool of myself when it comes to guys all the time, but this is different.

"Yeah. I'm Hope, by the way. Hope Malone," I say, extending my hand to him, which he takes. Is it my imagination or is he lingering. After another ten to fifteen seconds, he finally lets my hand drop. Yeah, he was lingering.

"Ayerton Lotus. It's a *pleasure* to meet you," he says. The way he said the word pleasure has my body humming. When I cross my legs, my skirt rides up my thighs and I notice him noticing. Is it hot in here? For some reason, I don't even try to pull the skirt down, like I'd normally do. He can look his fill. God, I am going to need to be hosed off here soon. He clears his throat but doesn't look away from me.

"Where are you coming from, dressed to the nines like that?" I ask, looking at his perfectly crisp tuxedo. He's pulled the tie open like guys on tv do when they've had enough of the day. I have expect him to whip a martini out of his jacket pocket.

"A work function." His simple answer leaves me wanting more. "What about you? Where were you tonight?"

"Work and then I grabbed a bite to eat. I am not sure why I'm telling you that." I don't seem to have a sense of stranger danger when it comes to him.

"Because that's how small talk works, doesn't it?" he asks, and I can't help it, but I start laughing.

"You know? You're absolutely right. Did you leave your wife at home?" I ask, quickly falling into my old routine of trying to land a guy who is not at all right for me. Except, I don't exactly feel that way about this one.

"I don't have a wife, or a girlfriend." His simple answer sounds like a lie to me. How could he not? How could he not have been snatched up years ago by some greedy girl. God, how I want to be that greedy girl. Man, I need to have sex. I'm acting like a crazy person. It's been... six months, maybe more. That's what's wrong me. I'm sure of it. I don't even

remember that guy or the sex other than it was bad. It's always bad for me.

"Bullshit," I say, then slap my hand over my mouth. He chuckles and moves my hand away from my mouth. "I'm sorry. It's just... ummm... you're really hot. I mean..." Mortification creeps up. You'd think I was a middle schooler talking to captain of the high school football team.

"It's not a lie, Hope. I'm unattached at the moment. What about you? You got a husband waiting at home for you?"

"No. No. Definitely not. I'm what you'd call unlucky in love. Oh, don't get me wrong, I fall in love all the time. I think it's the falling that I like. Staying in love is another story entirely," I trail off. What the fuck is wrong with me? I've never had verbal diarrhea quite like this before.

"I see. Maybe you just haven't met the right man. Did you ever think about that?" he asks, smirking at me.

"You know, I think that all the time," I say, flashing him my best smile as the cab comes to a stop in front of my building. "Well, thank you for letting me get dropped off first. I really enjoyed our conversation." I lick my lips because they suddenly feel dry as fuck.

"It was my pleasure, sweetness. I enjoyed learning about you as well. Don't forget to lock up, he says, and I nod, getting out of the cab. I feel like he's watching me as I go, so I put a little extra sway in steps. While I'm unlocking the door, I look back at him one more time and sure enough he's watching me. I fumble with the door, but once inside, I lean back onto it and take some deep breaths.

Get it the fuck together, Hope Catherine Malone. That man is exactly what you don't need right now, I lie to myself. Unfortunately, he's exactly the kind of man that makes my pussy wet and my heart skip a beat.

Too bad I'll never see him again.

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CHAPTER 4

AYERTON



THE CONVERSATION on the drive to her place is invigorating, but not informative enough about the things I need to know about her. It could also be that her voice sounds like honey and I'm so busy drowning in the sexy crooning that I didn't pay attention. I know I engaged in conversation with her, but my mind was on how sexy she would sound crying out my name as I spilled my seed in her cunt.

Before I knew it we were pulling up to her apartment and she was getting out of the car. "Well, thank you for letting me get dropped off first. I really enjoyed our conversation," she says licking her lips, tormenting me.

"It was my pleasure sweetness. I enjoyed learning about you as well. Don't forget to lock up." She nods her head and gets out. I watch to make sure she makes it in alright. She looks back once more before entering the building. The cab barely pulls back out into traffic when I pull my phone from my pocket.

"This better be good." My P.I. Onyx says, answering the phone.

"I need information on a young lady, and I need it now." I hear something muffled and then "*I will be right back, my pet,*" in his thick Russian accent.

"Is this girl meant to be something to you?"

"I don't care for being questioned, but in an effort to save time, yes. She is. As soon as I know what I am up against. Can

you do this or not?”

“Da. I can. You have information for me?” I tell him her name and address knowing he has done more with less. “You will have it by morning. I must see to my pet. She is breeding.” The line goes dead, and I simply look at it for a moment, stunned he hung on me, but also wondering who the hell his pet is. Is it a person?

Finally home, I walk into my place, drop my clothes as I make my way to my bedroom, not worried about seeing a mess because my maid will pick it all up before I see it. Actually, I will send her a message to have it burned.

Walking straight into the shower, I turn it arctic cold and lean against the tile with my forearm. My other hand grips my cock and I groan as once again I think of her lips, holding my cock between them. “Shit.” I grip it so tight my eyes blank out. I stroke it slowly, not yet ready for it to be over. The fantasy of her on her knees in this shower, those big brown eyes looking up at me, her neck bulging as she struggles to swallow this anaconda. “Fucking angel,” I growl in the shower. Precum squirts through the streams, mixing with the cleanliness of water. Too bad I want to do dirty things to her.

I picture her gorgeous ringlet hair, wet and draping over her breasts, circling her areola like a bullseye. Jesus. Will her nipples be the same color as her perfect skin? Will they turn colors when my baby is in her womb, swelling her entire body, ripening her, preparing her to bring a life we created in the world? “Oh fuck.” I cry out as I spill prematurely thinking about her thickening body that will house our children.

I grunt over and over as jet upon jet of my seed sprays the wall. Holy fuck. I am drained both literally and figuratively. I wash up and get out. Once I am dry, I throw my towel into the hamper and lie in the bed. My body lets me know when my routine has been thrown off. By now, at ten, I would already be in bed ready for an early morning. My last thought is how long it will take me to get her under me.

I have been awake for three hours already. I have been to the gym and for a run. More than ever, I need to burn off this energy.

As expected I woke up to an email from Onyx. According to his report, her parents are alive and well. She is an only child. She graduated college. Has six best friends that live all over the U.S. It's the last piece of information that gets my mind whirring. Seems my smart girl works as a French interpreter for the French delegation at the U.N. "Interesting." My little sister also works as an intern at the U.N. Building.

Satisfied with what was uncovered, I decided to forgo work right now. I have more important things to see to. "Good morning sir." Henry says, as he opens the door for me. "I took the liberty of getting you a collagen and wellness shot." He hands me this tiny red bottle. "I figured with you taking the cab, something to boost your immune system can't hurt."

I nod my head in agreement before getting in and shooting it back. "Thank you Henry. We are going to deviate from our usual schedule." His eyebrows go up in surprise. I don't blame him. I am regimented, exacting and kind of OCD. My schedule does not change much unless it is for a meeting and he knows if it was planned, he would have it on his palm pilot.

"Sir?"

"Yes. Please drive to Leighton's job." His eyes don't leave mine for a second wondering if this is a joke, before he looks to the front.

"Very well, Sir." As we drive, I open my laptop and focus on work for a few minutes. My company, Lotus Investments and Dreams, is my baby. My life's work. My own personal dream. I take the dreams of people and the money given to me and make their goals a reality. A man in his fifties comes to me and he wants to be able to retire in ten years and he and his wife would like to sell their house and live on a beach and be comfortable? Well, I take their retirement, invest it in things I

know for sure will continue to grow and in ten years' time, he is able to retire and then some. Quite simply, I make their portfolio bloom like a lotus and their dreams come true. "We are here, Sir." As per usual, I am lost in work.

"Thank you, Henry." I say as I put my briefcase away.

"Should I wait, Sir?"

"It's best you do." He nods and closes the door behind me. I walk into the U.N., and it dawns on me this is technically a government building, and I might not be allowed in. The thought is damn near humorous. The idea I wouldn't be allowed in someplace.

"Can I help you, Sir?" Security asks me at the desk.

"Yes. I am here to see my sister, Leighton Lotus." he looks at a list and looks back up.

"Is she expecting you?"

"No. I wanted to surprise her for lunch."

"What is your name?"

"Ayerton Lotus."

"I am sorry, Sir, but your name isn't on her approved list." I look down and try to think of something when I hear my name called.

"Ayerton? What are you doing here?" That voice. That honey heavy voice that I jerked my cock to last night and this morning before I left the house. I turn and feign surprise.

"Hope. I didn't expect to see you today." Thank fuck she brought her sexy ass down here.

"Are you not here to see me?"

"I was trying to see if my sister wanted to have lunch, but she is busy right now." I cover real quick.

"Your sister?"

"Yeah, she is an intern. Anyway, are you on your way out?" I move closer to her and begin ushering her out of the building hoping like hell she doesn't pick up on it.

“Yes. My job for the day here is done.”

“Well, isn’t that my luck. How would you like to have lunch with me?” I manage to get her to the car. She turns, facing me, her back against the car door and cock her head to the side.

“Lunch. You want to have lunch?” Something blazes in her eyes before the heat I recognize in myself shows itself to me in her pupils. Taking her cue, I lean into her ear.

“I want to eat you for lunch, sweetness, but I am not sure you are ready for me.” I manage to not say how she only has a short time before I no longer care and take what belongs to me.

Yeah. I am a fucking gentleman.

I’m so screwed.

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CHAPTER 5

HOPE



HE WANTS to eat me for lunch? Oh, God... I'm gonna fuck this guy, I just know it. My blood heats up and my pussy gets slick. I wasn't even supposed to come in today. Yet again, I forgot a file on my desk that I need to translate for my guys on Monday, but that's going to have to wait.

"Lunch, sounds great," I say taking his offered arm.

"There's a bistro around the corner. We can get a table."

"That sounds nice," I say but there is no way in the world I am going to be able to eat right now. "Or we could skip lunch?" I'm going for bold here. His eyes widen and I know I've got him.

"Damn, sweetness. You're killing me," he says as he rubs his hand over his chest.

"Don't want you to up and die on me," I say, running my fingers over his arm.

"Get in," he says, opening the rear passenger door to his chauffeured town car. I do as he says. He moves around to the other side and gets in.

"Where to, Sir?" the driver asks.

"Home, please," he answers. We sit in silence for twenty something blocks before we come to a stop in front of a tall glass building. I slide out of the car after him. He takes me by the hand and leads me inside the building. The doorman tipped his hat at me. I wasn't even aware doormen still existed, but

this building has one. There's a bank of elevators to the right, but we go right past those to a single elevator on the left. He uses a key to make the doors open. Inside the elevator, there's just one button and it says P.

“Penthouse?” I ask, breaking the silence.

“Oh yeah, sweetness. Nothing but the best.”

The ride up is fast. The doors open into his kitchen and dining room. I expected a sterile man cave type of environment, but it's not like that at all. It's warm and inviting. He slips his shoes and socks off before he takes another step, so I slip my ballet flats off as well, leaving them next to his shoes. I drop my purse right beside them.

Before I can say anything, he's got me to the wall near the elevator. My hands clench into tight fists at my thighs as he lips touch mine. For a second, they just linger there, tasting me. Learning me, but then he deepens the kiss and I open my mouth a little more. Our tongues duel in a dance. It's unlike any kiss I've ever had. It's hot, sensual, and I never want it to end. He's got one hand resting on my hip while the other hand reaches down and pulls the hem of my knee-length black skirt up. His fingers caress the outside of my thigh as he does, sending jolts of electricity through my veins, pumped right into my clit. This moment surpasses all others... nothing has ever felt this good. I almost feel virginal, but that hasn't been the case since I was a freshman in high school. The first in a long line of mistakes, but good God, those experiences don't measure up to this kiss. The kiss that's going to kill me. Then he moves my panties to the side and runs his fingers through my sopping wet folds. I moan right into his ear.

“Fuck, baby. That sound is delicious,” he growls. He yanks his hand away from my pussy and pulls my shirt over my head. He cups my boobs through the lace of my purple bra. Pulling the cups down, he grins when my nipples pop out. Lowering his head, he sucks one into his mouth. Biting and tugging on it before moving over to the other one.

“Ooooooh,” I cry out, so ready for him. I reach for him, sliding his suit jacket down his arms. He lets it fall to the floor.

The Windsor knot on his tie is easily undone, so I pull that away too. I make quick work of his buttons and his dress shirt soon joins the pile on the floor. Reaching for his belt as he opens the zipper at my hip. My skirt falls to the floor and I step out of it. I didn't realize I got the belt open as well as his slacks until I hear the buckle hit the floor with a loud, metallic clang. A shiver of anticipation rolls through my body.

"Cold?" he asks, running his hands up and down my arms where goosebumps have already started forming.

"No." He grins at me before picking me up and tossing me over his shoulder. His big hand caresses the curve of bare ass. My thong is aggressively rubbing my clit where his shoulder is hitting it just right with every step he takes.

"Hurry, please," I beg. It doesn't take but a few more second and he's tossing me down on a big bed. He takes his boxers off and I do a double take. Holy shit. He's huge. I lick my lips as my mouth waters.

"If you keep looking at me like that, baby, this will be over before it starts," he growls, and my eyes snap up from his dick to his face. Smirking, I reach up and wrap my hand around him. He sucks in a breath as I slowly stroke him.

"You touched me, it's only fair I get to do the same," I say, enjoying the hard length of him in my hand. He uses his hand to stop my movement. He gently pushes me down on the bed and savagely rips my panties away from my body. He spreads my thighs wide open, lowers his head, and licks my slit like a madman. "Don't stop," I say, drunk on this feeling. This euphoria.

I come hard, two, maybe three times before he stops. He moves to line himself up with my opening. He stops and looks down at me.

"There's no going back once I fuck you, baby. Got it."

"Mmm hmm," I mutter, just wanting him to take me. Then he does and I scream in delight. God, it feels so good. So... right.

Over and over, all afternoon and into the night, we laugh, fuck, talk, eat pizza, and fuck more and more and more until eventually we're exhausted. I lie in his for a long time while he sleeps, not wanting this end but knowing that it must. Ross. Sometime after one particularly vigorous bout of fucking or maybe it was during, there were so many, I may have lost track of them all, I asked him if he had a nickname. I giggled as I told him Ayerton was a bit of a mouthful to say while coming. He told me his middle name and I went with it.

I kiss him one more time before eventually climbing out of his bed and walk naked back to kitchen area and silently put my clothes back on. I look around his apartment one more time before leaving in the open elevator.

This time, a different doorman opens the door for me.

"Have an excellent day, Miss," he says, tipping his hat to me as well.

"You know, I believe I will. You too, Drake," I reply after looking at his name badge.

"Can I hail you a taxi?"

"That would be great," I say, waiting as he pulls a whistle out his pocket, blowing into it. Like magic four cabs pulls up to the curb. He opens the door and I wave to him as I climb inside. "Thank you." He shuts the door and give the driver my address.

Only then do I allow tears to fall down my face. I've never regretting something more than I do right now. Oh, I don't regret what we did, that was beyond amazing, but leaving him seemed right at the time, but now that I'm gone, it doesn't. At home, I take a hot shower and climb into bed. It's Saturday and I have nowhere to be, so I can remember every kiss, every touch, every sensation as we worshiped each other.

Maybe, if I'm lucky, I'll run into him again.

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CHAPTER 6

AYERTON



WAKING UP, I stretch and take a second to reflect on last night and this morning, marveling at how much this girl is made for me. No matter how many times I turned her over and slid inside her warm, wet heat, she never rebuffed me or tried to slow down. She was just as greedy as I am and that fucking cemented everything.

Turning over I look, ready to get my good morning nibble, but find the bed empty. “What the hell?” Naked and confused, I walk around calling her name, checking all of the rooms. Finding the place empty, I walk into my bedroom, pissed and beyond horny. I throw on some jogging pants and a shirt. Grabbing the car keys, I jump in the elevator and make it downstairs.

The lobby is full of people, and it is not lost on me that this is not my normal attire. Huh. Nor is this my routine. I am usually out of bed and in the office by now. Just one of a million ways I am sure she is going to change me. But first, I am going to spank her ass for running.

Driving to her place, I try to put myself in her shoes. She goes home with a stranger, sleeps with him and then let’s him fuck her all through the night. I know this is not her normal routine considering how many times she reminded me that ‘she doesn’t do this’. I politely told her it doesn’t matter to me if she does or doesn’t. I am going to be her last and only from this moment forward.

She looked like a trapped little kitten until I slid my dick in her. Then she turned into a tigress. Hell, I probably still have blood from the scratches she left on my back. Which is why I just can't figure out why the hell she left. One of the many times I took her, we cuddled for a bit and talked afterward. She told me about school and her parents. I know her life was similar to mine in that we both come from solid families, but hers was lonely as an only child and her parents had her late in life.

Neither of us mentioned past relationships, thank God. I didn't want to commit homicide so close to finally finding my forever. So, none of it fits and even if it did, I am not taking any excuses. She should have been in my bed, in my arms, waiting for me to make love to her before we had to go to work.

Parking, I walk inside the building, further pissed she is living somewhere without security. "Who is it?" she asks, after I knock.

"Ayerton." I tell her matter of factly like we have been dating forever. She opens the door, only minutely and looks at me in shock. "You look through the peephole, sweetness?" Her shocked face now becomes indignant.

"Of course, I did. I am not a child. What are you doing here?"

"You left." She has the decency to look sheepish before she answers.

"Well, yes. That's what we do when we have a one-night stand. We sneak out and do the walk of shame." I raise my eyebrow wondering how the hell she knows. I take one step and she stutters. "So, I am told." That better be how she knows.

"This," I move my hands back and forth between us, "is no one-night stand, sweetness. I thought I made that clear last night."

"Well, I thought you were just saying what men say when they are getting what they want?" What kind of schmucks has

she been dealing with? Shit. Not a good idea to be thinking about that. Out of patience, I invade her space, forcing her back into her place. She moves, her back hitting the wall. Standing toe to toe, nose to nose, I inhale and that sweet fucking honey I associate with the flavor of her pussy hits me, and my cock remembers he never got his treat.

Hand around her throat, I smile when she whimpers and her eyes partially close. “Nothing about this is temporary, baby. Nothing. The minute you got into that cab with me you became mine. MINE, Hope. You do not slink out in the middle of the night like a secret or a dalliance. You walk out beside me, head held high like my woman because that is what you are. Do you understand?” I fill her nails digging into my skin as she whimpers, nodding her head. “Such a sweet girl. Now, you have made me late this morning. Open your legs and make it up to me.”

Not waiting for her to comply, I kick her legs apart and drop to my knees. “What...are you doing?” she asks, voice huskier than usual.

“What I would have done if you had been in bed this morning.” I grip her thighs and pull them further apart. “Oh, baby. Did you make all that sticky sweetness when you saw me through the peephole?” She nods her bouncy head full of curls and I smile back at her. “Your pussy already knows who her commander is, huh, baby.” Her thighs are coated in syrup. Shiny and sticky.

I bury my face in her panty covered crotch, simply inhaling the fragrance of pumpkin pie or Thanksgiving treats. Ripping her panties from her, I move my hand up and down her slit. With my other hand, I yank her shirt, tearing it down the front exposing her nipples. Jesus. She doesn't have a bra on. It's like she knew I was coming. I take the finger now sticky with her honey and rub it over her areolas and nipples. “Shit, Ross.” Hearing her call me by my middle name is music to my ears.

Last night in the throes of an orgasm she asked me for something else to call me. She said my name was too long for an orgasmic experience. Funny little kitten. I told her my

middle name was Ross and that is what she called me all night. “Step out of them.” I instruct her as I pull her wet panties down her legs. She lifts one foot after the other like a sweet angel offering her virtue. Thank fuck I savored her last night. There’s no way I could do that right now. I lift her leg and put it over my shoulder. My tongue slides right up the middle of her slit and I hear her head hit the wall as she cries out, thrusting her pussy in my face. “Fucking beautiful, baby.” Clit to hole, I lick her over and over, moaning as her syrup coats my mouth. Shit. I can barely open my lips; they are so covered in her drip.

“Oh God. Ross.” I love her hands in my hair tugging me where she wants me.

“So delicious, baby.” I grip her ass cheeks and squeeze them, holding them in my hands and lifting her until her cunt is even with my mouth. It’s better access to her rosebud that want to taste as well. I spread those cheeks and slide my tongue from the back hole to clit. Her cries of shock and pleasure makes my cock spit down my legs.

“Do it again.” She commands, rocking against my face.

“Oh sweetness. You didn’t earn a command. Ask and you shall receive.”

“I need to come. Please.” Her cute whine and needy plea covers me. Like the ravenous lunatic I am, I devour her pussy. My entire mouth and tongue invade her sticky cave, licking and lapping, taking turns as my finger moves in and out of her cunt and my thumb rubs circles around her tiny asshole. “Oh shit. Oh god. Ross. Please.” I feel her pussy quiver and I know she is about to come.

“Come for me baby. Give me that sweetness.” Nothing has touched my cock and I am coming with her, my cream rolling down my balls and leg, as I groan against her mound and suck her clit into my mouth, taking her right over the edge. I feel her body sag and I kiss her pussy before standing and pulling her into my arms. “No more fucking running.”

Or next time I am going to tie her ass up.

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CHAPTER 7

HOPE



A FEW DAYS LATER

THANKSGIVING DAY

THE PLANE RIDE to Knoxville was uneventful. My rental car is teeny tiny, but it will get me to Gatlinburg, where my Super Squad, badass bitch Jinny lives. She is getting her master's degree at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and while she's not staying at her parent's house, she's here a lot. I make it to her house a little early and fuck, I should have waited in the car. Mr. Spruce is an obnoxious, narcissistic, asshole. I always thought Jinny was exaggerating, but if anything, she undersold the man. I've never felt so wholly uncomfortable in someone's house before. I am standing at the kitchen counter, next to Jinny's mom, stirring the gravy. I'm not much of a cook, but it's the least I can do since she is literally doing everything else.

"Wife, when is this going to be ready? I want to watch the football game," Mr. Spruce says, coming into the kitchen. Jinny went down to the basement for a bottle of wine, so it's just me and her mom right now.

"Ten minutes, Jim," she says, walking over the refrigerator. "Have a beer while you wait. Would you like some appetizers?"

“No, the beer is fine,” he says taking the one she offered him. No thank you, nothing. Ugh.

“You’re not mine. Who are you again?” he asks, pointing his beer bottle at me.

“I’m Hope Malone. I went to college with Jinny.”

“Right. I remember you from that godawful graduation when it snowed, in May.”

“Yes. I was there,” I say smiling. It barely snowed. I think it was something like .3 inches of snow, nothing to write home about.

“What do you do?” he asks. I don’t think he’s being polite since he sneered when he said it.

“I work for the United Nations. I’m a French interpreter.”

“You make good money doing that?”

“I do okay,” I say, totally uncomfortable with this line of questioning.

“What do your parents think about this?” he asks while I wonder where the hell Jinny is? Is this what she deals with all the time?

“They are proud of me. I’m the first person on either side of my family to graduate from college.” Both of my parents went a couple of years but got married and jobs before they could finish. They talk about going back but haven’t done it. They are in their early forties; they could go back. They are still young.

“I bet they are.”

“You know, Jinny is going to be a great teacher.”

“That remains to be seen.”

“Dinner’s ready,” Jinny’s mom declares, circumventing what was sure to be a terrible remark about Jinny.

“Finally. Let’s get this show on the road,” he says. Her mom nods and ushers him to the dining room table. It seriously looks like a spread a food magazine.

“Gorgeous table, Mrs. Spruce,” I say more than a little shocked that Mr. Spruce is holding her chair out for her. He might be an asshole, but I guess a southern gentleman never goes out of style.

“Thank you, dear. Do sit down,” she says gesturing to the seat on her left. When Jinny comes in she slides into the chair closet to her dad. Do they have assigned seats? He’s at the head of the table. His wife is to his left and Jinny to his right. She guzzles from her glass of wine after pouring it almost to the brim. Weird. I guess every family is different though. I’d be at home right now, but my parents got a great deal on a cruise through Norway, and I couldn’t let them pass it up. Once Jinny heard that she invited me here. I didn’t even think about or tell anyone. I got a ticket and here I am.

But our house is very different. My mom and dad both cook. My dad usually does the turkey while mom takes care of all the fixings. Once I was old enough, I think ten or so, I started the deserts. Even though it’s just the three of us, it’s loud and happy. Nothing like this stilted shit show. We end the night decorating our fake Douglas Fir, drinking hot chocolate, and listening to Christmas music. I doubt any of that is happening here.

We are back in Jinny’s apartment by eight. In her two-bedroom space, she has four Christmas trees ready to go up. I help her with the biggest one, her real one. I know this girl lives for Christmas. She was obsessed with when we were in college. She’s the girl that celebrated it starting November 1st. It no less adorable now then it was then.

“I’m sorry about that, I feel like I should have properly warned you about them,” she says as we wrap the tree in tinsel.

“Don’t apologize to me for them, Jinny. It wasn’t that bad,” I lie.

“Liar,” she says laughing. “So, tell me what’s been going on with you?”

“I met a man,” I say, I debated not telling her, but I’m not one to keep secrets.

“What else is new?” she says, laughing. “I’m kidding, Hope. Tell me all about him.” I laugh and so does she. She isn’t being mean. It’s true. Men are a dime a dozen to me, but not this one.

I tell her about Ayerton, and she listens intently, fanning herself when I get to the good parts. We talk about him on and off while we are shopping the next day. I found a really cute outfit that I can’t wait to wear to work on Monday, but it’s been amazing spending time with my friend. She never judges me, at least not really, and lets me go on and on about Ayerton, which is new for me. Normally, I’m over a guy so fast, it’s like I never liked them in the first place. He’s different. I know he is, but I can’t get my mind on track with the rest of me.

Suddenly, there’s a harsh knock on the door, followed by banging. Like a cop in a movie.

“You expecting someone?” I ask, looking up at Jinny.

“No. No one ever comes here but the pizza guy.” She gets up and walks over to the door, looking through the peephole. “I don’t know this guy, but he’s big.”

“What?” I say, getting up off of the floor and moving to stand next to her. She swings the door open and my heart leaps into my chest.

Then I get mad.

Okay, mad-*ish*.

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CHAPTER 8

AYERTON



TWO DAYS LATER

I SWEAR on all that I am going to tie her little sweet ass to my bed, fuck her until she's knocked up, carrying my heir and using my last name. She fucking ran again. Again. It is partially my fault. I knew the other day after I fucked her against her door and then made her grab some stuff and come to my house, that I should have spent a lot of time trying to figure out why she is running from us. But, every time I see her beautiful face, I forget everything else but being inside of her, making me a part of her and vice versa.

So, I can't say I am surprised, but, I am quite shocked she ran all the way to Tennessee. Luckily on the initial check, Onyx did for me, he sent me the names and addresses for everyone he determined was important in her life and unbeknownst to her, I put a tracker in her phone when she was asleep. So, the minute her sexy ass drove to the airport I was aware. I couldn't go after her until now, two days later due to a deal I was in the middle of closing.

Now here I am standing at the door of her best friend Jinny's apartment, giving her the 'you are going to be spanked' glare, watching her beautiful eyes grow wide, then, confused then, sheepish. Serves her right. "Grab your shit, Hope." I love when her eyes start fuming when I boss her around. I am pinching my nose because I am trying to control

my temper in front of her friend, but if she says anything contrary to her getting her stuff and coming with me, I am going to lose my mind.

“I don’t have to...” she gasps when she sees the look on my face. The realization hits her, and she swallows visibly.

“Uhm. I think you should get your stuff.” Her friend Jinny says, gulping.

“Some friend you are,” Hope growls at her before walking and grabbing her bag. I’m literally counting the seconds in my head until she comes back in front of me. I grab her stuff from her and put my hand on her back.

“Call me after...whatever.” Jinny not so quietly whispers. Hope nods and then walks in front of me. My hand touches her back, needing to feel her body heat on any part of me, telling me she is safe and in front of me.

“You have some nerve,” she says, half mumbling, half growling. “Who do you think you are?” I refuse to respond. Not until we are in the car. The driver gets out and opens the door. Once I make sure she is settled and the privacy window is up, I turn to her. “Ross.” She says my name, her voice calm. She is trying to soothe me because she can see the beast lurking inside me ready to attack her.

I touch her cheek before ripping her shirt from her body. “MINE.” I say into her ear before pulling her further down the seat. Her mouth opens in mock shock, but her eyes are hooded and flooded with desire. “You stop fucking running from me, sweetness. All of this...” I run my hands over her body, squeezing her tits and molding my hands to her thighs. “Belongs to me, baby. You don’t keep it from me. Hide it from me. Take it from me.” I lean into her neck and moan when her sweet smell hits my nose.

“Ross. Please.” I love how weak she turns when she is in my arms and being touched by my hands. I want nothing more than to bury my face in her honey crotch, but the knock on the window tells me we are at the hotel I booked for the night. I pull off my jacket and give it to her.

“Put this on and don’t say a damn thing.” Like the smart girl she is, she does as instructed. I guide her into the hotel, but on the elevator, I move to the other side. I am too close to the end of my sanity. She has pushed me too far and there is no pulling it back. There is only the ability to contain it until we are alone. Once inside the room, I stop trying to rein in the beast. “Take off your clothes and lay on the bed.”

“I don’t...”

“HOPE!” I shout her name hoping like hell she hears the desperation and infinite rage inside of me. I hope she can fucking see not only how close she has pushed me, but that she can also see the truth of the depth of my need for her. My devotion to her. My utter obsession with her.

Not sure how to take my scorn, she lays on the bed, pulling her clothes off until she is bare before me, nothing covering us. “Satisfied.” Her snarky ass voice asks.

“Not hardly, baby. But I will be. Hands on the headboard.” She does it, but I see the censure in her eyes. I move to the side of the bed and bend my head, kissing her to distract her. Fuck. Who am I kidding? I miss her fucking lips on mine. *Click.*

I click the first handcuff in place, and she looks at me, shocked and enraged. “What the hell, Ross! Uncuff me.”

“No.”

“What do you mean, no?”

“Not a chance baby. First, you look like the offering given to Jesus and his men for the last supper. Second, if you want to be loose, you have to pay the toll.”

“What freaking toll, you maniac?” she shouts at the top of her lungs. She has no idea how maniacal I am. But only for her.

“Tell me why you keep running from me.” Her mouth forms an O and I know this is going to be a long night.

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CHAPTER 9

HOPE



WHO DOES this motherfucker think he is? Handcuffing me like a criminal or a hooker. Okay that second one makes this sound hot. He made me strip down and lie on the bed and I did it. I know what I wanted to happen between us, but this... talking about my feelings... isn't it.

“Ayerton Ross Lotus, uncuff me now!” I say, through clenched teeth. I feel so exposed.

“Oh, baby when say my whole name like that I get hard.”

“You were already hard. There's no way I missed that,” I say sarcastically.

“There's my tigress. Tell me what I want to know.”

“Uncuff me.”

“That's not how negotiations work.”

“I'm not a business deal, Ayerton. I'm your...”

“Finish that sentence. You're my what?”

“Lover,” I hedge.

“Try again.” He tsks, running his finger down my chest and swirling it around my belly button. “All this caramel skin, baby. I want to lick you all over.”

“I literally can't stop you,” I moan as his fingers dip lower.

“Tell me what I want to know,” he repeats.

“Don’t use your magic fingers against me. It’s not fair,” I whine as he thrusts his finger into me shallowly.

“This magic finger?” he asks as he slowly pumps it in and out of me. “Or this one?” he asks, adding another.

“Yessss,” I hiss.

“Tell me,” he says pulling out of me entirely. I whimper.

“Fine, but I have to tell you everything first. You have to understand why this is hard for me.”

“Tell me everything, Hope.”

“I don’t want to do this to myself again. I fall in and out of love like most people change their underwear. Only, it’s not love. It’s not even lust. It’s a flaw I have. I want it. I want love so bad I make it up. I delude myself into thinking something is real when I know it’s not. It’s not. It’s nothing, but I build it up and build it up. Say something.”

“Why?” he asks. “I mean, what’s missing from your life?”

“That’s just it. Nothing. I told you about my parents, my family. We’re happy. I’m happy. I just want what they have, what they found when they were sixteen and seventeen years old. It’s still going strong. It’s the kind of thing that lasts a lifetime. They struggled a bit. No one cared that they were an interracial couple. It was the late nineties in New York City, but God, people said things about money. My dad was dirt poor and my mom’s family was rich as hell. My grandfather invented a nipple.”

“For a baby bottle?”

“No, for fake tits. A realistic nipple prosthetic.”

“I thought the person’s real nipple was used.”

“Not always. Especially if the woman had a mastectomy.”

“I see. Okay, so he’s rich.”

“Very. Anyway, that was their obstacle, but they prevailed.”

“Love never fails,” he says, surprising me. That’s my motto and he said it.

“Yeah. So, I wanted that. I still do. So, to answer your question, I just need time. I need to make sure this is real on my end, before you get anymore caught up, because clearly you are. Who comes to Tennessee to get their girlfriend?” I question, liking the idea of being his girlfriend.”

“Better,” he says, grinning at me. He leans down and kisses me.

I kiss him back with everything in me. “Fuck, me Ayerton. Please. Please,” I beg him in between kisses. I rub my thighs together because his kisses have the ability to make me wet. Shit. The heady conversation of moments ago is far from my mind as he climbs over me and spreads my thighs wide and drags his cock over my clit.

“Fuck,” I cry out. He guides his cock into me slowly. I want to touch him, but I can’t move my hands. Alright, this is hot. He rests one hand around my throat and the other on the headboard as he fucks me silly. It’s not long before we are both coming. For the first time, I realize that we never once talked about protection, nor am I on birth control. With him, it literally never crossed my mind to make him put a condom on. What does that say about us?

After, he doesn’t say anything, but he reaches above me and uncuffs me. I rub my wrists like I’ve seen on TV, but it doesn’t really hurt. He rests on top me, and we spend the rest of the night rolling around the sheets.

Best Thanksgiving ever and the days that followed...



I think I lied when I said that I wanted space. I’m straight up pouting like a little girl because he’s gone on a business trip. That was days ago now and our last conversation plays in my head over and over. Man, I want what he wants to give me.

“You have the week that I am gone to get your head on board with your heart and body baby. When I return, everything will move forward.”

“*What does that mean?*” I asked, unable to look at him. I wanted him to spell it out for me.

“That means you will be living with me, wearing my ring, pregnant with my baby within two weeks.” I didn’t say anything, but now I wish I had. I wish I had told him that I wanted that too. When I saw him off at the airport, I should have said it then, before he jetted off to Japan. I’ll just have to tell him the second he gets back.

I’ll put something sexy on and go over to his place. Maybe I can use this week to learn how to cook a meal and do that. Something wifely, maybe. Maybe Jinny’s mom can send me a recipe, her food was so good.

Yeah, that’s what I do. I’ll show him that my head’s finally caught up to the rest of me.

It will be everything I’ve ever wanted.

Everything.

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CHAPTER 10

AYERTON



THREE DAYS LATER

I HAVE BEEN in Tokyo for the last forty-eight hours on a business deal that is going to take a week to wrap up. The Japanese do business differently than us. My mind keeps going back to the day I left. Hope was at my place which is where she has been every night since I took her from her friend's house. I was packing to leave, and she was looking at me, trying not to look sad, but failing.

"Why the face beautiful? I thought you would be happy to get rid of me?" I try to joke with her and make her smile. She looks at me, eyes wide and honest for a moment before she shutters them.

"I am. I was just thinking of everything I need to do in the coming week." Her tone is a bit accusatory, and it makes me stop for a second.

"What's with the tone, Hope?" Something is bothering her, and I don't want to leave with something obviously on her mind. "Talk to me." I tell her, pulling her chin up so she is looking at me.

"I just...I have allowed myself to be in this bubble with you. You know? Lost in a Ross fog." She shrugs her shoulders like what she is saying is a given. "Now with you gone, I will have more time to...think. Me and thinking...not a good idea."

I hear what she is not saying. She is telling me not to let her pull away from me. Done.

I walk away from my suitcase and over to her. Pulling her into my arms, I kiss her like she is my everything. She is. In the last week she has become as vital as my heart. Maybe even more. The chase has made my love for her stronger. I just haven't told her because I am trying not to scare her. Hell, I haven't introduced her to my family for the same reason. My mom would smother her to death considering she is the first girl I am going to take home. "You have the week that I am gone to get your head on board with your heart and body baby. When I return, everything will move forward."

"What does that mean?" She asked, biting her cheek, barely meeting my eyes.

"That means you will be living with me, wearing my ring, pregnant with my baby within two weeks." She didn't comment but she didn't try to rebut me either.

She saw me off at the airport, and now here I am at some damn club with a bunch of drunk Japanese old men and my assistant, and all I can think about is my sweetness back home. I tried to call her this morning and see how she was doing, but she didn't answer. We did text one another last night. She was with her mom, baking cookies then heading to the consulate to translate for a trafficking victim being brought in. "Mr. Lotus, come drink with us," Mr. Tanaka insists, standing over me while I am sitting on the couch. I don't know what any of this has to do with the deal we are trying to put away.

"Well, well, well. If it isn't Mr. strait-laced himself." Shit. There is only one voice that makes me cringe like that. I turn from the bar and look toward the screeching sound. "Aren't you going to say hi to me?" My nose scrunches up as I look into the face of my ex, Grace.

"What are you doing here, Grace?" I ask her, making sure to heighten my disdain so she doesn't mistake it for anything else.

"Working. The same as you." Yeah. I'm sure she is. She walks closer to me and leans in my ear. "Come on, A. You

can't still be mad about..”

“I am not mad. As a matter of fact, if you hadn't fucked my best friend, I might have made the mistake of thinking we had something. Now I know what real love looks like. Now if you will excuse me.” I move to get around her, but she stops me, her pungent perfume making me want to puke. She leans into my ear.

“Same fucking asshole as usual.” Before I can move away from her, she turns, wraps her arms around my neck, leans her head slightly to the side and then I see a camera flash. I push her off me, and move, walking over Mr. Tanaka.

“I am going to the hotel. I will see you in the boardroom.” Without a backwards glance I walk out, pissed to have been in that shithole in the first place.

Back in my room, I pull out my phone and call Hope. “Hello.” Jesus I love her sweet voice.

“Hey baby. What are you doing?”

“Getting dressed to go meet a friend from work.” The growl happens instantly before I ask who.

“It better be a woman.”

“It just so happens it is. But, if it wasn't?” I smile, picturing her hand on her hip.

“Then I would be spanking your sexy ass as soon as I get home.” She gasps and then clears her throat.

“Whatever. What are you still doing awake. Isn't it past your carefully planned bedtime?” Smart ass. But she is not wrong.

“I just got in from a work function. I am going to bed. I just wanted to hear your voice so I can sleep.” She snorts and then mumbles whatever, although I can tell she is smiling.

“Well sweet dreams, Ross.”

“Have a good day baby. Be good.” She doesn't respond and hangs up. Now I get to close my eyes and picture her.

Bzz. Bzz. Fuck. Who is calling me a fuck a clock in a the morning? Lifting my phone, I see it is my sister. My alarm bells go off and I jump up, sitting on the side of the bed. “What’s wrong? Is it mom or dad?”

“Good morning to you too, big brother. I see you have been conducting more than business in Japan,” she teases in her bratty voice.

“Are you fucking shitting me right now, Leighton. This is why you woke me up?”

“No. I woke you up because I thought you would want to know once again you are the topic of the newsfeed, making out with your ex-girlfriend, Grace. Everyone is up in arms about a reconciliation.” My mind races to last night and I remember the camera flash. Then it all makes sense. I put my sister on speaker phone and open up my Google app. There is fucking living color is the photo of me and Grace. It pisses me off further when I see how she angled herself over me, which explains her change of position in the seconds before the flash. To anyone looking, especially my Hope, it looks like we were kissing.

“Shit.” I get out of bed and start packing my clothes.

“Ayerton?”

“Thank you for telling me, brat. I have to go.” As I am racing around the room packing, I hit my phone and try to call her. The first few times it rings and goes to voicemail. The third time it is obvious she sent me straight to voicemail. “Son of a bitch.” I have to get home now, five days earlier than planned and pray my whole life is not blown to shit over this bullshit.

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CHAPTER 11

HOPE



I BLOCKED HIM. I had to. He just kept calling. And calling. And calling. Back-to-back, nonstop. I am a thousand percent sure that I've never cried like that. All of the other guys I thought I was in love with or even liked never made me feel like this when it was over. Ayerton put a mark on my soul. I thought he was my soul mate. He made me feel things I've never felt before. He made me feel alive, but it's over now.

I cried because there isn't anything in the world that he could say that would make me forget he was making out with some other woman while on business on the other side of the globe. The image of that blonde bombshell hanging all over him makes my heart ache and it's forever burned in my brain. When I saw the picture, I died a little on the inside. I was right, after all. Even after he said all those things to me a few days ago. He made me believe it was real. That he wanted me, but all that shit was clearly a lie. I love him, that's why it hurts so much. I know that, logically, but I can't help it. There's no getting over this one. This one is going to do some lasting damage. I give myself the weekend to mourn the relationship, then I'm back at work Monday morning, still ignoring him, but I haven't quite let it go. So much so, that I am venting about it to my work friend.

"Leighton, I just can't believe he did that to me. I trusted him. I'm really going to miss those orgasm's though," Leighton listens intently while fixing her coffee the way she likes it, light and sweet.

“What exactly did he do?” she asks, testing her coffee. She wrinkles her nose and adds another spoonful of sugar. She tastes it again and smiles contentedly. I love this girl. She and I usually gossip about office stuff, but this is the first time I’ve had anything real to talk about. She’s really my only friend outside of the Super Squad.

“He was making out with his ex, in another country. He told me that I’d be his wife with a belly full of his baby when he got back, but then this happened. How can I trust him now?”

“That’s so weird.” Her face scrunches up.

“What do you mean?” I ask, thinking that cheating is a pretty normal relationship problem. Or so I hear. Is it even cheating when it’s been such a short amount of time? Of course, it is. He explicitly implied exclusivity when he said I was going to be his wife, right?

“My brother just had something like that go on. It was not what it looked like. He called me from the plane.”

“He did?”

“Yeah,” she says, but before she can say anything else, I hear a commotion outside the break room we are.

“Hope!” A man shouts. I’d know that voice anywhere. I hear it in my dreams. “Hope!”

I walk out of the room and into the hallway. I am surprised to see Ayerton rushing toward me.

“Ayerton? What are you doing here?” I whisper when he gets close enough to me.

“I came to apologize.” He’s still shouting.

“You’re making a scene, lower your voice,” I say, looking around. People are looking out their office doors at us. Shit. Just what I need right now.

“Not until you agree to hear me out. Talk to me, baby,” he pleads.

“I don’t want to talk to you,” I lie. Seeing him has my mind thinking all kinds of things I shouldn’t be thinking. The man can’t be trusted.

“Where’d you go?” Leighton asks coming out of the break room. “A?”

“Brat?” he questions.

“You two know each other?” I ask, confused.

“Ayerton is my big brother,” Leighton says. “The one I was just telling you about.”

“This is your brother, with the ex-misunderstanding?” I ask, wondering why I never put two and two together. All these months, I never once asked her what her last name is. Her swipe badge just says, “Leighton L, Intern.” The L stands for Lotus and she’s his sister. I feel weird for telling her about him now. I think I even told her that he gave me the best orgasms more than once. At dinner the other night and just a few minutes ago. Who would want to know that about their brother?

“The very one,” she says, grinning.

“Oh, my God, Leighton,” I say, mortified.

“Don’t worry about it, girl,” she replies, knowing exactly what I’m talking about.

“Fine, explain,” I say, dragging him into the breakroom by the forearm.

“I’m sorry, Hope. I don’t know what happened, exactly. I did not kiss her. I didn’t even know she was going to be there. I swear it. I would never hurt you. I fucking love you.”

“What?” I ask, breathless. I shouldn’t be so quick to believe him, but between his admission and Leighton’s vouching for him, I find myself leaning toward him.

“I love you, Hope. More than I’ve ever loved anyone or anything in my life,” he says, grabbing my hands in his.

“I... I love you too.”

“I know you do, baby. That’s why you were so pissed. Did you really block me?”

“I did.”

“Aww, hell hath no fury like a woman scorned,” Leighton says, reminding me that she’s still in the room.

“Brat?” Ayerton warns her, but his eyes never leave my face. He looks so intense right now, my pussy automatically clenches in anticipation.

“Alright, I’m out,” she says, giggling as she leaves the room.

“Now, where were we?” he asks.

“I think you were about to kiss me,” I say, needing that so bad.

“I think you’re right,” he says before lowering his lips to mine. God, has it only been a few days since I last felt his lips on mine? I missed this. I missed him.

“You know you’re marrying me, don’t you?”

“I do,” I answer, knowing that’s where this was headed as soon as I heard him shouting my name in the office like a lunatic. Only a lunatic in love would do something like that.

Maybe I shouldn’t have forgiven him so quickly, but love, real love, makes you do crazy things.

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EPILOGUE

AYERTON



FIVE MONTHS LATER

I AM WATCHING my gorgeous bride walk down the aisle to me and my chest swells seeing the evidence of our love and my ownership of her burgeoning belly holding my daughter safely. “You did good, son.” My father leans down and whispers in my ear. I turn to him and pat him on the back.

“I know, dad. God do I know.” He nods and takes his place at the altar where he is going to perform the ceremony. I wouldn’t want it any other way but for my father, a judge, to marry me and my soul mate.

The organ starts and she begins walking towards me on the arm of her father. She looks like an angel. Her face is beaming, the love I share with her is reflecting back at me. She makes it to me and immediately my hand goes to her belly, which has become harder over the last week. “How is our daughter?” I ask her, letting my hand rest on the life we created together.

“She is perfect. Been a little busy. I think she knows today is a special day.”

“That is because it is. Today is the day we become a family in the eyes of God. Forever.”

“I love you so much,” she says, a tear falling down her face. I wipe her cheek with my thumb. I hear the throat clearing of my father and we turn to face him.

“Dearly beloved..”

“Are you happy, sweetness?” I am currently spinning my wife around the dance floor.

“So happy, babe. I never knew love could be like this.” she says, kissing me and pulling back. “So open and freeing. I never felt more like myself than I did the moment I met you. You made me brave, Ross. I will spend my life making you happy and being your wife.” Well shit. I am so fucking glad she didn’t say that as her vows. Everyone would have been a crying mess including me.

“Oh, my sweet girl. You have no idea how much you changed me. I used order and regimentation to hide. To guard myself after being hurt, but with one word you ripped that gate wide open. You made me want to hold on and never let go. And now, I never will.” We kiss once more before her bridesmaids come over for pictures.

“Congratulations, Boss.” I turn and see Esteban standing behind me.

“Thank you for coming. I appreciate it.” He smiles and nods his head. “You didn’t bring a date?”

“Nah. I don’t fake date. Plus, with all the new accounts you gave me as you get ready for your honeymoon, I don’t have time. By the way, I am sorry I missed the ceremony. Mr. Tanaka needed a lot of finessing to put this deal to bed.”

“I understand and I appreciate you taking the time to handle it.” I am about to tell him not to let himself be pulled in by work when a squeal and then a rush of body weight hits me from the left.

“Ayerton. I finally got you alone.” My little sister tries to wrap her tiny arms around me and squeeze me. I laugh and hug her back. I hear a rumble from the side of us and see Esteban, intently staring at her like he has found gold.

“Don’t you have a wife?” He growls at me, before moving closer to my sister. It would be comical if it weren’t so surprising. She turns and immediately her body goes rigid, and her eyes buck out of her head. “Muévete de sus brazos, preciosa.” Leighton gulps and looks at me before turning back to him.

“Uhm... I don’t know what you said,” she says quietly. I attempt to move her away from him seeing she is overwhelmed, but he growls at me once again and pulls her into his arms.

“It doesn’t matter, precious. All you need is here in my arms.”

Well shit. Another one bites the dust.

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EPILOGUE

HOPE



TEN YEARS LATER

TEN YEARS and five kids later, I am feeling run down these days. I've been going since six thirty this morning. Our move to Washington, DC was done at the beginning of the summer, but with day camps, summer dance troupes, soccer practice, wrestling, and outdoor basketball, not to mention, my job at the White House, I'm exhausted. Actually, I think exhausted would be a welcome thing at this point, but don't mistake me, I love my life and my babies. I love they have activities that they enjoy, and they aren't just playing video games or vegged out in front of the TV all the time.

It's two am and I'm baking cookies for my oldest daughter, Eloise's dance troupe. I don't know why I agreed to this, but at least it's Sunday. I don't have to work today. The house is blissfully quiet, and I finish boxing up the oatmeal raisin cookies, Eloise requested in cute plastic boxes and set them on the counter. I will bring them with us when I drop her off at rehearsal in the morning. She's so passionate about dance. I love that about her.

I load the dishwasher and finish my glass of red wine. I am wiping the counters down when Ayerton comes up behind me and wraps his arms around my waist. His new beard scratches my neck as he nuzzles it. The beard is a new thing for him since he cut his hours at the office while the kids are out of

school. It's so helpful to have another driver for all these damn activities. I don't remember being so active when I was a kid, but it has given me a new appreciation for my parents.

"Come to bed, wife," he growls, letting his hands cup my boob, then pinch and stroke my nipple. I moan and lean back into him. I know exactly where this is going, and I want it. I want him.

"I was just on my way," I say as his hand wanders into my pale pink pajama shorts. I gasp when his finger traces my pussy up and down before he slides it into my pussy hole. He pumps his finger in and out a few times before adding a second one. "Oh, God," I whisper as that familiar euphoria begins to wash over me. Fuck yes. He makes me come quickly on his thick fingers then he lifts me up into his arms and carries me to our bed. He strips me naked and stares at me while jerking his cock slowly.

He pushes my thighs open and stares down at my pussy, then he licks his lips. My breath hitches in anticipation. "I have to taste you, Hope. I need your taste on my tongue before I fill you with my seed." God, I love it when it talks to me like this. It makes me so wet for him. Who am I kidding though? I'm always wet and ready for him. No amount of time is going to change that for me. Then he buries his face in my pussy and licks from clit to ass, over and over again until I scream his name. While I am still shaking from the orgasm, he slams his cock into me hard.

"Ayerton, please," I beg, though I am not sure what I am begging for.

"So tight, baby," he says through clenched teeth.

Over and over, he fucks into me until we are both panting and coming.

Even when I am at my worst, he knows just what to do to make me feel special.

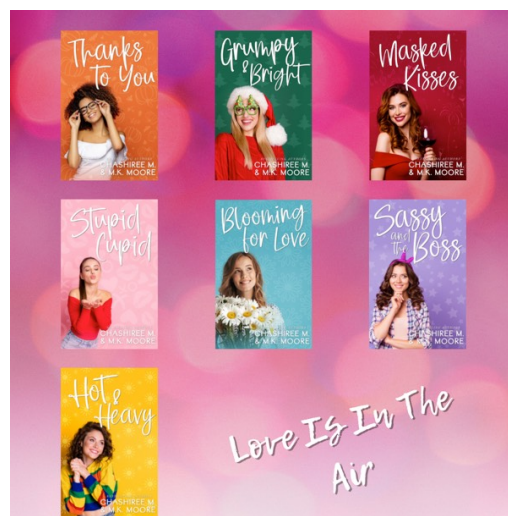
"I love you," I whisper as he drops down on top of me. I run my fingers through his hair as he lays on me. The weight of him always welcome and comforting.

“I love you too, baby.” He snuggles into me, and I wrap my arms around him. It’ll just be a few minutes then he’ll be inside of me giving me more incredible, mind-blowing orgasms. The day I met him, I thought I was lucky, but now I know that I am. I never would have thought that getting into a cab would have changed my life so thoroughly, but I am so glad that it did.

Thanks to him, I have everything I wanted and a few things I never knew I needed.

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