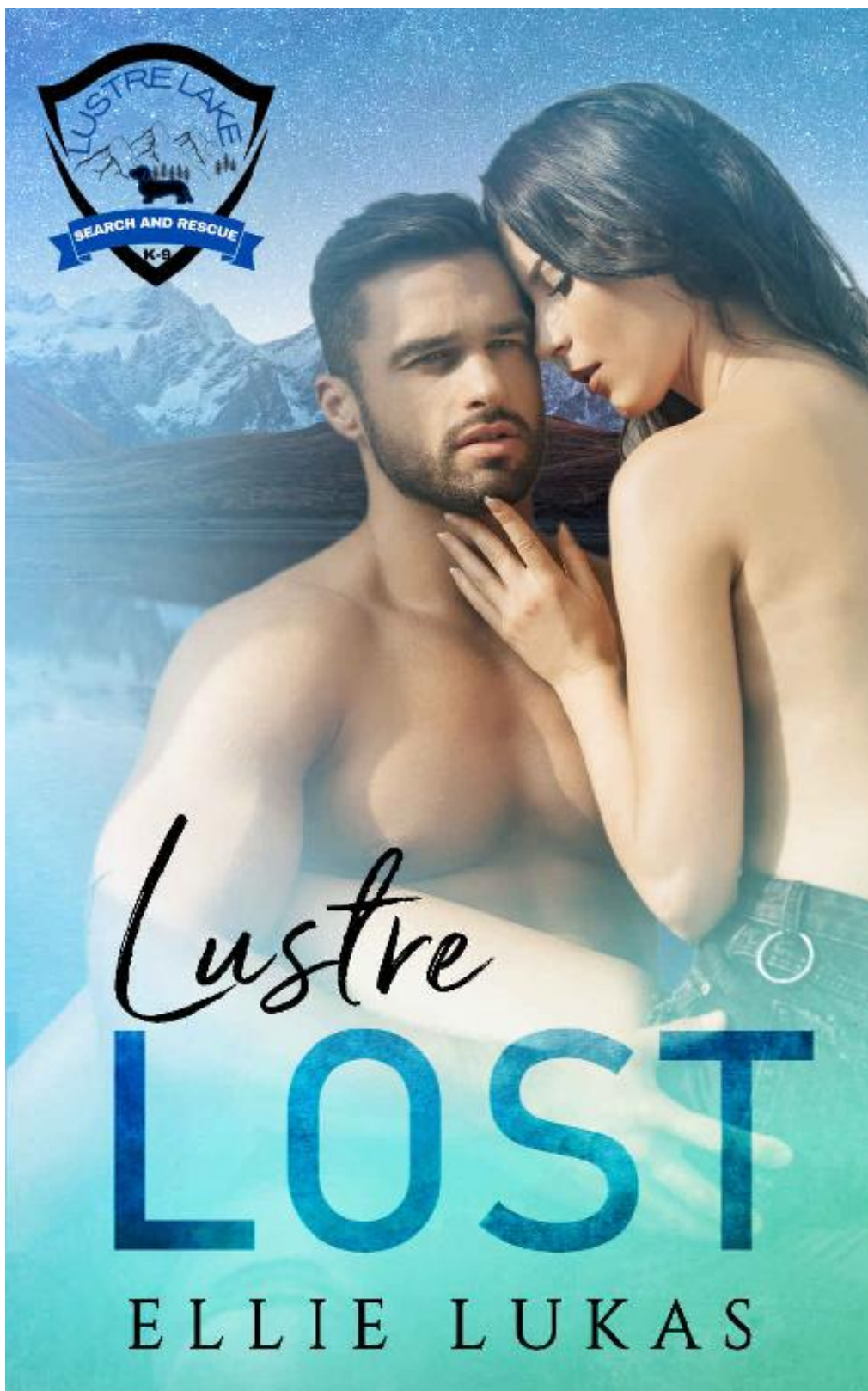




Lustre

LOST

ELLIE LUKAS



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Lustre Lost

Lustre Lake Search and Rescue ~ Book One

Ellie Lukas

Happily Ever, Forever LLC

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*To my amazing husband. Thank you for supporting me on
this wild ride.*

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Content Warning

Thank you so much for giving *Lustre Lost* a chance! I am so excited for you to meet Tilly, Drew, and Hot Dog, but please check the content warnings below before you begin. No book is worth your mental health, so please be sure to protect yourself.

Content Warning:

- Graphic Sexual Content
- PTSD Flashback episodes (two and they do happen on page)

Prologue

Tilly

Do not say bunion again. Do not say bunion again.

The pasta primavera on my plate smells incredible. Beautiful strands of linguini and perfectly cooked broccoli with sun-dried tomatoes sit uneaten before me. The scent of garlic wafts up my nose as I twirl my fork in my carefully prepared dinner. The first few bites were heavenly, better than sex, but then Gerald, my date, started talking. Now my appetite has fled, and as I look longingly toward the front door, I wish I could leave as easily.

Why do I let myself get pulled into these situations?

“Well, what do you think Tilly?” Gerald’s nasal voice asks.

“I think you should do what you feel is best. I don’t know much about foot ailments,” I declare, plastering a smile on my face.

“Yes, of course I will; but if it was your foot, would you have the surgery or just wait?” he persists; clearly not understanding that this is a pretty gross topic for a first date.

“Ummm, I’m not really sure. What did you say you do again? Tell me about your passions.” I quip, trying to steer our conversation to less smelly topics. Eww.

“Oh, I work in finance and I don’t have time for anything else. It’s just me and my bunion. Or maybe not—if I get the surgery. Should I go for a second opinion?” He continues on, not waiting for an answer as he lists the pros and cons.

Where the hell does my mother keep finding these men? And why do I keep letting her set me up? If I ask her to stop, or refuse, she won't push—but I never do, always hoping that this next time will be the right guy. The man who'll make my heart race, and fill me with butterflies and passion.

It's certainly not going to be Gerald and his troublesome feet. He has the personality of dry toast, or worse—cold, buttered toast. Yuck.

My brain wanders to my bakery menu. My grandparents recently retired and gifted me the New Moon Bakery, and now I get to experiment. A flare of excitement races down my spine—cinnamon roll muffins! Humm, but how to create that perfect gooey center... it would still need the ideal icing flavor...

“Tilly, are you done?” Gerald asks, his brows furrowed. My brain returns to reality and I notice our server standing by the table, waiting to take my dinner away.

“Oh, yes, it was delicious. Can I have it boxed?” The waitress smiles with sympathy in her eyes as they flick toward my date. She grabs my plate and checks to see if we want dessert.

“That sounds interesting. Should we look at a menu?” Gerald asks.

“I couldn't possibly. My stomach is way too full.” I reply with a sheepish shrug.

“No problem, just the check,” he grins. Looking me over, “Tilly wants to keep her perfect shape I bet.”

His gaze locks on my chest, and a shudder of revulsion works its way through me. *Nope. Never going to happen, foot man.*

“What do you think of cinnamon roll muffins?” I blurt, needing to say something as we wait.

“That sounds gross, honestly. Too sweet for breakfast. You should start your day with healthy nourishment, like oatmeal or toast.”

Sighing, I nod, pretending to agree as the server bustles over. After paying, I grab my coat and we head out the door into the night.

“Here, let me help you,” Gerald says, gallantly taking the black material from my fingers and holding it out to me. My arms slide into the warm sleeves, and I wrap it around my body to fend off the chill.

“Well, goodnight, thank you for the delicious dinner,” I say politely, as I turn toward him. Gerald steps closer, pulling me in for a hug. Cologne overpowers my senses and, without warning, his mouth comes down against mine. His cold, wet lips have me choking back a gag and bile rises in my throat as his arms tighten like tentacles around me. I stiffen, and for once he gets the message, immediately letting go and retreating.

“How about I come home with you for a nightcap?” he asks.

“I’m so sorry. It’s just a bit too soon,” I say.

“I can respect that. Make me work for it, huh? No problem—would you like a ride?”

“I think I’ll walk. It’s only up the road and I wouldn’t mind stretching my legs.” I reply, glad he took it so well.

“Alright, let’s go on a second date next week? It’s the New Moon, we could head to Lustre Lake...” he trails off.

“Maybe! I’ll check my schedule and let you know,” I say with false cheer, beginning to stride away. “Goodnight!” *Never in a million years, bunion boy.*

“Goodnight,” he calls, and I give a little wave before crossing the street. The second he can no longer see me, I run my hand over my mouth, trying to wipe off the saliva Gerald left on my face. Talk about your all-time terrible kisses.

The crisp night air whisks away the stench of Gerald’s cologne, and I take a deep breath, letting it out in little puffs, which create white rings that float toward the sky. My heels click, making noise as I step up onto the sidewalk, and leaves crunch under my feet. The quiet surrounds me, and I’m thankful for the peace.

“It looked like he was trying to eat your face,” a masculine voice drifts out from the shadows, startling a shout out of me. Whirling around, my eyes scan my surroundings until they find a large form propped against the florist’s closed door.

“And I can’t believe he just left you to walk home alone,” he growls, stepping under the dull, yellow light provided by the

lamppost. The man is massive, his muscles clear, even under his coat, and he's so tall that I need to tilt my head back to see his face. Stubble covers his chiseled jaw, and his dark brows furrow, as though annoyed. Nearly black, short hair adorns his head, and I am captivated.

"I wanted to walk home alone. I live just down the street," I insist, swallowing hard as he steps closer. My pulse pounds in my throat, and my legs carry me toward him like a moth to a flame.

"I'll take you there," he gruffly replies, falling in beside me. "Want to make sure you get there safely."

"I've never met you before. How does that make me safe?" I question, although my heart already knows the answer. His relaxed presence gives me a sense of comfort and tranquility. We slowly wander down the empty sidewalk.

"I'm Drew. I recently took over the Search and Rescue Team. You didn't look too happy about that kiss. I only wanted to make sure he stopped touching you," he admits, running his hand through his hair.

"I was fine," I insist. "But, I appreciate it. Welcome to Lustre Lake. I'm Tilly, by the way. How do you feel about cinnamon roll muffins?"

We're only a few shops away from the bakery now, and I wish the walk was longer. His voice is like silk, which makes me want to listen to him all day.

“Do they have frosting?” he asks, reaching for my hand. His warm palm engulfs mine, sending heat spiraling to my core. Our fingers fit perfectly together, and my mind jumps to us walking down the aisle one day. Could this man be the one I’ve been searching for?

“Of course!” I reply, “What kind of cinnamon roll doesn’t have frosting?”

“Sounds delicious,” he rumbles. *Take that Gerald.*

“So, what’s the deal with everything being called ‘New Moon’ something or other?” Drew asks as we make our way down the path.

“Well, it’s all part of the lore of the town. We’re known for our Love Lake, but it only works on the night of a New Moon,” I explain.

He glances toward me, quirking his eyebrow in disbelief.

“Legend has it that the Moon Goddess herself brings her animals to drink from the Lake. So, if she sees you there with a potential soulmate, she’ll bless your bond; making you feel a pull toward the person who can make you happy for the rest of your days. There’s also a story about a witch and a love potion that went awry. But we can save that one for another day.”

A snort leaves his nose, followed by a chuckle. Ah, a non-believer... nothing a bit of time here won’t cure.

We stop in front of the doorway. His eyes are now visible, and their startling blue shade takes my breath away. He looks from the storefront back to me.

“New Moon Bakery?” he questions.

“The one and only,” I chirp with a smile. “I own it, and my apartment is right upstairs.”

Giving his hand a last squeeze, I release him and reach into my pocket, feeling around for the cold metal of my keys. I pull them out and unlock the door.

“Here, let me hold that for you,” he offers, taking the box of food from me. The key turns easily and the door swings open. What do I do now? I’m not ready for us to part, but it seems way too forward to invite him in.

He gives me the leftovers when I turn back to face him. Bending forward he rubs his cheek across mine, his coarse stubble lights up all of my nerve endings and ignites a rush of desire.

“I’ll be seeing you soon Tilly,” he whispers in my ear, his warm breath fanning my neck. Kissing my cheek, he pulls away. “Be sure to lock up.”

Dazed, I step inside and follow his directions. He watches as I turn the locks before fading into the shadows.

As I make my way upstairs, something blooms in my chest. Something that feels an awful lot like hope.

Chapter One

Drew

Two Years Later

B^{ang} The door slams open into the wall so forcefully that the whole cabin shakes. Grinning, I lean back and spread my legs, allowing the smooth leather of the couch to cool my overheated skin. A drop of condensation slides down the bottle and lands on my chest as I lift my beer to my lips, taking a swig. I swallow hard as she fills the doorway. *Damn.* Tilly Collins is an absolute vision.

Long, dark hair swirls around her as she saunters into the room. Her brown eyes are already clouded with lust, her mouth is painted red, and I can see her nipples poking through the soft material of her short yellow dress. *Oh, yes, it is going to be a fantastic night.*

“Well, there you are,” she says, licking her lips.

“Here I am.”

My hands wave, beckoning her forward, and she glides toward me until she is standing between my outstretched legs. As soon as she reaches me, I grip the thin material she’s wearing and tug firmly on it. The seams pop and the dress slips to the floor, bearing her to my hungry gaze. My cock pulses as her rosy pink nipples come into view. They are already peaked and I can’t wait to roll them between my fingers; taste them.

My eyes slide down her body, noting all the smooth skin and her perfect belly until finally reaching the juncture between her thighs. Reaching out my hand, I cup her pussy and find her wet and ready. *Yes, finally.*

She lowers herself to her knees before me. Already naked, I grip myself at the base and offer her my cock.

“Suck me deep, beautiful girl,” I grunt as she licks over the head. She teases my throbbing cock with scattered kisses and slow swirls of her tongue, but I am not a patient man. Our eyes lock as I fist her hair and thrust myself into her mouth, pushing until I meet the back of her throat. With a mischievous smirk, Tilly swallows around me.

“Oh, yeah,” I moan as the warm heat of her mouth engulfs me. Unable to hold back, I set a punishing pace; in... out... in... out. I drive deeper, watching her red lips stretch as she takes me in all the way to the root. Tilly moans, taking all I can give her, and her thighs glisten with arousal. My hips pump faster, sawing in and out. Anticipation prickles at the base of my spine, and pleasure shoots through my body. I’m almost there.

Throwing my head back, I roar out my release... but my orgasm flees as sand and grit enter my mouth.

What. The. Fuck.

Looking down, my heart begins to pound because Tilly is gone, and all around me is red desert sand. *No. No. No. Not again.*

I hobble to my feet, but my leg won't move. It's stiff and dragging behind me. My standard issue camo pants are crimson, soaked in blood. Ignoring the pain shooting from my knee, I try to rush forward, but I am sucked back down; into the sand.

My feet struggle for purchase, but I slip and fall. The wind picks up, and dust and grime pelt my body as I sink deeper and deeper; the desert doing its very best to swallow me whole.

My heart is pounding, trying to leap from my chest. In the distance, loud pops of gunfire blast away. This is bad, really bad. My SEAL team is in trouble and I need to get to them, but my leg is useless. Blood soaks into the surrounding ground, turning the red sand a muddy brown.

The blistering sun beats down on me, sweat drips down my back, but I pull myself toward the people who need me. Unable to stand, muscles straining, I claw my way toward my team. The rough sand swirls again, slamming into my face like a thousand tiny razors until my eyes and lungs are burning. All I can taste is sand. All I can see is sand. Tears track down my cheeks, blood trails behind me and still I push forward.

My men are shouting and their cries for help ring in my ears, but I still can't get to them. *No matter what I do, the bombs will explode, killing them all.* There is no changing the past. I don't save them. I'm no one's hero.

Something cold and wet nuzzles my face. Wait, what? The wet touch comes again, this time followed by the oddest sensation, a rough tongue gliding across my cheek.

Lick. Lick. Lick.



Reality begins to break in through the fog of my nightmare as doggie breath wafts into my nose. My body is curled into a fetal position, covered in sweat, and every single muscle is locked tight. Heartbeat still thundering, I'm not ready to open my eyes yet, so I start my count first.

One. Wiggle my toes.

Two. Take a calming breath.

Three. What can I sense? Well, that's easy... dog breath.

Four. Stretch my body out.

Five. Suck it up.

With one final deep breath, I crack open my eyes, and a feeling of gratitude rushes through my battered body when I see two liquid brown pools staring back at me.

“Hello, Hot Dog,” I say to the little red dachshund. As soon as I acknowledge him, the foolish beast begins to wiggle around the bed, rolling himself under my chin. Using his paws, he presses against my chest, licking and wriggling against me until I stroke his soft fur. His antics are the final straw that brings me back to the present.

Rolling onto my back, I glance around my bedroom, noting that all is as it should be. My books and water are still set neatly on my bedside table. The chair is piled with clothing,

just as I had left it and the door to the bathroom is open, towel hanging on the handle. At least I didn't tear the house up this time.

Snagging my phone off the table, I tap the screen. Only one message pops up. It's from my mother and simply says, "Hope you're well. Would like you to check in." The phone thumps against the wood, falling back onto the table as a wave of guilt washes over me. Since coming back, I haven't been home much. I should, but it's hard to be there and pretend I'm the same man I used to be.

Grumbling at me impatiently, Hot Dog hops onto my chest and begins walking up and down my torso, making little grunting noises. Impatient little creature. He comes back up to my face and tips his head, giving me the patented dachshund side-eye.

"Okay, okay. You want to go outside?" His long tongue darts out, slurping along my nose one last time before leaping from the bed and taking off toward the back of our house. Extricating myself from my sheets, which seem to have woven around me like a python, I follow and open the door, stepping outside onto the porch.

Hot Dog scampers over to the grass, running happily until he reaches the trees. Dropping his nose, he sniffs and darts in and out of the woods playfully.

My leg continues to throb, but as I take in the deep forest and mountain air, I feel rejuvenated. The view from my porch soothes me as I watch the birds fly through the tall spruce

trees, their calls echoing. Enormous mountains jut toward the sky and, if I look just right, I can see the tiniest sliver of the magical cerulean waters of Lustre Lake. No one else is out here, no homes for miles, just perfect solitude. As the peace of my surroundings helps push the memories back, Hot Dog approaches me.

It's been about two years since I found the little guy starving to death in the woods. I still have no idea how he made it out there on his own. He was so skinny when I found him, but even then I could see his indomitable will as he growled at me, snipping and telling me to back off. I had rushed into the house to gather some food so I could get close enough to grab him and, of course, the first thing I laid my hands on was a pack of hot dogs. Huddled against a tree, trying to make myself look smaller, I sat out there for hours hoping he would come over to me; but he finally did, scarfing down every last one. My plan had been to fix him up and then pass him off to a loving family with kids, but he turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to me.

Hot Dog winds himself around my feet, before plopping down directly on my toes. He looks up at me expectantly, making little whining noises.

“What do you want, buddy?” He continues to stare at me, tongue sticking out, with a little doggie smile on his face. I know what he wants; In fact, I am fairly certain we are both craving the same exact thing.

“You wanna go get some breakfast from Tilly?” I ask, and his ears perk right up. “Go see Tilly?” Yup, that’s the key. Amusement rolls through me as he bounces around, doing the butt wiggle.

“Arf, woof,” he trills. As I open the door, he disappears inside. Combing a hand through my hair I toss on some clothes as he determinedly hops back to me; dragging my boot that weighs almost as much as he does.

“You fluffing nutter,” I say, shaking my head. I take it from him and get its partner, slipping them on before reaching down to pick up my red dachshund. I quickly slide him under my shirt and grab the keys off the counter.

Time to go see my dream woman.

Chapter Two

Tilly

If it is true love you seek,
Search before the new moon's peak.
Climb the mountain, standing tall,
Until you find the path so small.
This will take you to fates lake,
Now the chance is yours to take.
And if Destiny smiles on your endeavor,
Then you shall live, *Happily Ever, Forever.*

No matter how much I try to focus on making these chocolate croissants, my eyes just keep drifting up the wall to that poem. That stupid, magical, wonderful poem.

No, Tilly. Pay attention before you burn your fingers off. I usually find baking relaxing, although today my heart just isn't in it. Taking over New Moon Bakery from my grandparents has been one of the most amazing adventures. I love the baking; I love the coffee; I love the customers, especially the big burly one who runs our local Search and Rescue Team—but today the black moon is taunting me.

Our whole town is steeped in the lore of Lustre Lake. Tourists come from all over to try their hand at meeting a soul mate on the night of a new moon. They hike up to the scenic mountainside lake, hoping to meet their one true love, and the thing is... it does happen. Not always. Not for everyone—but it happens.

Some people say that a good witch performed a love spell that went awry, while others maintain that a goddess blessed the lake. Truly, I don't know, and—while I am not one for superstitions—I am a believer in the power of Lustre Lake. I mean, how can I not be? My grandmother met my grandfather under the stars on the night of a rare black moon, and they fell instantly in love.

They had never even met before but, with only one look, they knew they had found their soulmate. Within a month they got married, then opened the bakery, and a few years later had my mom. My grandparents have the happiest marriage of anyone I know and now, in their eighties, they still stare at one another with absolute devotion.

My eyes stray to the poem again and I sigh.

The tinkle of the door opening breaks me out of my musings.

“I'll be right with you,” I call out, quickly turning to place the chocolate croissants in the oven and set the timer. I wash my hands, then head to the front to serve my customer.



As I walk through the doorway, the scent of crisp mountain air and forest hits my nose. I can feel his presence instantly; Drew is here. Nerves flutter in my stomach, and I wish I had taken a moment to clean up before I came out. My hair is tangled in a knot on my head, and I'm still wearing my flour-coated apron.

Stepping around the corner, the sight of him hits me, forcing a little gasp. My gaze takes him in hungrily and butterflies flap in my belly, my heart beats faster, like it always does. Tall and so broad, Drew's muscular arms are straining the fabric of the white shirt he has on under his vest. A tattoo peaks out of the bottom of his sleeve, and I'm dying to know what it is. His stubble looks rough and I imagine him rubbing it against my skin. Shuddering, I take in his chiseled jaw, black hair, and nose that is just slightly crooked. He turns toward me and flashes a panty-drenching smile.

I want him so bad.

“Good morning, Drew. What can I get you?” I ask stupidly, already moving to make his coffee. I know his order by heart.

“Just the usual,” he replies in a deep voice that slides over me like black silk. I can feel his eyes on my ass and catch him looking as I spin to get his muffins. A sense of power rolls through me. Maybe he wants me too...

“Do you want the box for the SAR team today? Or just the coffee and cinnamon roll muffin?” I ask. Glancing up, I see a furry red head pop out of the top of Drew's green vest, right under his chin. Sweet brown eyes look at me imploringly. “And, of course, a doggie treat for my favorite guy.”

“Your favorite guy? Well, I guess that doesn’t say much for the male population of Lustre Lake,” he says gruffly.

My cheeks heat as an embarrassed flush spreads across my face. Turning, I snag some options for Hot Dog and come around the counter with my offerings.

I hold up the blueberry donut and he turns his nose away. Next the banana-carrot doggie muffin, this one gets a sniff and another polite decline. Finally, I offer him the bacon cookie and his ears perk up, a little tongue darting out to indicate he wants this treat today.

Breaking it in half, I step closer and offer it to him. He gently takes the morsel from my fingertips and I pet his silky ears, trying not to look up at his enticing owner. Drew’s woodsy scent surrounds me, and I can feel his body heat. I want to run my fingers over his stubble, stand on tiptoes and kiss his sexy grin. But of course, I don’t do that; instead, I take a step back before Hot Dogs’ little whimpers stop me in my tracks.

“I think it’s bacon cookies for the win today. Here you go.” Reaching out, I attempt to hand it to him, but Drew’s hand comes up to brush my face instead.

I freeze. My eyes immediately dart to his bright blue ones. Awareness crackles between us as his calloused fingertips wipe across my cheek before sensually sliding down to my neck.

“You’ve got some flour right here,” he murmurs, his voice rumbling in his chest.

“Life of a baker,” my voice sounds breathy, even to me. I tip my head back, inviting him. *Kiss me. Please kiss me.*

The tension grows thicker, and I think for just one second that his lips will descend on mine, but then...

“Grrrr.” Hot Dog gives a little growl and Drew jumps back, guilt flashing across his face.

“I guess he wants some more. Would you please add some more to the order? And one of those little doggie muffins? We’re heading to SAR Headquarters and Jeremy told me he would be there with Blue. Don’t want that enormous monster getting grumpy.”

I nod and scoot back around the counter, gathering his order and adding a few extra apple pie scones to the box since those are Jeremy’s favorite.

“No charge today,” I say with a false cheerfulness that I hope he doesn’t pick up on.

The chime over the door tinkles, admitting my best friend Blyth, a stunning woman with long silver hair that is dyed blue at the tips. I smile in greeting.

Upon seeing her, Drew drops some cash on the counter and hustles right out the door without so much as a backward glance.

Sighing, I greet my bestie.

“Hey you, are you here for a snack or a visit?”

“Both, of course!” she chirps.

The timer on the croissants beeps in the back, so I head that way, knowing that Blyth is comfortable enough in the bakery to follow me.

Grabbing the familiar oven mitts, a wave of heat hits me as I pull them out of the oven and place them onto a cooling rack. I can feel Blyth staring holes in my back.

“Sooooooooo, are you going to tell me what Mr. Tall, Dark, and Broody wanted?” she asks.

“Food and coffee,” I say in a clipped tone.

“Nothing else? It seemed like there was some tension when I came in.”

Whirling to face her, I can’t help it as the words tumble out of my mouth. “There was. We were so close and I really, really thought for a second that he was going to kiss me. But then nothing. He even touched my face.” Throwing up my hands in frustration, I continue to transfer the croissants.

“He should have gone for the butt grab.”

“I wish.”

“Yeah, I know you do. So does this mean Operation Black Moon is a go?” She wiggles her eyebrows and does a little hip thrust.

My eyes stray to the poem again. Reaching up, I pull it down and hug it against my chest. Tonight, a Black Moon will grace the sky. Although the lore talks about the new moon, my grandmother told me that the chances of finding true love are

higher during the black moon—like the night she and my grandfather met.

Blyth and I have plotted endlessly about getting Drew up to Lustre Lake to see if the magic picks us...

Maybe it's time.

The plan we have concocted—Operation Black Moon—is simple. I head out on a hike. When I get to the little path that leads to the lake, I'm supposed to call Blyth, and then she will rush to the SAR building to tell Drew that I'm injured on the mountain. She'll give him my location so that he can come to meet me lakeside to "help", hopefully getting caught up in the moment and bam—Happily Ever, Forever.

Obviously, there are tons of ways that this whole thing could go wrong...but perhaps...

Nodding my head, I decide it's time to take a chance.

Hope for a little magic.

"Operation Black Moon is a go."

Chapter Three

Drew

“Well, I guess that wasn’t particularly smooth, huh?”
I say to the little dog in my vest. I am a moron. Plain and simple, I can’t believe I just walked out when Tilly’s friend came in. Hot Dog hits me with the side eye.

“I know, buddy,” I mutter, shaking my head.

Walking down the sidewalk, I try to hurry. People in this town tend to stop you, just to chat.

Who does that?

Mrs. Worther steps out of her flower shop, directly into my path, causing me to pause.

“Good morning, Drew. Happy Black Moon Eve,” she says with a cheerful grin. I mumble a quick thanks and dart around her so she can’t see me rolling my eyes.

This town and its stupid superstitions. Who the hell believes standing by a lake can make you fall in love? It doesn’t make any damn sense. It does lead to lost, injured, and trapped tourists, though. Unlucky-in-love losers who think a lake will fix their lives.

I hustle along before anyone else can slow me down.

Trees and flowers line the street, and unique little storefronts are everywhere. Antique stores, bookshops, and even a tattoo parlor. Dodging through the groups of talking tourists and locals, I veer down the street where the firehouse and police department are located. Off to the side is the little brick

building the town provided as a Search and Rescue Headquarters.

The metal door squeaks as I push it open, revealing our shared space. It's not much, just a bunch of tables, couches, and comfy chairs, but it's perfect. Its cozy vibe allows the team to take a breather between calls and serves as a place to hunker down and rest the dogs.

I am the only full-time SAR member; the others are part-timers or volunteers. Right now, there are seven of us with trained dogs, but the community here is strong. People are always willing to lend a hand, or a hoof, to aid us.

For a moment I think the office is empty, but as the door slams baying erupts from the bathroom. Blue, Jeremy's enormous Bluetick Coonhound, is the only one who can make that unholy sound. The thump of pounding paws heads our way, so I quickly set down my bag of goodies and coffee.

Blue rushes into the room and jumps up on me to greet Hot Dog. His enormous paws slam into my chest and I stumble back a step. Hot Dog reaches his long snout forward until they touch noses and Blue sits, waiting for me to place his buddy on the floor.

Digging into my vest, I grab my now squirming dog and set him down.

The two act like they haven't seen each other in years, when in reality it's only been a few days. Before long, the butt sniffing is over and Blue's incredible nose has picked up the

scent of Tilly's muffins. Gobs of drool fall from his mouth as Jeremy wanders into the room.

“Do I see New Moon Bakery coffee? Please tell me you brought me some food.” He doesn't wait for me to reply before snagging the bag off the table. Rifling through, he tosses a treat to each dog before reaching for the second bag that contains the people food.

“I didn't ask for anything for you, but they are in there just the same,” I grumble at him. With his blond hair and pretty boy face, Jeremy is beloved by all of the local women. I hate that she tossed in his favorite snack, even if it makes me a dick. Jeremy needs to stay the hell away from my girl. *Wait, no... not my girl. Stop that.*

“Sweet. Tilly packed me Apple Pie Scones, that woman is a goddess.” My blood begins to heat. “Amazing baker, not to mention she's damn fine to look at. All that long dark hair, legs for days, and oh yeah, don't even get me started on her rack.”

With a growl, I spin to face him, blood roaring in my ears, ready to pound him into the ground—but the asshole is smirking at me. Clearly trying to get a reaction with his crude language. Dick.

“Oh yeah, you've got it bad for her; huh Boss?”

“Shut up and eat your scone,” I grunt at him. He gives me a knowing grin and we fall into a companionable silence.

Of course, I want Tilly. Anyone with eyes would. But she deserves so much more than me; So much more than a wounded soldier who hates being around people and has violent PTSD episodes. I could hurt her. Hell, I could *kill* her during a blackout. She's better off without me.

Tilly is sunshine, and me, well, I'm a freaking hurricane.



“Heads up,” Kenna, one of our SAR team members, shouts as her black lab Abigail almost knocks me over trying to get to the scent she just located. Abigail is our newest trainee, so she's still a bit green.

Chuckling, I grab her and get her in the proper position to alert. I shake my head. “Well, she's definitely getting the scenting down. Now we just need to work on how she tells us she found something. She's doing good though.”

“Yeah, she loves it. I am so glad the shelter called me when she came in. She's so snuggly too,” Kenna comments, grabbing Abigail's ball for a game of fetch to praise her for a job well done.

I watch Abigail bound around enthusiastically. She is so different from Mayhem, Kenna's twin brother's police dog, who is on the team as well. But then again, the Andersen twins are like night and day.

“That's a wrap for today, everyone,” I tell them and we all begin to clean up.

We're just about done, and most of the team has already left when our front door slams open with a bang. Tilly's weird friend runs in, clutching a hoodie, looking flushed and flustered. I can't remember her name.

She rushes over to me and begins talking a mile a minute. "I think we have a huge problem Tilly went hiking and she never called to check in and I am worried." She screeches without pausing for a single breath. The only thing I can make out is the name Tilly and her panic. A sense of dread immediately settles in my stomach.

Fortunately, by this point, Jeremy has come over to see what the commotion is all about.

"Blyth, darlin', you need to slow down so we can help." He says, leading her over to a seat. "Take a deep breath for me and then start over."

I move closer. If something is wrong with Tilly, we don't have time for all of this deep breath shit. I am about to yell at this woman when she finally opens her mouth and lets out a coherent thought.

"Tilly went on a hike a few hours ago, and I haven't heard from her. We always check in with each other when we hike alone. I even checked our tracking app, and it says it can't find her location."

"Okay, she hikes these mountains all the time, she may just be in an area with poor reception," Jeremy says rationally; as my heartbeat pounds in my ears.

“Yeah, that is why I wasn’t freaking out...but she was supposed to get back almost two hours ago...” Blyth looks up at me with tears in her eyes. She holds out the hoodie she was carrying. “I know they usually say you should wait longer before calling for help—but this is just so not like her. This is her sweatshirt...I remember when I volunteered to help search for that missing kid a few months ago that you needed something that smelled like him. Will this work? Will you go look for her?”

“Sure thing, Blyth. Though it is Black Moon night, maybe she found love up by the lake,” Jeremy whispers, directing a smug grin my way. “Either way, I’ll check it out.”

Jeremy reaches out for Tilly’s top, and before the thought even registers, I push him aside and snag it.

“Hot Dog and I will go.” I glare at Jeremy—daring him to protest. A brief flicker of something that looks like satisfaction crosses Blyth’s face, but that makes no sense, so I head to the back to grab a SAR bag and call for my dog.

In just a few seconds, we are ready to go.

“Hey Drew, seriously man, if you need help you better call me, okay?” I give him a quick nod. *No fucking way am I calling him on a Black Moon Night.* Even if I don’t believe in the superstitious shit.

As I rush out to my car, Hot Dog in my vest, hoodie in my hand, I glance toward the mountains.

Grey storm clouds are building behind them, and my sense of urgency grows.

Fuck.

Chapter Four

Tilly

Birds sing in the treetops as I walk further into the forest. Swooping from branch to branch, they trill cheerfully, raising my spirits.

Breathing in the fresh air, I stretch my arms toward the sky. I have always been drawn to this place; being in nature fills me with a sense of tranquility that I can't find anywhere else.

I spin slowly, letting the gently filtered light wash over my body. Even as a child I was never afraid of this place, exploring the mountains with my parents and grandparents. Fanciful images of fairies and gnomes whirling in my head, promising fun and joy.

I stop at a boulder to relax since I'm nearing the tiny path to the lake. There are so many different trails on this mountain, all of them scenic, but some are more direct than others. Today I chose my favorite route. It's a little longer than most, but the views and wildlife spotting are the absolute best. Grasping the shoulder straps of my bag, I yank it off my back, place it on a large rock, and pull out my phone, water, and a granola bar.

Tearing the wrapper open, I take out my snack and break it in half, popping some into my mouth and setting the rest down beside me. I tap out a quick message to Blyth letting her know I am on track to reach the lake by sunset and wait for it to go through.

Big mountain. Terrible reception.

A quiet chattering reaches my ear, and I turn just in time to see a giant fluffy squirrel's tail abscond with my granola bar.

My soft giggle mixes with the animal noises of the woods and disappears.

“Guess you were hungry, buddy?” I call out, enchanted.

My phone vibrates—Message Failed to Send—is scrolled across the screen. Oh well, I gulp my water and dust myself off, ready to get closer to the lake. My toes are itching to slip into the soothing water on the sandy bank. Plus, I want to be there before sunset, that way I can watch the animals that come for a drink. It's my favorite time of day.

Once my bag is strapped correctly, I hike on, letting my imagination run wild.

“Get your ass in here with me right now,” Drew growls, his lower half submerged in the magical water of Lustre Lake.

He shakes out his hair, spraying little droplets my way, as I smile from ear to ear. My gaze slides from his chiseled jaw, down his muscular chest, to his abs. My mouth waters as I consider running my tongue from his navel, down, down...

A shock of red shoots by my face, as I startle back to reality.

“Helloooooo,” the bird seems to screech as it settles on a tree branch. My mind swirls with confusion.

Is that a parrot? There is no way, it doesn't make any sense—they aren't native to Lustre Lake. Gnawing on my lip, I move quietly, trying not to spook my pretty feathered friend. If there is a parrot out here, it's probably lost.

The red bird is right above my head, but I can't get a clear view of it, so I shrug my bag off, wincing as the sound of the zipper seems to echo through the forest. Rifling through my bag, I allow it to drop to the ground when I touch the round, bubbled surface of my binoculars. Yes!

Now, I just need a closer look...



Well, fuck a duck.

As always, abso-freaking-lutely nothing in my life is going as planned. Operation Black Moon is officially a disaster.

From my spot, splayed across the damp ground, all I can see is sky and treetops. I attempt a deep breath again, but I just can't suck in any air. I think the last time I had the wind knocked out of me like this was the one and only time I tried ice skating. Freaking clumsy genes.

Gasping, my lungs finally draw in a full breath, but as I move to sit, a sharp pain slices up my leg and I flop back down to the ground. *Ouch.*

I don't even know what to do right now. Just a second ago, I was bopping along enjoying my hike and I'm not even sure what happened. Did I fall? Looking around, I try to piece it all together.

I was sexy daydreaming; I thought I saw a parrot; I wanted a closer look; I stepped on that log and...

Now my ankle and foot are stuck...

Well, mystery solved I guess. Stepping on a rotten log equals bad idea—makes sense. Shifting my weight, I attempt to shimmy my leg out of the wood, but each move causes more pain and my sock is getting squishy. Is it blood? Water? Something wet and foul inside the log?

A shudder wracks my body at the possibilities.

From my prone position on the ground, I try to look around for my bag, wondering if something in there could help me break this treacherous wood. I don't see the bag anywhere, but then again, stuck like this, I can't really see much. I reach for my back pocket, not remembering where I put my phone, and of course, it isn't there either.

Pushing up with my arms, I grit my teeth as my ankle throbs and my knee and hip scream; I look around as quickly as I can, but I still don't see my bag or phone. Ugh.

Falling backward onto the mossy ground, I stare at the branches above me. My feathered nemesis is still there, its black beady eyes staring at me, unblinking. Looking now, I'm able to see that the silly bird is just a bright red cardinal—not a parrot—seriously, what was I thinking?

Great job, Tilly.

I am so close, I can literally see the lake through the trees, but there doesn't seem to be anyone around...

That's a little odd. It's not usually packed, but today there isn't another soul around. It should be sunset, but the sky is

getting darker, and not in the pretty twilight kind of way. In the giant thunderstorm kind of way.

Shit!

The fireflies are out, already drifting over the lake, buoyed by the wind that has picked up. They flicker like little candles as darkness descends. They aren't stars, but I still send out a little wish, hoping above all else that this will turn out all right.

“Come on Lustre Lake magic!” I yell in frustration. Maybe the lake goddess or some forest fairy will come to my aid? A dainty snort leaves me as soon as that thought flits through my head. I know Blyth will send out Search and Rescue soon, but I didn't think I would actually need the help. Why, oh why, did I come up with this stupid plan?

Shivers course through my body as the dampness from the ground underneath me soaks through my clothing and the temperature starts to drop.

What have I done?



Looking around, I try to gauge how long my leg has been trapped in this log. The sky has darkened, but I can't see any stars. My eyes sting from all the tears I've shed and my teeth chatter uncontrollably.

“Serves me right, if I die here of my own stupidity,” I mutter to myself.

“If he actually liked you Tilly, then he would have asked you out. It’s not like he hasn’t had plenty of opportunities. No Moon Magic is going to change that, idiot.” I rant on.

Something cold and wet drops onto my face. Well, great—did that feathered monstrosity shit on me? That would be just freaking spectacular. Moments later, another splatter, but this time on my neck. I glance down, noticing a few little wet spots dotting my clothing. Rain.

Well, this situation just went from bad to worse. Awesome.

A rustling sound from the underbrush has me whipping my head to the right. There are plenty of predators in these woods and, with the way today is going, I wouldn’t be shocked to see a bear or wolf pop out. Fangs bared, saliva dripping, ready to eat the moron with their foot caught in a blasted log.

The leaves closest to me shift, and shake...

Thump. Thump. Thump. My heart is pounding in my ears.

Brown eyes and a little twitching snout appear, followed by a long, wriggling, fluffy red body.

“Hot Dog,” I whisper as relief crashes over me. Twisting, I reach toward my miniature savior. A sharp stab of pain shoots up my leg, spots dance across my vision.

Suddenly, everything goes black.

Chapter Five

Drew

My body is taugt and my hands are shaking. Usually, during rescues, I am sharp and focused, but today I am a trainwreck. Tilly is out here, in danger, and every second that I spend looking for her is agonizing. My mind spins with scenarios, injuries, predators, and even death.

STOP IT.

I have been keeping her at arm's length for so long, knowing that I don't deserve her, but losing her...

I push that thought back down where it belongs, and pay attention to Hot Dog. He is sniffing at the path and from his steady pace I can tell he is clearly on her scent. Hot Dog has one of the very best noses in the country; we haven't had many instances where we were unable to locate our targets. I am hoping Tilly didn't go in any water though; that always makes it harder, diluting the trail.

Hot Dog's ears perk up and he glances back at me.

"Yep, I'm with you buddy," I nod at him and he begins to move faster, indicating that the scent is getting stronger.

Suddenly, he stops and lets out a gentle woof. He is asking if it is safe to leave the trail because that is where Tilly's scent goes.

"All good. FIND HER," I release him from his harness and he darts quickly into the underbrush. I follow as closely as I

can, but he's fast and small. I quickly lose sight of him. That's okay, he will alert when he finds her.

Quieting my footsteps, softly stepping, I strain my ears, hoping to hear the sounds of my dog reuniting with our favorite baker. Breathing in deeply, I can smell the pine surrounding me and a hint of rain in the air. *Please find her.*

Suddenly, a bunch of little yips erupt.

I try to follow the sound, but the forest makes it difficult, so I whistle. Moments later Hot Dog emerges and grabs my jeans between his little jaws. He tugs at my pant leg, urging me to move faster as he leads me to Tilly.

As soon as she is in sight, he rushes off and begins licking her face—but there is no response. No sweet giggle of welcome, no smiling eyes staring up at me.

“Tilly!” I shout, hastening to her side. She is covered in dirt and grime; her dark hair is knotted and splayed around her with leaves stuck throughout, but my biggest concern is her lips. They have a bluish tinge. I quickly check her pulse and breathing. Thankfully, both are normal, but her skin feels like ice. Reaching into my SAR bag, I pull out an aluminum blanket. Using my teeth, I rip open the package, listening to it crinkle as I gently cover her. It will help her warm up as I search for other wounds.

“Drew?” Tilly whimpers as her eyes flutter open.

Her voice reaches my ear, and breath rushes into my lungs. The soft cry is the sweetest thing I have ever heard. I have no

idea what I would have done if she hadn't been okay. All of the love I have tried so hard to keep at bay rises and overtakes my senses.

Unable to hold myself back for another second, I gently cup her face and crash my mouth down against hers. Sliding my tongue slowly across the seam of her mouth until she opens for me. I groan at my first-ever taste of her; it's better than I could have ever imagined. Tilly reaches up and runs her fingers through my hair, pulling me deeper into our kiss.

I am completely lost to her. Her taste, her touch; she is everything.

My hand falls to her tiny waist, wanting to slip under the hem of her shirt, but instead, I fist the blanket, feeling it crunch.

Shit, I am such an asshole. Here she is, injured and freezing, yet all I can do is maul her. *Great job, Drew.*

I gently pull away and see the confusion in her chocolate-brown eyes. Unable to stop myself, I swoop down and drop another quick peck on her lips.

"I'm not nearly done with you. But we better get you out of this predicament before that storm rolls in," I reassure. Slowly running my thumb across her plump lower lip, I notice it returning to its rosy color. She quirks them up in a big smile. Tilly is my light, even in the dark.

"What hurts, Sunshine?" I ask, moving down her body, prodding gently to find the source of her injury.

“That,” she cries out as I press on her knee. It is twisted at a strange angle, causing pain to radiate up and down her leg.

Tilly sniffs as tears pool in her eyes and I know I need to work faster. I can’t stand seeing her in pain.

“I’m sorry I was so stupid,” she whispers, the desolation in her tone pulling directly on my heart. Hot Dog must hear it too, because he hops up on her chest, snuggling in. She gives a little hiccup that cracks my walls further, as she lifts her hand to stroke his fur. I never thought I would feel jealous of a dog—but well, here we are.

“Hey, don’t talk that way; it was an accident,” I say gruffly. Trailing my finger slowly down her leg, I come to the place where her foot is stuck. Barely able to see through the inky darkness, I pull my flashlight out of my SAR bag.

I lean in, trying to get a closer look, just as I feel raindrops land on the back of my neck.

Time’s up.

“Hey Sunshine, it looks like that storm is rolling in pretty quick. I need to use a saw to cut your foot out of this log, okay?”

She gives me a small nod. “I trust you, Drew, do whatever you need to.”

She shouldn’t trust me. Everything I touch turns to shit. Thoughts of my SEAL team flicker through my mind. *No. Not now.*

Shaking my head, I turn back to the task at hand. The little saw from my bag feels heavy in my hand as I cut away at the wood. I need to do this quickly but also don't want to risk causing Tilly further pain. A small chunk of the log pops off, giving me a better angle. Back and forth I move the saw, careful not to jostle her leg. Her jaw is tight as I work. Please don't let me be hurting her. As I pull off another piece, her ankle comes into view. There is a lot of dirt and possibly a little blood.

Worry forms a pit in my stomach. What if the bone is broken? What if her hip is dislocated? What if she already has an infection setting in?

Taking a deep breath, I clamp down on my intrusive thoughts. Thunder rumbles overhead and a bolt of lightning turns the sky an eerie blue. The rain falls faster and faster. A small stream is forming around the gnarled roots of the nearby trees. This area could flash flood at any moment.

Out of time, I do the only thing I can think of; using my bare hands, I tear a weak chunk out of the log and slide Tilly's foot out as gently as possible, cringing when I hear her gasp in pain.

"I'm sorry, we need to get out of here...Do you think you can stand?" I ask, reaching under her arms and helping her to her feet. My fingers graze the soft swell of her plump, round breast and my cock hardens. The fucker begins throbbing, pulling my focus from the task at hand.

“Yes, I’m actually feeling a lot better already,” she squeaks, trying to be brave, but I see her wincing as she puts weight on her injured ankle. Tears well in her eyes again, and I can’t stand by and watch her struggle. Nope, never gonna happen.

I scoop up Hot Dog and place him in her arms.

“Hold tight, Sunshine,” I say, swinging her up in order to carry her bride-style down the mountain.

“Drew, really, I can walk. I’m too heavy to carry like this.” She objects.

“Say something like that again and I will bend you over the hood of my truck and spank your ass when we get down to it,” I grit, giving her a little warning squeeze. I feel her tremble and I can’t tell whether she is chilled to the bone or turned on. Hopefully the latter.

The rain pours down in sheets, making the leaves slick under my feet. I slip, stumble, but refuse to go down. My bad leg aches with each step—I ignore it. I won’t fucking fail Tilly.

Having her in my arms is making me feel all kinds of things I never let myself indulge in. Her soft body is curled into me, and I can just make out the faintest scent of vanilla and sugar. She always smells like the sweetest baked goods; mouthwatering, and I am dying for a taste.

As we reach the car, her breathing evens and deepens—she has fallen asleep with Hot Dog nestled on her chest. The day has taken its toll on her. No worries though, I gently slide her

into the passenger seat, buckling her in and giving Hot Dog's head a quick rub.

“What should we do with her bud?” I ask the dog. He gives me a little doggie grin, tongue sticking out.

“A smart man would take her to the hospital.” Hot Dog snorts, side-eyeing me with disdain, clearly not amused by that idea.

“Yeah, I know, I'm not a smart man.” He tilts his head to the side. *You know she's coming home with us*, his eyes say.

“The cabin is the closest place; I can make sure her leg is okay and we can ride out the storm. If it looks like she needs a hospital, then I will take her.” I nod my head; Hot Dog grins back. Decision made.

Thunder booms and the rain continues to pound down as I make the slow drive to my home.

I almost lost her, and now I'm never going to be able to let her go...

Chapter Six

Tilly

Drew's truck rumbles underneath me, and my fingers slide through the soothing texture of fur as I slowly awaken.

Opening my eyes, I take in my surroundings. The windshield wipers are swiping away the rain, swishing back and forth like mad. Drew's hair is matted to his head, little drops of water trickling down his neck as he peers through the window, his muscles locked up tight. Not wanting to break his concentration I remain quiet, observing.

His big hands flex on the wheel, knuckles turning white. So big, I wonder how they would feel on my skin, sliding under the hem of my shirt, his calloused fingertips trailing up...

My pussy pulses, and I shift in my seat to get some relief, but I only manage to make my ankle throb painfully. But even the sharp twinge doesn't stop my libido. My mind jumps back to that kiss we shared on the forest floor; his tongue tangling with mine. Maybe Operation Black Moon can still be salvaged.

The fire behind that kiss has hope igniting in my belly.

The truck comes to a stop and Hot Dog wriggles around in my arms.

"Where are we?" I whisper, not wanting to break the spell.

Drew glances over and the corners of his lips turn up slightly in a hesitant grin. He turns off his truck and runs his hand over

his short hair. From the way his jaw clenches, I can sense his nerves.

“The storm really blew in, so I thought we should go back to my cabin. It’s way closer than your place and I figured...” his voice drifts off. After a moment, he continues, “If you’re uncomfortable we can keep going, get you to a hospital or something...”

“Oh, no, this is absolutely fine!” I blurt. Something comes over me and I just can’t stop the word vomit. “It’s great, actually. I’ve never seen your room before and I’ve always wondered what it looked like. I mean your place, obviously not your room... like your bedroom or anything. I don’t think about your bed at all. Not that I wouldn’t like to see that too. Of course...”

The babbling continues and I don’t even know what I’m saying. *Tilly, stop talking. This is so embarrassing.* A flush is taking over my face and heat claws up my neck as Drew’s eyes crinkle in amusement.

Before I have a chance to continue my awkward tirade, his strong hand captures my chin and his lips come crashing down on mine in a breath-stealing kiss. Our tongues slide against one another in a fight for dominance, but I am all too happy to surrender. My mind gets fuzzy, drunk on his taste, and my body thrums with excitement. *Please, touch me, I ache for you.*

“I want you to see my bedroom too, Sunshine,” he murmurs against my lips. He slowly pulls back, “But first, let’s get you

inside so I can make sure you don't need medical attention. Sit tight while I come around, can't have you slipping now."

He disappears for just a moment before my door wrenches open. I fumble to release my seatbelt, my hands clumsy. Drew steps into the truck, the scent of rain on his skin as he reaches around me, his heat seeping into me and making my nipples pucker as he unsnaps the belt. He skims his hand along my cheek and makes sure I have a tight grip on Hot Dog before hauling me into his arms once again.

"I really think I can walk," I protest. My leg *is* feeling better and better by the moment.

Smack. With lightning-fast reflexes, Drew delivers a hard spank to my ass. What the heck? His little show of dominance causes my pussy to slicken and I can't help but want him to do it again.

"Ohhh," I say; trying to hide my growing desire by attempting to push out of his hold.

"Stop that," he replies gruffly. "I want to make sure you get inside without another injury. It's slippery out here."

"So, you spanked me?" I yelp, with an incredulous cry that sounds fake—even to me.

"You liked it." A little smirk takes over his face as his blue eyes sparkle with mirth.

I snap my mouth shut as he carries me through the rain to his front door.

You're right, I did.



I barely catch a glimpse of the house as Drew hauls me through it, but what I see is stunning. High ceilings, gorgeous wood floors, masculine, rustic and all of it just screams of him—though it could use some color.

Before I know it, I am being set gently on top of the toilet in the bathroom. Without a word, Drew leaves.

Ummmm... I honestly have no idea what I am supposed to do. Is he expecting me to take a shower? Use the restroom? What?

Hobbling to my feet, I grip the counter tightly and chance a look in the mirror. OH. MY. GOSH. There is dirt all over my face, my hair looks like something a bird decided to nest in, all my makeup is smudged and there is a big scrape across my cheekbone. Reaching up, I pluck the muddy leaves out of my filthy locks, wincing as they get caught and pull. Yuck. Yuck. Yuck.

My eyes widen as I stare at my reflection. Holy heck, is this what I've looked like the whole time? He *kissed* me looking like swamp thing? He's been flirting with me?

My mind whirls with possibilities and my world tilts on its axis. The Black Moon Magic worked. It chose us—there's no other explanation.

Twisting the knobs on the sink, I adjust the water until it feels just right, then I slowly wash the caked-on mud from my

hands. There may not be enough soap in the world to make me feel clean again. A thumping sound from behind me has me glancing up, my eyes meeting Drew's through the mirror. Stepping forward, enveloping me in his heat, he sets down a Gatorade and a bottle of ibuprofen.

“What are you doing standing up? I want to check out your ankle, Sunshine.”

Sunshine? I love the way the term of endearment sounds coming from his lips. A little quiver works its way through my body at the deep sound of his voice.

As he reaches for me, my heart swells with affection for this amazing man. Allowing myself to be pulled into his arms and set back down, my mouth goes dry as he drops to his knees. I have certainly imagined him in this position before, only with a lot less clothing... and mud. My pulse is pounding so hard that I wonder if he can hear it. He quickly removes my shoes, the socks follow and then his calloused hands are skimming over my flesh, sending tingles straight to my pussy. My leg is improving by the second and all I want is for him to touch every part of me. A small moan escapes.

“Does it hurt there?” he asks, concern knitting his brows together.

“Not anymore.”

“I think you need to take off your jeans so that I can take a closer look at your knee and ankle...if you're okay with that?” he gulps, Adam's apple bobbing in his throat.

“Of course,” I say, swiftly standing. My breasts bump into his chest, nipples hardening and begging for attention. His eyes drop to them and I can’t help but arch toward him, inviting him to touch me.

Drew gives me a little grin.

“Is something else aching, Sunshine?” He chuckles as he reaches for the button on my jeans. Ever so slowly, he slides his fingers along my waistband before snapping them open.

“Do you want this, Tilly?”

Biting on my lower lip, I give him a quick nod.

“Oh, no baby, that isn’t nearly enough. Give me the words. Tell me what you want.” He demands.

My mouth is suddenly dry. Licking my lips, I try to answer, but the only thing I manage to squeak out is...

“Everything,” and I mean it. I want every part of him, the fun, the hard, the sad, the physical, and everything in between. He must like my answer though, because he moves in quickly.

Fusing our lips together, Drew plunders my mouth. *Finally*. Our tongues tangle and I am overwhelmed by his flavor. I feel my jeans being tugged down and we break apart long enough to take them off.

“Shit. You’re way too distracting. Sit back down and let me check you for injuries. It’s important that we make sure you’re okay.” He growls, then snags the Gatorade and medicine off the countertop, shaking out a few pills and offering them to me.

I quickly swallow them down as he watches.

“Good girl, now drink the entire bottle.” He kneels between my splayed legs and, as I wonder if he can see the wet spot on my panties, my entire body flushes with arousal.

His hand rubs soothing circles over my leg, making me want to spread them even further.

“How does this feel?” he asks, pressing lightly on my ankle.

“Good, no pain,” I say breathlessly, as his warm hand wiggles my foot around to check my range of motion.

Satisfied, his palm slides sensually up my calf. *Higher, please higher.* The only pain I feel is the emptiness in my core.

“What about here?” Drew’s voice deepens as he prods my knee. My legs slide apart of their own volition.

“It feels amazing,” I pant, watching his nostrils flare.

“Really?” he asks, huskily. The rough pads of his fingers trail up my thigh until they reach the edge of my panties. Wiggling, I guide his finger toward my heat.

He runs his finger over the material, pushing it in between my folds. Eyes burning as he watches the wet spot grow. I let out a gasp as he connects with my sensitive clit.

“Well, everything looks okay, but you have a small, superficial cut, so we should get you cleaned off to make sure there are no hidden injuries.” He growls, rubbing me once more before rising to his feet and turning toward the shower.

“It’s actually feeling so much better, though getting clean sounds amazing.” I stand, unsure of what to do next... should I just undress, right here in front of him, with all these bright lights? Should I ask him to join me?

Damn it. I am no good at this stuff.

He fiddles with the knobs for a moment, adjusting the water temperature.

“Jeez, how many shower heads do you have in there?”

His eyes flash to mine, a wicked grin overtaking his face.
“More than enough to keep us both warm.”

Game on.

Chapter Seven

Drew

Watching Tilly closely, I can see the moment that my words pierce her brain. A light pink tint blooms across her cheeks and my cock hardens as she runs her tongue along her bottom lip.

Extending my hand toward her, she reaches out to grasp it, and the second we connect, a pulse of electricity shoots up my arm. I want her naked. I want to *devour* her.

Dropping my hand, she toys with the hem of her shirt, and my mouth goes dry as she drags the material over her head, revealing her lacy black bra and panty set. Her silky skin is perfection, and I can just barely make out her rosy nipples under the lace. Unable to wait for another second, I step closer until she's pressed between me and the wall. I'm not sure who moves first, but our lips crash together. Hers part, allowing me access, and I deepen the kiss.

My fingers trace the curve of her back, stopping to pop open her bra clasp and free her luscious tits. They tumble out of the material, directly into my waiting palms. Her breath hitches as I squeeze them, toying with her peaked nipples. *So sensitive. So mine.* My mouth trails kisses down the long column of her neck, pausing to leave my mark. I suck hard, and she rolls her head to the side in submission.

"Drew, please..." she whimpers, arching toward me as she grapples with the button on my jeans. I quickly help her

remove the rest of our clothing before pulling her into the steamy shower.

Her eyes widen as she sees me naked for the first time, and her gaze trails down until her mouth parts in astonishment. My cock pulses, demanding we put her on her knees. Right. Fucking. Now. *Down boy, not yet.*

Her hand reaches for me, but I quickly step back, afraid if she touches me I'll lose all control and fuck her like a savage against the wall. And I haven't had my fun yet. I slide my hands over her skin, my fingers lightly tracing between her breasts, flowing slowly down her body until I'm right above her pussy.

“Be my good girl, Sunshine, and pass me the soap. I'm going to get you all clean.” Confusion clouds her eyes, but she does as I ask. Building up a lather between my palms, I run them over her shoulders, watching as the dirt disappears from her skin. The bubbles skate down her body, and I chase them eagerly with my hands; caressing every curve, noticing every freckle, dropping kisses across her heavy breasts before skimming over her hips, cleaning every inch before turning her toward the tiled wall.

“Hands on the wall,” I bark, and Tilly quickly complies. My big hands palm her breasts, kneading, and plucking at her nipples until she's squirming with abandon. I run my teeth along her nape, the desire to claim her almost palpable.

“Is your pussy dripping for me?” I rasp into her ear.

“More,” she moans, wantonly grinding her round ass against my cock. I know what she needs, but I’m not done tending to her yet.

Smack. I give her a spank and love the sight of the light pink handprint that blooms across her ass. She moans seductively, pushing her bottom out, her body begging for another. *She’s perfect for me.*

“Behave while I wash your hair,” I rasp, lust deepening my voice. Squirting shampoo into my hand, I quickly clean and condition her long silky locks, getting all the mud and leaves out until it’s soft and shiny. The hair trails down her back, dark and thick. My fingers flex on her hips, wanting to yank it and thrust myself inside of her, all the way to the hilt. *Down, beast.*

Instead, I drop to my knees behind her, parting her cheeks until I have the perfect view of her glistening pink pussy.

Tilly’s mouth is open, softly panting and there are goosebumps all over her body, despite how warm it is in here.

“It looks like I missed a spot,” I say, running my finger along her slit. She’s soaking wet and her legs are trembling, but she spreads them further immediately, pushing back toward me.

“Turn around,” I growl, spinning around so fast that she needs to grab my shoulders for balance.

I lift her leg, slipping it over my shoulder. She is spread before me like a feast, and my gaze travels up her body until our gaze meets. Tilly’s eyes are clouded with lust, but I want to make sure she’s not in pain.

“I’m gonna clean you with my tongue.”

“Yessssss,” she hisses, opening to me, and that’s all I need to hear before diving head-first into heaven.

I run my finger along her seam, parting her folds before slipping my tongue inside her. Her sweet flavor bursts on my tastebuds and I become ravenous. Licking my way up, I lap at her, loving all the little moans coming from her mouth as she grinds her slit against my face. Latching onto her clit, I suck rhythmically until she’s shouting my name. Her pussy is fluttering and I can tell she’s almost there, so I slip a finger into her and find that spot inside that sends her soaring.

I continue to lap up her juices as she comes down, loving the way she digs her fingers into my scalp.

The water is getting cooler, so I give her clit a parting kiss before standing. I lift her and she immediately wraps her legs around my hips as I slap the knobs to turn the shower off.

Tilly yanks my head back and fuses our mouths together as I stumble into my bedroom.

We’re soaking wet, but I couldn’t care less as I drop her onto my mattress and follow her down, never once coming up for air.

Chapter Eight

Tilly

Thunder rumbles as lightning flashes just beyond the window. But the storm outside is nothing compared to the raging inferno of need within me. After coming so hard in the shower, I would think my body would be satiated, but my desire has only grown.

The masculine scent of Drew's soap clings to my skin as we fall backward onto his bed. His weight on top of me sends tingles directly to my clit, and when his muscular thigh slips between my legs, pressing against my pussy, I almost come. My hips circle, spreading my arousal all over his skin, causing a feral gleam in his eyes as a growl rumbles from his throat.

I have never felt so sexy, so *desired*. This is everything I've ever wanted. My dreams come to life.

My fingers play over his short hair; there isn't much for me to grab onto but I love the rough texture.

"Hands over your head," he grunts. I ignore him, having too much fun as I fuse our mouths back together and lift my hips to grind against him harder. My pussy is needy, aching for him, and so sensitive that I'm already close. Little licks of pleasure shoot up my spine as I move faster, chasing the friction. My cries are carried away by the sound of thunder, drowned out by the patter of rain against the window.

A gush of juices floods out of me as my core clenches, and I reach between our bodies until my hand finds his warm length,

hard and waiting. His shaft is thick and velvety, the tip leaking a shiny line of pre-cum. It twitches in my hand, and I realize his cock is the biggest I've ever touched. Will he fit inside me? A thrill runs through me at the thought of him stretching my pussy, filling me completely.

Drew pulls back slightly and chuckles, allowing our breaths to mix.

“You're not listening again, Sunshine. Hands over your head, or do I need to get out some rope?” Impossibly, I get even wetter, but I can't give in that easily.

“Kinky, Mr. Hicks,” I reply, reaching up to run my hands down his tattooed chest, giving his nipples a playful tweak. His eyes blaze with desire and he throws back his head, emitting a loud groan.

“You have no id—,” he cuts off mid-word when I push up, forcing him onto his back with all my might. Straddled over his abs, I take a moment to trace my fingers over his muscles, through the light dusting of hair. *So fucking sexy.*

Drew props himself up on his elbows and, when our eyes lock, I can see mischief in his gaze.

Scrambling down his body, to the foot of the bed, on my knees—I reach for his jutting cock, wanting to taste him. I close my lips over the head and his salty flavor explodes on my tongue. I lick the underside, using my fist to coat his member as I try to suck him as deep as I can. His thick girth forces my jaw wide as I take the tip to the back of my throat.

The coarse hair on his legs tickles my already sensitive nipples and my pussy pulses in time to my motion.

“Oh, Tilly, you’re not getting away that easily,” Drew growls. He leans down, stroking my cheek as he watches me bob up and down on his cock, his eyes hooded with desire.

Gathering my hair in a firm grip, Drew thrusts deep and my pussy floods as he takes control. He tugs me off his dick, and I whine as my mouth pops off.

“Get up here and straddle my face,” he demands, helping to guide me as I shimmy up his body. “Now turn around, so you’re facing the bottom of the bed.” *Ohhh yesssss. This is new.*

My legs shake as I hover over his face, and my mouth waters as my eyes settle on his cock once again. Reaching forward, I drape myself over his abs, intent on stuffing him back between my lips.

“Keep sucking, beautiful,” he grunts, winding his powerful arms around my thighs to settle my core over his face. His tongue snakes through my folds, giving me a long lick. Pulling me down, he brings me closer to his mouth and sucks my clit rhythmically. I match his speed, bobbing up and down until he reaches the depths of my throat.

I suck harder as he plunges a finger inside me, causing me to moan around his cock. My hips grind back as he slips another into my soaked cunt. Sliding back and forth as he alternates between soft and hard suction on my clit. A shiver runs up my

spine, and tingles are shooting from my pussy down to my toes. No one has ever made me feel this way before.

Pleasure is firing all over my body. My legs are shaking. *So close... I'm almost there...*

Drew reaches up and thrusts one more finger into my pussy. He curves them, massaging my inner walls and I go soaring. My toes curl and my pussy clamps down on his fingers, begging him to never leave. Little white spots dance in front of my eyes and I collapse on top of him, panting.

My heart is thundering in my ears as I feel him slowly slide out of me, pressing a gentle kiss against my sensitive pussy. My lungs suck in deep breaths, and I realize he is still hard and throbbing in my hand. I slide forward, intent on getting him back in my mouth when his hands grip my hips.

The world spins as he lifts me, lying me back down on his bed. The smooth sheets feel cool against my heated skin and he flops down beside me with a satisfied grin. Closing my eyes, I inhale his musky scent and try to memorize everything about this moment.

“You’re the most delicious snack I’ve ever eaten. I’ll never get enough,” he says, as calloused hands rove over my breasts. My eyelids flutter back open to find his deep blue gaze filled with lust. He plucks and twists at my nipples, and I squirm in anticipation.

Rising onto his knees, he moves between my legs and I spread them wider to accommodate him. Licking my lips as I see his engorged cock. He runs the head up and down my slit,

gathering my juices. Using the tip, he taps it lightly against my throbbing clit, causing me to jump. Another orgasm pools in my belly, so close from that move alone.

“Again,” I cry, reaching down to spread my outer lips for him.

“Dirty girl,” he growls, jaw popping as his eyes darken. Grasping his cock, he brings the tip down on my clit again, this time a little harder. Nothing has ever felt so good. Waves of ecstasy roll through my body with each tap, making me moan and thrust toward him.

“Need you. Please, please,” I babble, as he rolls on a condom.

Notching himself at my opening, he slowly pushes forward, inch by delicious inch. The stretch is intense as pleasure and pain intertwine. My walls flutter around him and I can't help the moans and whimpers coming from my throat. He's filling my heart, just as he's filling my cunt.

“You're my everything, Sunshine. Look at that pretty pink pussy taking my cock. You were made for me,” he grunts. Still stuffing me. How is there more?

“That's right, take it, take all of me. You're so tight, baby.” He leans forward, laving my nipple with his tongue and sucking hard. Snapping his hips, he thrusts all the way in, pausing as a bead of sweat trickles down his chest. My pussy ripples as I accommodate his size, and restlessness overtakes me.

“More. Harder.” I demand, and that must have been what he was waiting for because he slides out and begins driving into me at a punishing pace. Pressing me deeper into the mattress. *It feels so good.*

Pleasure sparks with every thrust, and he angles his hips to rub over a spot deep inside me that makes it even more intense. Our bodies slap together, the sound echoing around the room. My juices coat my thighs as we slide and grind against one another. His muscular arms flex, lifting my hips and joining our bodies even deeper. I no longer know where he ends and I begin as our cries drown out the thunderstorm. My limbs are shaking, trying to hold back the climax that is threatening to overtake me.

“Come for me, Sunshine,” he demands. “Let go, I’ve got you,”

Not giving me a choice, he reaches between us and rubs circles over my clit, pushing me right over the edge into ecstasy. Screaming his name as my pussy convulses around him.

“Mine,” he roars, locking eyes with me, and with one final pump, he comes.



We lay together quietly for a few moments, Drew sifting his fingers through my hair.

I reach for him and my arm brushes over a raised bump on his hip; lifting myself up, I realize he has scars all over. Overcome with emotion, I plant gentle kisses on each one. The knotty tissue is rough against my lips, and I wonder if they are painful. There are more scars snaking up his side, some hidden behind tattoos.

“There are so many,” I whisper, swallowing down the emotion clogging my throat.

“They’re from my time overseas,” he says matter-of-factly.

“What happened?” I ask, then immediately regret it, as his body stiffens and he gets out of bed, moving into the bathroom.

The wind is howling outside, rain is ringing against the window, and my heart is pounding. Worrying my lip, I take a few deep breaths, trying to calm my racing pulse. Tears fill my eyes as the time seems to stretch, every second slowing to an eternity.

Black Moon Magic can only do so much...

Drew reappears in the doorway, a wet washcloth in his hand. The bed dips, and he raises my leg, swiping the cloth gently through my folds, cleaning me before tossing it toward the bathroom. His brow furrows when he sees the tears in my eyes.

“You okay? Did I hurt you?”

“No, I didn’t mean to make you angry,” I croak.

“Oh, baby, I’m not angry. I just don’t really know what to say. I’ve never told anyone about my time as a SEAL before...”

Hot Dog waddles into the room and begins growling at us. Running from side to side in an attempt to be picked up. I giggle and reach for him, plopping him on the bed. He walks around and does a few circles before settling comfortably in the blankets.

Drew pets him fondly, then slides into bed. Pulling me flush with his body, he tucks the blankets around us before beginning his tale.

“I was out on a standard patrol, in friendly territory, not expecting anything out of the ordinary....”

Chapter Nine

Drew

I awaken slowly to the smell of vanilla and cinnamon; my Sunshine always smells delectable. My body is warm and relaxed, my heartbeat is steady and I don't feel even a trace of panic.

Tilly's dark hair fans across my arm, and her perky ass is nestled right over my cock. With her lush body curled into mine, my morning wood refuses to be ignored. She needs her rest though, so I settle for cuddling closer, tucking her back into me until I can feel every rise and fall of her breathing.

Sliding my hands over her smooth skin, I can't help but marvel at the fact that she's really here. *She's really mine.* She lets out a sleepy little sigh and her body begins to undulate ever so slowly. Her eyes remain closed, but she pushes back toward me, letting me know she's awake.

I drop little kisses over her neck and shoulder. Sucking and licking as I reach around her to palm her heavy breasts. Her nipples pebble and she exhales with a breathy little gasp of delight. They get harder, like little diamonds, as I roll them between the pads of my fingers. A moan escapes from deep in her throat as I play with her body. Gliding my hand over her curves, I trail my fingers down her belly until I gently cup her mound, finding her slick.

She opens, and I lift her leg over my thigh. Reaching down, I circle her sensitive clit with my finger. She's already pulsing, and so, so wet. Already close. *Mine.*

“Are you too sore, baby?” I rasp in her ear. I would rather die than hurt her.

She reaches her arm back, cupping my head, lightly scraping my scalp.

“Only a little,” she murmurs. I slow my caresses. “Don’t stop. I want you. Please, Drew, don’t tease me.”

“Is your pussy needy this morning, Sunshine?” I ask, my breath causing goosebumps to erupt all over her. Raising her leg even further, I slide my length against her pussy, coating my thick rod in her arousal. Her whole body shudders at my words and slick slides down my shaft.

“So needy,” she agrees.

Bracing a hand on her belly, I watch the thick purple head of my cock appear and disappear as it glides across her core. Angling my hips, I bump her clit on each stroke, loving the way her body jumps each time I make contact with the sensitive bundle.

“Drew...” she pants, and I can hear how close she is.

“Are you on birth control?” I ask.

“Yes,” she cries, “I’m clean. I haven’t been with anyone in years. Please, please, please.”

Without any hesitation, I slam into her, groaning as her heat engulfs my hard cock. Her pussy is already fluttering around me as I shuttle in and out of her tight core.

“You feel amazing,” I grunt.

Without leaving her pussy, I push her onto her hands and knees, pulling her closer with every snap of my hips.

The image of the two of us in the mirror draws my gaze. And I want to see more. I want to see everything. My arms wrap around her belly, lifting her until she is on her knees. Sliding my hands up her torso, I take hold of her breasts, plucking and twisting at her nipples until her cries turn frantic.

She twists her head, taking my lips in a savage kiss, nipping my bottom lip. Our tongues duel as I pound into her, and I love the taste of her. Vanilla and cinnamon.

Gripping her chin, I turn her head back toward the mirror.

“Watch us. Watch the way you take me. Watch as I make you come,” I purr into her ear.

The urge to possess her slams through me and, with one hand gripping her throat, I slide the other down until I reach her cunt. Using two fingers, I scissor open her outer lips until we can see her shiny little clit. Her body shudders as we both watch my enormous shaft slide in and out of her, glistening with her cream.

Her eyes are hooded with lust, and she is shaking in my arms. The rhythmic pulses of her pussy let me know she is so close to coming.

“Come for me,” I demand. “Milk me with *my* pussy.” I press down roughly on her clit and watch as she detonates.

I have never seen anything more beautiful in my life.

As her pussy clamps down, I follow her right over the edge. Spilling inside her, filling her until our joint juices run down her legs.

I slip my finger through the mess, rubbing it into her skin before trailing a glistening line up her torso to her mouth.

“Suck,” I command, and she cleans it without any hesitation.

Releasing her throat, I kiss her temple. Noticing the finger-shaped bruises I left on her hips.

“Damnit, I’m sorry Tilly, I was too rough.”

“You were perfect. This was perfect...I love you.” She says words in a rush and I am blown away. My mouth gapes open and I will words to come out.

But just then, there is a banging at the door and Hot Dog lets loose a cacophony of deafening barks.

What. The. Fuck.



Whoever is at my door had better be having some major emergency. They pound rapidly on the solid wood as I hop around, trying to get both legs into my pants. Tossing a hoody over my bare chest, I look out of my window to see who the hell thought this was an appropriate way to start my damn morning.

Hot Dog weaves around my feet, excited by all the commotion and I try not to step on my crazy pup. Scooping

him up, I crack the door open only to be met with Jeremy's pretty boy face.

"What do you want?" I grunt, stepping out onto the front porch.

"I've called and texted you like ten times. What's the deal, man?" Jeremy asks.

"Where is Tilly? Where's my bestie? You found her, right mountain man? If you didn't I'm going to chop off your balls," a voice chirps as Tilly's little blond friend from yesterday pops out from behind Jeremy's back. Undeterred by my presence, she makes a beeline straight for my door.

I try to head her off, but she darts around me and lets herself right into my home. *What. The. Fuck?*

A frown takes over my face and I glare at Jeremy; who gives me a shrug and a shit-eating grin. My fingers clench, wanting to put my fist through his smug face.

"Blondie has been up my ass all morning; she left me no choice," he says, though the apology sounds insincere.

Narrowing my eyes, I scowl at him.

"Hey look, this is not my fault. *You* didn't answer my billion messages... So, I take it last night went well?" He wiggles his brows. My jaw clenches and I can feel the muscles popping on the side of my neck as I work to contain my rage.

"I found her easily enough. When I got there, her foot was stuck in a log, and the angle was putting her in some real pain. She was also wet and freezing. Once I got her leg out, she felt

better quickly, so I brought her here to warm up. That storm though; it rolled in fast.” I shake my head.

“We both know that wasn’t the information I was looking for,” Jeremy grumbles.

“Well, it’s the information you’re getting,” I declare as we follow Blondie into the house.

An itch is starting under my skin. These people are invading my sanctuary and I just want them to leave. I’m not good in social situations, and I don’t like surprise visitors. Sensing my tension, Hot Dog nestles himself under my chin and I absently stroke the soft fur on his ears.

“TILLY WHERE ARE YOU?” Blondie shouts.

“Jeez, give her a second. I think she’s in the bathroom,” my annoyance seeps into my tone. Blondie flashes me a disgusted look, but it quickly morphs into a smile as Tilly enters my living room, looking like sunshine incarnate.

She has one of my shirts on and a pair of grey sweatpants that are rolled at her waist to help keep them up. Her dark hair flows down her back in long shiny waves, and she looks relaxed and happy. Freshly fucked—and my inner caveman crows and pounds his chest. Fuck off, Jeremy.

“Oh my god, girl, I should have brought you some clothes. Are you okay? You never called me. Was Operation Black Moon a success? Why didn’t you call me? I’m so mad at you” Blondie is throwing out questions so fast that I wonder if she

is breathing. She's making my head spin, but Tilly takes it all in stride—shutting her up with a quick hug.

“Hi, Blyth. I've never been better,” she says, smiling at me. Love blooms in my chest. No one has ever looked at me like that before. *Mine*.

“WHY didn't you call me?” the friend continues to whine.

Tilly laughs, before replying, “My phone is somewhere in the forest because I couldn't find it after I got stuck yesterday. I'm probably going to need to replace it.”

“Oh, do you want to leave now? I can take you.” Blyth says.

Oh. Hell. No. There is no way Tilly is leaving. Not after last night, and this morning.

Jeremy, clearly seeing my mutinous expression, pipes up, “How about some coffee before we figure anything out?”

“Coffee, yup, I'll make some.” I sigh, heading into the kitchen.

“I'll go help him, you guys head out to the back porch, and we'll bring it out,” Tilly says cheerfully.

Walking into the gleaming white space, I let out a breath. Coming up behind me, my Sunshine presses her cheek to my back and winds her arms around my stomach. Her scent and warm presence soothe me in a way nothing else has, smoothing down all my ruffled feathers.

“How long do you think we're stuck with them?” She whispers into my back.

A bark of laughter escapes my mouth, and I pull her around until we're chest to chest. I yank her to me, bringing our lips together in a passionate kiss. My hands grab her perky ass—I will never, ever get enough of this woman.

She lets out a lusty moan, then steps back with the cutest little giggle. “We better make some coffee.”

“I guess. The sooner we caffeinate them, the sooner we can ask them to leave.” I grumble, but get to work.

I grab some To-Go cups out of the cabinet, wondering if that's still too subtle.

Tilly snorts out a laugh when she sees them, and it's the cutest thing I've ever heard. I can't help myself; I press her into the counter and start trailing kisses down her neck.

“Drew!” she admonishes, but her body is grinding back into me. “They might come back in.”

“I think you like that idea,” I growl into her ear, sliding my hand under the waistband of the sweats she's wearing. I groan when I realize she is completely bare underneath. My cock is pulsing, dying to be inside her; but he's going to have to wait. Tilly comes first.

My Sunshine is already wet for me.

“Gonna make you come all over my fingers before the coffee beeps.” I rasp, drawing on her neck and plumping her sensitive clit, swirling around and around. I feel it swell and pulse in my hand as I slip my leg between hers, giving her something to grind down on as her body rocks against me.

She lets out a moan.

“Shhhhh,” I whisper against her nape. Circling faster, sucking harder. The coffee starts filling the pot. “You don’t want them to hear you outside, naughty girl.”

I see her bite down on her lip as her pussy flutters and slickens. My fingers thrust into her, fast and deep.

“You like that idea, don’t you? They could come in and see my fingers buried in your needy pussy.” I growl.

Her body grows taught, and I roll her sensitive button between the rough pads of my fingers, biting down on her neck. “Come for me,” I command as she rockets over the precipice, her juices gushing over my hand just as the coffee pot trills.

Turning her toward me, I lick her flavor off my digits before dipping down to claim her mouth.

The back door snicks open and Hot Dog races in, breaking us apart.

Chapter Ten

Tilly

A deep red blush travels up my neck as Jeremy and Blyth burst into the kitchen. *Yikes, did they hear me come?*

They clearly know something is going on based on my bestie's rounded eyes and Jeremy's gaping mouth. Whoopsie.

I have no idea what to say, but luckily Hot Dog paws at my leg, asking to be picked up. As I lean down to lift him, Drew skirts around me, to-go cups in hand.

"Welp, here's your coffee. I'd ask you to stay, but we have lots to do today." He says using his massive body to propel them toward the door.

It's so unbelievably rude, but I can't help but giggle. Knowing that he wants us to be alone so badly makes me feel loved, cherished.

"But, wait, Tilly! You didn't even tell me what happened! Did you make it to the lake? Black Moon Magic!" Blyth yells, and I cringe. I'm shocked she mentioned Operation Black Moon—some secret keeper she is. Hopefully, Drew didn't pick up on it.

I cuddle Hot Dog close to me as a sense of foreboding fills my gut. There's a conversation going on at the door, but I can't make out what is being said. The door closes and quiet descends on the house.

My throat feels like it's constricting and tears well up in my eyes. I rapidly try to blink them back, but I can't seem to help

it as droplets trickle down my cheeks.

Hot Dog licks my face as Drew reappears.

A frown mars his handsome face as he takes in my blotchy eyes. Stepping close to me, he gently cups my cheek in his palm.

“Sunshine, why are you crying?”

I don’t know what to say, what to do. Should I tell him that I tricked him into sleeping with me? That the sudden pull he’s feeling is just Lustre Lake’s Moon Magic?

Guilt washes through me and I want to ignore my conscience...

He rubs his thumb over my cheekbone, patiently waiting me out.

Breathing deeply, I try to calm myself before slowly exhaling.

“Drew, I need to tell you something. I tricked you into sleeping with me and I totally understand if you never want to see me again.” I sob out.

His thumb pauses, and his body goes rigid. “Do you mean you lied about birth control?”

“No, not that. I’m definitely on birth control. But you... wanting to be with me... it isn’t real. I mean, I really do love you; I have for years now. But your feelings are all the Black Moon Magic—you know, from the poem.” I spew out the

words so quickly that I can't breathe. All the oxygen has been sucked from the air and I stand there, gasping, floundering.

Looking into his eyes, I wait to see hate or disgust come over his features. Instead, his dimple springs to life, and a smile lights up his face. A boisterous laugh explodes from his chest as he pulls me to him.

Ummmmm what?

He's laughing so hard that now tears are streaming down his perfect jawline. If he wasn't holding me so tight, I would be running right out the door.

"Oh, Tilly girl. I've wanted you since the moment we first met. That day when we first spoke and you smiled at me; it was like I had seen the sun for the first time since my injury overseas."

"What?" I gape at him, completely dumbfounded.

"Seriously, you are the only reason I come into town so often. I hate being around people. Everyone always wants to talk and share. The only place I feel comfortable is in the SAR Headquarters or the Bake Shop with you." He shakes his head and his strong arms hold me a little tighter, blanketing me in their warmth.

"But... you never... I mean...I've thrown myself at you over and over again. Why haven't you asked me out?"

"Sunshine, I couldn't. I'm a broken man. I have PTSD, sometimes I trash my own house during an episode. I'm still

worried this is a terrible idea.” His reply is low and filled with despair.

“It’s not,” I say, voice clear with conviction. “I won’t let you give up on us that easily.”

“When I saw you on the ground, blue, I thought you were dead, Tilly. At that moment, I realized I don’t want to live another day without you. There was no Black Moon Magic—just me pulling my head out of my ass... Though I’m thinking maybe I should redden yours for putting yourself in danger like that.” He grips me tightly, carrying me outside to seats on the patio. I squirm until I’m sitting comfortably on his lap, head resting on his broad shoulder, breathing in the fresh mountain air.

“It’s beautiful out here,” I sigh.

Looking out, I can see the mountains and even a little peak of Lustre Lake. The trees are so green, and the scent of pine and sage is thick around us. Hot Dog is poking around at the property line.

I know that Drew hasn’t said the words yet, but my heart swells with love. I feel like I’m home.

There isn’t much time before I need to get things sorted, the bakery, my phone. But right now, I just want to enjoy this perfect moment.



I'm surrounded by the scents of the bakery, cinnamon, vanilla, and almond swirl around me. It hasn't even been a day since I've been here, and yet I feel so different, so light.

I stir the mix in the bowl, happy to be making Drew's favorite, Cinnamon Roll Muffins. I reach for the eggs and add them to the batter as my new phone begins to buzz with alerts. So many alerts.

Finishing up, I slide the muffin tray into the oven and grab the infernal message monster. Almost all of the texts are from Blyth, except for the most recent one from Drew telling me he misses me and will be here to pick me up soon.

I grab everything I need for the icing before propping my phone on a bag of flour to FaceTime my bestie. It barely has a moment to ring through before her face appears on the screen.

"Glad to see you've returned to the land of technology," Blyth answers.

"I'm sorry! I honestly didn't even think about it once Drew found me," I apologize, unable to keep the smile off my face.

"Bitch, you're freaking glowing. Spill! What happened? I was so freaked out when you didn't call me."

"Honestly, I'm not even sure! I was hiking, like always, and there was this super odd-looking bird. For a minute I thought it was a lost parrot, and of course, I was worried about its safety. So, I tried to get closer to check it out," I explain.

"Oh my goodness, Tilly! We both know that I don't give a fuck about the bird. You're actively trying to kill me here."

Blyth groans, rolling her eyes before flopping around and pretending to die.

I can't help but laugh at her antics. Completely ridiculous.

"Anyway," I continue. "I tried to get near it..."

"Killing. ME." She shouts.

"And I fell through a rotten log, messed up my ankle, and got completely stuck. I was so cold and disgustingly muddy when Drew found me. Honestly, it was bad. If he and Hot Dog hadn't found me, I'm not sure if I would have been okay."

Blyth stares at me somberly for a minute, letting it sink in. I really could have died. But then she shrugs.

"Oh, hush, you're fine and please tell me you had all the sex. Oh, was it good? Is his dick big? Is it pierced? I've always wanted to know." She gets it all out in one breath and I barely keep up.

Blushing, I giggle. I love this girl so damn much.

"It was amazing," I confide, but not wanting to get too into detail about something so private, I quickly change the topic. "Did you and Jeremy visit bone town? I thought I caught a vibe yesterday when you stopped over."

She takes the bait.

"BONE TOWN? Seriously, Tilly," she cackles. "No, sadly, Princess Jeremy completely turned me down after we left. *But*, last night, two of his firefighter friends were more than up for

the task. They wanted me to slide down their poles...if you know what I mean.”

She waggles her brows at me and starts hip-thrusting.

“Two?” I gasp.

“Yesssss,” she moans. “I’m so sore, but in the best way. They’ve ruined me for all other men. I may just need to keep them. I wonder if they would be up for getting cock piercings...” She trails off.

The icing is done, so I set it aside, just as a red little ball of fur comes flying into my kitchen. Hot Dog entwines himself around my feet.

“Blyth, I gotta go. Drew just got here,” I tell her.

“Go get your pussy pounded! And call me later!” She shouts before ending the call.

Bending down, I scoop up the spunky pup.

“You, Sir, are absolutely not allowed in my kitchen.” I coo to him, heading toward the front of the bakery. His head tilts, as though he is listening.

“We are going to need to set some boundaries,” I tell him. “Or the health department will shut down my business, and there won’t be any more bacon treats for you.”

Hot Dog whines and licks my face. I swear he understands.

I round the corner, and my gaze immediately snags on Drew. He smiles, and it reaches all the way to his eyes. I’ve never

had anyone look at me like that. The love radiating off him in waves takes my breath away.

And then all hell breaks loose...

Chapter Eleven

Drew

Tilly chats with Hot Dog on her way to the front, gently scolding him. Shoot, I didn't think about not letting the dog in the kitchen when I sent him to go find her.

Luckily, she doesn't seem mad as she saunters into view. Her dark hair is tied up in a giant knot atop her head, and it bobs back and forth as she walks. I can't wait to pull it down and sift my fingers through the long strands, but she looks damn cute this way too.

A smile covers my face as my heart fills. Emotions overtake me and I feel fit to burst. It's only been a few hours since we were last together, but damn if I didn't miss her. My mind kept straying the whole time I was supposed to be working with the team. And yeah, I noticed all their sly, knowing grins when I forgot to hide the scent items for the dogs to practice with.

I take a few steps toward her, and stretch my arms out to pull her toward me...

BAM. Rat-a-tat-tat.

The bomb goes off behind us and I can hear gunfire on the street. My pulse is beating in my ears, breath coming in rapid pants as I grab Tilly and take her to the ground. I feel her body crush underneath me as she cries out. But there is no time to make sure she's okay.

I need to save her; I need a good location to protect her.

Glancing around, I spot the front counter and drag her and Hot Dog behind it. The insurgents haven't made it to her shop yet; maybe there is time for us to rush out the back.

The dusty scent of sand invades my nostrils, and the grit coats my tongue. No... no, not now. I can't have a flashback when I need to get Tilly to safety.

Her soft hair in my hand grounds me when tiny razor blades of sand pelt my face. Peeling my eyelids open, I look down at her.

Honey-brown eyes are staring up at me, and blood trickles down her chin. Hot Dog begins to wriggle around between us and I push back to give him some space.

"Be very quiet," I whisper, getting into a crouch. "We need to sneak out the back before they come in the front."

"Who?" she asks with a quiver in her voice. I try to pull her out of the room.

"The enemy combatants, stay low and follow me." I slide Hot Dog into my shirt and reach around to grab my gun—only to find it missing. Fuck, where did my gun go?

We crawl silently back to the kitchen area with our fingers interlocked. Tilly keeps rhythmically squeezing my hand, and it helps to calm my racing heartbeat. As I focus on her, the swirling sand disappears and my panic recedes.

I can do this. I was trained to do this. I must keep Tilly safe.

We finally make it into the kitchen, and as soon as we get there, a shrill alarm screams. I reach for her, but Tilly jumps

up and walks quickly to turn it off and pull a pan out of the oven.

“Get back here,” I whisper-shout.

She returns to me and cups my face, leaning in and pressing our lips together. The smells of cinnamon and vanilla engulf me and chase away the last remnants of dusty sand. I relax into the kiss and her arms come around me, allowing the tension in my chest to loosen.

Her kiss is all I can think about; her soft lips, the sweet little whimpers she makes as I take control. I softly skim my hands over her body, then pull back, still holding on to her.

There’s no blood on her face now and the world feels clear again. Reality slowly filters in. Fuck. What did I just do? An episode in broad daylight? And in the bakery? Shame slithers up my spine.

“Are you okay?”

“Are you okay?”

We both say at the same exact moment, and Tilly gives me one of her Sunshine smiles, while slowly tracing my face. Her gentle caresses continue down, massaging my neck, sending the last of my panic away.

“There you are,” she murmurs, her honey-brown eyes filled with concern.

“I’m sorry,” I croak. “Did I hurt you?”

I can't help but reach up to touch her chin, turning her face this way and that. There is no hint of bruising, no line of dried blood.

Fuck. Adrenaline is still surging through me, and I'm trembling with the aftershocks. Tilly seems to know just what I need and interlocks her fingers with mine, giving them a squeeze.

"Not even a little," she replies, shifting forward to settle her head on my chest. Leaning back against the wall, I pull her even closer, relishing the way she feels in my arms. Her soft curves fit against me perfectly.

Relief washes through me, just as embarrassment rises up. I shouldn't be with her. Clearly, I'm too damaged. I could have hurt her. And what if there had been a room full of people here today?

"Stop!" she demands. "I can hear you thinking a mile away. And I want you to cut it out right now Drew. Yes, you got triggered when that car backfired—but your only goal at that moment was to protect me. Even when you pulled me to the ground, you made sure not to hurt me, or Hot-Dog for that matter."

"Sunshine..." I say, trying to put a bit of distance between us. But she absolutely will not stand for it.

"Oh, hell no. I love you, Drew. Damaged bits and all. I don't care. You're the warmest, kindest man I know. I've loved you; pined after you for years. You and Hot Dog coming in here is the highlight of every day. Nobody makes me feel like you do,

no one could ever take your place. I'm yours and you are mine. You are not going to end this."

Her words circulate in my mind.

I didn't hurt her.

She doesn't care about my issues or my scars.

She *loves* me.

And she's right, there is no way I can live without her. I don't want to live without her. If she had died up on that mountain, then my life would have ended right there too.

Maybe this is my second chance. The moment when I stop punishing myself for my past.

Hot Dog's head springs from the top of my shirt, and he licks my face, clamoring around trying to get to Tilly for pets and cuddles. I pull him out and hand him to her. She pushes her body closer to mine, cradling him against her.

"Sunshine, I love you too. And I'm not going anywhere." I finally say the words to her.

A glorious smile overtakes her face, and she places Hot Dog on the floor before jumping into my arms. I grip her ass and squeeze as she peppers my face with tiny little kisses. Spinning us around, I press her body to the wall and take her mouth.

Our furry companion begins hopping around and barking.

"Shhhh," I scold him. "I'm kissing your soon-to-be mother—gonna try to talk her into moving in with us, and you're

messing up my moment.”

As if he understands, Hot Dog plops down onto his butt and looks at Tilly expectantly. His head tilts from side to side as if to say, *you know you want to*.

Her sweet laughter rings out as her body shakes with mirth. I tighten my arms around her. It's fast. I know it's fast to ask her to move in, but now that she's mine I don't ever want to spend another night without her. Hell, I don't want to spend another minute apart.

“What do you say, Sunshine? Wanna come live with me? We can live in the cabin, or I can buy us a new house closer to town. Whatever you want, as long as we're together.”

“I'm in,” she says without any hesitation.

“But, let's grab that frosting to take with us. I'm dying to taste it on your skin.” I rasp, sucking hard on her neck.

Sliding down my body, she goes over to her workstation, but before she retrieves the frosting she stops and grabs a little plaque off of the wall.

“I think we should bring this. I know you don't believe in the legend of Lustre Lake but, even after everything, it worked,” she grins.

Looking down, I see that she is holding her copy of the town's Lore Poem. My eyes skim over the words, really seeing them for the first time.

“Well, you certainly took a chance, and I agree, Destiny smiled,” I say cheerfully.

“The biggest smile,” she agrees, kissing me. “Now, there’s just one part left.”

“The frosting?” I ask. There is absolutely no way I’m leaving it behind.

“No,” she shakes her head, amused.

But I know exactly what she’s saying. Now is when we finally get our Happily Ever, Forever.

Epilogue

Drew

B^{ang} The cabin door flies open, as it does almost every day. My girl still hasn't mastered the art of quietly entering a space.

I love her for it; in fact, I love everything about her. Plus, knowing she's here gives me a chance to slip out to our back porch silently.

The space is all set, just like the pictures she's been showing me. Twinkle lights are strung up, winking like stars against the night sky, cozy chairs surround a little table, and in the corner, an enormous outdoor lounge is piled high with pillows and blankets. Hot Dog is hunkered down there, and I give him the signal to stay.

"Babe, where are you?" she yells.

"In the back, come on out," I call.

It takes a moment before she appears in the doorway, and I drink her in. Her long dark hair is piled in a messy bun on top of her head, she has a little smudge of flour on her cheek, and her luscious pink lips are quirked up. My gaze flows down her body, noting how amazing her curves look in her black work tank top and leggings. My cock hardens, but this is not the time.

As she steps out onto the porch, Tilly's eyes widen in shock, her mouth opens and she glances at me.

“Oh. My. Goodness!” She exclaims. “You didn’t? I can’t believe you did this! These chairs are perfect. I love the lights!”

She twirls around, spinning with her arms out, drinking it all in before flinging herself at me. Like always, I am here with outstretched arms, ready to catch her and hold her against my body. Her vanilla and cinnamon scent mixes with the fresh mountain air and makes my mouth water.

“Thank. You. So. Much. I. Love. It.” she chirps, punctuating each word with a kiss.

I slip my hand up to fist her hair, and as she opens for me, I take over. Our tongues intertwine and lick into her mouth, gathering as much of her sweet flavor as I can. My cock is now fully erect and threatening to break out from behind my zipper as I grind against her warm center, wishing there wasn’t clothing between us. My strides move us slowly toward the lounge.

“You didn’t even see the best part,” I whisper into her ear before dropping her into a nest of blankets.

She bounces and lets out the sweetest little giggle. Unable to wait for another second, Hot Dog begins jumping and wiggling, greeting my Sunshine with tons of little yips. Distracting her.

I get down on one knee. Waiting for my moment...

She pets Hot Dog, scratching his ears just the way he likes, and finally sees the little bag attached to his collar. Reaching

forward to grasp it, she unties the knot and the black velvet falls into her outstretched palm. She opens it and shakes out the ring.

It lands on a soft purple blanket, the diamond and jeweled band gleaming. Plucking it from the plush surface, she turns toward me.

“Drew, what is...” she trails off when she notices I’m down on one knee. Her eyes fill with tears.

“Tilly Collins, Sunshine, I love you...” I take the ring from her and slip it onto her finger. But I don’t get out a word of what I planned because the next second we are on the ground.

“Yes,” she cries, tightening her arms around me. Her breasts push against my chest, and I can’t wait another minute to touch my fiancé.

Hauling her up, I step back, yank her shirt off and pull down on her bra cups until she spills over the top. Her rosy pink nipples instantly harden, and my mouth waters. Suctioning my lips around her taut bud, I tease her until she throws her head back, gasping.

My hand slips below the waistband of her leggings, reaching down... but stopping just above her center.

“Drew,” she whines, spreading her legs apart, inviting me to dive deeper. Giving her nipple one last, hard suck, I release her.

“Turn around and look out at the forest, Sunshine,” I growl against her ear.

She moves like lightning, grabbing onto the railing with both hands and presenting herself to me. My eyes take in every inch of her perfection as I rapidly remove my clothing. Her smooth skin, the little freckles that dot her shoulders, the curve of her waist. Stepping closer, I run my hand sensually down her back and over her perky ass, pulling her leggings off as I go.

Her pink pussy comes into view, peeking at me through her thighs, and I can't decide if I want to use my fingers or tongue to fuck my fiancé first. She's already slick, and I slide my fingers through her velvet folds, circling her clit just the way she likes. Using my other hand, I release her hair from its tie, watching it fall like a silk curtain. This woman undoes me.

Her hips writhe, seeking more pressure, but I continue to tease her with light touches, loving how wet she's getting for me. Circling her entrance, I gather her arousal, gently easing a finger into her heat. Ever so slowly, I glide in and out while using my thumb to tap rhythmically on the sensitive bundle of nerves. Playing with her body is my favorite hobby, but when her breathing picks up, I become eager to hear her screaming my name. Adding a second finger, I crook them, knowing just how to hit that place deep inside that sends her soaring. Only a few pumps later I can feel her orgasm getting closer.

“Ohhhhhh, Drew,” my sunshine screams. Her pussy flutters and clamps down as a gush of juices slide down my hand.

Tilly looks over her shoulder at me. Her eyes are hooded, glazed over with lust, and her plush lips open as she pants.

“That's one,” I say with a satisfied smirk.

“Please, I need you,” she gasps, her body vibrating.

“I’ve got you, baby,” I grunt, sliding my thick cock along her sensitive pussy, nudging her clit until she’s arching back, begging me to impale her. Reaching around, I grab her hands, twining her fingers with mine. Her ring winks, catching my eye. *Mine*. Holding her captive against the railing, I slam home.

She throws her head back, resting it on my shoulder, and screams out another release. Her pussy is pulsing around my dick, urging me to come, but I’m not finished with her yet.

“Two! You. Feel. So. Good,” she sobs out.

As her orgasm continues around my shaft, I slide out before thrusting completely inside her with a single stroke. I set a punishing pace as our moans and cries of ecstasy float out over the forest. My hand moves to her throbbing pink clit.

“One more, Sunshine, you’re going to give me one more,” I command, pressing down.

“I can’t,” she squeals, but we both know she can.

“Look out and find the sliver of Lustre Lake.” I pant. “You made its love magic real for me. Now you’re mine, forever.”

Roaring out my release, I give her sensitive nub a little pinch, sending us both over the edge as I spill inside her. We collapse on the big lounge, hearts pounding in unison. Unwilling to leave her tight heat, I snag one of the blankets and pull it over us.

She snuggles into my chest and contentment washes through me. I never believed I would get this lucky. I never believed she could be mine. I never believed in magic at all... until her.

And this is just the start.

HAPPILY EVER, FOREVER

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About the Author

Ellie Lukas is completely obsessed with reading. Whenever she has a spare moment, you can find her curled up, devouring a book. Ellie also loves a fun adventure, preferably outdoors, and traveling the world. Ellie believes that animals are way better than people, and almost all of her books will have a sweet animal sidekick—but don't worry, nothing bad will ever happen to them.

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