



Heartland
HEROES

Rebel BOSS

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

LANA LOVE

REBEL BOSS

A BBW & MILITARY ROMANCE

HEARTLAND HEROES: REBEL AUTOS

BOOK FOUR



LANA LOVE

LOVE HEART BOOKS

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CHAPTER 1



AIMEE

I slide into the worn leather booth at Uncle Joe's Bar. "Hey, girl," I say, thankful to see one of my best friends. She lives over in Raytown, but after meeting during summer camp, we became like sisters to each other.

"Hey, Aimee. Long day?" Maya sets down her cocktail and smiles at me.

I nod, and some of the built-up tension melts away just from being with Maya and being able to unwind a little. Waving down the waiter, I ask for an IPA. "You have no idea. The project for Morrison's is a nightmare. They keep changing the goalposts and it's exhausting," I groan, leaning back against the back of the booth and closing my eyes. "I'm also mocking up some concept designs for Antonia and Colleen, for the Warrior Cares fundraiser, and I'm much more excited about that project. But I don't want to talk shop. I have some big news."

Maya's eyes light up. "I know we haven't talked lately, but are you holding out on me? Have you found a man who appreciates you and adores you beyond measure?"

"Ha," I laugh and roll my eyes. "Not even close. Remember my dad's Mustang? Remember how he always said I could have it on my thirtieth birthday?" I pause, watching Maya.

"Your thirtieth was last week..." Maya says, her eyes showing everything clicking into place.

"Yeah. It's mine now. Dad swore my mom to secrecy before he passed. She gave me the keys on my birthday. I'm honestly

not sure how I feel about it,” I sigh, a wave of mixed emotions rolling over me.

“Wow.” Maya gasps, her voice filled with awe. “I remember you telling me how you dreamed about owning that car. But wait,” she pauses, tilting her head in confusion. “How did you not know your mom still had the car?”

I shrug. “I guess it was in the garage, and it’s not like I go in there these days. Though I can’t believe Mom never said anything.”

The waiter comes by, drops a coaster on the table, and places a pint of beer on it.

“Thanks,” I say, taking a deep drink of the cold beer and savoring the sharp, hoppy taste.

A rush of memories floods my mind – my little hands gripping the leather steering wheel as I pretended to drive while we were at the gas station and my dad was filling the tank.

Maya leans forward, squeezing my arm gently. She knows how it was with my dad. “How do you feel about it?”

“Honestly? Conflicted,” I admit, sighing softly. “That car was his pride and joy. But after I chose graphic design at college...” I wave my hand, and Maya nods. She’s heard it all so many times before that there’s no reason to rehash it all again.

I stare into my beer, bitterness rising in my throat. My relationship with my father weighs heavily on my heart, though now that he’s gone, it’s not like anything can be changed. I know it’s not an uncommon story, but he wanted me to live my life the way he wished he could have lived his. I’m pretty sure I wouldn’t do things differently if I had another chance because to change things would have meant giving up on my dreams.

“I wish we could’ve understood each other better,” I say finally. “I’m taking it to Rebel Autos this week because the car needs a lot of work. I didn’t know he’d slacked off on the maintenance for it before he had his heart attack.” I look away, trying to push down the feelings rising in me. Fixing our

relationship was something I thought we'd eventually manage, but then Dad had a heart attack and died a few days later. There are so many things I wish I could have said to him and so many things I hoped he would say to me.

Maya nods understandingly. "Maybe this could be healing for you?"

I look at my close friend and shrug. It's been a week since my mom gave me the keys to the car on my birthday, but I still can't figure out how I feel about this gift. Was my dad just honoring his promise? Or was this meant to be some kind of guilt-trip gift?

"Enough about me. How's the new project at work?" I ask Maya, eager to shift the focus away from me and the Mustang.

Maya's face lights up, and she tucks a loose chestnut curl behind her ear. "Good! I just closed on my first big listing."

"Look at you, real estate mogul in the making," I tease playfully. "I'm so thrilled for you!"

She rolls her eyes, a laugh escaping her lips. "Hardly a mogul, but maybe one day. I am loving the challenge of growing my family's business."

Maya pauses for a beat too long, and beneath her confident facade, I sense a hint of worry. I nudge her foot under the table. "What's up, babe?" I ask, my voice filled with genuine concern. Maya tends not to open up about the things that bother her the most.

Maya sighs, and her shoulders droop. "It's just... Mom and Grandma have been hinting pretty heavily about me 'settling down.' They want me to get married and have kids."

I snort, unable to hold back my laughter. "That's rich coming from the matriarchs of Raytown's most successful real estate empire. What about Martin and Lucy?"

"Right? She's already pregnant with her second child!" Maya throws her hands up in exasperation. "I want to focus on my career, but they make me feel so guilty, like I'm failing as a woman. It's not like there aren't other grandchildren already."

My heart aches for Maya, knowing the internal struggle she faces. I reach across the table, gently squeezing her hand in support. “Maya, you’re the most badass woman I know. Don’t let them make you doubt yourself,” I say firmly. She is incredibly talented, and I know her family knows, even if she’s getting pressured to start her own family. “You’ll have kids when – and *if* – you want to.”

Her lips lift into a resigned smile. “We’ll see. First, I have to find a man who looks past who my family is and all these,” she gestures down at her beautiful, voluptuous body, “curves. You know how it is.”

I sigh and nod. I’m not the only daughter of one of the founding families of the Heartland region, but I’ve met plenty of men intimidated by me running my own business and who think a woman with meat on her bones is only up for a good time and nothing more.

“We’ll find good men, Maya. I promise we will.” *One day, hopefully*, I add to myself.

* * *

I FOLLOW the tow truck on the drive to Rebel Autos, the most-respected repair shop in the Heartland region. I’ve never been here before, but I’ve heard about them, especially how they’re the top garage for vintage cars.

“Afternoon, ma’am.” One of the mechanics walks toward me, wiping his hand on a rag before shaking mine. “I’m Wes. How can I help you today?”

“Hi, Wes. I’m Aimee. I need to have my dad’s...*my*,” I correct myself, “Mustang restored. Everyone says Rebel Autos is the best, so here I am.” I smile and shake his hand.

Wes’s eyes light up when he sees the Mustang. “I’m glad you brought her in. We don’t get many Mustangs these days. She’s a gorgeous car.”

“Thanks,” I say, watching the tow truck lower the car in front of an empty bay.

“She’s a real beauty. What year is she? ‘68? ‘69?” Wes glides his hands gently over the gold paint.

“1968,” I reply. “It was my dad’s.”

Understanding flickers in Wes’s eyes. “We can definitely fix this up for you. Let me get some information, and we can get started.”

“Hold up a second,” a deep baritone instructs.

I turn to see a burly man with short dark hair and tattoos emerging from the garage. “This your car?” he asks, extending a muscular arm to shake my hand.

“It is. It’s been in storage for a few years. I don’t think my dad kept up with maintenance before putting it in storage, so it needs some TLC.”

The man’s eyes glint with admiration as he looks over the Mustang. “Haven’t seen one of these in a while. She’s a real beauty. Wes,” he says, turning away, “I got this one. You finish working on that truck.”

Wes looks frustrated but nods and doesn’t say anything before returning to the garage.

“I’m Mack,” he says, extending his hand to mine. “This is my place.” I’m momentarily stunned as a jolt of electric desire zaps me when his strong hand holds mine and shakes it.

“Please to meet you,” I say, hoping my cheeks aren’t as flushed as my whole body feels.

Mack walks around the Mustang. He trails his fingers over the body before popping the hood and inspecting the engine. “This is a truly magnificent car, though she needs some work. You’ve come to the right place to get her restored.”

“Thanks,” I say, wishing his fingers were trailing my skin instead of the Mustang. “I’ve loved this car since I was little.”

Mack grins, and I bite my lip as I look at him. I push down the images that pop into my head of me touching his hot skin, using his body like my personal playground, and how it would feel to be held in his muscular arms.

Down girl!

I blink rapidly and hope my sudden lust isn't written all over my face.

As Mack and I discuss the work needed, I can see how deeply he cares about cars. When my voice catches as I tell him how I inherited the car, he doesn't press me.

A smile tugs at the corners of my lips as a thought crosses my mind. "I always dreamed of taking this car on a road trip and driving up the coast."

Mack's eyes meet mine, and his expression softens. "That sounds like a damn good idea. After I'm done, she'll be ready to hit the road."

I wonder if I could convince him to join me.

CHAPTER 2



MACK

Wes stares at me, his forehead creased. “Mack, man, why’d you have to take this project for yourself? I thought you were finally going to take some time off.”

I clench my jaw. How do I explain that one look at Aimee was enough to know I’d do anything to simply talk to her? It’s also no secret among my guys that I love vintage cars, and even though Aimee’s car has seen better days, that Mustang is a glorious car. No way am I passing up the chance to restore a beauty like that.

Wes is right that I’m overdue for some time off – it’s something the guys have been harping onto me about for months. But as I’ve gotten older, I’ve learned to recognize the meaningful moments you have to grab with everything you have. Seeing Aimee was one of those moments. She’s more than a pretty face and a curvy body that begs to be explored, but one glance told me she was a woman I needed to know. The guys all know that finding a woman who loves vintage cars as much as I do is the woman I’ve been searching for my whole life. My gut told me that Aimee was that woman, and there was no way I was going to let Wes or any of my other mechanics deal with her.

Her car – like Aimee herself – is *mine*.

“Well?” Wes presses, his voice filled with expectant irritation.

I like Wes, but if he presses this further, he won’t like how that plays out. “I like the car. I took the job. End of story.”

I don't feel like explaining myself, and as the boss, I don't have to. I cross my arms over my chest and level a stern look at Wes.

Wes scoffs, leaning against the counter in reception and drumming his fingers loudly. "When did you decide I don't know how to do my job right? Or is this to do with the woman who brought the car in?" he asks, raising his eyebrow.

"Aimee," I say, liking the sound of her name on my lips.

Wes sighs, his skepticism apparent. "Thought so." He shrugs. "Look, don't let a pretty face keep you from taking care of yourself, Mack. You don't take time off soon, you're going to self-combust."

My jaw tightens. The thought of Aimee's fingers trailing down my cheek makes my skin burn with desire. "I know what I'm doing," I say gruffly.

Wes holds my gaze for a moment longer before heading back to his car bay, shaking his head. It's not that he's wrong because it's been way too long since I took time off, and I know I've been short-tempered lately. Yet when I saw Aimee and the Mustang, I knew she was worth postponing my vacation.

Every married man I know says that when you find the right woman, you just know. Even without knowing anything else about Aimee, I know with every cell of my body that she's the woman I want. And if working on her car means more contact with her, of course I'm going to fucking step in and take the project.

A man has to claim what's his.

* * *

WHEN DID SINKING into bed alone each night become my life?

I lie in bed, exhausted but unable to drift off to sleep. *How did I get to be forty and not have a wife and family?*

The answer to that is easy: I've been taking care of other people since I was a teenager. After Dad died when I was in high school, I got a job washing dishes at the diner and became the man of the house so I could take care of Mom. I lied about my age to get the job, though I don't think I fooled them. Jefferson is a small town, and everyone knew about my dad's passing.

After graduating high school, I knew college wasn't for me, so I joined the Army and served my country. That's the best thing I've done with my life, and I don't regret anything about those years. It was hard work and a deep honor to protect my country. When I mustered out and came home, I started Rebel Autos. Since then, my mechanics have become my family.

Only now, they're all married and starting families of their own. I knew we wouldn't be single forever, but it was easy to think that as the years rolled by. Then Roman, the man I thought would be single until his daughter Tessa was married off herself, met Marsha. Watching her passion for her job and how she stands up for Tessa, it wasn't just Roman she took by surprise. The woman is a force of nature, and Roman was a goner.

Same thing with Wes and Kira, then Clark and Betty. Couldn't believe it, but even Kid found a woman to make him settle down and stop his horndog ways. Never thought I'd see the day any woman would make Kid consider saying, "I do."

Even after Ma died, I never opened up to finding happiness with a woman and building a family. I've spent so long caring for everyone else that it was habit to look after others before myself. I forgot to take care of my own needs. *I need to change that.*

My eyes fall on the framed photo of Ma and me right before I went into basic. She's squinting into the sun, and I'm in my fatigues and grinning. There's such pride in my Ma's smile that I ache with missing her. What would she think if she knew I was still a bachelor?

Never thought I'd be the last single man standing at Rebel Autos, but here I am.

I head into the kitchen and grab a bottle of beer from the fridge. It's not the best way to quiet my mind and fall asleep, but a man does what he has to.

When I see the calendar on the fridge, an idea takes shape.

The vintage car show. Aimee clearly appreciates vintage cars. This would be the perfect chance for me to see Aimee again, away from the garage and prying eyes.

Before I can overthink it, I grab my phone and scroll to her name. It's been so long since I put myself out there, but I know it's time to let go of the belief that my sole purpose in life is to take care of everyone else. My finger hovers over the call button, but it's late, and I don't want her getting the wrong idea.

Aimee. Mack here. Could I interest you in going to the vintage car show with me this weekend? Are you free?

I put my phone on the counter and lean back as I drain my beer. The unfamiliar sensation of excitement twists through me. If only I'd gotten this idea earlier, I wouldn't have to wait until morning for her response.

The sound of my phone buzzing makes me jump.

That sounds wonderful. I'd enjoy that, Mack. Thank you.

I grin so hard that it feels like my cheeks are going to crack open. Without hesitating, I text her back.

You've made me a happy man, Aimee. Meet me at the garage at 3 pm?

It's a date.

Reading Aimee's text sends a thrill through me, melting away any lingering doubts and making me smile. I have something to look forward to for the first time in forever.

And it feels damn good.

CHAPTER 3



AIMEE

Mom?" I call as I close the front door to her house behind me.

"Back here, sweetheart."

I follow the sound of her voice back to the kitchen. Her hands are dusted with flour as she rolls out pie crusts. The scent of cinnamon and sugar is warm and comforting, making me smile with the memories of all the times we baked together when I was growing up. We've baked more pies than I could ever count in this kitchen.

"Aimee! I wasn't expecting you! This is certainly a nice surprise." Mom smiles, wiping her hands on her apron before pulling me in for a hug.

"Hey," I say, leaning into the comfort of her hug. "Can I help with anything?"

"If you have time, you can help with these pie crusts. I'm prepping them for the bake sale at the high school. Maeve insisted that I donate some of my famous apple pie."

I smile as I roll up my sleeves and join my mom at the counter. She's made pies for bake sales at the high school since I was a student there. "How many pies are you making?"

"Haven't decided yet. I suppose it depends on how much flour I have. I certainly have enough pie tins," she says, nodding toward the far end of the counter where a couple of packs of aluminum pie pans are stacked.

We work in a familiar rhythm, which helps to settle the crashing emotions I've felt since my birthday. How come my dad couldn't just accept my choices? Why does the gift of the Mustang feel like a guilt trip?

Mom glances at me, her blue eyes crinkling with concern. "Everything okay, sweetie?"

I manage a smile. "Yeah. Just thinking about Dad. I'm still getting over him leaving me the Mustang. To be honest, I didn't realize it had been sitting in the garage all this time. I've taken it to Rebel Autos for them to get it back in working condition. It was pretty neglected when you gave me the keys."

Mom pauses working on her dough and turns to me. "It's true he neglected it the year before his heart attack. He didn't talk about it much, but his eyesight was starting to fade, so I did most of the driving in my old Toyota." This is news to me. "Your dad would be so proud that you're fixing up the Mustang, Aimee."

"You think so?" I ask, pushing the dough into a pie tin. I thought I knew my dad, but I continue to discover things about him that he kept from me. I know parents want to protect their children, but now it feels like he kept secrets from me.

"Your father loved you more than anything, Aimee," she assures me, her voice full of conviction. "He might not have always understood your choices, but he was proud of you. Don't ever doubt that."

Her words surprise me, and the heaviness in my heart shifts. "It's nice of you to say that, Mom, but that doesn't sound like him. He never acted that way when I saw him."

"Aimee," my mom says, coming over and running her hand over my cheek. "I know your father wasn't an easy man, but he did love you."

Dad and I fought so much those last years over my career. He wanted me to pursue an MBA, but I refused. He never seemed to understand that a corporate career was never something I

remotely wanted. He had tunnel vision when he got an idea in his head.

Mom squeezes my arm, grounding me. “I know so. That car was his baby. Seeing you restore it would mean the world to him. Before he passed, he was adamant that you get the car on your thirtieth birthday, like he always promised you.”

“Thanks, Mom. I needed to hear that. It’s...,” I gulp air as I fight the tears threatening to explode from my eyes, “it’s been weird and hard since you gave me the keys. You know how much the car means to me, but I never thought it would be mine. Then you surprised me on my birthday, and it’s dredged everything up with Dad.”

She kisses my cheek and pulls me into a gentle hug, and tears stream down my face. “Remember all the reasons you wanted the Mustang. You were so in love with it when you were little. Your dad always said that Mustang was special. Maybe it still has some magic left.”

I nod, wiping a stray tear from my cheek. There’s still so much I wish I could say to Dad, so much I wish we could work through. Our last conversation was an argument, where he disbelieved that I was doing well as a graphic designer and had more work than I could handle. He snapped that it wouldn’t last and I’d regret not studying business like he told me to. I said he couldn’t tell me how to live my life, and he should accept and support my decisions, but he’d closed down and didn’t say anything further.

I thought the wounds were healed, but I’m realizing I only buried them, not worked through them.

Mom pats my hand, her eyes glistening. “Oh, sweetie. Your father wasn’t always the best at communicating. But he loved you with his whole heart. All he wanted was for you to be happy.”

I look up at my mom, disbelieving. “That’s not how he treated me.”

“You listened to your heart, as you should,” Mom says firmly. “Don’t wish you’d made different choices for yourself. Never

regret following your heart, Aimee. Promise me you won't."

"I promise," I whisper, wiping my wrist across my eyes as I try to catch my tears before they fall into the pie.

"So, are you seeing anyone these days?" Mom asks casually as she starts working on more pie dough.

I freeze, not ready to tell her about my upcoming date with Mack. She's always hoped I'd end up with someone like Jack, my high school sweetheart – kind, reliable, and unfortunately, utterly boring. Mack is...not that. Mack makes my heart excited about the possibilities. The night he texted me to invite me out, I knew I "should" wait until the next day to respond, so I didn't seem too eager. But my excitement was too great, and I didn't try to hide how much I wanted to go out with him.

"Not really. I have a date with someone this weekend, but it's just a first date." I hedge, devoting my attention to mixing a fresh batch of pie dough.

Mom raises an eyebrow but doesn't press me. "Hmm. You not saying anything makes me think you really like this man. I won't push for more details." She smiles. "I know you'll tell me if things go well."

I smile as my thoughts drift to Mack. Rough, tattooed, a little older, handsome. He's completely unlike the men I've dated.

Maybe he's exactly the kind of man I need.

* * *

THE SCENT of perfume and the thrum of pop music fill the air as Maya and I browse the racks for something to wear on my date with Mack. I flip through endless variations of crop tops and miniskirts, growing more discouraged by the minute.

"This is hopeless," I sigh, moving a pile of hangers aside in frustration. "Everything here is meant for girls half my size."

I don't hate my body, but I hate that it can be hard to find clothes that fit and flatter. So many brands add inches instead of designing for a woman with curves and weight. Or they

don't design for women with heavy breasts like I have. I wish it weren't so hard to find something nice to wear.

Maya gives me an encouraging smile. "Don't worry, we'll find something. What about this?" She holds up a pink sundress dotted with tiny white flowers.

I scrunch my nose and shake my head. I make a face. "Too... sweet. I'm going to a vintage car show, not the Kentucky Derby."

Maya laughs and makes a funny face. "What are you going for, then?"

"I want to feel confident," I say as I flip through a rack of blouses. "Sexy, but without looking like I'm trying too hard, you know?"

"Got it. Sexy, not sweet." Maya returns the dress and pivots to a table of distressed jeans.

I want an outfit that's cool and sexy while still staying true to my curves. As I sift through the hangers, a glint of gold catches my eye. I reach for the shimmering fabric and pull out a beautiful wraparound blouse. The silky material shimmers under the store lights.

"Ooh, that's gorgeous!" Maya says, coming over and inspecting the blouse.

I run my hands over the smooth chiffon fabric. With its deep V-neck and loose sleeves, the blouse looks like it would look amazing.

"It's perfect," I breathe. I imagine Mack's eyes popping as he sees me in this. It might be a little dressy for a car show, but I still want to impress him. "I'm trying this one on."

I grab the blouse in my size and practically sprint to the fitting rooms, Maya on my heels. I shed my t-shirt inside the cramped stall and carefully slip the blouse over my shoulders. The luxurious fabric whispers against my skin, and I turn to examine myself in the mirror.

My face falls as I look at my reflection. The deep V-neck gapes open, unable to contain my chest. I try to reposition the

front so my breasts are covered, but the fabric strains. The silky chiffon is unforgiving. Tears prick at the corners of my eyes. I shouldn't be surprised at a blouse not fitting, but the sting of something not fitting both my waist and chest never gets easier.

"How's it looking?" Maya calls.

I blink back the tears and clear my throat. "It's, uh...not great. Too tight."

"Aw, bummer! No worries, we'll keep looking." Ever the optimist, Maya isn't deterred. Meanwhile, I wrestle my way out of the blouse and put my shirt back on, putting the ill-fitting top back on a hanger.

I'm about ready to call it quits when Maya grabs my arm. "Wait, don't give up yet. I found something I think you'll love."

My shoulders slump as I follow her lead. I appreciate Maya's determination, but I'm reluctant to try on anything else after the last disappointment. The fabric looks stretchy and soft, the dusty rose color feminine yet cool. It's definitely a date-worthy blouse.

"Go try it." Maya gives me a gentle push toward the dressing room. "I have a good feeling about this one."

I sigh and take the blouse back to the dressing room. Shimmying out of my T-shirt for the second time, I slip the stretchy material over my head. I gasp when I see how beautifully it hugs my curves and flatters my breasts. The neckline shows a hint of cleavage, while the fitted bodice skims over my stomach and hips. It's absolutely perfect.

I step out of the stall, holding my breath. "I think I'm in love!"

Maya's eyes go wide. "Oh, my god! Aimee, you look amazing."

I let out a triumphant laugh and pivot to see the back view. The blouse lays smoothly and looks just as amazing from the back.

“This is it!” I can’t stop beaming as I admire my reflection. The blouse transforms me into the bombshell I want to be for Mack. Sexy yet classy, accentuating my curves rather than making me look like a fancy sausage.

Maya whistles. “Damn, girl. Mack’s gonna swallow his tongue when he sees you in that top!”

A thrill rushes through me as I imagine Mack’s reaction. With this blouse, I feel like I could take on the world and look fantastic doing it. “I’m getting it!” I don’t even glance at the price tag before rushing back into the stall to change.

“You’re gonna slay your date!”

I laugh. “Let’s hope so!”

CHAPTER 4



MACK

The moment I saw Aimee today, I was a fucking goner.

Aimee showed up wearing jeans that hugged her luscious full hips, immediately filling my mind with fantasies of grabbing her hips and losing myself in the treasure between her legs. And fuck. The blouse. Nicer than I would have expected for going to the car show, but damn if it's not the most tasteful *and* sexy thing I've ever seen on a woman. The soft fabric hugged her breasts, and I had to think of sick puppies to stop the raging hard-on that threatened to take over.

When all was said and done, I was ready to abandon the car show, take her to my favorite overlook on King Mountain, and make out with her in the back seat of my car. She makes my motor rev like a fucking horny teenager.

"You having a good time?" I ask Aimee, putting my hand on her lower back as we navigate the crowd. There aren't many people here, but I can't stop touching her. Every time I touch her, I want to carry her to bed and devour her.

"I am, Mack. I hadn't heard about this show, and I'm so happy you invited me! These cars are wonderful," Aimee smiles at me, and I'm not sure my chest can contain how wildly my heart is thumping. "Oh, look!"

"Well, I'll be damned." I grin as Aimee grabs my hand and leads me to where a perfect match to Aimee's Mustang is on display. This one is in pristine condition and waxed to within

an inch of its life. “Your Mustang will look like this one when I’m finished, though maybe with less wax.”

Aimee looks at me, her eyes filled with a happiness that stirs my grumpy old heart. I want to make her smile like this today and forever.

“When I was seven years old, I told my dad I wanted to use part of my allowance to make a down payment on his Mustang so I could buy it when I was sixteen.” A smile that is both fond and sad plays on her lips, and I understand at once that her relationship with her father was strained.

“What did he have to say about that?”

Aimee sighs and shakes her head. “He thought it was cute but told me to keep my money. He said I could have the car when I was thirty, which seemed like an eternity.”

“How were things between you two?” I ask, once again putting my hand on her lower back. She leans toward me, and every atom of my body fires like a piston.

“They were...” She pauses, and I see some of a wall return. “Things were fine until high school. He wanted me to study business, but I wouldn’t consider it. I’d been drawing and practicing art all my life and knew I wanted to be a graphic designer. He didn’t take it well and never got over my decision.”

“I’m so sorry, Aimee.” I put my hand on her arm. I want to take her in my arms and hug her so tightly that all the pain of her past disappears. I want her to be safe and happy with me, and I’ll do anything I can to make her feel that way.

She pauses, staring off into the distance. “When I was accepted to the art school at college and later landed my first internship, we had another huge blow-up. He laid into me again about finding a so-called sensible career. Apparently, he thought the ‘art thing,’ as he called it, would run its course, or I’d finally understand how difficult it was and abandon it. I only ever fell more in love with what I do.” Aimee gives a sad sigh. “We never saw eye to eye after that. Not even when I

proved I wasn't starving. He didn't want to believe that making my own choices would result in something good."

Aimee turns to me, her eyes glistening with unshed tears. I pull her into a hug, and she tucks her head against my chest. Her breath hitches, and I hold her tighter, gently rubbing her back with my hand. I wish I could take the burden of this painful memory from her.

After a moment, she pulls back, dabbing at her eyes. The sadness isn't gone, but there's a lightness to her now. Sometimes, you need to open up those old wounds and let them breathe so they can heal.

I push Aimee's curly brown hair behind her ear, and a twist of frustration fills me as I see the sadness and hurt in her eyes. "I know what you're talking about. Your dad sounds a lot like one of my mechanics, Roman. His daughter is studying creative writing in college now, but for a long time, things were tense between them."

"What happened to change that?"

I smile. "Well, he met Marsha. She was one of Tessa's teachers and intervened. The way I hear it, she gave him an earful about all kinds of writing and how much money can be made. She got Tessa to agree to also study technical writing, so she has a safety net."

She sighs, looking down at the ground for a moment before meeting my gaze again. "I wish someone had done that for me when I was younger. I loved my dad and know he wanted the best for me, but graphic design was my true passion. He never understood why I wanted something he thought was so foolish for myself."

She pauses and fixes her pretty gaze on me. There's so much going on behind her eyes. "You know, you surprise me, Mack."

I return her gaze. "How do you mean?"

"Well," she gives me a dazzling smile, "you're not what I expected. You seemed gruff and grumpy, but you're tender and sweet with me. I don't talk about my father with strangers, but

there's something...comforting about you. I feel completely at ease with you." Her cheeks flush with color as she meets my gaze. "I mean, we just met, and I feel like I could tell you anything."

Her candid words fill my heart with pride. Without hesitation, I reach out and stroke her jaw with the palm of my hand. Our eyes lock as she leans into my hand, her lips parted. At this moment, the din of the car show fades away. There's only me and Aimee – nothing else exists.

The air between us is heavy with attraction as we stand together, neither of us moving and breaking the perfection of this moment.

I clear my throat, trying to gather my scattered thoughts and calm the hard-on that's stirring again. "I know what you mean. It's easy being with you."

A group of people crowd around us, and we start walking again. I want to share everything with Aimee, but I don't know where to start.

"Let me tell you a bit about my grandfather. I used to help him work on his 1957 Ford Thunderbird when I was a kid. That car meant the world to him." I smile at the memory. "He'd let me hand him tools and taught me all about engines. I loved spending that time together, just the two of us in the garage. It's what started my love for vintage cars." My voice grows thick with emotion, but I force myself to meet Aimee's gaze. I'm not going to hide from making myself vulnerable to her. "So, I get it. I know how a car can represent so much more than metal and wheels. The memories tied to it, the history... that's where the real value lies."

Aimee nods slowly, her eyes glistening. "Yeah, exactly," she whispers. "It's about so much more than the car itself. It's..."

"It's about family," I finish quietly.

She reaches out to squeeze my hand. We understand each other in a way that strengthens our attraction from more than pure desire into something that connects deep in our souls.

Aimee's hand lingers on mine, her touch soft and warm. She steps closer, and all my senses go on high alert as my body vibrates with need for her.

"Thank you for listening, for understanding," she murmurs.

Her eyes search mine, vulnerable but filled with something more. Her eyes move to my mouth, and her lips part again. In that instant, I know I can't deny myself – or her – any longer.

Blood roars through my veins as I cradle her face in my hands. I draw her in, my desire burning hotter as her eyelids flutter closed, and she tilts her head to mine. Our mouths meet in a searing kiss, quickly moving from tender to passionate.

I pull her tight against me, one hand tangling in her hair, the other pressing into the small of her back and pulling her against my body. She melts into me with a soft moan that makes my heart pound.

We come up for air, foreheads touching, breathing ragged.

Her eyes shine as she traces her thumb along my bottom lip and smiles. "Wow," she whispers.

I grin and caress her cheek. "Wow is right."

Our lips meet again and again, each kiss deeper than the last. Her hands grasp my shirt, pulling me impossibly closer until no space remains between us. I trail kisses along her jawline, relishing the sound of her throaty sigh. When I reach a sensitive spot behind her ear, she gasps and arches into me.

"Mack," she breathes, desire heavy in her voice.

Hearing my name on her lips fans the flames inside me. I plant more kisses along the slope of her neck. She feels so right in my arms, like she was custom-made to fit with me.

Aimee has awakened something I wasn't sure I'd find in myself or with another woman – a yearning for love, passion, and hope. Now that I've had a taste of it, I can't get enough.

"I don't want this to end," she confesses.

I press my forehead to hers. "Me, neither." I barely remember that we're standing in the middle of a crowded event. All I see

is her. And I know one thing for sure – I'm never letting her go.

CHAPTER 5



AIMEE

J clear my throat. “Okay, ladies. Let’s get started.”

My presentation boards are all set up, and I wait for Colleen and Antonia to give me their attention. I walk them through the graphics I’ve created for the annual fundraiser for Warrior Cares, which is one of my favorite projects every year. I always do it pro bono, no matter how many times they insist on paying me.

“Wow, Aimee. These are incredible! You’ve outdone yourself this year. I love these graphics,” Antonia gushes, pointing to the board with my design they’ll use on their website.

Colleen nods, eyes wide. “They’re incredible, Aimee.”

“I’m thrilled you like the designs.” I smile with satisfaction. I’ve worked with Colleen and Antonia for a few years, but even though I’m confident in my work, there’s always that moment of “Will they like my designs this year?” that’s hard to shake. “Now, let’s talk about options for the banner.”

The rest of the meeting rushes past, but my thoughts keep drifting to Mack. Since we kissed at the car show, I haven’t stopped thinking about his strong arms around me and how easy and comforting it is to be with him. I don’t care that he’s older than me because I’ve never met any man who made me feel even half as adored and isn’t intimidated by me running my own business.

“We appreciate you donating your time and talents.” Colleen smiles. “You have a real talent for graphic design.”

I beam, filled with purpose. “It’s my pleasure.”

“Okay, I think we’re all good to go, Aimee. Thanks again for your work this year. Just email all the files to us, and we’ll get them up and running,” Colleen says, hugging me before she and Antonia rush out for another meeting.

As I make my way back to my car, I realize this is the first time I’ve been truly happy in a long time. Work is going exceptionally well, and...Mack. I wasn’t looking for a relationship, but now I’ve met Mack, I can’t imagine him not being in my life. Telling him about my dad isn’t something I usually do with people I’ve just met, but he made me feel like he cared and truly wanted to know.

My phone vibrates, and I smile. *Speak of the devil.*

“Hey, Aimee. How are you?” Mack asks, his husky voice sending a shiver of desire across my skin.

I smile at the sound of his voice. “I’m great! I just got out of a client meeting, and they loved the designs.”

“Congratulations, Aimee. Are you free after three?”

I glance at my portfolio bag and realize I have nothing else that needs doing today. With Colleen and Antonia happy, and it being Friday, I can afford to start my weekend early.

“Yeah, I can make that work. I need to drop my work stuff off at home, then I’m all yours. What are you thinking?”

Mack’s chuckle lights a flame of desire in my core. “It’s a surprise. Meet me at Rebel Autos in two hours.”

“I can’t wait,” I breathe, bursting with anticipation.

* * *

“YOU REALLY LIKE THIS GUY, don’t you?” Maya asks as we video chat while I tear through my closet, trying to find something to wear.

“I do, Maya. I really do. It’s true what they say about finding someone when you’re not looking. What do you think?” I ask,

holding up a black blouse.

She shakes her head. “I think you need to go further. Wear a dress this time.”

“But I don’t know what we’re doing,” I say, hesitating.

“Doesn’t matter. Dress for him, not for what you might be doing.”

I turn to Maya and grin. “You might be on to something. Hold on.” I rifle through my closet, looking for the dress I’ve wanted to wear but haven’t had a reason to. “What about this?”

“Oh, Aimee,” Maya says. “That dress is gorgeous. It’s so pretty! Try it on and let me see!”

“Okay. Hang on,” I say, stepping away from my laptop so I can change. “When do we get to do this for you?” I call out as I slip into the dress. “It’s been ages since you went on a date.”

“I can barely get a guy to talk to me for more than five minutes at the bars lately.” I can hear Maya sigh. “I haven’t really been looking, but I’m always kind of looking when I meet men, you know?”

“Yeah, I do. You’ll find someone soon, Maya. I know you will.”

“I haven’t seen you this worked up over a guy since we were in high school. Mack must be something special.”

“There’s a connection between us that I’ve never felt, Maya. It feels weird to say that when we’ve only seen each other a couple of times, but it’s like finding someone I didn’t realize was missing from my life. Am I crazy to think he might be The One?”

Maya laughs. “He must be something special to make you so giddy. I trust you, though. You’ve never been one to fall in love at the drop of a hat.”

“You’re right,” I say, moving back in front of my laptop. “What do you think?” I twirl in a dark pink dress with a tiny flower print over it.

“Aimee... You look so beautiful. You’re going to knock his socks off!”

I sure hope so! I let Maya get back to work and ensure my makeup isn’t smeared before I grab my purse and head out.

More than anything, I want tonight to be perfect with Mack.

CHAPTER 6



MACK

*S*pace around the garage. The smell of motor oil and gasoline is a constant at Rebel Autos.

Roman and Wes are under the hood of a '62 Thunderbird, laughing as they work on pulling the engine out of the car.

"You two okay over there?" I call out. I trust them, but they may get hurt if they're distracted by joking around.

"Yeah, we're fine," Roman says, standing and wiping his hand across his forehead. "Hey, boss, why are you so jittery today? You've been pacing around like nobody's business."

I set down the rag in my hand. "I'm taking Aimee up to King Mountain for a picnic after she sees the progress on the Mustang," I admit, bracing myself for the inevitable teasing and bullshitting from my guys.

Quincy rolls out from under a car, his brow furrowed in grease. He smirks and exchanges a glance with Roman, Wes, and Clark. "Well, it's about damn time." He grins, wiping his hands on a shop towel.

I feel my face flush a little, but I meet all their eyes. "Yeah, Aimee's amazing. She has this spark, and...she's different. I can't get enough of her. I'm taking her up for a picnic up on King Mountain."

My mind wanders as I imagine holding Aimee's curvy body close and caressing her soft skin. I want to see her curly hair spread out over my pillows, her eyes locked on mine as I make

love to her. An overwhelming need to be with her consumes me.

Roman claps me on the back, grinning. “About time, man. You deserve to find some happiness.” He gestures around the shop. “Take all the time you need – this place will still be standing when you get back.”

Wes winks at me conspiratorially. “And if you lovebirds want to stay the night at one of Waylon’s cabins, don’t worry about the shop. We got you covered here.”

I laugh, shaking my head. “I appreciate that. You best not burn the place down.”

Just then, I see Aimee’s car pull into the lot. My pulse quickens, and I smooth my hair back. “You guys better not make a scene,” I warn, specifically looking at Quincy.

He laughs and holds up his hands. If there’s one thing to be thankful for, it’s that Claire has settled Quincy down. He’s still a smartass but he doesn’t have the chip on his shoulder like he used to.

I hurry outside into the sunshine, eager to have Aimee in my arms again.

“Aimee! You’re here!” I say as she steps out of the car. God, she looks gorgeous, her hair lightly blowing in the breeze and that pretty dress she’s wearing. “You look amazing.”

“Hey, Mack. I’m happy you called.” Aimee’s smile and the way her dress hugs her curves are the best things I’ve seen all day. *This woman is it.* “I can’t wait to see how the car turned out.”

“Let me show you where I’m at,” I say, leading her into the garage. I’ve parked the Mustang right in the center under the lights. I watch Aimee closely as she walks around the car and sees the progress I’ve made.

She gasps, her hands flying to her mouth. “Mack, this is...I don’t have words.” Tears well in her eyes as she runs her hand along the glossy paint and chrome detailing.

I grin from ear to ear and push my chest out. “I’m glad you like it. I’m waiting on a couple more parts, then she’ll be yours again and you can take me for a spin.”

Aimee’s cheeks flush pink, and her eyes widen. *Good. She feels it, too.*

“It would be my pleasure,” she responds, winking and sending my heart on a collision course with love.

I wrap my arms around her, breathing in the sweet scent of her hair. “I can’t tell you how happy I am to see you, Aimee. I’ve missed you.”

“I’ve missed you, too,” she whispers, leaning against me.

Fuck. I could seriously get used to this.

I lead her out to my Chevy C/K pickup truck. “Let’s hit the road.”

We cruise down the two-lane highway leading to King Mountain. I glance over to see a huge smile on Aimee’s face. She closes her eyes and leans her head back, and I know this is the woman I’m going to marry.

We make small talk and joke around as I drive us out of town. Eventually, I turn down a winding dirt road that leads up to one of the ridges on King Mountain.

“Where are we going?” Aimee asks with a playful smile.

“You’ll see,” I say, reaching out and placing my hand over hers.

She glances at me and smiles, the shyness fading from her eyes.

After a few more miles, we arrive at an overlook. Pulling into a parking space, I breathe a sigh of relief that we’re finally here and it’s not crowded. King Mountain is a rejuvenating place to visit, and on any other day, I’d make it a point to drop in on Waylon and the other guys. They mostly keep their own counsel, but I know what they’re up to here, and I support it.

At the summit, the valley opens up before us, endless green fields dotted with wildflowers that seem to roll on forever.

Aimee rushes ahead. “This view is spectacular!”

I lick my lips as I watch her dress flutter around her legs. Fuck. I want to kneel before her and kiss those sweet, creamy thighs. She’s a gorgeous fucking picture of perfection, standing at the lookout.

“I’m glad you like it,” I say, pulling her into my arms and giving her a slow, gentle kiss.

Her breath catches and she wraps her arms around me, pulling me closer. I deepen our kiss, hungry to taste her again and feel her body yielding against mine.

“I sure like that, too,” she whispers, her breathing jagged.

I kiss her forehead softly and take her hand to lead her to the picnic area. “Me, too, sweetheart. I have more planned. Have a seat,” I say, gesturing to a picnic bench.

I return to the car and pop the trunk, grabbing the picnic basket and a blanket. It’s still early, but a cool breeze is starting up, and there’s no way I’ll let Aimee get cold up here.

Aimee turns to look at me, her eyes shining. “Mack! You did all this for me?”

“I thought we could have supper here and enjoy the view.” For the first time, a flash of nervous tension hits me. Have I misread Aimee and the chemistry we have? I’d bet my granddad’s car that I haven’t, but the rush of finding a woman I can see building a life with, and the not-yet knowing if we have a future, is a cocktail of confusion.

“That sounds perfect, Mack. You’re a wonderful man.” Aimee helps me unpack the basket, and it already feels like we’re in sync as a team. I don’t know what I’ll do if this doesn’t work out.

“What do we have here?” Aimee asks, sitting down and opening the food containers.

“I thought we’d have an old-fashioned picnic. There’s fried chicken, potato salad, fruit, and apple pie for dessert.”

Aimee looks at the pie box and chuckles. “Where did you get this apple pie?”

“From the bake sale at the high school. Roman made us all go and buy pies to support the fundraiser.”

Aimee laughs with delight. “Mack! That’s too funny. I helped my mom make pies for that bake sale.”

Now it’s my turn to look surprised. “You made that pie?”

“Quite possibly I did! My mom was always part of the PTA, and they still ask her to make pies for the bake sale.”

“Well, that’s something,” I say, smiling.

It seems at every turn, we’re finding connections between us like we’ve been orbiting the same planet, and it took far too long for us to meet. Jefferson may be a small town, but sometimes it feels like there are always new things and people to be discovered, even when you think there aren’t.

Our conversation flows as we eat, and the pie is as delicious as I imagined. With Aimee, everything feels so comfortable, so right.

After we eat and clean up from our picnic, I help Aimee to her feet and kiss her lightly. “How about we walk a little? There’s another spot I’d like to show you.”

“I’d love that,” she says with an infectious smile.

We make our way deeper into the woods until we reach a stunning lake surrounded by lush pines. We spread our blanket on the shore, and I pull Aimee close to wrap my arm around her shoulders.

“It’s so peaceful here,” she whispers. “Thank you for sharing this place with me.”

“Of course,” I reply. “This is one of my favorite places. I wanted to share it with you.” I’m unable to tear my gaze away from her beautiful face. I want to see this amazing woman every day for the rest of my life. Not making her mine is not an option.

My heart pounds as I muster the courage to express my feelings for her. “Aimee, I never thought I’d meet a woman like you. I admire that you fought to follow your dreams, and now run your own business. I admire that you donate your

work to Warrior Cares. You're also the most goddamn beautiful woman I've ever laid eyes on. I never want to be apart from you. You take my fucking breath away."

Color rises prettily in Aimee's cheeks, but she squeezes my hand and laces her fingers through mine. "I feel the same way, Mack. Finding you was like finding home."

I pull Aimee close, breathing in her sweet scent as our eyes lock and molten lust radiates through me. My body craves hers. I plan to spend a lifetime kissing every inch of her perfect skin and exploring every curve with my hands.

I'm going to make this woman my wife.

CHAPTER 7



AIMEE

*A*s the sun lowers in the sky and the night sounds of the mountain begin, I know more than anything that being with Mack is what I want. I've never felt so drawn to anyone, and I want to spend a lifetime with him.

Mack's lips trail along my neck, each touch igniting a spark of desire that grows stronger by the second. I lean into him, my body aching to be in bed with him. I want to give into my lust for Mack and give everything to him.

"Tell me something," Mack whispers against my skin. "What do you want right now, more than anything?"

"Right now," I confess, not even needing to think about it. "I want you."

Mack's hands grip my hips, pulling me closer to him. His erection presses through his jeans and against my stomach, and I shiver with need.

"God, Aimee," he whispers, his voice hoarse with need. "You have no idea how much I want you right now."

"Show me," I whisper.

"Follow me," Mack says again, leading me back to the lookout. "I was hoping you'd feel this way. I rented a cabin from my buddy. He has property up here, and he rents some of it."

"That sounds perfect," I say, squeezing his hand as we walk along the darkening trail.

We finally arrive at the cozy cabin, nestled among towering pine trees.

“Here we are,” Mack says, unlocking the door and pushing it open. “Home away from home for the night.”

“Wow, it’s beautiful,” I murmur, taking in the rustic cabin. Intricate woodwork adorns the walls, and a plush rug sprawls in front of a large fireplace.

“Not as beautiful as you,” Mack murmurs, his muscular arms wrapping around me from behind and pulling me close. The heat of his body sears my skin, and I want nothing more than to lose myself in the fire of our desire.

The moment the door closes behind us, the rest of the world fades away.

“Aimee,” he murmurs. My name on his lips makes me tremble with intense need. “I want you more than I’ve ever wanted anyone.”

Heat burns and expands in my core. I need to feel Mack’s skin on mine. “I feel the same way, Mack.”

Stepping forward, I cup his strong jaw, smiling when he wraps his muscular, tattooed arms around me and pulls me closer. I love that he’s sharing his tenderness and vulnerability with me.

“Show me,” he says, his voice low and seductive.

“Anything for you,” I whisper.

I step away from him and turn on a lamp by the bed and the radio.

With each button I undo, I slowly dance to the music from the radio, teasing him with glimpses of my skin as I move. Mack’s breathing gets heavier and more ragged, and raw desire fills his eyes. He pulls off his shirt, kicks off his shoes, and moves behind me. His hands slip around my waist and travel up my back to unclasp my bra. I shiver at the sensation of his fingers against my skin and turn in his arms so we’re face-to-face.

Mack steps back to look at me, then leans forward to kiss me deeply. His touch is electric, sending sparks of pleasure through my body. He pulls away and looks at me again before

moving to the bed. He sits down and pulls me onto his lap, his hands roaming my body.

Mack's thick, hard cock presses against me, and I moan. He nibbles on my earlobe, sending shivers down my spine. I kiss him passionately, shivering as our bodies press against each other. The anticipation of falling into bed with him is nearly blinding.

Mack's hands move lower as we kiss until he's cupping my ass. He squeezes, causing me to gasp and grind against him harder. He pulls back and looks me in the eye, so hungry for me that I almost lose my grip on what I'm about to do.

Mack kisses me deeply again and guides me toward the large, four-poster bed. "You're so beautiful," he whispers.

Mack lies back on the bed, pulling me on top of him. He pulls me down so we're chest to chest and kisses me more urgently. I grind my aching core against his cock and moan into his mouth.

"I can't wait any longer," Mack groans. His cock pushes against my hotly slick entrance, and I push down, desperate to have him inside me. "Oh, fuck, Aimee," he groans. "You feel like heaven."

I move my hips in circles, hungry to feel Mack deeper inside me. My breathing is ragged, and I dig my nails into his back as he bucks his hips to meet mine with each thrust.

We move together, faster and faster, until our bodies are slick with sweat.

Mack flips me onto my back in one quick motion, pushing into me deeper than before. He sucks and nibbles at my nipples as he thrusts into me. His tongue teases the sensitive nubs as I moan his name.

The sensations send a wave of pleasure through my body, and I arch up to meet Mack's thrusts with all the force I can muster.

"I'm going to explode," I moan, my body grinding against Mack as he thrusts harder and faster into me.

“Come for me, baby,” he urges, thrusting deeper and holding onto my hips.

Stars burst in my eyes as I come hard and fast, crying out as I run my hands over Mack’s arms and hold on tightly.

“Oh, my God!” I cry out, my body shaking as if electrocuted.

“Aimee!” Mack’s voice is strangled as he moves faster, his cock making me groan at how good he feels.

His body shakes, and he pumps into me again. He exhales heavily as he comes and collapses over me. We lie still for a few minutes, panting and sweating, trying to catch our breath.

Mack lifts his head and looks into my eyes. “I love you, Aimee,” he whispers.

Tears sting my eyes, and I pull him closer, breathing in his scent as our hearts beat together. “I love you too,” I reply with a smile, caressing his back.

“I knew from the moment I saw you that you were special,” Mack says, pulling me close and kissing me tenderly. “I’m never letting you go.”

“That’s good,” I say, reaching between us to stroke his cock. I smile when he groans and pushes against my hand, his cock quivering as it hardens again. “Because I’m never letting you go, either.”

EPILOGUE



The savory aroma of my homemade seven-layer bean dip fills the kitchen as I stir the final layer of shredded cheese into the glass dish. Mack leans against the counter, stealing slices of avocado when he thinks I'm not looking.

"You're going to ruin your appetite," I scold lightly, swatting his hand away.

He grins at me and snakes his arm around my waist and leans into me, kissing me just below my ear. I shiver as his hot breath tickles my ear.

"We have guests arriving soon," I remind him gently. "Plus, I need some time to recover from last night."

Goosebumps dance across my skin as Mack breathes heavily on my skin and he plants another soft kiss below my ear. My heart pounds wildly in my chest as my core floods with heat.

"Okay, okay," I moan softly, then kiss him hard on the lips once more before pushing him away with a smile.

Living with Mack still feels surreal sometimes. They always say that you'll find love when and where you least expect it, and that's what happened with us. The first time I heard his voice and saw him, it took my breath away. Every day with Mack has been an extraordinary gift of love and partnership. I've never felt as safe and cherished with someone as I do with Mack.

The oven timer beeps, and as much as I love Mack, I don't mind the distraction. I slip on oven mitts and pull out the

freshly baked cornbread muffins.

“Perfect timing,” I say. “Everyone will be here soon.”

“Perfect timing unless you were groping the most beautiful woman in the world,” Mack teases, letting his hands drop to my hips. A wave of lust washes over me when he lightly squeezes my hips and presses himself against me. The man is insatiable for me...but I also can't get enough of him. He makes me feel like the most beautiful, desirable woman in the world.

The doorbell rings and Mack lets in our first guests – Wes and Kira, looking devoted as always. Wes was Kira's father's best friend, and they served together in the Middle East. Her father made Wes swear to look after Kira if something happened to him. After Kira's father died, Wes came to Jefferson to honor his promise...and then they fell in love. Wes claps Mack on the back while Kira hugs me warmly.

“Where's the bean dip?” Wes jokes.

I laugh and point to the table. “Just for you, Wes, front and center on the table.”

Eventually, the three other mechanics from Rebel Auto arrive, along with their wives and girlfriends. Roman and Marsha are set to get married in the summer. Everyone teases them about waiting so long, but they always look at each other and share a private smile, then say that there's no rush because their love is so deep and unbreakable.

I smile when I see Quincy and Claire. They got married in winter and still have that newlywed glow. She's got one hand resting on her just-noticeably pregnant belly. When Mack pulls Quincy aside to congratulate him again, the pride on Quincy's face is touching to see.

“You're here!” I exclaim when I see Maya. She gives me a big hug.

“I wouldn't miss this for anything. I'm going to miss you while you're gone!” Maya hands me a cake box, with the Sweet Temptation logo on it.

“Oh, thank you! I love this bakery!”

Everyone makes a plate and sits casually in our living and dining rooms, and our home is filled with happiness and the people we love. Laughter echoes as Wes loudly recounts a story from high school to Mack's amusement. On the sofa, Claire and Betty are deep in conversation while their husbands grab second helpings.

As if reading my thoughts, Mack's strong arms wrap around me from behind. He nuzzles into my hair and murmurs "Penny for your thoughts?"

I twist my head to smile up at him. "Just thinking how lucky I am. We have a life to be thankful for."

He kisses me sweetly before heading to the buffet and making me a plate of food.

"Make sure you don't burn the place down while I'm gone," Mack calls out to the men, but his eyes are alight with amusement.

The other mechanics rolled their eyes, recognizing the joke.

"You know we got it, boss," Roman says. "I'll keep these boys in line. You just focus on taking a vacation with your beautiful girlfriend and having a damn good time on the coast."

* * *

AS MACK CLOSES the door behind the last guest, he pulls me into his arms and sways us gently to music only he can hear.

"Have I told you today how much I love you?" He murmurs in my ear as we turn slowly across the dimly lit living room, a loving smile on his lips.

"Maybe," I tease in return, but then pull him back down for an impulsive kiss. "But you can always tell me again."

He smiles against my lips and says solemnly, "You make me so happy, Aimee. This life with you...I never thought I'd meet a woman like you."

My throat tightens with emotion at his words, nearly overtaken by the love in my heart for this man who has come to be the

most important person in my life. Without another word, I reach up on tiptoe and drag his head down for an intense kiss.

When we finally break our kiss, Mack rests his forehead against mine. "Marry me," he whispers.

My pulse races as I look into his eyes. "Mack..."

He cups my face tenderly. "I mean it, sweetheart. I want you by my side for the rest of our lives. You're the best thing that's ever happened to me, Aimee. I love you more than I thought a person could love another. Say you'll spend your life with me, so I can make you as happy as you make me."

"Oh, Mack," I gasp, tears of joy filling my eyes. "Yes! I love you so much that it feels like my body can't contain all the love. Spending a lifetime together would be heaven."

Here in Mack's arms, I know I'm home.

"We should go upstairs and make sure we're finished packing for the road trip," I say, nodding toward the stairs.

"Hm," Mack says, pulling me so close I can feel how hard he is. "I think there is something better we can do upstairs."

Mack takes me upstairs and my heart overflows with love for him. His hands are hot on my skin and I shiver under his touch. When I arch into him instinctively, Mack groans.

I gasp as Mack's fingers slide between my thighs, and his touch sparks a raging fire through my senses. His hands move slowly and teasingly, sending blazing heat throughout my body until my core is on fire. I press down onto him urgently, begging for more as he takes me apart with expert skill.

Mack replaces his fingers with his tongue and I moan loudly as he works his magic, intensity building and shattering my world until an explosive orgasm bursts through me. I tremble and writhe in pleasure as Mack looks up at me with that wicked grin of his that always sends shivers down my spine.

"Get into bed," I say, patting the space beside me. "Show me how happy you are right now."

Mack kisses his way back up my body, then nudges my legs apart. My calf slides over his hipbone as he positions himself

over me, and then thrusts deep inside me.

His strong hands grip my hips as he moves inside me, my pleasure intensifying with every thrust. I arch my back, pushing my breasts against his chest as my orgasm takes over my body and my pleasure aches to explode.

“Come with me, Aimee! I can’t hold back,” Mack groans as he thrusts deep inside of me. I push my hips up, my body moving wildly in its need for release and my need to make Mack happy, too.

“Mack!” I cry out as the first waves of pleasure wash over me. Mack moves inside me faster and harder, each stroke, making his body shake as his orgasm crashes into me. His body shudders above mine and I cling to him tightly until we collapse together onto the bed in a tangled blissful mess.

We lay there, catching our breath, and Mack pulls me close to him and kisses my lips tenderly.

Mack’s voice rumbles against my ear. “What has my sweet fiancée smiling so beautifully?”

I lift my head to smile at him, my heart overflowing. “You, Mack. Us. There is nothing more perfect than my life with you, loving with you.”

His hand comes up to cradle my jaw, keeping me close. “I love you,” his voice filled with emotion.

“I love you, too.”

* * *

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ABOUT LANA LOVE

Lana Love is a USA Today Bestselling Author of steamy stories about relatable women, and the strong men who will move heaven and earth to capture the heart of the curvy woman they can't live without. Curvy since forever, Lana writes the heroines she never read about when she was growing up.

Lana lives in the Pacific Northwest and is passionate about dancing, travel, chocolate, and cocktails, and writing stories that make her heart race and bring her fantasies to life. She loves a man who loves curves and who knows what to do with them!

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