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Amber Finn

Her
Prized
Student



Her Prized Student

Professor Avery Jackson is fighting hard to resist graduate student Blake Emory, who is also her teaching assistant. Dating a student is taboo, but Avery and Blake are drawn together by an attraction that proves too powerful to resist. Blake makes Avery's body burn with every touch, and the chemistry between them is undeniable. Soon, though, Avery realizes she's fallen in love with the sexy TA, and she has no idea if he feels the same.

After an unexpected and complicated turn of events, Avery must choose to have a life with Blake or endure one without, but how can she make the right decision when she's so unsure of his feelings?

Genre: Contemporary

Length: 25,662 words

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EROTIC ROMANCE



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A SIREN PUBLISHING BOOK

IMPRINT: Erotic Romance

HER PRIZED STUDENT

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E-book ISBN: 1-61034-404-9

First E-book Publication: June 2011

Cover design by Jinger Heaston

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PUBLISHER

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DEDICATION

For my family, who without even realizing it, gives me the support and the courage to forge ahead and follow my dreams simply by loving me unconditionally. It is that immense love that fuels me when my own strength does not.

HER PRIZED STUDENT

AMBER FINN
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Chapter One

Avery Jackson stood outside the classroom door to her Argumentation Composition class and took several breaths in and out to try to calm her out-of-control nerves. PhD, she thought. Why didn't that give her the confidence she thought it would? Instead, she felt the same bundle of nerves she did as a graduate assistant. The door was closed, but the shade was up, and she peered through the window to get a look at the students in her first class here at Cross University as an Associate Professor.

She caught the eye of an incredibly handsome student in the first row and inexplicably felt her cheeks flush, and her stomach now started doing somersaults as though she were in junior high. He smiled at her as though he knew exactly who she was.

Seriously, Avery? You're going to add this now to the jumbled mess that calls itself your brain at the moment? She tore her gaze away from the dark-haired, blue-eyed student whose gaze had her heartbeat going way too fast and picked up her briefcase. She straightened her shoulders, opened the door with what she hoped appeared as confidence, and strode into the classroom.

There was a large desk in the center of the lecture room in front of the whiteboard, and she set her briefcase down on top of it.

“Good morning. Welcome to Argumentation 112. Please check your schedules to be sure you are in the right place before we begin.”

As usual, there were a couple of lost students who were in the wrong place, and Avery sent them on their way to the correct classrooms. As she was about to proceed, the dark-haired student from the front row raised his hand to speak.

Startled, Avery said, “Can I help you?”

“I apologize for interrupting, Dr. Jackson, but—”

Avery interrupted him, “You know my name?” She knew that English professors were listed as *Instructor* on students’ schedules and was startled to hear him call her by name.

“Yes, I tried to reach you before the semester began, but as you are new to the campus, the department secretary said you did not have a phone yet. My name is Blake Emory, and I’m the graduate assistant assigned to your class.”

“Thank God!” Avery exclaimed.

The students smirked a little at Avery’s outburst. Realizing what she said and how she said it, she quickly added, “I mean, I was so worried I’d not be assigned an assistant this semester, this being my first semester here and all, as you said. I usually like to have my graduate assistants introduce themselves to the class on the first day. Why don’t you take this opportunity to do so before we begin?”

And I can go try to pull myself together before I make a complete fool of myself while you do. Avery sat at her desk while Blake stood in front, introducing himself to the class. When he was finished, Avery stood in front of the class to introduce herself and passed out the syllabus.

Blake took his seat in the front row. Avery could feel his eyes on her as she went through the syllabus with the class. She explained the course policies and the assignments for the semester. This was safe territory. She just needed to explain what was written on the page. How was she going to get through an actual lecture? When she even

glanced at his direction, she lost her train of thought. Finally, the class period came to an end.

“Remember the two-page draft on the ‘I Believe’ assignment. Make sure it is your own belief, and be sincere! See you next time.”

The students filed out of the classroom as they put their backpacks on. Blake stayed at his desk. Avery was still sitting at her desk and looked up to see him there. Again, she felt the flush, and her heart began to race. “Anything I can help you with, Blake?” She tried to sound nonchalant but was convinced her voice cracked like a schoolgirl’s.

Blake smiled and stood. He crossed over to the desk and sat on the corner, clearly brimming with confidence. “I am very eager to learn. The department was very excited about your hire. When I saw you on campus during your interview and found out I was assigned to your class, I knew I got the best. Perhaps it would be a good idea if we planned on meeting to go over your syllabus and upcoming lectures? We could start tonight at my place?”

Stunned, Avery could barely find the words to respond. Her body was screaming yes. Her mind was screaming equally loud, “no way,” knowing they had to work together, and Blake was coming across as a major playboy. Although she was new to campus, she had already heard the rumors of his love-them-and-leave-them attitude towards women. Nevertheless, Avery’s body won.

“Sounds great. Why don’t you write down your address? Seven o’clock okay?”

“Good for me. See you then.” Blake handed her the address, turned, and walked out of the room.

Only at that point did Avery exhale, not realizing she had been holding her breath. What had she done? She was going to meet with a man she just met under the pretense of going over syllabus notes, but clearly, the physical attraction was overwhelmingly powerful. And then it hit her. *Blake may not be attracted to me at all.* This could all be one-sided. At the thought of this, Avery actually began to relax. If

Blake wasn't attracted to her, then his invitation to discuss the notes and assignments would be it.

Avery packed up her briefcase and headed home. Her office was not ready yet, so her office hours were there in the classroom for the time being. She stayed through those and then some, knowing it wasn't likely students would be looking for her on the first day, but Avery was thorough and wanted to be sure.

She pulled up the driveway to her new home and felt the same sense of well-being and contentment when she saw it and purchased it on sight. A cape-style home that had been lovingly and beautifully maintained, it said home to Avery when she had spent almost her entire life moving around and never putting down roots. The lawn and flower beds were immaculate. But it was the inside that did it for her. There were three bedrooms, which admittedly was more than she needed. Avery loved the original hardwood flooring throughout the whole house, and the previous owners had remodeled the kitchen and living area into an open floor plan that was much like a great room in one of the newer homes she had seen. She especially liked the fact that the garage was attached to the house, which would come in handy during the cold, snowy months. After she saw the house, Avery didn't look at anything else and offered full price.

Avery put her car in the garage and walked into house. Setting her things down in the utility area, she could think of nothing else but a bath. Blake's place wasn't far from here, so she had time.

* * * *

Blake couldn't remember when he had been this uptight about a woman coming over. He had to keep reminding himself this was for school and not a romantic visit. He was having difficulty separating the two, however, as he got hard just thinking of Avery Jackson. He hoped and prayed she wouldn't find out the strings he pulled to get

assigned to her class. When he saw her on campus the month before and found out she needed an assistant, he knew it had to be him.

Avery Jackson had filled his every waking thought since he found out he got the assignment. She had beauty and brains, a breath of fresh air compared to the dinosaurs he'd been assigned to for the last two years. Those professors had been enjoying their tenure a bit too long in Blake's opinion. He felt his academic drive go stale and started putting out feelers at other universities in the hopes of younger blood, new ideas. Then Avery came to campus with her thick mane of golden blonde hair and the greenest eyes he'd ever seen, not blue-green but actually green. Her firm, full breasts filled out her suit, and her legs seemed to go on forever beneath the skirt that she wore just a tad too short.

Blake thought she was wonderful on sight. He read her bio and found out she'd been a Fulbright scholar and had already been published in several highly acclaimed journals. He really wasn't quite sure why she took the job at Cross when Ohio State, Penn, Iowa, and Stanford were all pursuing her. He wasn't one to argue, though, because she was here, and he was going to make the most of it. He wasn't dropping a line on Avery when he said he was eager to learn. His looks sometimes got in the way of his academic goals as professionals in the academic world didn't often take him seriously, thinking he was just coasting through on his looks. It was frustrating, but he worked hard and kept his nose clean, despite the fact that he knew rumors persisted about him and multiple women. He let them go because it kept interested women at bay so he could concentrate on his studies. This was working just fine for him...until Avery. Now he could barely concentrate. As if on cue, the doorbell rang, bringing Blake to the present.

* * * *

Avery was so nervous she could barely keep her knees from shaking. Blake answered the door just minutes after she rang the bell, not giving her any time to compose herself.

Blake stared a minute before speaking, “Wow, you look great. Come on in. I wish my English profs looked like you when I was an undergrad.”

Avery flushed with pleasure at the compliment. She chose her outfit carefully, wanting to look casual but not like she didn’t put any thought into how she presented herself either. She wore a short skirt and T-shirt with a plunging neckline that Avery thought showed off her cleavage without coming on too strong. Because it was August, it was still warm, so she wore matching sandals to keep it casual.

Avery watched Blake swallow audibly as he answered the door taking in her appearance. It gave her the chance to admire him and his physical attributes. His torso rippled with muscles from shoulder to abs that bulged through his T-shirt. She didn’t think he had an ounce of fat on him. He stood about six-foot-four, she estimated, well over her five-foot-six. His legs were strong, evidence that he was a high school, maybe even college, athlete. His quadriceps were clearly defined. Avery thought she could even see the blood coursing through the veins. She even dared a glance at his penis, and although she had only been with a couple of men, she could definitely say none of them looked like that in a pair of shorts. She pulled herself out of her daze and followed Blake inside.

Avery was pulling out the papers from her briefcase when Blake sat down beside her and offered her a glass of wine. “Oh! I, um, wasn’t expecting, well, okay, why not. Just one glass, though—don’t want to get too fuzzy, though.”

“No problem. I thought we might as well enjoy each other’s company since we’ll be working together for several months.”

Avery’s stomach started the somersaults again at the mention of working together for several months. This could be a problem if she developed a serious attraction to this assistant, especially if he was

completely unaware. How was she going to deal with it? Should she be up-front about it? Should she ask for a new assistant? She stole a glance at Blake, who was reading over her notes on the upcoming lecture for the next class.

Avery exhaled loudly. This wasn't going to work, she thought. She was so attracted to him physically she had no idea how to present her lecture notes to him. She was going to have to tell him that something just wasn't clicking, and she was going to ask for a new assistant.

Avery set her glass of wine on the coffee table and turned to Blake to tell him her decision. As she did, she was met with Blake staring intently at her, papers dropped to the floor. Without another word said, Blake reached one hand to the back of Avery's neck and pulled her to him. Avery leaned in to kiss Blake back, and he pulled her closer, straddling her across his lap. When Avery didn't resist and placed both her hands on Blake's face to deepen her kiss, Blake groaned and reached up underneath her shirt to cup both breasts. Blake slid his hands underneath Avery's bra and flicked both nipples with his thumbs as they stood upright and taut. Avery gasped with pleasure and wrapped her arms around Blake's neck.

Avery thrust her tongue into Blake's mouth as she kissed him deeply and hungrily. She darted her tongue in circles around his and then stroked his tongue over and over as Blake moaned and unhooked Avery's bra to grasp her breasts fully in response. Avery could feel his cock rising up against her, and suddenly, she realized what she was about to do! She couldn't do this. Not with Blake Emory. Wasn't he a major playboy? Wouldn't he just break her heart? Avery pulled away and fastened her bra. "Um, I have to go. This, this can't happen. I don't usually do this."

"I don't understand. I thought we had a connection."

"I have to go." Avery grabbed her briefcase and ran out the door, leaving most of her papers behind.

* * * *

Blake sat on the couch, stunned. Admittedly, things moved faster than he had planned, but he thought Avery was on board with that. He put on some porn and started rubbing his cock to jack off his erection. Not quite how he thought the evening was going to go. He cleaned himself off and went back to the living room to get Avery's papers together to take to campus the next day.

As he pulled them together, he found a loose sheet with her handwritten note at the bottom.

Blake Emory: playboy?

So that's how she sees him. No wonder she took off. The rumor mill had reached even Avery Jackson, new girl in town. Well, Blake Emory wasn't going to let this one slide. He was going to set this one straight.

* * * *

The next day, Avery felt almost recovered from the night before. She was thinking clearly now and knew that nothing could happen between her and Blake. She had a day before the next class, so some time in the office was necessary to prepare her lecture.

As Avery approached Tinley Hall, the English Department, she wondered if she would ever grow tired of the large willow trees that were symmetrically placed outside the front door. It reminded her of the giant willow in her childhood backyard that she used to climb every day in the summer to the very top and just swing in the breeze. Ivy scaled the walls along the side of the deep-red brick building. She gathered her thoughts and entered the building. She was grateful to have a lecture to prepare. She needed the distraction.

Avery wasn't seated at her desk more than a minute when there was a knock at the door. Dread filled her as it swung open before she could say, "Come in." As she expected, Blake strode in smiling and took a seat on the corner of her desk. It was all Avery could do to resist running her hand up his thigh. She cleared her throat. "Can I help you with something, Mr. Emory?"

"Come on, Avery. Aren't we at first names by now?" Blake asked so charmingly.

"Fine, Blake. What can I do to help you?"

"I want a date."

Avery nearly jumped out of her chair as she exclaimed, "What?" She continued, "I thought I made it perfectly clear that we cannot happen, *Mr. Emory*"

"Ah, my dear Avery. But you need more information before making such a big decision." "Are you crazy? What are you talking about?"

Blake stood up and put his hands on either side of her face. "I'm talking about this." He kissed her slowly and gently. It was a romantic, alluring kiss. He did not kiss her long. He finished the kiss and softly pressed his lips to her forehead. He then turned and left her office, leaving Avery stunned and wanting more. *Now what am I going to do? He's just made it so much harder to say no. Damn him!*

Chapter Two

Avery Jackson walked into her classroom on day two, feeling somehow worse than she did on day one. Only this time, her nerves weren't about greeting a classroom of nameless, faceless students. They were nerves about seeing one person—Blake Emory. She should not have let it go as far as she did the other night, but she was powerless to stop it. When Blake touched her, she couldn't think of anything but wanting more. She could not allow herself to get involved with someone, however, who racked up lovers like billiard balls. Avery Jackson believed in monogamous relationships.

Avery allowed a glance at Blake and was relieved, and disappointed, to see him reading his notes and not looking at her at all.

"All right, everyone. Let's work with those drafts. I'm going to divide you into groups of four, and you will work as peer reviewers as you read and critique one another's drafts. Mr. Emory and I will wander the room to offer any assistance as you work."

The tension was palpable as Avery and Blake worked the room as they passed by one another, moving from group to group. Avery turned to head back to her desk and didn't see that Blake was standing with his back to Avery as he turned to the next group. They turned into one another, and Avery felt her knees turn to water.

"Dr. Jackson."

"Mr. Emory."

Avery made it back to her desk, hoping none of the students felt the electricity that jolted through her. Avery wrapped up the class and reminded the students of their assignments for the following week.

The students emptied the room, and Avery, again, stayed at her desk, still waiting for her office to be set up. The door closed, and she heard the shade come down and the door lock.

She looked up, startled to see Blake coming towards her. He stopped at her desk and put a piece of paper on it. Avery picked up the paper and saw her handwritten note at the bottom. "Blake, look..."

"No, you look. You made a decision about me when you knew nothing but my name. I'm a serious academic, Avery. I'm no playboy. I let those rumors persist because it keeps the women away, so I can concentrate on my studies. The truth is, I've been with three women in my life. My high school girlfriend, my college girlfriend, and a woman I dated after college. I sleep with one woman at a time and only when in an established relationship. What happened the other night took me by surprise as much as it did you. But I can promise you this, I wasn't going anywhere after. In fact, I was looking forward to many more nights like that one. Now, if you think you can handle a relationship with me while we work together this semester, then I'd like to give this another shot. What do you say?"

Avery stood and, unable to say anything, simply nodded. Blake walked around her, took her briefcase off the table, and set it on one of the students' desks. Avery watched, not sure what he was doing. With the large desk now cleared, Blake came to Avery and picked her up. Avery gasped as she realized his intent. She hooked her legs around his waist. Blake yanked off his shirt and laid it on the desk as he laid Avery back down on top of it. He dropped his shorts with one hand as his other hand wandered up Avery's skirt to discover the thong he knew would be there.

Blake pulled that delicate thong down, away from Avery's pussy that was already wet with anticipation. He plunged his finger deep inside her and rubbed her clit back and forth until Avery felt that first gush of sweet wetness crying out in response to her first orgasm.

Blake then pulled off Avery's shirt and bra and took one nipple in his mouth. He flicked the nipple back and forth and sucked on it until

Avery shivered in delight. Blake cupped the other breast and caressed it over and over. Avery, unable to take it any longer, reached down and grabbed Blake's penis and began to stroke up and down.

Blake's eyes flew open at Avery's touch. Avery smiled and drew him to her and kissed him deeply. Blake groaned and grabbed Avery's hand. He grabbed the other hand and raised them both above her head. Avery arched her back towards Blake sensing what was to come as Blake thrust his penis into Avery's swollen, pulsing vagina. Blake matched the move with his tongue in Avery's mouth. She tilted her hips to get Blake to penetrate as deeply as he could.

"So you want me to ride you, do you?"

"Please," was all Avery could get out.

Blake started his movement in and out as he continued to hold Avery's hands back. He moved slowly, in and out, until Avery thought she would lose her mind. She was unable to touch Blake as his penis rubbed inside her. He was so hard and so big. He set off sensations she had never felt before. Her clit was sending wavelengths of alternating feelings of warmth, foggy unawareness, and vibrating jolts with bursts of euphoria in between. She was in her own world and had no idea when Blake ejaculated and stopped moving. When she finally opened her eyes, she began to shake. She looked around and saw Blake staring down at her, smiling.

"Welcome back."

"Where'd I go?"

"I don't know. You tell me."

"I think I went to heaven and back."

Blake smiled and wrapped her up in his arms. Avery was still shaking as she was coming down from her euphoric state. He helped her get her bra and shirt back on and retrieved her thong before redressing himself. Avery sat up and blinked as the fog was lifting.

"Well, that was certainly unexpected."

"I want to see you again." Blake came and stood in front of the desk where Avery sat.

“Well, you’ll be seeing me every day in the department as my assistant. Of course, I’m hoping that’s not what you meant.”

Blake placed a hand on each of Avery’s cheeks and kissed her tenderly on the mouth. He kissed her for several minutes and ran his hands through her hair while he did. Avery ran her hands up Blake’s hard, muscled chest in response.

“Is that what you were hoping for?” Blake asked.

Avery smiled. “So, when will I see you again?”

“Tonight?”

“Sure, would you like to come to my home?” Avery responded.

“See where you sleep at night? Wouldn’t miss it.”

* * * *

Avery had little of the apprehension she had the last time she prepared to meet Blake. This time she knew this was not a work date. This time she knew he was attracted to her, too. This time she knew how the evening would end. Blake arrived right on time. He looked so handsome. Avery realized she hadn’t appreciated his looks before. He was stunningly good-looking. His eyes were so clear-blue they were almost translucent. They set off his dark black hair, identifying his roots from the British Isles. He did not, however, inherit the inability to tan and had a deep, dark summer tan. He took Avery’s breath away.

Avery invited Blake in and gave him a tour of the first floor.

“This is a great place, Avery. I can see why you jumped on it so quickly. I love the open floor plan.”

“That’s what did it for me, too. Would you like to take our drinks out back? There’s a lovely patio, and it’s still so warm.”

Blake agreed and helped carry the bottle of wine Avery had chilled for the evening to the patio while Avery got out the glasses. They sat at the table and chairs and drank quietly for a few minutes before Avery broke the silence

“So, tell me, Blake Emory. Since you are my graduate assistant, what are your plans for your PhD? Teach? Write? Where did you get your Master’s, anyway?”

“Am I being interviewed, or is this a casual conversation?” Blake smiled as he answered but was clearly dodging the question.

“Strictly casual. I’m not interested in finding a new graduate assistant. The job is yours.”

“Okay then. My plans are to learn everything you have to offer this semester. It’s my final semester, and my dissertation is shaping up quite nicely. I plan on graduating in December and most likely adjunct here in the spring unless, by some miracle, a full-time job presents itself between fall and spring semester somewhere else. Otherwise, I’ll be sending out my curriculum vitae and attending the MLA convention to make those ever-so-important connections.”

As Blake spoke, her heart sank. *Of course he’ll be looking for a full-time job elsewhere, you idiot. What did you expect him to do? Teach part-time here simply because you’ve had one good fuck and he’s supposed to put his career aside?* Avery shook her head as she realized what she knew deep down all along. She knew that their time would be limited and most likely short. *What the hell. Let’s make the most of it. I’m tired of playing by the rules. I’ll deal with a broken heart later.*

“Avery? Are you in there?”

Avery blinked as she realized that Blake was calling her name. She looked at him. He was within arm’s reach. Avery put her wine glass on the table behind her. She reached over and unbuckled Blake’s shorts, slid her hand over each of his abdominal muscles, and then down to his penis, which was already growing hard at her first touch. Avery’s backyard was fenced in and private, so she stood and came to kneel in front of Blake’s chair. She pulled his shorts the rest of the way off and with one hand cupped his balls and the other hand encircled his now engorged penis and began to stroke up and down. Avery heard moaning and realized it came from her as she was

getting excited herself. She bent forward and used her tongue to circle the head of Blake's cock.

He grabbed the back of Avery's hair. "Oh, shit!"

She opened her mouth to make room for his large, hard dick and took it fully in her mouth. She continued to stroke his balls with her right hand as her left hand still stroked the shaft, now increasing the pressure. She could feel the semen inside straining to release. Her mouth matched the rhythm of her hands moving up and down. She took his penis in so far, it reached the back of her throat. When his penis reached the back of Avery's throat, it was Blake's undoing.

"Oh, Jesus, Avery, I can't hold back any longer."

Avery felt the rush of warm fluid flow down the back of her throat as Blake released the semen that had been just waiting to come out. She continued to stroke his shaft as it shuddered in relief. She decreased the pressure ever so slowly and then gave the head one final flick of her tongue before raising her head.

Blake stared down at Avery in a daze. "Are you fucking kidding me? I've never had a blow job like that in my life. Where in the hell did you learn how to do that?"

Avery smiled. That wasn't the first blow job she'd ever given, but she knew it was different. She'd hoped he felt it was good, but the best? That gave her immense pleasure. "I was inspired."

"By what?"

"Not by what, by whom."

Blake's eyes darkened with desire. He stood and took Avery with him.

"It's time we take this to the bedroom, so I can show you how you inspire me." Avery began to shake in anticipation but somehow found the way to show Blake to the bedroom. He left his shorts on the patio and discarded his shirt on his way up the stairs. As they stood in the bedroom, Blake was completely naked.

"I think you are a bit overdressed, Avery."

It was now Blake's turn to undo Avery's shorts and drop them and her thong to the floor. He raised her shirt above her head and made quick business of her bra. They stood face-to-face, just inches apart, both completely naked but not touching. The sexual tension was so hot between them, Avery was afraid if they touched, there would be an actual electrical spark.

"Now this is more like it. You are so beautiful. I could look at you all day." Avery closed her eyes. Blake's words caressed her and stimulated her. Blake picked her up and laid her down gently on the bed. "But touching is so much more enjoyable," he whispered.

Avery shuddered as Blake's hand started at her ankle and began its way up her leg, across her abs, cupped both breasts, then stopped at her right cheek where his thumb lightly stroked back and forth. He leaned forward and kissed her lightly and tenderly. Avery whimpered at the tenderness, the beauty of the kiss, and stroked his cheek in return. Blake looked down into Avery's beautiful blue eyes and smiled.

His right hand now began its travels back down towards her breasts but kept on going. Avery held her breath as he made his way to her vagina, which was already wet and waiting. She spread her legs, inviting his fingers to do their magic. Blake began with his middle finger. He flicked her vulva back and forth, which was so maddening Avery thought she would pass out. She clutched onto Blake's back, digging in, pressing him to enter her. Begging him. Yet, he didn't comply, using his middle finger in search of her clit, circling and pressing against her vagina.

"Oh, God, no. This is too much." Her pelvis pressed up against his hand in invitation to drive against it. Finally he complied. She fucked his finger. Orgasm one.

He then inserted his second finger. Avery gasped in pleasure.

"No rest for the weary, my dear."

His second finger now scooped further back—deeper towards her cervix, towards the elusive A-spot. With two fingers now working

their magic, Avery truly wondered if she was losing consciousness. Her world was hazy. She couldn't hear Blake if he was talking to her, she had no idea if she was even talking. Jolts of intense pleasure coursed through her body. She thought she could hear herself begging Blake to take her before she lost her mind, but she wasn't sure. Then finally, she felt the rush. It was almost painful, yet it felt so good. As she struggled to catch her breath, she opened her eyes and saw Blake smiling. It was a mischievous smile.

"You look like you're up to something," Avery said cautiously.

Blake reached out and grabbed her hand. He led it down to his engorged penis. "We're not finished yet. This is just halftime."

Avery smiled. As much as she enjoyed Blake's finger bringing her to orgasm, she really wanted his dick. It was so big and felt so good this morning. But this morning was on top of a desk. She wanted to feel him inside her while in a bed.

As is if on cue, Brett didn't waste any more time and slid his penis into Avery's pussy. Avery couldn't think anymore. If she thought she wouldn't be able to reach orgasm again after the first two, Blake's cock dismissed the notion. As he rode her back and forth, he filled her so fully, touching every nerve. He reached every spot. Avery wrapped her legs around Blake's back and raised her pelvis to meet each of Blake's thrusts. Together they reached orgasm and lay connected to one another for several minutes after breathing heavily and coming down from their euphoric rise. Blake gently wiped Avery's hair away from her face, gazing into her eyes.

"You amaze me, Avery Jackson, in so many ways. How did I live before you came along?"

"I'm sure you survived just fine, as you will again when you've moved on."

Avery sat up and went to the master bathroom to clean up. Her closet was attached to the bathroom, and she changed into a clean T-shirt and shorts. When she returned, Blake was sitting up in bed. He had retrieved his boxers and shorts from the patio but had only put his

boxers back on. For some reason, that pleased Avery. Did that mean Blake meant to stay awhile longer? A lot longer?

“What did you mean by your last remark? What makes you think I’ll be moving on?”

“Of course you are. You’ll be searching for a full-time job, remember? That could be anywhere. The likelihood of it being here is rather small, don’t you agree?”

“Well, sure, but there are a dozen or so colleges and universities in a sixty-mile radius of here, don’t forget.”

Avery had forgotten. This was a dense area for higher education. Blake would be willing to drive that far to stay in the area?

“Is that where you’ll be applying?”

“Of course. They are my first choice—all of them, if that’s possible. I don’t want to leave the area, especially now.”

Avery warmed at the last remark. *Could this really be happening? This feels so right, but it’s too soon. It has to be.*

“That would be wonderful. They are all great institutions.”

“Yeah, and if all else fails, I can adjunct at a bunch of them for a while until something opens up.”

“You would do that?”

“I told you. I don’t want to leave the area.”

Chapter Three

Avery was sitting in her brand new office at Cross University. It had taken several weeks, but it was worth the wait. She was given a corner office with two windows that overlooked the center of campus, or the “Crossroads,” as the students liked to call it. It’s where everyone had to walk through, regardless of where they were headed. Four sidewalks that went in north, south, east, and west directions converged at the Crossroads. Each of the sidewalks was lined with beautiful oak trees that told the time of year by the shade of their leaves. It was easy to lose track of time just looking out the windows and watching the world go by. Luckily, Avery didn’t have a problem with self-discipline.

And yet, today, she had trouble concentrating on the pile of essays on her desk and went to stand at her window that had a direct view of the intersecting sidewalks. It was in between classes, so students were headed in every direction on their way to their next classes, backpacks hung over their shoulders. As Avery looked down, one student stood out. She let her eyes focus and realized she had picked out Blake among the hundreds of students walking by. As if he felt her gaze, he looked up and spotted Avery at the window. He smiled and gave a quick salute while continuing on his way. Avery felt her heart skip a beat and her cheeks flush once again. *What is going on here? I’m behaving as though I’m developing feelings for Blake. This simply isn’t possible. It’s way too soon. Isn’t it?* Avery couldn’t tell if he entered the English building or went on past. She sighed and shook herself out of her procrastinating state. *Get a grip, Avery. This is a fling and nothing more, and you are letting it get in the way of your*

work. Not a good way to make a first impression if you have any shot of getting on tenure track. That was enough to get Avery back to her desk and down to work. She was halfway through her first essay when there was a knock at her door.

“Come in,” she said without looking up from her essay.

Blake entered Avery’s office and closed the door behind him, locking it as he did. “Dr. Jackson?”

“Yes, can I help—”

Avery finally looked up and couldn’t finish her sentence. Her heart started ramming against her rib cage, and she found it difficult to breathe as she saw Blake standing in her office, looking devastatingly handsome. She tried to recover and walked to her bookshelf to put away the reference book she had been using to check her student’s source.

“I didn’t expect to see you today, Blake. Isn’t this your off day?”

Inwardly, Avery groaned. She just revealed that she knew his schedule. Blake didn’t notice. He was too busy admiring how well Avery filled the short pencil skirt she wore with her suit jacket. He noticed she had taken off her shoes and was barefoot, which was turning him on faster than he could control. He crossed the office and was standing in front of Avery as she turned around after putting the book back on the shelf.

“I came to talk to you about grading responsibilities.”

Blake was inches away at this point. He could see Avery’s chest rise and fall, and her breath was ragged as he stepped even closer.

“The door,” she whispered. “It’s locked.”

Avery closed her eyes and moaned at this announcement. Blake made his move.

He reached up Avery’s skirt and yanked down her thong to the floor then slid his shorts to the floor to join them. He hiked her skirt up to her waist and grabbed both of her hands in one of his own and held them above her head as he slammed his dick straight up into her pussy. He rammed his penis up and down as Avery anchored her feet

to the ground to get Blake higher and deeper inside her. Blake bit at the earlobe on her right ear, and the quick pain startled her yet sent tingling sensations down through her upper body that made her shudder. Blake continued to suck and pull on her neck with a hungry fervor. He rode Avery so hard and fast that the walnut-shaped head on his penis slammed into her cervix over and over while his engorged shaft rubbed and teased her vulva. She tilted her pelvis to take in as much as she could. The dual pain and pleasure made her dizzy, and she held on to Blake's hands as she reached orgasm just before Blake. She opened her eyes to see Blake moan with relief as he ejaculated, his eyes practically rolling back into his head.

He looked down at Avery to see her smiling up at him.

"Jesus, what you do to me. I really did come to talk about grading, but one look at you in that skirt and my penis made all my decisions." He kissed her then, as if to seal their wild sex, and pulled out of her.

Avery felt empty. Blake was in this for the sex. So why did this disappoint her? She should be, too. Her reaction confirmed that her heart had been engaged. What was she going to do now? Blake was charming, intelligent, good-looking, and they were obviously good in bed together. She could either continue to enjoy his attention and risk deeper attachment and possibly even falling in love or end it now.

Not realizing she hadn't moved yet, she jumped when Blake gently lifted one of her feet through the opening of her discarded thong and then the other foot through the other opening. He then slowly and gently raised it up her legs and put it in place and stroked her butt and thigh in what Avery felt was a loving, non-sexual manner. He lowered her skirt and smoothed it into place. He had already pulled his own shorts into place. He then tenderly stroked her hair and kissed her slowly but deeply.

"I know what you're thinking. 'He's just in this for sex.' That's not true, Avery. Please remember what I said the first day I met you. I only sleep with women I'm involved in a relationship with. I know this has moved fast, and the sex came early—really early. But I

couldn't fight the attraction, and I don't think you could either. But I'm not interested in just the physical aspect of a relationship with you. I want to know you, heart and mind, inside and out. Are you willing to be a part of that with me?"

She nodded and reached out and laid her head on Blake's shoulder, and he wrapped his arms around her. Avery felt him exhale and realized he had been holding his breath while waiting for her response.

Avery stepped back and looked up at Blake. "This might be a good time to sit down and start that grading discussion."

Blake smiled. He looked over at the couch in the corner and said, "How about you sit at your desk, and I'll sit at this lovely chair in front?"

"Good thinking. Now, you've read the syllabus. You know the kids will be turning in their weekly topic essays. They're two-pagers, so I thought that would be yours to cover. As for the main essays in the semester, there are five. I'll give you two or three to grade after I've read them and made my own notes, and then we'll meet to discuss to see that we are on the same page."

Blake sat stunned for a moment. Avery looked at him and worried that she insulted him by not giving him enough to do. "Blake? Is this what you were hoping for? We can discuss this if you had other ideas."

"No, this is more than I even expected. You have no idea what I've been doing for my last assistantships. I've been filing and handing out essays to students in class. Essays I had not been given a chance to read, ever. I don't think I've read a student essay yet. I knew there was more to you than those never-ending legs."

Avery smiled. "I thought we were going to keep this professional."

"This is professional. I gave you a professional compliment. I never said I'd leave your physical attributes out of our conversation."

“Blake, maybe we should slow down the physical side of our relationship. You know? Maybe curtail that a bit to get to know one another?”

Blake stood and leaned over Avery’s desk. He placed both hands on the desk as he leaned in towards Avery’s neck to nibble gently just below her ear. He made his way down her neck and then back up again to her face to kiss her tenderly, still leaving his hands on his desk. Avery was breathless when he was finished.

“Now, what was that about curtailing the physical aspects of our relationship?”

“Um, forget I said anything. I think we can handle both at the same time. I’m a doctor, aren’t I?”

Blake chuckled. “Well then, doctor, thanks for the assignment. I am truly sorry to say I have to go because I’d really like to make use of that couch over there. I wish I’d have noticed it earlier. Shall we meet tonight?”

“Yes, but let’s start somewhere public, so we can get some actual conversation in?”

Blake sat down again, looking rather concerned. “You don’t know?”

“Know what?” Avery asked.

“Two years ago a professor had a relationship with a student, wasn’t even a student in his class. It was consensual, however, he was looking for a long-term relationship, and she was looking for some short-term fun. So, needless to say, it ended badly, and he didn’t exactly handle it well. She went from being a straight-A student to earning Ds on her essays and received a D for the class. She filed a complaint against the professor and with the university. The department reviewed the complaint and her essays before and after her plummet in grades and found in the student’s favor. They changed her grade. That would have been the end of it, but her father was a lawyer, and when he found out that she had been sleeping with her professor prior to her slip in grades, he stepped in and filed a rather

large lawsuit against the university. The professor was ‘asked’ to move on, and the family was well compensated. To avoid any future embarrassment, as the dean put it, he added to the university bylaws that faculty and students, graduate students included, are not allowed any romantic relationships of any kind while the student is enrolled here at Cross University, or it will result in termination of the faculty’s employment, regardless of tenure status.”

“Oh.”

That was all Avery could get out. She felt deflated as she knew that Blake would not be a graduate for another four months when they’d be free to pursue their relationship in the open. This was also the time he’d be free to pursue a full-time job anywhere he chose. In the meantime, they’d have to sneak around, risking both their careers, hoping they didn’t get caught. She knew that was the only option because waiting four months to pursue an open relationship with Blake, working every day side by side, simply was not. She was too emotionally involved now.

As if reading her thoughts, Blake said, “There’s no way I’m waiting until graduation to touch you again. I knew about the rule when I started this with you. I thought you did. I figured they’d go over things like when they hired you. I’ll sneak around as long as I have to.”

“I don’t like the idea of sneaking around. I want to stay on track for tenure track. But that being said, knowing it’s only for a couple of months, and not indefinitely, makes me willing to do it. That and I honestly don’t think I could work with you over the semester if you weren’t fucking me, too.”

Blake smiled at Avery’s use of salty language. It was so seemingly out of character.

“You’re trying to get me to that couch, aren’t you?”

“Working on it.”

“Oh, baby, you’re killing me. I really wish I could. But I’m running late now as it is.”

Avery wondered where Blake had to run off to, but since he wasn't offering, she didn't ask.

"Okay, no problem. See you tonight? Why don't you plan on having dinner at my place? I make a mean pasta dinner with homemade red sauce and meatballs."

"Café Jackson it is. Six o'clock okay?"

"Fine. I'll plan dinner for six-thirty."

Blake came around the desk then and leaned over to kiss Avery good-bye. It was sweet as he stroked her cheek while they kissed. He pulled away and kissed her forehead.

"See you tonight."

Blake turned and walked to the door, unlocked it, and closed it behind him as he walked out. Avery stared after him as she thought about what just transpired. She felt that she and Blake were headed in the same direction as far as this relationship was concerned. However, he seemed more mysterious, and she was not sure she made any headway in getting to know him any better. *Maybe tonight at dinner.*

* * * *

Blake arrived right on time. Avery appreciated punctuality, and it pleased her that Blake apparently did, too. He entered the kitchen and put on one of Avery's extra aprons with such familiarity, Avery felt her heart tug. She was amazed and impressed with the ease at which he stepped right into the preparations for dinner. Avery was chopping the basil for the sauce. Blake stepped right in and started chopping alongside Avery. At the same time, Avery enjoyed the natural way the two of them fell in sync with each other. She worried about it, too. Avery did not want to grow so attached to Blake, not like this, not this soon. *Why can't I ever have a relationship that's just about sex? This would be the time, Avery! He's not going to be here long, the sex is totally hot, so what do I do? I fall for the guy. Figures.*

Avery started to cut more aggressively as she grew frustrated with herself.

“Hey, what’d that basil ever do to you?” Blake asked with mock concern.

“Sorry, redirecting frustration, I guess.”

“Anything I can do to help?”

“Unfortunately, no.”

They continued their preparations without destroying any more herbs or other food necessary for dinner. Avery set the table on the patio for dinner, and Blake lit the candles. They sat down and ate and talked through the evening.

“I can’t believe we were both born in the same hospital! That is absolutely unbelievable,” Avery exclaimed.

“Yes, but you still won’t tell me what year you were born. Maybe we were there the same year?”

“What difference does it make? We have different birthdays. You don’t need to know what year I was born, snoopy.”

Blake laughed. “Okay, okay. I give up. You’ll forever be twenty-two, right?”

“Something like that.” Avery smiled. Blake’s deep throaty laugh warmed her heart. “So, where are your parents now?”

Blake’s smile froze, and he looked down at his plate, clearly uncomfortable. He shifted in his seat as he answered. “My parents were killed in an accident. I was raised by my aunt.”

“Oh, Blake, I’m so sorry.”

Blake didn’t say any more, so Avery didn’t want to press. It was clearly still very painful.

* * * *

Blake wanted to reach over the table and kiss Avery for her compassion and not pressing him for more details as his other girlfriends in the past had. Blake did not want to answer their

questions, not when he wasn't ready. The women in his past always had to have answers, all of them, and weren't willing to let him keep anything to himself until he was ready. He hadn't met anyone like Avery, who not only accepted this response but seemed to understand he had to reveal more on his time when he was ready. But instead of being bitter about it, she offered compassion. Blake felt his heart swell and realized this relationship was going in a direction he hadn't planned. He thought they could keep this light, no emotional attachments, just hot sex and companionship. He'd graduate and hopefully move on. He told Avery he slept only with women he was involved with—that part was true—but he also didn't usually get emotionally attached. Although he left that piece of information out when he first met Avery, she is the first one he has become emotionally attached to.

"Penny for your thoughts?" Avery asked quietly.

"I'm thinking these dishes can wait," Blake said meaningfully.

Avery and Blake stood interlocking their hands and kissed deeply on the patio. Their hands and arms went around each other as they continued to embrace. Blake paused and placed his hand on Avery's cheek.

"Let's take this upstairs," he said breathlessly.

Avery could only nod as she placed her hand in his and followed him upstairs to her bedroom, grateful he knew the way because her head was swimming from the kiss and the wine she drank earlier.

* * * *

When they reached the foot of the bed, Avery noticed something different. Blake wasn't tearing at her clothes with the hunger and passion as he had in the past. Tonight, he was gently, teasingly taking her clothing off, one by one. Slowly, he lifted her top over her head, kissing her skin all the way up as he went. His kisses burned as she begged him to move faster. He only smiled and shook his head no. He

then knelt on the floor in front of her to unbuckle her shorts and wiggled them down to the floor, rubbing and massaging her legs as he went. He came back up for her thong, using his teeth and tongue to grab a hold of the single string on the side, and yanked it down. He sucked on the inside of her leg as his hand hovered just above her pussy, rubbing and caressing, but not going in. Avery thought she would go mad before they even made it to the bed. Blake put both hands on her taut midriff and massaged up as he moved to her breasts to open her bra and send it to the floor, finally revealing her naked body. He lifted her effortlessly and laid her on the bed. Blake whipped his clothes off as Avery held her hands out to him, yearning for him to come to her.

Blake came to the bed and again shook his head no. "This is all you, baby. Sit back and enjoy the ride."

He raised her hands above her head on the pillow. He then started to make his way down her body with his own hands as he plunged his tongue into her waiting mouth. She gasped at finally receiving the touch she'd been craving and encircled her tongue around his, going as deep as she could.

"Mmm, you're hungry tonight," Blake provoked.

Blake moved to her throat and sucked in spots Avery didn't even know existed, but she could feel herself getting wet already. Blake's hands cupped her breasts and flicked her nipples until they stood on their own, just ready and waiting for Blake's mouth. As if on cue, Blake continued to move down and took her entire nipple and areola in his mouth. Avery gasped with pleasure and pain. It was glorious. Blake nipped and sucked and licked with his tongue. He repeated the process as he cupped the other, and Avery actually felt herself starting to come.

"Oh, getting excited, are we?" Blake teased.

He took his free hand from her breast and went to her clitoris. He flicked her clit and helped Avery along to an orgasm.

“Oh, my God, I want you. How long are you going to make me wait?” Avery panted.

“Until you can’t stand it any longer.”

Avery groaned in agony.

Blake shifted and moved his hand to fit two fingers deep in her vagina. He stroked and stroked then circled and pressed against the back of her clit. Avery felt her vagina swell in response. She felt the pressure and warmth build as she rode his fingers in response. Finally, the release came as the pop of her wetness spilled through her pussy. Avery exhaled in broken jags and opened her eyes.

Blake was leaning over her, staring at her intently. “Now you’re ready.” Avery tingled with desire and anticipation with what was still to come. With one single move, Blake grabbed Avery by the hips and flipped her over so that she lay facing the bed. “I’m going to fuck you now, Avery. I’m going to fuck you hard, baby.”

“Please,” was all Avery could get out as she could hardly stand the wait.

Blake lifted her up to all fours by her breasts as his penis slid deep into her vagina where it hadn’t reached before. Avery arched her back, and Blake grabbed a hold of both breasts as he dove deep over and over. The sensation sent shockwaves through Avery’s body. She was the one making demands now.

“Fuck me harder, Blake. Do it. Do it. I want you to fuck me!”

“I’m going to come now, baby.” They both gasped as Blake released and Avery had yet another orgasm. Blake rubbed Avery’s breasts as she started to come down from her euphoria and then shifted to rub her back. He pulled out and she rolled to her back as he fell to the bed on his back. They lay there gasping for breath like fish out of water.

“You’re like a chameleon. So conservative outside this bed, but in it—look out!”

Avery smiled. “Maybe you just bring it out of me.”

“I hope so. I’d hate to think of you like this with anyone else.” This hung in the air as the implication of the statement hit her. “Well,” Blake said as he cleared his throat, “do you think I could hop in your shower before I take off?”

Avery tried to hide her disappointment that he wouldn’t be staying longer. “Sure. I’ll go get you a towel.” She grabbed her robe at the side of the bed and went to the linen closet. Blake banged his head against the pillow in frustration.

Avery returned with a clean towel for Blake. “Here you go. You may use my shower.”

She was decidedly reserved as she showed him to the master shower. She knew Blake didn’t know how to undo the tone he had set by asking to take the shower. So, he just got out of bed and walked to the master bath. Avery climbed back into the bed, still wearing her robe. She turned on the TV and started flipping through the channels. Nothing interested her, and she finally settled on ESPN. She wasn’t sure why she was so upset, but something in Blake’s pending departure made her feel used and not at all like they were building a relationship. *I thought that was why we planned this evening. Nice dinner, interesting conversation, and then something more than “see you later” after sex, like cuddling or watching TV in bed together— isn’t that how you build a relationship with someone?* Avery sighed. Perhaps Blake was like all the rest after all.

Blake came out of the master bath freshly showered, wearing only his boxers.

Avery raised her eyebrows at this. “I thought you were heading out?” she asked.

Blake climbed into bed beside her and removed her robe. “I changed my mind. It didn’t feel right running out right now, so I thought I’d hang here with you for a while. If you don’t have anything in the morning, maybe even stay the night so we can wake up together?”

Avery smiled wide, not caring that she couldn't hide her pleasure. She wished she could be one of those women who could be so nonchalant and play it cool, but the truth was she was over the moon at the thought of Blake spending the night, and she didn't care if she showed it.

"I would love it if you stayed here. I don't have anything until 1:00 p.m."

Blake pulled Avery close and stroked her hair as they watched SportsCenter. They lay in bed without talking. Avery longed to tell Blake what she was feeling but was afraid to express herself too soon. So she let him hold her in silence. She closed her eyes and promptly fell asleep.

Chapter Four

Avery wrapped up her lecture and reminded the class of their assignments for the next class. As the students filed out, Leslie Preston stopped at her desk. Blake packed his things slowly to wait for Leslie to finish with Avery.

“Dr. Jackson? Do you have a minute? I’d like to discuss my last paper with you.”

Avery was seated at her desk by this time and looked up to address Leslie. “Sure, Leslie. What’s on your mind?”

“Well, I don’t feel this grade accurately reflects my ability. In fact, I feel you have been grading me too harshly this whole semester, and I’d like to know why.”

Avery sighed internally as she looked at Leslie. This was a complaint she heard at least once a semester from a freshman used to receiving higher grades in high school. These students were then often surprised at the higher standards in college and the lower grades that come as a result. Avery explained this to Leslie as she had in the past to other freshmen unprepared for college standards. Leslie, however, unlike the other freshmen, did not accept the explanation.

“Dr. Jackson, I am fully aware that standards change in college, and I feel I have met those standards. However, you do not seem to recognize the merits in my writing.”

At this point, Avery was appalled at the way Leslie was practically demanding that Avery change her grade simply because Leslie disagreed with it, and Avery stood to address her. However, as she opened her mouth to speak, Blake stepped in and was beside her and came to her defense. “Ms. Preston, you forget your place. Dr.

Jackson has had years of education that make her an expert in assessing composition. How much education have you had?"

Leslie took a step back, not expecting the assault from Blake. She looked at him and then at Avery and was about to respond when Avery looked at Blake. Leslie thought she looked at him more than professionally. She swallowed her original response and formulated a plan.

"You're right, Mr. Emory. I apologize, Dr. Jackson."

Leslie turned and left the room. Avery and Blake turned and stared after her.

"I don't trust her, Blake. There's something about that girl."

"Avery, don't worry. She listened to reason and realized her mistake. Don't be paranoid."

Avery was irritated that he defended Leslie's actions but brushed it aside as he took her in his arms. Unfortunately, they forgot to draw the shade, and Leslie was in the hall.

Leslie peeked back in the window of the door to see Avery and Blake embrace. "Exactly what I thought. You screwed the wrong the girl, Avery Jackson."

* * * *

Avery walked into her classroom for the next class meeting with a feeling of dread she couldn't explain. She looked over at Blake's seat and saw Leslie sitting right next to him. They were engaged in conversation, and Blake didn't look up when Avery walked in. Avery's stomach fell, and the dread she felt deepened. *That girl is up to something. Don't be silly, Avery. She's an eighteen-year-old co-ed. Blake is a grown man. He's just being polite.* Avery shook off the uneasiness and started class. They were doing workshops that day, and she couldn't help but notice that whenever Leslie had a question, it was when Blake was making the rounds at her group. She also held on to his arm when he looked over her desk at her paper. Avery tried

to convince herself she was overreacting but wasn't very successful at it. When class ended, Avery was tied up in knots. Leslie was at Blake's desk, laughing and touching him every chance she could.

As she left the room, she called out to Blake, "That sounds great, Blake. I'll see you tomorrow night!" Leslie turned to Avery, smiled, and left the classroom.

Blake came to Avery's desk as she was packing her briefcase. "Are you ready to go?"

"I'm going home. I don't feel well," Avery said tightly.

"What's wrong? You sound upset."

"Since when do my students call you Blake?" Avery couldn't resist asking.

"Oh, that? Yeah, I'll have to address that with her. I didn't give her permission to do that."

"Yes, we wouldn't want to set a precedent with the other students. Perhaps you could address it with her when she comes to your place?" Avery snapped.

"Why are you getting so angry? It's just a tutoring session," Blake responded.

"We have a writing center for that. Our master's candidates get paid to do that very thing. Don't you see what she is doing? She is trying to make me jealous," Avery fired back.

Blake laughed. "That's ridiculous! She doesn't even know about us. Nobody does! She doesn't have a reason to make you jealous. If you are getting jealous, that is your own doing. But I am telling you right now, there is nothing to get jealous about. I do not have any feelings for Leslie Preston."

Avery began to relax. "Are you sure? She's very pretty."

"Well, you're beautiful. Let's go."

* * * *

Avery and Blake could barely get through the door of her bedroom as they groped at one another's clothes, pulling them off as quickly as they could. They fell on the bed naked, Blake on the bottom. Avery placed both hands on his cheeks and kissed him deeply, plunging her tongue in and out of his mouth. Blake ran his hands up and down her back and through her hair. Avery sat up and smiled. She shifted down as she began kissing his neck and chest. She slowly stroked her hand down the length of his body and ended at Blake's swollen penis. She cupped his balls then worked her way up to encircle the shaft. She began sliding her hand up and down, slowly at first, then increasing the pressure and speed. Blake moaned. Avery could feel wetness gathering in her own vagina and continued her progress down as she kissed his chest, abdomen, then swallowed the now purpled head of Blake's penis deep in her mouth. She kept her hand on the shaft, stroking, while she swallowed the penis deep into the back of her throat, in and out.

"Oh, lord, Avery. Oh, God."

He grabbed the back of her head. Avery could feel the semen pulsating in his penis and could feel the orgasm building in her own clit.

Blake was moaning loudly now. "Avery!" he shouted.

And Blake's release came in warm waves. As it hit the back of Avery's throat, she took it all in. She now slowly released the pressure on his cock as it quivered through the ejaculation. She continued to rub up and down and ran her tongue around the head. She released his penis and laid it back and gently pulled it out of her mouth. She sat up in a daze as Blake looked at her, eyes glazed over. He sat up and pulled her onto his lap, wrapping her legs around him. He then drove two fingers into her wet pussy and began stroking in and out. Avery pressed her breasts against his chest and held on to his neck as she felt herself go limp from the pleasure Blake was giving her. She began to ride his fingers.

“Yes, Avery. Ride me. It’s your turn now. Is this what you want? Is this what you need?”

“I want you,” Avery said huskily.

“Not yet, baby. I’m going to make you come first.”

Avery groaned, “Oh, God, I can’t take this. Please, I want your penis inside me.”

Blake smiled. “I love making you wait.”

Avery pumped her hips and finally reached the climax she sought. She shouted in release. She held on to Blake as she breathed heavily. It turned her on knowing that there was more to come. She kissed Blake deeply to show her gratitude for the orgasm he just gave her and to let him know she was ready for more.

“Is someone ready to continue?”

Avery reached down and rubbed Blake’s now hard again penis.

“Oh, baby, I like the way you think.”

They sat facing one another, legs wrapped around each other. Blake plunged his penis deep inside Avery’s vagina, and they both starting grinding.

“Harder,” Avery begged. “Deeper, Blake. I want as much of you as possible.”

“Avery, you kill me, you know that?”

Avery didn’t answer. She was lost in her own world of euphoria. Her head felt light, and her vagina was pulsating as Blake thrust in and out. Avery reached her climax, and as her orgasm filled her vagina with her sweet wetness, Blake ejaculated and moaned in his release. They held each other, stroking one another’s faces, kissing intimately.

“That was amazing, Blake.”

“I agree, darling. No one can disagree with our compatibility in bed.”

Avery sighed. “I’d like to think we have more than compatibility in bed, Blake.”

“Yeah, sure. Of course.”

“That sounded really sincere,” Avery said, disappointed that Blake wasn’t more enthusiastic. Avery felt as though she was the only one of them who felt more than just sexual feelings towards the other. “Look, Blake, if you are just in this for the sex, then let me know, please, so I know what the expectations are. But I have to be honest, I thought we were building something here.”

“What’s the problem, Avery? We are, and I don’t think of our relationship as only about sex. But I don’t know what you expect from me. You can’t expect something to develop overnight.”

“I know that, Blake, but it wasn’t long ago we were talking about getting to know each other outside the bedroom, and you were all for it. Now you are back to talking about how good we are in bed. Why the switch? Maybe there is something there for Leslie Preston?”

“I can’t believe you would bring her into this conversation. How could you think I’d be attracted to her or let her influence what we are building?”

“How could I not? You’ve pulled back, and it just so happens to coincide with her coming on to you? I’m not stupid, Blake, nor am I blind.”

Blake stared at Avery. “Are you actually accusing me of being attracted to this girl? Even after I have told you I’m not?”

“Why else would you schedule a private tutoring session with her when you would have suggested any other student visit the writing center?”

Blake ran his hands through his hair. “I don’t know, Avery. Maybe because I let her flatter my teaching ego. Is that a crime?”

“That’s an easy answer, Blake.”

Blake got out of bed and got dressed. “Look, we aren’t going to get anywhere with this. I’m not attracted to Leslie Preston. Believe me, don’t believe me—that’s up to you. I’d like to continue with this relationship, with you that is, but I guess that’s up to you now.”

“Of course it is. You’ve just given yourself an exit. Put it all on me, and you can wipe your hands free of this, can’t you?”

“Avery, did you not just hear me? I want you. You decide if you want me.”

With that, Blake stormed out of Avery’s bedroom and out of her house. She listened to him start his car and peel out of her driveway. She flung herself back onto the pillows.

As tears fell from her eyes, she said, “I know you want me, Blake, but you’ve never said if you love me.” She rolled over, knowing that she had fallen in love with a man that had not returned her love and now he may never.

* * * *

Leslie Preston knocked on Blake’s door then smoothed her short skirt while she waited for him to answer. Her low-cut, V-necked top was a size too small and clung to her breasts, her taut nipples revealing she wore no bra. Blake answered the door and caught his breath as he couldn’t help but look her over. She was undoubtedly a very attractive young woman. Maybe he did agree to this tutoring session because he was attracted to her. Could Avery be right? Blake let Leslie in and showed her to the couch and suggested she put her books on the coffee table. He asked her if she’d like a drink, Leslie reminded him she wasn’t twenty-one yet and asked for a Diet Coke. He sat down beside her and asked to see the essay she was currently working on. She leaned over to pull it out of her folder, revealing her full, creamy white breasts, and Blake found it difficult to breathe. He picked up his beer and downed the rest of it.

“Need another?” he asked.

Leslie laughed. “I’m barely through my first one.”

“Suit yourself. I’m going to grab myself another.”

He jumped up from the couch and almost ran to the kitchen for another beer. When he returned, Leslie had her essay on her lap, ready to go. Blake inwardly groaned at the location of her essay.

He cleared his throat. "Maybe you should put your essay on the table. It will give us something to write on."

"Okay," Leslie said.

She set the essay on the table and leaned against the table with her pen in hand. Blake rolled his eyes as this wasn't much better. Her skirt pulled up, revealing more thigh, and he could once again see down her shirt.

Blake took another swig of beer, shook his head to try to clear his head of the lewd thoughts and leaned over to see Leslie's paper. "So, what issues are you having here?"

"Well, first of all, I am struggling with my introduction."

"Okay. A typical problem area. Your opening statement is weak. Let's work on strengthening that. But your real issue is your organization. When your introduction is weak, you don't have a good idea of what you want to do with the body of the essay, and as a result, you wander through your thoughts with no direction."

"Brilliant, Blake! I hadn't thought of that."

Leslie smiled and laid her hand on Blake's thigh. She picked up her paper and leaned over to Blake, pointing to a spot on the page.

"What do you think of my thesis statement?" Leslie was now shoulder-to-shoulder, her thigh rubbing Blake's. She turned and looked at Blake, placing her hand on his shoulder. "Blake?"

Blake's voice was low and barely above a whisper. "Leslie, why are you really here?"

Leslie set the paper down on the coffee table and her free hand on Blake's thigh. She began to slide it up towards Blake's crotch under his shorts. Blake closed his eyes. Leslie took that as her green light and began kissing Blake hungrily as her hand found Blake's penis, which had grown hard and erect. Blake removed her hand and grabbed her by the waist, pushing her back on the couch as he moved on top of her. He removed her shirt, revealing her breasts, full and taut. He clamped down on one with his mouth, sucking and pulling on the nipple, biting and pulling. Leslie gasped at the pleasure and pain

of it. Blake sat up and stared down at Leslie half-naked on his couch. She reached up and grabbed his hand, pulling it down to her breast as she reached for his penis once again and began stroking up and down. She closed her eyes and moaned with pleasure.

“Stop,” Blake managed to get out.

Leslie was certain she heard Blake wrong and continued to try to seduce Blake.

“I said stop, dammit! Can’t you hear?” Blake practically jumped off the couch and leaped to the other side of the room. Leslie sat up, blinking dramatically, trying to assess the situation. Blake turned to her. “Get dressed. It’s time for you to go.”

“I don’t understand. Did I misunderstand something? Did I do something wrong?”

“No, I did,” Blake said with deep remorse. He went to the door and held it open. Leslie Preston had never been rejected by a man in her life. She knew exactly why it was happening tonight, and she was going to make Dr. Avery Jackson pay. As Leslie gathered her essay, she noticed a sheet of paper on the coffee table. There was a handwritten note on it, and the handwriting wasn’t Blake’s. As Leslie took a closer look, a plan began to form in her mind. She stood gracefully and walked slowly to the door Blake still held open for her. She stopped in front of Blake and laid her hands on Blake’s chest. She leaned up and kissed him softly on the lips.

“Such a shame, Blake. You have no idea what you are giving up and what you’ve already lost.”

She walked out the door with Blake staring after her in bewilderment.

* * * *

Avery was working at her desk in her office when someone knocked at her door unexpectedly. It was rare for a student to drop by

outside of office hours, so it pleased her when one took advantage of the extra hours she put in.

“Come in,” Avery called pleasantly. Her body turned taut with tension when Leslie Preston walked in.

“Hello, Dr. Jackson,” she said smoothly.

What can I help you with, Leslie?” Avery got right to the point. Avery still didn’t trust Leslie and her suspicions were aroused.

Leslie was equally direct. “I believe there is a problem with my grade.”

“Haven’t we already discussed this?”

“No, no I don’t think we have. I mean my semester grade. You see, I believe it doesn’t represent my true ability, and I think you should raise it. I am an A writer.”

Avery was irritated and fed up with the time Leslie was taking from Avery’s work. “Leslie, you are a young girl who expects things to be handed to her without actually working for them. I will not change your grade—period. I will see you in class tomorrow.”

Avery motioned to the door to indicate the discussion was over, however, it was at that time Leslie sat down and smiled chillingly at Avery.

Avery raised her eyebrows in question at Leslie.

“I don’t think I’ve made my point clear enough, Dr. Jackson. You see, you have a problem.”

“I do? I wasn’t aware that I did.”

“Oh, yes. Your problem is me. You are engaging in a secret affair with Blake Emory. I’m sure you are both aware that this is against university rules, punishable by dismissal. It would be such a shame to lose you as a faculty member as you have become such a popular professor.”

Avery’s face went white as a sheet. “You have no idea what you are talking about. Blake and I are colleagues. He has been assigned to my class as my graduate assistant, and as such, we work long hours together. However, those hours are work-related only.”

“Really? Then how do you explain this little note?”

She pulled out a sheet of paper with Avery’s handwriting on it.

Blake—last night was amazing. Can’t wait for tonight—just give me time to change the sheets.

There was a smiley face followed by her name, clearly written.

“Now, I’m pretty sure that is in reference to a previous night of sex. And the reason I can be so sure is because I also saw you two going at it in the classroom after class last week. You forgot to pull the shade and lock the door. Imagine my shock and dismay?” Leslie feigned dismay and disappointment as she looked across the desk at Avery.

“I see. Well, there isn’t really any point in denying it now, is there? How is it you got your hands on this note, anyway?”

“Oh, didn’t I tell you? I was at Blake’s last night. I went to get some help on my essay, and your note ended up in the middle of my essay pages. It must have happened while we were having sex on the couch because things got pretty hot and wild.”

Avery’s stomach dropped to the floor, and she felt like she was going to get sick. “I think you’d better leave now, Leslie.”

Leslie looked stunned. “But,” she stammered, “we haven’t discussed my new grade.”

Avery looked Leslie straight in the eye and said coolly, “You came to the wrong woman. I won’t be blackmailed.”

Leslie jumped to her feet. She practically shouted, “If you don’t change my grade, I’ll go to the department chair.”

“I’ve got news for you, Leslie. Blake is considered an employee of the university as well. He gets a paycheck, so he plays a dual role here. Yes, it is against the rules for me and him to have a relationship because he is a grad student. But it is also against the rules for the two of you to be romantically involved because as a teaching assistant, he receives that paycheck. And you have just revealed to me that the two

of you have had sex. That now puts you at risk for dismissal from the school if I go to the dean.”

Leslie lost all color in her face. “That can’t be true.”

“Next time, check the university bylaws, Leslie. I suggest you know what you are talking about before you try to blackmail someone.”

Avery stood up and walked to the door. She opened it and motioned for her to leave. Leslie walked out of the office. Avery closed the door and started to shake.

Avery went to her desk and sat down as she considered her next move. For a brief moment, she had hoped that Leslie was lying, but when she left without argument and didn’t try to pursue her blackmail, she knew then Leslie wasn’t lying. Leslie would not have dropped it so easily if she had made it up. So now Avery had to face the fact that Blake cheated on her. But what did he cheat on? They had never declared themselves exclusive with one another. Avery still had not told Blake she loved him, and of course he had not said it to her. So why did she feel like her world just ended? *Because you are in love with him, and you haven’t felt this way about anyone—ever.* Avery slowly gathered her things and left her office in a daze, much like Leslie did not long before.

* * * *

Just as Avery pulled up to her home, her cell phone rang, and the caller ID showed Blake’s number. Too numb to deal with him at the moment, she let it roll into voice mail. Avery was not sure when she would be able to deal with him. She barely had the strength to climb the stairs to her bedroom and crawl into bed. She let the bliss of sleep take over and closed her eyes. The sound of her cell phone ringing once again woke her from her pain-free existence. It was, again, Blake. She wasn’t ready to deal with him, so she let voice mail take the call. Avery looked at her phone and saw that Blake had left four

voice mails since she arrived home. *Four? How long have I been sleeping?* Avery was surprised to see that it was six hours later. She sighed as she still felt exhausted. She rolled over and closed her eyes.

The next morning there were five more messages from Blake. At this point, it was clear to Avery she was not going to be ready to speak to Blake anytime soon and deleted the messages. She put on her robe and headed downstairs to make coffee. Avery was grateful for the weekend. If she'd had a class, she would have had to face Blake. How was she going to get through next week? Thankfully, it was the last week of classes. The students would be working on their portfolios, so Avery did not have anything to prepare. On the other hand, the downfall to that was preparing a lecture would have kept her occupied. During portfolio preparation, she would wander the room and offer assistance when needed. Unfortunately, it would leave free time for her during class. This was what she was afraid of. She did not want Blake to have any chance to get to her. After class, she could leave straight from class in the midst of the students. The only thing that eased her fears somewhat was the thought that, during class, Blake would not try to discuss anything personal or fear of anyone else finding out about them. That thought did quite a bit to waylay her fears, so she now set about trying to figure out how she would avoid him until graduation.

Chapter Five

It was the last week of classes, and Avery had only two class meetings left. Avery woke the morning of class feeling as nauseous as she did the first day of class. *Wonderful. I've gone back to feeling like a green professor who has yet to get her feet wet.* She arrived on campus and went straight to her office. She had over an hour before class and wanted to be sure she was available for any students in a last-minute panic over their portfolios. When she got there, there was a note in her mailbox from the department chair asking to see her. She instead went straight to Dr. Amelia Wentworth's office. She knocked on her door, praying Amelia was in. Amelia called for her to come in. Avery said a prayer of thanks.

"Avery! How's your first semester treating you? I haven't seen you much. I hope you haven't felt ignored?"

Avery felt at ease by Amelia's pleasant tone. *She can't be firing me and sound this happy!* "No, I'm not feeling ignored at all. My students are keeping me plenty busy, thank you. Was there something you wanted to tell me?"

"Yes, I wanted to tell you that your Graduate Assistant, Blake Emory, was picked to present his master's thesis at a regional conference, so he won't be in your classes this week. He'll come back for graduation, but of course, classes will be completed by then. He said he tried to call you but only got your voicemail."

Avery couldn't tell which emotion won out, relief or disappointment, and wanted to get out of Amelia's office as quickly as possible as her mind tried to figure it out. "Thank you, Amelia. My

class load is light this week, so that won't be a problem. I wish him luck." Avery walked back to her office shaking with the news.

Blake had tried to call to say good-bye, but she didn't take the call. What would she have said? *He slept with Leslie! You should have said good riddance! But I love him! Well, guess who doesn't love me?* Avery reached her office, closed her door, and collapsed on the couch.

She was granted the miracle she prayed for, no Blake the entire week. She couldn't figure out why her stomach was still so unsettled. She closed her eyes to relax and almost jumped off the couch when someone knocked at the door. The last time someone knocked at her door it was Leslie Preston.

Avery went to the door and cautiously opened it. She was surprised to see Amelia Wentworth standing there.

"Hi, Avery. May I come in?"

"Sure, please do." Avery opened the door wider and waited for Amelia to enter. "Please, sit. Can I get you something?"

"No, thanks. Too much coffee already. I do have something I'd like to talk to you about, though. You may want to close the door."

This time, Avery's stomach did fall to the floor. She closed the door and walked back to her desk. Amelia surprised her with her next request.

"Could we sit on the couch? The desk is so formal."

"Okay, sure."

They sat down and Amelia opened the conversation with, "Are you in love with Blake Emory?"

At that moment, Avery again said a prayer of thanks for deciding not to pick up her cup of coffee off her desk because it surely would have ended up in her lap. She looked at Amelia, stunned, knowing she had been caught. What she couldn't figure out was how it happened. And she couldn't figure out how she knew she *loved* him. She decided to tread carefully.

“Yes, Amelia, I have been seeing Blake this past semester.” Amelia smiled at Avery’s admission of dating Blake, but Avery wouldn’t admit to loving him. “May I ask how you knew?”

“Because I thought you two would be a good match. That’s why I assigned him to your class. He couldn’t keep his eyes off you when you came to campus for your interview. I felt it was time he settled down and that you were the perfect woman to capture his heart. You had already captured his interest.”

Avery’s mouth fell open. She could not believe her ears. “I don’t understand. You were *hoping* we’d get together? But what about the university rule against it? You must be aware of it. Blake knows all about it.”

“Of course he does. I told him, so he’d be careful. I can’t have my nephew getting kicked out of school during the final semester of his master’s degree, now can I?”

Avery started to choke on a phantom piece of dust. “Your nephew?”

“Are you okay? Do you need some water?”

Avery shook her head no as she regained control. Unfortunately, she could not claim control of her senses as her mind was still reeling. “Blake is your nephew? I can’t believe it. He never told me. Now I understand why he didn’t want to discuss his past and living with his aunt any further.”

“Well, he keeps that between us because he doesn’t want anyone to claim nepotism in any way. I tried to tell him that wasn’t a way to begin a relationship, but he wouldn’t listen.”

“Yes, I can see that. He told me he pulled some strings to get assigned to my class. I can see why he’d try to hide the fact that you are his aunt. However, I hate to disappoint you, but I don’t think he was interested in a relationship. Yes, I am in love with Blake. But I don’t think he is in love with me.”

Amelia smiled and shook her head. “Oh yes, dear, he is. He is head-over-heels in love with you. I’ve known that boy his entire life and have never seen him this way over anyone.”

Avery started to feel hope over that news but then remembered Leslie. Amelia watched as Avery’s face fell.

“What’s the matter? Most women consider it good news that the man they love feels the same way,” Amelia said smilingly.

Avery looked at Amelia through tears and said, “Most women don’t get a visit from another woman claiming a one-night stand with the very same man.”

Amelia stood and paced the room. “Blake is many things, but one thing he isn’t is dishonest. I would stake my own life on that. I’ve never had children, and when Blake’s parents were killed in a car accident when he was 6, I stepped in and raised him as my own. I’ve never looked back. As it would happen, my husband and I later found out we were unable to have children, and we regarded Blake as a gift. But we never spoiled him. We raised him with the morals and values with which we were raised, and Blake inherited his mother’s goodness and integrity on top of that. I don’t doubt that you believed this woman, Avery, but did you ask Blake about it?”

Avery felt ashamed as she remembered the many phone calls she let roll over into voicemail. “No,” she whispered.

“When did you find out?”

“Three days ago,” Avery responded.

“Oh, Avery, don’t beat yourself up. You’re still in shock. But you need to talk to him.”

Avery happily nodded and said she would call him after class.

Avery rushed out of class and went back to her office. She felt as though she was going to be sick at any moment and was convinced she wasn’t going to make it to her office. The women’s restroom was directly across from her office, and Avery made a beeline for it instead. As she finished getting sick, she finally made it to her office.

Avery felt better. No fever, no chills, no body aches. *This doesn't feel like the stomach flu. Maybe it was something I ate last night?* She couldn't remember what she had eaten, so she shrugged it off and tried to decide what to do about Blake. What Amelia said gave her great hope on the one hand, but on the other hand, she was somewhat biased and may not know Blake as well today. She doesn't know the grown man he has become. She also did not know Leslie Preston and would not know her powers of persuasion. Blake could be as honest as George Washington and still succumb to the likes of her. Sitting there wouldn't get Avery the answers she needed, and Avery decided to take action. The conference where Blake went to present his paper was only two hours away. Avery decided the conversation they needed to have was not one to have over the phone but face-to-face. So she decided to drive there that afternoon to confront Blake. She could be back by dinner or stay the night, depending on how things went. Avery went home to pack an overnight bag to be prepared for the best scenario and then hit the road. She was still feeling sick, so she stopped to pick up some Dramamine and a Diet Coke to stay awake.

* * * *

Avery pulled up to the four-star hotel and decided against valet service. Should things not go well, she did not want to have to wait for someone to get her car for her. She felt the Dramamine pills wearing off and needed to get to the nearest restroom fast. She parked her car and entered the hotel. She found the ladies' room and was promptly sick.

"What is going on with me?" Avery asked herself.

She cleaned herself up and set out to find Blake. She knew he'd be attending the seminar on syntax and that was going on now. It should be ending in about fifteen minutes, so she had some time to locate the conference room and gather her thoughts. When she found

the room, she sat down outside it and waited. She had no idea how Blake would react to seeing her. Would he be happy? Was he upset with her for ignoring his calls? Avery had to remind herself of Leslie's claim of Blake's infidelity and steeled herself for the possibility that it was true.

The conference room started to empty, and Avery stood to wait for Blake. When he appeared, he saw her immediately. He stepped to the side where Avery was standing and let the other attendees go by.

"Avery? What are you doing here?"

Blake sounded neither angry nor happy to see Avery.

"I came to talk to you, Blake. Is there somewhere private we can go?"

"Sure, we can go to my room."

Blake led her down the hall to the elevator and pushed the button. He turned and looked at Avery as they waited. The doors opened, and they stepped inside.

As the doors closed, Blake said to Avery, "You don't look too good, Avery. Do you feel okay?"

"Yes, I'm fine. My stomach has just been a bit upset today. Probably just nerves."

Blake gave her a questioning look that Avery ignored as the doors opened to Blake's floor. They walked the rest of the way in silence.

Once Blake and Avery were inside Blake's hotel room, Blake took Avery in his arms. "Are you sure you're okay?"

Blake's concern was enough to undo Avery's resolve. She put her arms around him. "I am now."

Blake cupped her face in his hands and kissed her gently. "I've missed you, beautiful."

Blake scooped Avery up in his arms and carried her to his bed. He pulled off her shirt and shorts, and he got his clothes off as quickly as he could. He joined her in the bed and caressed her body as he teased her breasts and vagina with his hands. He slowly slid her bra and thong off as Avery starting writhing in pleasure, begging for more.

Once Avery was finally naked, Blake leaned over her and started sucking on her breast as his hand wandered lower to her vagina. He inserted his finger and began stroking, slowly. And then Blake removed his finger and stopped sucking her breast. He spread her legs as he was kissing her abdomen then her inner thighs. Then his mouth was at the lip of Avery's vagina. He kissed it gently at first, and then suddenly, his tongue plunged deep inside her pussy and teased her back and forth. Avery's senses were assaulted like never before. There were explosions over and over in her pussy as Blake pulled his tongue in and out then around the outside of her vagina. He smiled as her sweet wetness spilled from her vagina.

"I'm begging you, Blake. You have to take me now."

Without a word and in one swift motion, Blake inserted his penis into Avery's wet, swollen vagina. He waited a moment, as Avery enjoyed the sensation of Blake being deep inside her. Then he looked down at Avery and plunged deeper and deeper as he rode her hard. She grabbed his hips and wrapped her legs around his butt and raised her own hips to meet him stride for stride.

"Oh, Avery," Blake moaned, "you're killing me."

Now it was Avery's turn to smile. They met each other stride for stride as they climbed to the peak of their mutual climax. Blake spilled his seed into Avery's pussy as Avery's orgasm exploded, sending spasms throughout her nerves.

Avery and Blake began their descent back into reality as they lay in each other's arms. Blake stroked Avery's hair. "I'm so glad you came here, baby. I've missed you so much. There's been something I've wanted to tell you—needed to tell you—but haven't had the courage."

Avery stiffened as she listened to Blake build to what she believed to be his confession. Every nerve in her body was screaming, her muscles taut. She felt the nausea come back again and fought the urge to run to the bathroom.

Blake noticed Avery stiffen but continued on. “Avery, you are unlike any other woman I have ever met. I haven’t felt this way for anyone, and in the beginning, I’ll admit it scared me. But it doesn’t scare me anymore. Avery, I love you.”

Blake waited for her response.

Avery sat up with a look of astonishment on her face. “Is that it? You don’t have anything else to tell me?”

Blake was stunned. He had never told a woman he loved her before, and Avery just threw it back in his face, expecting more?

“What else did you expect? A marriage proposal?”

“Whaaat?” Avery shrieked. “You’ve got to be kidding?” When were you going to tell me about Leslie?”

The color drained from Blake’s face.

“That’s what I was afraid of,” Avery responded.

She couldn’t keep the nausea at bay any longer and ran to the restroom. When she returned, Blake was sitting at the desk with his head in his hands. Avery sat down on the bed facing him.

“That was why you came here today, isn’t it? To confront me about Leslie, I mean. Why did you sleep with me if you knew about Leslie?”

“I don’t know. I felt powerless to fight my attraction to you, I guess,” Avery responded without emotion. They sat for several minutes in silence. Avery broke the silence. “It’s true then? You did sleep with Leslie?”

Now it was Blake’s turn to yell in disbelief.

“Whaaat? She told you that? And you believed her without asking me first? How could you? Is that why you didn’t take my calls last week? How could you believe Leslie and shut me out like that?”

Blake paced the floor, shaking his head in disbelief as Avery watched, not knowing if she should feel relieved, worried, or ashamed.

Blake turned to Avery. “No, I did not sleep with Leslie. Yes, she did come to my house—for tutoring. Yes, she did try to seduce me.

Yes, I did kiss her. But I showed her the door before it could go any further. I realized I wanted only one woman in my bed because I was in love with her. I don't sleep around when I am in a relationship, Avery—I told you that. However, committed relationships do require trust, and you obviously don't trust me. You believed a person who was barely an acquaintance, who, by the way, was out to intentionally hurt you and me. You didn't have faith, Avery—not in me and not in us.”

“How could I have faith, Blake, when you hadn't said one word about your feelings towards me? At that point, our relationship was about the bedroom.”

“Really? Is that what you thought? Then we really were in two different places, Avery, because faith requires more than just words. I've loved you from the start.”

Avery did not know how to respond to that. She wanted desperately to believe him but doing so would require a leap of faith. Did she have that in her? Again, she felt the nausea swell inside her, and she ran to the restroom. Blake watched with concern as she came back, looking decidedly pale.

“Are you feeling okay? This is the second time you've dashed off to the restroom,” he said.

Avery nodded. “I'm okay. I think I've just caught the bug that is going around campus.”

Blake didn't look convinced but nodded anyway. “Why don't you lay down here and rest while I attend my next seminar? We can talk later.”

Avery shook her head. “No, Blake. I'm going home. I am not sure I can give you what you are asking for. I am not even sure what you *are* asking for. I just know that I want to go home and figure things out for myself while I get over this bug in my own bed.”

Blake didn't speak as his disappointment overwhelmed him. He helped Avery gather her things and held the door for her.

She stopped at the door with tears in her eyes and said, “Good-bye, Blake,” then turned and walked to the elevator.

Blake closed the door and walked to the bed. He sat down with his head in his hands. Despite the agonized look in Avery’s eyes when she said good-bye, he could not believe the relationship was over. He would give her a few days to feel better and sort things through and then he would go to her. With that plan in place, Blake set off for his seminar, his heart heavy.

* * * *

Avery returned home, exhausted both mentally and physically. She had to stop three times during the two-hour trip to get sick. She was beginning to get concerned as this simply did not feel like the typical stomach bug she’d had in the past. She decided she would call the doctor in the morning just to be safe. In the meantime, she pulled on her favorite pajamas and made some hot tea. She crawled into bed and put on whatever TV movie she could find to try to take her mind off of Blake. It didn’t work as she started to think about their conversation. She knew she loved him. She loved him from the very beginning of their relationship. She wished she knew that he had loved her, too. Did that make a difference? *It meant he met with Leslie while he was in love with me, yes, but it also meant he sent her packing because he was in love with me* The round-and-round thinking made Avery dizzy and tired, and she promptly fell asleep.

In the morning, she called her general physician and made an appointment for later that morning. She busied herself by tidying and cleaning her home. She wished she had papers to grade, but the semester had ended weeks ago. She could be putting up holiday decorations as Christmas was fast approaching, but just the thought of pulling out the boxes exhausted her. Finally, it was time to head to the doctor’s office. Apprehension started to build as her appointment time grew near. When the nurse called her name to go back, her stomach

once again felt as though it would fall through the floor. Something was up, and Avery couldn't quite put her finger on it.

Avery was led to a generic exam room and asked to slip into a hospital gown. Her doctor, Dr. Jennifer McKenzie, was highly recommended by all the female professors on campus, and Avery liked her immediately at her first appointment.

"Hi, Avery, I didn't expect to see you back too soon after your initial appointment. Is everything okay?"

"Well, I don't know. I've been feeling nauseous lately, but without the other symptoms, I expected for the stomach flu. So, I thought it would be a good idea to come talk to you about it."

"Good thinking. Any chance you could be pregnant?"

"Pregnant! Heavens, no! I am on the pill, and I take it religiously. I've never missed a day."

"Well, just to be sure, let's do a blood test. I take it you didn't take a pregnancy test?"

"Of course not!" Avery replied indignantly.

"Okay, I'll have the nurse come draw some blood. It's a quick test, and we'll have the results in a few minutes, okay?"

"Okay, sure," Avery replied nervously.

Avery now understood the apprehension. Dr. McKenzie left as the nurse came in to draw Avery's blood.

Avery tried to read the magazines left in the exam room as she waited for her results. It was the longest twenty minutes she had ever spent. When Dr. McKenzie returned to the exam room, Avery thought she would jump off the exam table and grab her chart from her hands to read it herself.

"So, doc," she said, trying to sound smooth, "what's the word?"

"Well, Avery, I'm not sure how you'll react to this, but you are pregnant."

Avery had never fainted before in her life, and yet, when Dr. McKenzie told her she was pregnant, Avery Jackson fainted dead away.

“Avery? Avery? Are you with us?”

Avery slowly sat back up and blinked her eyes a few times.

“How could this happen, Dr. McKenzie? I’ve been so careful!”

“Well, Avery, the odds are extremely low, but the pill is only ninety-eight to ninety-nine percent effective, depending upon which one you were taking. It has happened before, and now it has happened to you. I hate to ask you this, but do you know who the father is?”

“Yes, I do. Unfortunately, I just broke up with him.”

“Oh, dear. Any chance of a reconciliation?”

“No, I don’t think so. It will be just me and this baby.”

“Avery, are you sure you want to do that? You have no idea how hard that is. Believe me, I know. I was a single mother until I met my husband.”

“Really? I didn’t know. Well, look at you now. Besides, there are plenty of women out there doing it without help—I can, too. I am not going to get back together with the baby’s father just for his help. I am stronger than you think. I have a full-time job with a flexible schedule. I can do this. I can.”

Dr. McKenzie looked at Avery with concern. “Who are you trying to convince? Me or you?”

As Avery pulled into her driveway, she was still digesting the news. It was a complete shock, one that she was unprepared to handle at the moment but had no choice in making it a top priority. Blake would have to take a backseat while she figured out what to do about the baby. Thankfully, the house would not be a problem. She had plenty of space. Full-time teaching at a university and childcare would be an issue. This needed to be addressed. She would have to speak to Amelia. She was surprised when she got in the house to find a message waiting for her from Amelia already. She couldn’t know about the baby. *What could this be about?*

* * * *

Avery arrived on campus mid-afternoon. Dr. McKenzie suggested carrying small snacks with her to keep food in her stomach at all times. If she didn't let her stomach get empty, the nausea would stay away. So far, for the first three hours, it had worked. She went straight to Amelia's office and knocked on her door. Amelia opened the door within seconds of Avery's knocking. Amelia did not greet Avery in her usual manner. As Avery walked in, she noticed Dr. Kenneth Scofield, the Assistant Chair of the English Department, sitting on the couch and not looking too happy. Avery felt the apprehension from this morning return and had a feeling this meeting would not end well.

"Sit down, Avery." Amelia beckoned to the empty chair in front of her desk. Amelia sat behind her desk and pulled out a folder. "Avery, I've asked you here because Ken has brought to my attention some accusations about you and Blake Emory. Someone left these photos in his mailbox."

Amelia opened the folder on her desk and showed Avery photos of her and Blake at her house on her back patio in a passionate embrace. When Avery looked up at Amelia with tears in her eyes, Amelia said, "I'm sorry, Avery."

Ken stood up. "You're sorry? This is reprehensible, Dr. Jackson. We have rules against this sort of thing for a reason."

Avery blanched at his reference to their relationship as "this sort of thing"—especially knowing that she was carrying Blake's baby. Thinking of the baby reminded Avery that she was now responsible for another being. She was not about to let Ken Scofield scold her about a loving relationship because of rules that were the result of someone else's relationship that got out of control.

Avery stood as well. "Dr. Scofield, this relationship was between two consenting adults who were not only above the age of twenty-one but were also both college graduates. The intent of this policy was to prevent inappropriate relationships between faculty and undergraduates, yet for some reason, it was written to include the graduate students as well. It was an overreaction on the university's

part.” Avery paused and took a deep breath as she looked between Amelia and Ken. “Nevertheless, we knew the policy and broke it. I will go clear out my office now. Thank you for the opportunity. I am sorry this didn’t work out.”

Without another word, Avery turned and walked out.

Chapter Six

Avery stood in the middle of her office after going to the local office store for boxes. She was determined to keep moving. If she stopped, she was afraid the reality of the situation would hit her and she would end up in a ball on the floor crying uncontrollably. She tried to convince herself it was the hormones, but she knew it was because she was scared to death about the prospect of having lost her job and finding out she was pregnant within twenty-four hours of each other. While she couldn't, or wouldn't, do anything about the pregnancy, she could do something about her recent unemployment. After packing up her office, Avery decided she would contact the department chair at Weston University, where she received her doctorate. Weston had been good to graduates in the past, and Avery was a star student.

With a plan in place, Avery packed swiftly and efficiently. She hoped to get out of the department without seeing anyone. It was to her advantage that summer break had begun, and most of the faculty had already left for their holiday vacations. Avery got the boxes to her car and came back to the office to do one last sweep before leaving her keys on the department secretary's desk. She was on her way out when Amelia came knocking at her door.

"Oh, good! I'm so glad I caught you before you left. I am so sorry things had to end this way, Avery. I had no idea Ken had those pictures. I never would have pushed you to get back together with Blake if I had known, honest. Did you tell him what happened? He must have been furious!"

Avery interrupted Amelia, “Amelia, stop. He doesn’t know what happened because I haven’t talked to him since I’ve returned home. We are not back together. It isn’t going to work—the two of us, that is.”

“But why? What happened? He’s *crazy* about you. I don’t understand.”

“Well, apparently he wasn’t crazy enough about me to say no to...” Avery paused. As much as she disliked the fact that Blake let Leslie come to his home and attempt to seduce him, she felt that should remain between the two of them. While Amelia was Blake’s aunt and Avery’s friend, she was also the department chair and would not take kindly to learning that Blake had even just a close encounter with an undergraduate. Avery continued, “...to that ‘other woman.’ She did try to seduce him but only got as far as kissing him before he asked her to leave.”

“Well, that is disappointing,” Amelia conceded, “however, how many men his age do you know would have shown a woman to the door after she had offered herself?”

Amelia stood and hugged Avery.

“Where will you go?”

Avery always considered herself an honest person, but she knew if she told Amelia her plan, Amelia would tell Blake. “I thought I would go to the MLA this year and put my name out there. Will you give me a reference if I get any bites?”

Amelia nodded sadly. “The best. I’m going to miss you, dear.”

She turned and left Avery’s office, leaving her standing by herself in the empty room. Avery never felt so alone in her whole life.

* * * *

Blake drove up Avery’s driveway, not quite sure what he would say when she opened the door. They had not spoken since the conference. He had not been able to get her out of his mind and knew

that he wanted to spend the rest of his life with Avery. He prayed she would feel the same when he proposed. Blake knew Avery was upset that Leslie came to his apartment. He should have told her about the visit. But in his own defense, she wouldn't even take his calls. If she had, would he have mentioned it? He was calling her about the conference. Blake had to get Avery to see the past was in the past, and that she was his future.

He got out of the car and dread overcame him. The house was too quiet, as though Avery hadn't been here in quite a while. Blake thought it would be best to give her some space after the conference and went to visit friends. He hadn't been home in over a month. Maybe he waited too long. He peered in the windows and saw an empty living room. His dread proved true. But where would she go? She loved this house and had classes this semester. Maybe she decided on a bigger place. She did say she would have liked a bigger backyard. He decided to go to the university to see if his aunt knew anything or if there was any information at her office.

Blake arrived at Avery's office and saw the door standing open and felt relief at first, thinking she was inside probably hard at work. When he reached the door, his relief turned to panic as he saw that her nameplate was gone and the office was cleared out. He walked inside in a daze.

"I don't understand," he said aloud.

"She's gone, Blake." Blake turned quickly to see his Aunt Amelia standing in the doorway. "She's gone. I tried to reach you, but your cell phone message said you couldn't be reached."

"Yeah, um, I was with friends in the mountains. No cell phone service," he said distractedly. "What happened? Why is her house empty and her office cleared out? What the hell is going on here?"

"Don't raise your voice with me, young man. Remember who you are talking to," Amelia reprimanded Blake.

"I'm sorry, Aunt Amelia. I'm just stunned and a bit scared. I think I may have lost the woman I love forever."

Amelia sighed. “Oh, Blake. I wish I could tell you where she is, but I honestly don’t know. Right after she got back from your conference, Ken Scofield showed up in my office with incriminating pictures of the two of you. Someone took pictures of you two in an embrace in Avery’s backyard. No, I don’t know who.”

Amelia held her hands up to stop Blake from saying anything more as he tried to interrupt her.

“Anyway, I was forced to call her in. Ken was going to take the pictures to the dean and the president. Before Ken could even lay into her, she stood up to him and basically told him she was not sorry about your relationship and that the rule was stupid. You should have seen her, Blake. She was marvelous. She put Ken back in his place. He was speechless. Before I could say anything, she quit. She had her office cleared out by the end of the day. I asked her where she was going to go, and she said she would check out any leads at MLA. She asked me if I would give a reference if she found anything, but I haven’t heard from her. I’m so sorry, Blake. I have no idea where she went. She wouldn’t leave a forwarding address or number. I don’t think she wants to be found.”

Blake hung his head dejectedly.

“There’s one more thing, Blake. She didn’t look good when she left.”

“What do you mean she didn’t look good?”

“Well, she was pale and she kept going to the restroom to get sick. I was really worried about her.”

Blake looked alarmed at the description. “She was the same at the conference. What am I going to do? I’ve got to find her. I’ve got to know if she’s okay. She’s got to know how I feel.”

“Come to my office, honey. I have an idea.”

* * * *

Avery was relaxing on a lounge chair on her lanai. Avery loved Florida. Weston University was on the west side of Florida on the Gulf of Mexico. Avery loved the year-round warm temperatures and sunny days. She remembered walking on the beach in January and sleeping with her windows open in July to feel the hot breeze. Still only in her first trimester, Avery wasn't showing, so the pregnancy wasn't causing any discomfort other than the nausea. She asked Dr. McKenzie to recommend a doctor in Florida, and he had given her a prescription to help with the nausea. This was the first time Avery was able to eat comfortably. She stretched and thought about the past four weeks. It has been such a whirlwind that this was the first time she'd had to sit and think about things.

Avery was grateful Dr. Carl Baylor was able to give Avery a position in the department at Weston when she called. It was not a tenure-track position, but it was full-time in the composition section. She called the realtor Carl recommended and chose a three-bedroom home right on the beach. She decided to rent for the moment as her home up north still needed to be sold, and she would have to hire full-service movers. She packed up what she would need for one week and let the movers do the rest. She drove herself to Weston, Florida in two days, and two weeks later she was relaxing on the lanai. She loved being able to walk out to the beach whenever she wanted and thought about raising her child here.

That thought made her think of Blake. As her thoughts wandered to Blake, she tried to steer them away but could not. Her heart ached as she thought of him. Was she making the right decision by not telling him about the baby? The further she got from the conference, the more she thought, perhaps, she had been unfair expecting Blake to tell her about Leslie when Avery wasn't even taking Blake's calls. She also began to rethink cutting him out of her life and not letting him know he was to be a father. Avery could see the situation with better clarity now. She needed to call Blake. He needed to know about

the baby. The thought filled her with dread. How would he react? Did he even still care about her?

Avery got up and went to the great room. She picked up her cell phone to call Blake. She paced the room as she waited for him to answer.

“Hello? Avery, is that you?”

Avery couldn’t be sure, but she thought he sounded excited to hear from her. “Yes, it’s me, Blake. Do you have a minute? I need to talk to you.”

“Baby, I’ve got all the time in the world. Open your door.”

Avery froze. She could not have heard him correctly. “Blake, I’m in Florida now.”

“I know, baby. Open the door. Please.”

“Oh, my God!”

Avery dropped the phone and ran to the door. She flung it open and there Blake was, standing with his cell phone still to his ear, tears in his eyes. Avery was sobbing as Blake enveloped Avery in his arms.

“Please don’t ever let me go. I’ve missed you so much.”

It wasn’t quite what Blake was hoping to hear, but it was close.

“I’m not going anywhere. I’m here to stay, sweetheart. Can I come in?”

“Oh, yeah.”

Avery laughed through her tears. She grabbed his hand and led him into the great room, shutting the door behind them. Once inside, Blake pulled her to him, and with his hands gently holding her face, he kissed her softly on the lips. Avery’s hands went to Blake’s waist then up his chest as she deepened the kiss.

Blake groaned. “Oh, honey, I can’t resist your touch, you know that.”

“I know.”

Blake looked down at Avery and saw the invitation in her eyes. “Where’s the bedroom?” he said huskily.

“Right behind you,” she said, pushing him through the open doorway.

“Thank God,” he said, stripping Avery of her clothing as she stripped him of his clothes.

By the time they reached the bed, they were both naked and hungrily kissing and gasping for air as they fell to the bed. Avery landed on top and began to stroke Blake’s already erect penis. She rubbed his balls first then wrapped her hand around his shaft, moving up and down with pressure that almost made Blake blow his load.

“Not yet, baby, too soon.”

He flipped Avery on her back and in one motion, his finger was inside her vagina, rubbing up and back. His finger was so deep Avery was seeing spots as the sensations shot through her body. She could feel the climax building, and her hips pulsed up and down to meet the strokes of his finger. Finally, she reached the top, and she shuddered as her wetness spilled out of her vagina. She blinked as the stars faded away.

“Blake, I...”

“I’m not finished with you yet, baby.”

Blake then started his way down Avery’s neck with his lips. Softly at first, he stopped at her breasts and grabbed a hold of one nipple with his teeth. He let go then sucked and pulled. He ran his tongue round the areola then squeezed with his hand as he sucked with his lips once again. Avery gasped at the sensation. Blake sucked and sucked until she thought she couldn’t take it anymore then he suddenly moved his mouth lower to her belly. He softly kissed across her abdomen then shifted as he kissed and ran his tongue along the tip of her pubic hair. She held her breath as he took his hands and spread her legs then his head was lost between her legs, and she felt his tongue thrust into her pussy.

“Oh, my God.” Avery almost sat straight up. Blake used his tongue to flick her clit back and forth. “Blake, no, please, I can’t take anymore. I need you. I’m begging you, please, get inside me now!”

Blake ignored her requests and continued to thrust his tongue in and out of Avery's now very swollen vagina. She rode her hips to meet his tongue.

"That's it, baby. This is for your pleasure. Come on, Avery—ride me," Blake said between thrusts.

Avery reached yet another climax. Out of breath, Avery held on to Blake.

"Blake, that was amazing," she gasped. "But what about you?"

Blake smiled. He flipped Avery over. Avery went up on her hands and knees. Kneeling, Blake plunged his penis into Avery's wet pussy. She arched her back to take all of him, and he drove deeper and deeper as he thrust in and out. With one hand, Blake reached over, and using both his hands, he grabbed Avery's breasts. Avery went up on her knees and wrapped her arms around Blake's neck behind her as he stroked her breasts. He stroked in and out of her vagina, bringing Avery to her third orgasm as Blake ejaculated. He caressed her breasts and belly as he slowly lowered her to the bed and then lay next to her. Avery lay on her stomach next to Blake lying on his back. She turned on her side and traced his jawline with her finger.

"Blake?"

Not opening his eyes, he responded, "Um-mm? Yes, baby? I'm here. I'm not falling asleep, just basking in your glow."

He turned to face her then.

"Blake, I have so much to tell you. But first, I'm sorry for not taking your calls when you tried to reach me before the conference. And second, I have been in love with you since my first day of class."

Avery held her breath as she waited for Blake to react.

Blake leaned over Avery, pushing her shoulder back to the bed. "You stole my thunder, Dr. Jackson. When I discovered you were gone and I might not be able to find you, I thought my world had ended. I don't want to feel that way again. I want to spend my life with you, Avery. But you have to know, I'm not the dishonest guy

you thought I was, and I'll spend the rest of my life showing you if you'll let me."

Blake leaned down and kissed Avery gently on the mouth and then kissed away the tears that had begun to fall down her cheeks.

"Avery, I pray these are happy tears because it will make this next question a lot easier..." Blake took a deep breath as Avery smiled at his nervousness. "Avery Jackson, will you marry me?"

Avery said simply, "Yes, Blake, I will marry you." Blake exhaled. Avery laughed. "It's a good thing I didn't have a long response. I'm not sure you would have lasted through it."

"No, I'm not sure you would have lasted through it," Blake replied as his hand wandered down to Avery's vagina and began to rub and tease the outer edges.

Avery spread her hips in response and then quickly clamped them shut. Blake looked up in surprise.

"Are you okay? Did I hurt you?"

Avery took advantage of his distraction and sat up quickly, flipping Blake back to the bed and onto his back. She placed his arms above his head against the headboard, and as he began to protest, she placed one finger against his lips and shook her head no, whispering only, "Shhh."

Avery then began her descent towards Blake's bulging and erect penis. She took her time massaging every inch of his body, and when she'd come near his penis, she would back off to rub his thigh and his lower leg. This teased and hinted of what was to come. She sucked on his nipples and drew them hard against her lips. Finally, after what seemed an eternity to Blake, Avery's hands cupped his balls and stroked his shaft in unison. The touch, without warning, nearly sent Blake to the ceiling as he tried to sit up, moaning in ecstatic agony. Silently, Avery took one hand and gently pushed him back to the bed. She spread his legs to position herself between them and began her massage of Blake's penis, rubbing his balls and shaft together then bringing her tongue to the purpled head of his penis. She ran her

tongue around the head and then up and down the shaft. And then, as suddenly as she grabbed the penis, it was engulfed in her mouth and down her throat. “Oh, God, Avery. Oh, oh.”

Blake was desperately trying to maintain control and nearly lost it as Avery placed her hands beneath Blake’s butt cheeks and pressed his butt up as her mouth came down on his penis. The movement pushed his penis as deep down her throat as it would go, and Blake thought he was either going to pass out before ejaculating or go off too soon and not have enough time to enjoy it. Avery began to increase the tempo and pressure—each time her mouth slid over the lip of the head of Blake’s penis, Blake moaned with pleasure. Avery was really pushing and grinding now, her own pussy wet with excitement.

Blake said, “Oh fuck, baby, I’m going to blow,” and Avery felt Blake’s warmth hit the back of her throat as his shaft shuddered and jolted as he shot his seed.

Avery and Blake were lying in each other’s arms, both having reached climax after climax. For the first time, Avery felt content and hopeful about the future, and then she realized in Blake’s entire marriage proposal, he had not told her he loved her. She chided herself over the little detail because she knew he would not have proposed if he didn’t love her. And she also knew she had one more thing to tell Blake.

Chapter Seven

Avery woke early the next morning and was surprised to find Blake out of bed already. She went to the kitchen and saw that he had started the coffee. She was trying to limit her coffee intake during the pregnancy, so she poured herself only half of a cup. She went out to the lanai and found Blake sitting on it, watching the waves break.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?”

“Mesmerizing. The sunsets must be beautiful.”

“They are. I can’t wait for you to see them.”

“I can’t wait to share a lifetime of sunsets with you, baby.”

Avery warmed at the remark and thought this was as good a time as any to tell Blake about the baby. “Blake, about that. There’s something I need to share with you.”

“Is everything okay? Are you having second thoughts?” he asked with concern.

“No, no, not at all. It’s not that.” Avery sighed. “Blake, the week I returned from the conference, I went to my doctor because I was concerned about the nausea I was constantly feeling.”

“Yes, I remember. You had me concerned, too. Whatever she gave you seems to have worked because you look great now.”

“She gave me information, Blake. She informed me I was seven weeks pregnant and gave me something to help with the nausea. I am now eleven weeks along, and the nausea is subsiding somewhat as I approach my second trimester.”

Blake did not hear any of what came after “pregnant.” He stared at Avery, trying to digest this piece of news. He was admittedly stunned.

However, even as he was saying the following words, he knew he would regret them.

“Is the baby mine?”

Blake closed his eyes and shook his head, knowing he just made a mortal mistake.

Avery stood and said simply, “I’m going to take a walk. I’ll expect you to be gone when I return. Leave an address where you can be reached, and I’ll contact you by mail only to keep you informed of the pregnancy and the birth of *your* child. I’ll let you know when I am ready to discuss visitation.”

Avery turned and walked away to the beach, not turning back once. Blake lifted his head and watched her go, thinking this would be the last time he would ever see the love of his life.

* * * *

Avery walked for thirty minutes before she finally let herself break down and cry. No one was on this stretch of the beach, so she sat down alone and sobbed as the realization hit her that she just left the only man she had ever loved. How could he even think this baby could be someone else’s? *I’ll tell you how, Avery. As easily as you believed Leslie Preston when she told you she slept with Blake. Is his question any different?* She knew it wasn’t but just couldn’t bring herself to admit it. The hurt ran so deep. When she believed Leslie, there was another woman involved. Blake did not have any reason to suspect she had been with someone else. She didn’t care if she was rationalizing or not. She would stand behind this irrational, stubborn viewpoint, and if it meant raising the baby on her own, then so be it. She would not let Blake accuse her without reason or provocation. Deep down, she knew she was being unreasonable, but she couldn’t bring herself to admit it—not to herself and certainly not to Blake.

So she slowly walked home. There was a part of her hoping to find Blake still packing, but he was gone when she arrived home. She

went to the bathroom and drew a bath, suddenly exhausted from the morning's events. She bathed and put on a short, silk nightgown, knowing she would soon not be able to fit into it. She crawled into bed and cried herself to sleep. The next morning, Avery awoke refreshed and declared herself out of tears.

"It's time for you and me, baby."

* * * *

"Avery, you are truly glowing. I mean it. When I was pregnant, my ankles were swollen, and I waddled like a duck. You can't even tell you are pregnant from the back! What is your secret?" Sarah Whitehouse, Avery's neighbor, exclaimed.

Avery smiled and brushed back the hair on Sarah's baby girl's forehead who was sleeping in Avery's arms. "Sarah, you have a selective memory. As I recall, I prayed I could look half as good as you did."

Sarah laughed. "You succeeded and then some." The tiny baby began to stir and look around for her mommy. "Oh-oh. I'm over here, baby. Are you getting hungry?"

Avery handed her over and rubbed her own belly in anticipation of her baby, due any day to arrive.

"Just you wait, Avery. It's amazing. You'll fall so in love. It's a love you've never felt before." Avery smiled. "Oh, honey, I wish you didn't look so sad when you smiled."

"I'm fine, Sarah. Don't be silly. I am getting tired, though, so I think I'm going to head back to my house and try to grab what could be one of my last uninterrupted naps!"

"Okay, honey, but you call if you need anything, got it? Steve and I have it all worked out on how we'll get you to the hospital."

Avery leaned over and gave Sarah a quick hug and baby Emily a kiss on the head. "What would I have done without you guys all these months?"

“It doesn’t matter because you don’t worry about it,” Sarah answered in her usual pragmatic way.

Avery smiled and made her way home.

The final weeks of pregnancy were sapping every ounce of strength from Avery’s body. She collapsed in her bed and fell soundly asleep. Only minutes later, she was awakened by terrific cramps.

“Whoa! What did I eat?” Avery asked herself. She started to run through her diet for the day when her water broke, and then Avery knew she’d be heading to the hospital that day. She took her time getting her things together before she called Sarah and Steve.

* * * *

Sarah called to Steve from the lanai, “Honey, could you bring me an iced tea? I’m dying of thirst out here while this little one is drying me up.”

“I’m one step ahead of you,” Steve replied as he stepped out carrying two iced teas and handed one to Sarah. He sat down next to her with his own.

“Thanks, honey. You always take such good care of me,” Sarah said with a sigh.

“You’re welcome, dear, but why do you say it with such sadness? Is there something else you are hinting for?”

“No, I’m sorry. I’m just worried about Avery. She looked so sad today. I think she’s missing Blake so much, but she won’t call him to tell him. She’s so stubborn, you know? But that’s not entirely her fault—it’s the hormones. She just needs some help, I think.”

“Oh no, don’t do it, Sar. Don’t start meddling. You don’t have a good history here. Your sister still isn’t talking to you after the disaster blind date you set up for her.”

“What was the matter with Gary? He was a great catch.

“Nothing was wrong with him! It was the fact you meddled after the date by calling him and telling him all about Caroline, too much

information after one date, know what I mean? You scared him off, and Caroline really liked him.”

“Well, this is different. Blake and Avery have a history and, more importantly, a child together. He needs to be here. She needs him here. She wants him here, whether she is willing to admit it or not.”

“Sarah, even if all you are saying is true, there is nothing you can do about it. You have no way of contacting Blake. You don’t even know where he is.” Sarah smiled at Steve. “Oh, don’t tell me. Are you serious? How did you find out?”

“I have my ways, my darling husband. I have my ways.”

* * * *

Avery was finishing the packing when she decided it was time to call Sarah and Steve. Her contractions were steady but still not very close together, so she thought she had some time. She had read that actual labor could take up to twenty-four hours in some cases. She called next door and told Steve the news. Within fifteen minutes, the Whitehouse family was in her driveway, waiting for Avery. When it was time for Avery to bring the baby home, their plan was to have Steve and Sarah go back to Avery’s house to get her car and bring it back to the hospital. Steve would drive Avery home, and Sarah would follow behind in their van. With the plan in place, Avery lumbered into their van, and they headed to the hospital. Avery didn’t know if the pain of the contractions was making her crazy or if she was picking up vibes that Sarah was acting strange about going to the hospital.

“What is the name of your hospital again?” Sarah asked for the second time.

“Weston Methodist,” Avery replied. “Why?”

“Just making sure,” Sarah answered.

Sarah was tapping her feet nervously.

“Are you okay, Sarah?”

“Yes, of course. Just fine.”

Steve shot Sarah a warning look. Just then, a strong contraction hit Avery, and she forgot about the interaction between Sarah and Steve.

* * * *

They arrived at the hospital, and Avery was taken to Labor and Delivery while Sarah and Steve were shown to the waiting area. Steve held Emily while Sarah paced.

“Sarah, who were you talking to in the other room while I was changing Emily and then talking to Avery?” Sarah looked guiltily at Steve. “Oh, Sar, you didn’t. What did he say? How did he react to you?”

“Well, to be honest, it wasn’t the first time we talked.”

Steve almost dropped Emily. “What? You’ve been in contact with Blake and didn’t tell me? What have you been telling him?”

“What do you think? I’ve been keeping him informed about the pregnancy. Avery promised she would and hardly told him anything. She told him if there was anything she thought he needed to know, she would tell him. But he wanted to know everything. He wanted to see what she looked like. He wanted to know when the baby first kicked. He’s so excited. Steve, he’s devastated about questioning Avery about the baby’s father. He’s truly sincere. I can hear it in his voice.” Sarah paused. “That’s why I called him today to tell him I heard Avery call you when she had gone into labor, and I gave him the hospital information. He’s been scouting flights for the past week or so and booked a flight online while we were on the phone. He’ll be here in two hours.”

“I hope you know what you are doing, Sarah. That’s all I have to say.”

By the time Sarah was allowed in to see Avery, her contractions had progressed, and Avery’s discomfort level had increased dramatically. Over an hour had gone by, and Sarah was increasingly

aware of the time. Blake told Sarah that he would get a cab from the airport to the hospital, which was only fifteen minutes away. She checked her watch again. Blake would arrive within twenty minutes. She prayed she had done the right thing. She turned her attention to Avery.

“Sweetie, is there anything I can do for you? Are you ready for the epidural yet?”

“Five centimeters, Sarah. I’m going to five centimeters then I’ll get the epidural.”

“Avery, I don’t know why you’ve set such an arbitrary goal for yourself. If you are in pain, get the epidural now.”

“No, I’m getting to five.”

“Boy, your stubbornness just digs in and won’t let go, no matter how much it doesn’t make sense.”

Avery looked sharply at Sarah. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Nothing, honey. Never mind. You need to concentrate on what you are doing.”

“No, actually, this is a good distraction. You weren’t talking about my epidural just now. You were talking about my decision to exclude Blake, weren’t you? I know you’ve always disagreed, haven’t you?”

“Well, frankly, Avery, yes. You are in love with the man, the father of your child, and you won’t make one call that could change your life—change all of your lives. He made a mistake. We all make mistakes, and he regrets his more than anything. But you refuse to forgive him, which means you are saying you can’t allow the fact that he makes mistakes. Do you really think that is reasonable? How is someone supposed to live up to that standard?”

Just as Avery was about to respond, Blake walked into her hospital room. Sarah turned from Blake to Avery, who, despite enduring contractions, was lying in stunned silence.

“I think this would be a good time for me to go check on Steve and Emily.”

Sarah made a move to leave and Avery stopped her.

“No, you should stay.”

The disappointment on Blake’s face was visible as Sarah turned to Avery. “I don’t think so, Avery. This is between you and Blake now.”

“No, I want you to hear this as you clearly had a hand in bringing Blake here.”

Sarah’s face turned red as her role in Blake’s arrival was revealed.

Blake was standing at the foot of Avery’s bed.

“Blake,” Avery began and held out her hand on the opposite side of the bed to Sarah. Blake looked to Sarah, unsure as to what to do, and Sarah nodded vigorously in the direction of Avery’s hand. “Blake, you have quite the champion over here. She happens to be also very wise.”

Tears began to well in Blake’s eyes, and Sarah couldn’t control her emotions as her tears streamed down her face.

“Please don’t. I’ll never get through this if I see you cry,” Avery whispered, choking on her own tears.

Blake did his best to dry his eyes. “I’ll try, baby.”

That was practically Avery’s undoing. “Oh, God, I’ve missed you so much. I was so wrong and so stubborn. I couldn’t see reasoning and logic through my veil of bullheaded views. I couldn’t admit I was wrong when an ‘I’m sorry’ would have been all it would have taken for us to be together. I am so sorry. I held you to an unfair standard that isn’t fair. It’s okay to make mistakes, and yet I made the biggest one of all. I let you go. Please forgive me. Please don’t ever leave again.”

Blake was openly crying now, holding Avery’s hand against his cheek. He kissed the palm of her hand as she cried uncontrollably.

“Shhh, my love. My biggest mistake was letting you push me away. This I promise you, I will hold on to you and never let you go the rest of our lives. Avery, look at me. Sarah has been updating me on everything about this pregnancy. I cannot wait to meet our baby and begin our life together as a family. You, me, and our baby. That is

what I need, what I want, and I only want it with you. Are you ready? Let's have this baby and start our life together, if you'll have me."

Avery smiled the first true, contented smile that Sarah had ever seen. "Blake, I'll have you today and all the rest of my days." Avery turned to Sarah. "Sarah, I owe you a debt of thanks for not listening to me and bringing Blake to me."

Sarah wiped her tears. "Anytime, dear friend, anytime."

"Now, will you ignore my earlier instructions and go get a nurse and tell her I want that epidural *now*!"

Sarah laughed. "You bet, honey!"

* * * *

Blake lay next to Avery as gently as he could while she held their infant daughter in the hospital bed. He held her tiny finger in awe.

"I can't get over how small everything is. She is so beautiful. Just like her mother."

"Thanks. We need to talk about names. I didn't find out the sex, and with you here now, I think we should do this together. So I sent Amelia a text for some help. What do you think of Grace?"

Blake didn't speak at first, and when he did, his was shaky with emotion. "My mother would be honored to have our daughter named for her, as am I. Thank you."

"Grace it is. Beautiful. Would you be okay with my maiden name as her middle name?"

"Absolutely. Grace Jackson Emory. I love it. Will there be a wedding in *our* future?"

"That depends."

"On what?" Blake asked with concern.

"You haven't asked me."

Blake smiled. "Avery Jackson. Mother extraordinaire. Would you do me the honor of becoming my wife?"

"It would be *my* honor."

Grace stretched and smiled her first smile.

Epilogue

Avery and Blake hungrily kissed and clawed at one another as they made their way to the hotel bedroom three months later. Not wanting to be gone long or far away, they traveled to the panhandle of Florida for a long weekend for their honeymoon. Blake fell in love with Florida and found his own teaching job only eight miles from Avery's house on the beach. Steve and Sarah graciously offered to take Grace for the weekend. This was the first time since Grace was born Avery felt she had both the energy and the time for sex, and she could hardly wait for it.

Avery and Blake were naked in record time, and Blake picked up Avery as she wrapped her legs around his waist and her arms around him as he laid them both on the bed. Blake put Avery's arms above her on the pillow and held them down with his hands as he dipped his tongue in her mouth then, with passion, kissed Avery on the lips, his tongue deep in her mouth. He'd pause and look her in the eyes and begin the kissing again. It was the most romantic, passionate embrace he had engaged in with her. Avery could already feel herself getting wet.

As if Blake could read her mind, he moved his lips to her neck. He sucked and licked behind her ear and continued to move down to her breast. His hand cupped the breast while he grabbed onto the nipple with his mouth and pulled hard onto it until it stood on its own. His teeth nipped it, and he sucked and pulled again until Avery began to writhe beneath him. She tried to caress his back and reach his penis with her hand, but he shook his head no and put her arms back on the pillow. He continued his descent and spread her legs with his hands.

She realized where he was going and shuddered in anticipation. He took one finger and gently flicked her clit and then softly blew on it. She gasped at the sensation.

“Oh, Blake, oh my.”

He then teased her pussy with just the tip of his tongue. He stroked it as his hands cupped both her butt cheeks, bringing her closer to him, and then he plunged his tongue deep within her vagina.

“Oh, God,” Avery groaned, “More, please!”

His tongue deep inside, he sucked on the outer lip of the vagina. His tongue stroked in and out in a lapping motion. It flicked her clit and then back to her cervix, back and forth while his lips still sucked on the outer lips of her vagina. Avery began to move her hips in rhythm, seeking her first climax.

“Please, please,” Avery begged, “I need your dick inside me.”

Blake withdrew his tongue and sent three fingers inside. Avery sent her hips off the bed as far she could to get them as far and as deep as they could go. She was grinding and grinding her hips, increasing the speed.

“That’s it, baby. Ride me. Get to your place of ecstasy.”

Blake let Avery set the tempo as she rode him until finally reaching her orgasm. Her wetness spilled over his fingers, and her hips shuddered as she lowered them back to the bed. Avery could see white spots behind her closed eyelids.

“Now, I’m going to fuck you.”

Avery opened her eyes. Her stomach fluttered at his words as her vagina began tingling again already.

“Please,” was all she could say.

He put his hands in hers and thrust his penis in her swollen vagina in one swift motion. She swung her legs up around his waist, lifting her pelvis higher, allowing him to drive deeper than before.

“Ohh, baby,” he moaned as he lifted his head in reaction to her move. He looked back down at her and enveloped her with his arms. She wrapped her arms around him as well as he kissed her, long and

hard. He had not yet begun to ride his penis inside her, and the sensation of his cock filling her vagina was exciting her. Avery kissed Blake back with great fervor.

Blake placed both hands on the bed beside Avery and began his motion in and out of her vagina.

“Is this what you wanted, baby?”

“Blake. Ride me now. Harder. I want your cock, yes,” Avery panted. “Fuck me, Blake.”

Blake arched his back as he drove his penis deeper and faster into Avery’s pussy. Avery wrapped her legs higher around Blake’s back now, her arms around his neck to hold on.

“Yes, Blake. That’s what I want! Please, that’s what I want!” Avery cried out as she neared another climax. She shouted as she peaked, “Oh shit, oh my God, oh fuck, Blake. I couldn’t wait. Ohhh myyy God.”

She held on as Blake continued to ride, exploding as he shot his seed. “Avery—Avery, ah, ah, ah,” as his penis shuddered the final drops of his ejaculation.

“Avery, look at me.” Avery opened her eyes and looked at Blake. “I love you, my wife, my lover, mother of my child. I will always love you.”

Tears filled Avery’s eyes. “I love you, too, Blake.” She paused and looked thoughtful for a moment. “Did I ever tell you that on my first day of class at Cross, I thought you were one of my students?” Blake shook his head no. “Well, I did. If you had been one of my students, I’d say you would have been my most prized student, you know.”

“Well, in that case, teacher,” Blake said as he rolled Avery over on top of him, “teach me everything you know.”

THE END

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amber Finn lives in the Midwest with her husband and four children. She is a life-long romance reader but enjoys mystery, suspense, and contemporary fiction as well. At the end of the day, it is the romance which drew her to this genre as a career choice.

Amber holds a Bachelor's and Masters' degree in English and Composition. Language has always been a love for Amber. She believes in the importance of developing one's skill for writing and helps young people develop their skill as her day job. When she isn't teaching, she enjoys many creative pursuits including photography and piano.

Her greatest love is her children and loves the flexibility that both teaching and writing affords her to allow her to devote time to their school and athletic pursuits. Ultimately, at the end of the day, it is the family time that gives Amber the most joy.



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