

## ONE | BUTTERFLIES

Matt

"Matty, calm down. You are going to be ne. Trust me," Alaiia said.

This woman had somehow become my best friend, little sister, and Luna, all rolled up in one tiny and erce package. She was terric and always knew when I needed her to keep me grounded.

"What if she says no, bean? I can't handle that right now. Maybe this is all too soon? We should just keep dating casually—at least that way, I still get to see her. If she turns me down, that'll be it for us."

"You're just asking her to be your girlfriend, Matt, not to marry you. At least not yet anyway. You're a Gamma: you've dealt with situations far more stressful."

I had found Taylor six months ago in a strip club. No, strip clubs were never my thing, but we were there for Xander and Alexi's joint bachelor party. She smelled of cinnamon and vanilla, and it took over my world. I knew she was mine.

She was a server and came to our booth dressed as a bunny—an almost naked bunny. Seeing her that way both turned me on and infuriated me. I wanted to touch and taste her while also protecting her from the eyes of other men at the same time. In less than thirty seconds, she had become my world, my everything, but she barely noticed me.

Taylor was human and the most beautiful thing I had ever laid eyes on. She had the most incredible chocolate brown skin. It was awless, and when paired with her emerald green eyes, she was a vision. Her long brown hair was pulled back and hung to the middle of her back, but I imagined it loose with my ngers running through it.

She had curves in all the right places, and the sky- high black heels she wore only made her legs and ass even more prominent.

I wanted those heels in the air, those legs spread far apart, and that ass ... I wanted sinfully dirty things for it. She walked out of our booth, unaffected by me. I was oored. I don't want to sound cocky, but no woman has ever, in my entire life, been unaffected by me. At 6'3, I had all the muscle tone and denition you would expect from a warrior werewolf. We were continuously outdoors, so I kept a summer tan all year round and had dirty blonde hair, baby blue, eyes, and a perfect white smile. I had eyes. I was a good-looking guy, no doubt about it. And on top of that, I was a male on the Stone family tree.

Many years ago, one of my male ancestors was cursed by a witch.

She had fallen in love with him, but she wasn't his mate, and he was saving his heart for his one true love. Out of anger, she cursed him and all the men to ever come from him.

We would be irresistible to all women, young or old. It didn't matter. Even homosexual women, it made no difference. The only thing that would stop our appeal was if that woman were to become marked, or if we men found and marked our own mate. Otherwise, it was a bevy of women throwing themselves at you every minute of every day.

On the outside, that sounds like anything but a curse, but actually, it's horrible. You never have room to just breathe or be by yourself. Girls sneak into your room at night when you're sleeping and try to have s\*x with you. You can never know if they truly like you or are just compelled to. And it's hard to keep male friends because they always think their girlfriends will leave them for you.

Needless to say, with all that I had going on, when she just smiled at me then walked away, any doubts about her being my mate vanished. I took her out that same night, and every free moment I've had since has been spent with her.

"Matt, no woman would spend almost every single moment with a man she has no intention of getting serious with. You two have been inseparable for months. She'll say yes, and then you can nally bring her home to meet the family."

Oh, and that was another thing. I hadn't yet told her I was a wolf.

I was too afraid of scaring her off.

Everything was just a huge mess, and now I was panicking. "I'll just call her and cancel or reschedule."

I picked up my phone, ready to make the call and let fear take over, but her perfect face lit up my screen. Tesoro mio; my treasure. I would never do anything to disappoint her.

I put my phone away and took a deep breath. "Okay, how do I look, Bean? Should I change my shirt or maybe my hair?"

"Don't change a thing. Ever. You are perfect, Matt, you always have been. Now go get your girl." She spun me around and pushed me out the door of my room.

"You've got this. I know you do," she yelled behind me as I made my way down to the garage.

She was right. I had this.

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Taylor

I had a date tonight with Matt, and I was so excited and nervous. Whenever I spent time with him, it was a constant buttery party in my stomach. He made me feel so beautiful and so loved.

His voice sent chills down my spine, and every time he called me his treasure, my panties were soaked. But when he called and asked if I was free tonight, he sounded weird. He sounded nervous, and I was afraid he was going to leave me.

We had been seeing each other for six months, and the most we'd done was some heavy making out. A well-placed touch from him could have me cumming in seconds, but I wanted to feel all of him.

Whenever we got close, though, he would stop us. I could see that he wanted me as much as I wanted him, so what was stopping him from taking me?

I stood in my closet, searching and searching for the right outt. I wanted to be perfect for him, even if he was leaving me. My best friend Morgan was stretched out across my bed, just staring at me and eating Hot Cheetos. Offering zero help.

"Morgan! I thought you were coming over to help. Eating my f\*\*\*\*\*g snacks is not helping."

"b\*\*\*h, please. You could wear a tattered shirt and shit-stained sweatpants, and Matt's eyes would still light up. He worships the ground you walk on."

She didn't understand. She was happily single and didn't see the need to put so much effort into a date.

"Tonight is big, Morgan. I can feel it. So please help me nd something to wear. Then you can eat all my Cheetos when I'm gone."

She smiled and hopped off the bed. That girl would do anything for a good snack. We spent about twenty minutes going through every item in the closet before I was nally satished with my choice: a tight black knee-length pencil skirt and emerald green silk spaghetti strap top to make my eyes pop. I nished it off with my favorite four-inch pumps.

Only being 5'3 had its disadvantages, especially when the man I was dating was a full foot taller than me, but Matt loved me in heels, so I wore them as often as possible when we were together.

I decided to wear my natural curls in my hair, partly because I had spent too much time nding my outt and because I was too lazy to put any real time into it. A bit of black eyeliner, mascara, and clear lipgloss, and I was ready.

I paced my living room oor, checking my watch over and over.

"He's late, Morgan. He's never late. What if he's not coming?"

I looked over at her, begging her to x this, but Morgan just rolled her eyes and went back to scrolling f\*\*\*\*\*k on her phone.

"Morgan! This is—"

I was cut off by the doorbell, but I couldn't move. He was here, and now my nerves were on overdrive.

"Jesus, Taylor. You really are hopeless." She stood up and opened the door.

For some reason, I still couldn't move. I couldn't look over. What if he didn't like my outt. Was I overdressed?

"So, I'm really done with men for now, but I must admit, you're looking like a total snack tonight, Matt. She's in here hyperventilating over nothing—"

Morgan was cut off by Matt rushing past her to stand in front of me. He gently touched my face and lifted it up to meet his. "Are you alright, tesoro? What's wrong?"

He was always so damn sweet. I had never met anyone like him in my life. "You were late. I thought you had changed your mind about coming," I told him honestly.

He smiled, then leaned down to press his lips against mine.

"I'm so sorry, beautiful. You know I'd never stand you up. Parking was terrible. I thought of calling and just having you come down, but then I remembered: you're my treasure, and you deserve a man to come to the door to pick you up and drop you off. Nothing less."

Damn. He was amazing.

"You two disgust me. Now get out so I can watch my crime shows and snack in peace," Morgan interrupted.

He took my hand in his and led me from the apartment and down to his car. Once he had me settled in the passenger seat, he ran around to the driver's side and hopped in. "Have you always been such a gentleman, or am I just special?"

"You are more than special. You deserve to be spoiled, and my mom raised us to treat women with a certain level of respect. Her family is old school Italian; old-world values."

Ahhhh, so that's how he was able to slip into Italian like it was nothing. "I never knew you were Italian. Your last name doesn't exactly scream 'lasagna.'" I slapped my hand over my mouth and squeezed my eyes shut.

I did not just say that. I was so embarrassed, but when I heard his deep sexy laugh, I loosened up a bit. "That was terrible. I'm so sorry."

"Don't be. I love how you always make me laugh. And Stone is my father's family name. He met my mom when he was traveling through Italy after high school. Her family name is Giordano. Is that 'lasagna' enough for you?"

I rolled my eyes and laughed. "Yes, it's perfect. So, who do you look more like, your mother or your father?"

"I'd say I'm a decent mix of both. Believe it or not, there are blond hair, blue-eyed Italians out there—more than you'd think. My mom is one of them. My dad, the opposite: brown hair and hazel eyes. My hair and eyes are all mom, but my height, facial structure, body type are all from my dad. He's got a darker skin tone while mom's more on the pale side."

"Pale skin, huh? What would she think of my skin tone?"

He pulled up to the red light and looked over at me. "She would think it was beautiful, just like I do. We don't see race, and we never have. We just see the person. Yes, you're a woman of color, so what?" He shrugged a shoulder and turned back to continue his drive.

It was always clear to me that he didn't care that I was a black woman, but I was always curious about what his parents would think. Now I knew. He laced our hands together and pulled my knuckles to his lips.

I had dreams about this man's lips. Never in my life have I felt something so soft.

He looked at me and whispered, "You're perfect."

I couldn't handle all the compliments raining down on me, so I turned to the window and watched the scenery pass by.

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Pulling up to our destination, I looked up to see we were at one of the fanciest restaurants in town. Fleur de Lune had only opened three weeks ago, and the waiting list was insane. The chef had three Michelin stars, so I knew it was way out of my budget. Matt drove up to the valet, and after leaving his keys, he walked around and took my hand.

"Whoa, Matt. We can't afford this place. And how did you even get a reservation?" I asked, grabbing his arm and pulling him to a stop.

"This is Alaiia's restaurant. Xander bought it for her since she's so in love with food." Right, Alaiia. The female best friend that I've never met. Xander was Alaiia's husband and Matt's boss. It was getting hard keeping everyone straight. I didn't have any faces to go with their names, and he didn't seem in any rush for me to meet them.

He smiled down at me and pulled me forward towards the front door. When we entered, the hostess warmly greeted us and ushered us to a quiet booth in the back. It was cozy and intimate; I loved it.

I picked up the menu, and my eyes bulged at the prices. "Holy s\*\*t, man. The steak on here's an entire week's salary for me!"

Matt just laughed and took my hand. "You order whatever you want. I'm friends with the owner, so we're not paying what everybody else pays. I promise." He ordered us a bottle of wine I had no idea how to pronounce, so I decided to let loose and enjoy myself.

If this was our last night together, at least he'd put in the effort to make it memorable, so I'd enjoy this expensive-ass food. I ordered a huge juicy steak, a lobster tail, and the most amazing cheesy mashed potatoes I'd ever tasted. As we sat and ate our meal, the conversation owed freely.

This may have been one of our best dates ever, and the idea of it being our last made me sad. Matt seemed to notice the change in my mood and reached over to take my hand. "What's wrong, Taylor? Did you not like your dinner?"

"No, it was perfect. And I'll dream about those potatoes for weeks. It just feels like you may have brought me here for a reason, and it's making me nervous."

He took a deep breath and let go of my hand.

Oh, no.

"I did bring you here for a reason. I guess now is as good a time as any to discuss it. I've had a great time with you these past few months, some of the best of my life but—"

I couldn't do this. I could already feel my heart breaking. "Stop, Matt. Don't do this, okay? Let's just enjoy the rest of the night and part ways as friends. Can we do that?"

"But why? I don't want to be your friend, tesoro, I want—"

He didn't even want to remain friends? I thought I could at least have that, but maybe this was better for all of us.

"Excuse me. I'll just go grab a cab back to my apartment. Tell Alaiia that I appreciate her allowing me to dine here. It was amazing."

I stood up to go, but before I could take a step, Matt grabbed my arm.

"Taylor. Sit down and let me nish my sentence. Please."

Why?! Why did he have to actually say the words? I already knew what was coming; I had accepted it. He lifted my chin, pulling my eyes from my lap.

"Taylor, I'm not breaking up with you. I've been in love with you since the moment I saw you in that tiny little bunny costume. I'm trying to ask you to be my girlfriend. I want you to be mine. Please?"

"Oh, s\*\*t!"

He looked so confused at my reaction. I needed to clarify. "I'm sorry, Matt! I've just been so nervous about tonight. You've been so weird! I thought you didn't want to be with me. And I've never met your friends, but you always talk about them!"

I then lowered my voice to a whisper. "And you refuse to have s\*x with me. WHY won't you have s\*x with me?!"

A huge laugh burst out of him, and it pissed me off. This was serious. "What's so funny, Matt? I want to know."

"I'm sorry, tesoro, you're right. I just feel like I'm completely bombing this. Just give me a moment, please."

I took a gulp of my wine and waited for him to explain.

"So, I'll start with the biggest issue: the s\*x. All I have to do is catch a hint of your scent, and it brings out the animal in me. It makes me rock hard, painfully so. If I could have you riding my d\*\*k right this very moment, I'd do it without a second thought. But I know you. You've never been with a man before, and you've saved yourself for a reason. I respect that more than you know. I would never want you to give that special part of you to someone you're only dating. That's not fair to you."

I wouldn't admit it out loud, but that was a damn good explanation.

"And you haven't met my friends because I've been self-conscious about you meeting them. They're all incredible, and you'd love them, I'm just afraid that you won't want me once you truly know me."

"How could I not want you, Matt? You're all I want, all the time."

"It's better if I show you. Can I do that?"

Now I was getting worried. What would he have to show me that would make me not want the sexiest, sweetest man alive? "Okay, show me."

"Not here. Let's pay the check, and then I'll take you somewhere. I'll explain it all, I promise."

I swear, if he was taking me off somewhere to show me his custom "human hair sweater" collection, I'd lose my s\*\*t.