

Something Wonderful (Something Great Book 2)

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Dedication Â To my loves—hubby, Joshua and Kaitlin—thank you for all your support, especially when I'm on Facebook...lol! I would like to thank my street team. You are amazing and I can't thank you enough, especially my admins-Janie Iturralde and Elliot McMahon To Kim Rinaldi—Your feedback means the world to me. You're not afraid to let me know. I appreciate your honesty for helping me make this book awesome. To my PR, Damaris Cardinali—What would I ever do without you? Thanks for EVERYTHING you do and will do to get me out there. We make a great team! To Alexandra Weis—For giving me great feedback. I love sharing our crazy book ideas. And thank you for taking your time to look over mine when you could be writing. To Jennifer Miller—Thank you for swapping teasers with me, but most of all for your friendship. To Sam Stettner—for your continuous support in everything I write. I love you to the moon and back! I want to give thanks to Lisa from The Rock Stars of Romance for hosting the best blog tours! To Laura Hidalgo, who does amazing book covers. She has done all of mine. You are truly talented! To Esperanza Duarte and Jodi Shaw for being great editors and for polishing up my book. To Jane Soohoo—for taking the time to make sure my book is polished and ready to go. Thank you for everything! To Kitty Bowers—for being my number one cheerleader. I can't thank you enough for spreading the love of all my books. To Jenny Brewer—for loving this series so much, she runs Something Great Fan page. I can't thank you enough. How cool is that! To my breakfast club moms—thank you for ALL your support in books and in life—Rosie, Michelle, Gracie, Hung, Holly, and Patricia. Extra thanks to the three amazing friends. I'm excited to have their made-up quotes as part of my story. "Books! The other soul food." –Vanessa Strickler "Book hangovers, a girl's worst nightmare." –Ashley Garland "Book boyfriends are better because they are always there when we need them." –Pamela Joy Pope To my readers and bloggers—I can't thank you enough for falling in love with my characters. It means the world to me that you want to continue this journey with them. I hope you'll love Something Wonderful just as much, or if not more than Something Great. Thank you for your continued support, whether I write YA or NA. Your support means the world to me and I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Praise for:

Something Wonderful Â "Something Wonderful is truly something wonderful. M. Clarke/Mary Ting captures love, romance and forgiveness beautifully. One of 2014's MUST READS!"

Sammie's Book Club, for Book Lovers "Be mine, because I want to be yours. I want to give you forever. It doesn't get much better than that. Something Wonderful from M. Clarke is an amazing sequel! Everyone will wish they had the epic love of their lives like Max and Jenna."

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Romantic, Page turning good. Could not put this book down." **Janie, Crossangels** "Just when you think the art of storytelling couldn't possibly get any better, M. Clarke paints a delicate and refreshing masterpiece that will inspire, electrify, and melt your heart. Her exquisite and unforgettable talent is a rare jewel that you will treasure and enjoy over and over again." **Amber, The Wonderings of One Person. Â** "In the darkest times, when your trust is tested, love will conquer all. Something Wonderful gives us two stories of love, passion, and the ability to save someone who was once broken." **Brittany, Spare Time Book Â** "M. Clarke has done it once again. I am officially addicted to this series!" **Delphina, Delphina Reads too Much Â** "If you are looking for love, heartache, hot steamy sex and brothers that will rock your world this is the read for you!" **Bella, Paranormal Book Club** "This title says it all. It's so fitting for this book! It truly is Something Wonderful!" **Jennifer, Jeniâ€™s Bookshelf Â** M. Clarke/Mary Ting has done it again with the sequel to Something Great. It was better than the first. I highly recommend it! **Victoria, Novel Reality Enjoy a Sneak Peek of:** Pretty Little Dreams, book 2 of Pretty Little Lies by Jennifer Miller My Clarity by M. Clarke From Gods, book 1 by Mary Ting **Prologue Becky** What a crazy night. Everyone was wasted, including me. Beer bottles and red cups littered the place. Couples made out every way I turned. Most of the party guests were juniors in college, including me, but the senior who had invited us passed out on the sofa and had no idea about the mess he would find in the morning. As it was past two in the morning, and I didn't want to spend the night there, I decided to go home. As I looked for my roommate, everything moved in slow motion. I wouldn't have gotten so buzzed, but since it was Amber's turn to be the designated driver, I let myself go and drank as much as I wanted, even knowing I would regret it the next morning. Since I had just broken up with the guy I had been dating, I needed a night out. He turned out to be a jerk, but as far as the guys I'd been attracted to, that seemed to be my pattern lately. I was an asshole magnet. "Amber!" I yelled. The music pounding in my ears made it difficult to figure out if my voice carried. I opened the nearest bedroom door. Smoke filled the space and they held a joint in their hand, so I slammed the door. "Amber!" I called again by the bathroom. When I heard my name, I rushed in. "Amber?" I stopped from going in any further. Her hair snaked over to one side, and her hands rested on either side of the toilet seat bent over. "I need a minute." Her words echoed inside the toilet. A few seconds later, whatever she drank and ate poured out of her mouth. "Amber, you okay?" I grimaced and dropped next to her. "Yeah," she managed to say, flushing the toilet. After wiping her mouth with the back of her hand, she collapsed beside me. "I feel...awwwful. Let's go home." "You said...you weren't supposed to drink, remember? You drive. Me drink." I pointed at myself. I didn't feel sorry for her anymore. Anger rose to the surface. "What the fuuuck, Amber?" "Sorriry. I saw him...with...her," she sighed, somberly. Holding on to the sink, Amber stood up, stumbling until she got a hold of herself. "Come on." When I didn't respond, she grabbed my arms. With an irritated sigh, I pulled myself up. "I don't..." I started to say, but I lost my words and finally understood what she meant by seeing him. Her boyfriend had broken up with her and had started seeing some other girl right away. I sympathized, but it didn't matter. We were both wasted, and we had no way to get home. Amber tugged my arm. I had no idea where we were going as I let her lead the way. We passed the kitchen, the living room, and oh, crap...passed her asshole ex-boyfriend and somehow, we burst out of the house with our purses. The cool wind whipped against my face and made me alert, reminding me I'd left my jacket inside. Not only that, a few drops of rain landed on my arm, falling faster by the second. Shivering, I glanced at Amber, struggling to get her keys out of her purse. "We can't," I said, a bit more aware of the situation. "We're both wasted." "I feel better," she argued, pushing me aside to get in the car. I held the door open, hoping to calm her down. "Forget him. He's not good enough for you." Amber had already started the engine. "Get in," she barked, as tears dampened her eyes. "Please...get out of the car. We're both too drunk," I said forcefully, trying to snap her out of the buzz and make her come to her senses. "I can't be in the same room with them." The tears she held at bay streamed down her face. "How could he just move on like that?" Feeling her pain, my heart ached for her. If we were home, I would cry with her. "We'll stay away and hide in one of the rooms." Amber wiped her tears, and then she peered up to the sky. "I'm getting wet. You coming?" She reached for the door and missed, her coordination lacking. Finally, on her third try, she

managed to grab the door, forcing me to jerk back as she slammed it shut. "I'm serious. You can't drive." I desperately pounded on the window. My words didn't get across the urgency of the situation. I thought I had convinced her when she looked up at me again, but her mind apparently had been somewhere else. When your heart broke with that intensity, nothing mattered. You want the pain gone, even if you have to physically distance yourself from it. I understood. I had been there before. "It's not that far," she said. "Please...stay with me." When she realized I wasn't getting in the car, she sped away. Drenched from head to toe, I ran back into the house. Warm, smoky air wrapped around me, and I shivered from the drastic temperature change. I fumbled through my wet purse and took out my cell phone to dial Amber's cell. The pouring rain, the booming thunder, and the worst reception from her Bluetooth made it difficult to hear her voice. "Amber, come back. It's dark, it's pouring, and you're freakin' wasted." She was risking her life over a loser who wasn't good enough for her. "He broke my heart," she bawled. Her cry pierced my heart. I knew that cry. I've cried like that several times myself. I also knew it would be difficult to drive in that condition, not to mention the other reasons why she shouldn't be behind the wheel. "Amber!" I snapped. My heart pounded against my chest. I had a terrible feeling and I couldn't shake it. I was scared out of my mind and I didn't even know why. "Pull over. I'm coming to get you." Looking around the living room, I urgently searched for someone sober...anyone. "He's such an ass and I—" The next sound tore my world apart. It was worse than a boyfriend break up, worse than failing a class. You never think it would happen to anyone you know because at that age, you think you're invincible...untouchable...unbreakable. She yelled my name, then a loud screeching caused immense pain in my ear, and then silence fell as the call disconnected. It happened so fast it felt like a dream. My phone slipped out of my hand. I couldn't speak. I couldn't move. Then I knew. I just knew I'd never speak to her again. **Matthew** Sometimes life is cruel and fate doesn't work in your favor. I wondered what the hell I did to deserve this. Her family certainly didn't deserve it. As I sat there on a chair next to the hospital bed, my heart pumping into overdrive, I gazed at my Tessa hooked up to a bunch of machines, the only things keeping her alive. She was already brain dead and bleeding internally. Tessa...my Tessa...was gone, and yet her hand was still warm as I held it to my cheek. My lips quivered and every cell, every nerve, every muscle in me shook. Panic gripped me...so tight, constricting, preventing me from moving, preventing me from breathing. I was running out of time; *she* was running out of time. I spoke to her, desperately praying for a miracle. "Tessa, baby. How am I supposed to let you go? How do I breathe without you? Don't do this to us. Come back to me. I know you can hear me." I didn't think I had any tears left to shed, but when I realized that would be the last time I would ever see her...touch her...speak to her face to face again, I lost it. "Why did you run off and get in that stupid car?" I reprimanded. "And why the fuck did it have to rain that day? If you leave me, you're taking everything good in my life. You're going to take my heart...my soul...my will to live. Do you hear me? Your parents need you. Your sister needs you. I need you. If you want to punish me, then fine. Just...come...back." I let go of her hand and rubbed my face with my palms. My throat made an awful grunting noise, but no tears came. I was utterly drained, dried out. The life had been sucked out of me and all my will had been spent. Letting go of what I loved hurt, but holding onto something I thought was meant to be forever was killing me. Though I knew it was time to let her go, I couldn't...I just couldn't. "You know what's really fucked up?" I continued. "Your parents have to decide whether to pull the plug and let you die. How the hell are they going to live with themselves knowing they gave up? How the hell am I going to live with myself knowing that I stood by and let it happen? You tell me?" Standing up, I hovered over her and gave her one last soft kiss on her lips. It was the most painful kiss I'd ever given anyone. I lost it again when I buried my face into the side of her neck to inhale her scent. I needed to memorize her smell, memorize the feel of her soft skin, memorize...*her*. I was afraid I would forget her, afraid she would disappear in my mind. I was terrified I would forget how much I loved this woman. In desperation, I started shouting at her. "Wake up! Wake up!" "Matthew." Max placed his hand on my shoulder. "It's time to let her go. The doctor is on his way." I didn't know what I would have done if Max hadn't been there. Even understanding what he had said, I didn't budge. My body refused to listen. "You need to step aside. You had your time. Her family is waiting." "I can't, Max. I fuckin' can't. How am I

supposed to walk out of here? This is where I belong...with her. The moment she dies, I'll die with her." I looked at Tessa again. Hoping... Wishing... Praying... I waited for her to open her eyes, staring at her so the first thing she would set her beautiful eyes on was me. "You'll make it through, Matt. I promise. You have your family; we'll help you get through this. You're not alone." Max's shaky voice didn't help the situation. He hurt too, but he was being strong for me. Max meant every word he said, but it wasn't enough. The pain cut too deep and it had sliced through whatever faith I had left. When the doctor came in, followed by Tessa's family, Max grabbed my shirt and pulled me to the other side. "Please...let's wait one more day," I pleaded wearily. "Matthew," Tessa's father started to speak in between taking small breaths. He tried to contain himself. "She's gone. And even if somehow there was a miracle, she wouldn't be the same Tessa." He was right, but I hoped he would change his mind. "No," I said quietly as I watched the doctor do his thing in horror. "No...no, no, NOOOOO!" Max dragged me out of the room. He knew I would've attacked the doctor if he hadn't restrained me. Through the window, I watched her family sob, and I did the same in Max's arms, feeling helpless, like someone had ripped out my heart. "It's my fault, Max. It's my fault. I...let...her...go." I bawled. My body trembled in Max's hold as I let out a gut-wrenching cry that poured out of my soul until nothing was left of me. My body and mind had disconnected and I became lost to the emptiness. Air...no air. I needed air. I couldn't breathe. My air, my purpose, my will to live had been sucked out of me. My world shattered that day. In some ways, it broke me forever. I cursed at life and I cursed at God. I had been damned to hell, but I didn't care. I was dead anyway. **Chapter 1 Jenna** "Becky!" I exclaimed, running toward the open front door. "Let me help you with that." Grabbing the tail end of the Christmas tree, I lifted it up to my waist and helped her carry it to the living room next to the television. Thank God we had wooden floors. The pine needles left a scattered trail and my head spun at the thought of having to sweep them up. "You okay, Jenna?" Becky asked worriedly, placing her hand on my shoulder. I must have looked flustered. "Yeah...just...nothing." I smiled, inhaling the fresh scent that spiraled into my nostrils, imagining myself in an enchanted forest. "Doesn't that smell heavenly?" Becky proudly looked at the tree with her arms crossed as I mimicked her stance. "Yeah, it does." Gazing at her, I scowled. "Why didn't you ask me to go with you?" "You had company. Speaking of which, is Max still here?" Taking off her red scarf and black coat, she flung them on the sofa. "No, he left a little while ago. He's going to stop by the office, then come back around noon." Becky headed to the kitchen, coming back with a broom and started to sweep the pine needles into a pile. I wanted to help her, but we only had one broom, so I became creative and tore off some paper towels, got down on my hands and knees, and swept up some needles. "Jenna? What are you doing?" From her tone, she didn't like my ingenuity. I stopped and peered up to her. "Helping, silly. We only have one broom." "Get up," she demanded, sounding a little irate. Her intonation softened. "Stop. I can do this. It's no big deal." Standing up, I met her stare, baffled by her expression. Without a word, I headed to the kitchen and threw the paper towel in the trashcan. As grateful as I was, part of me felt helpless. Max had been there day and night taking care of me, though I felt much better since the car accident. What I needed to do was get out of the apartment. I wasn't the type to mope around and have everyone treat me as if I couldn't lift a finger. "Jenna." Becky stuck her head into the kitchen, looking guilty for slightly blowing up at me. "I'm sorry. I'm not mad at you. I just didn't want you to overdo it." "I'm fine. I wish everyone would stop treating me like I just got out of the hospital." I rolled my eyes. Becky's eyes popped open in disbelief. "But...you...did." Then she went back to sweeping. Leaning back against the kitchen cabinet, I crossed my arms in annoyance. "Is that the reason why you didn't ask me to go pick out a tree with you?" I asked loud enough so she could hear me. I was trying to brush the hurt aside, but I couldn't help the way I felt. We had always gone tree shopping together. It was a tradition. How could she go alone? Becky came inside the kitchen and stood in front of me. "I'm just thinking of you, dummy." Draping her arms around me, she squeezed me tightly and spoke with sincerity and tenderness. "Don't ever end up in the hospital again. I thought I'd lost you." A sudden pang pierced my heart. I could imagine how she felt. If she had been the one in the hospital, I would have felt the same. Tears pooled in my eyes and one drop managed to escape at the corner. When she released me, I quickly wiped it away and she did the same when she turned from me. "Anyway," she continued. "Who would pay

the other half of the apartment cost?" she snorted, trying to hide the fear and sadness as she walked out of the kitchen. I was deeply touched, and though I was the one who had physically suffered, I understood—Becky, Kate, Nicole, Max, and especially Matthew—what they had been through because of me. I felt guilty for being so stupid, driving while clearly incapacitated by gut-wrenching sobbing, hurt, and anger; all because I thought Max had cheated on me with his ex, Crystal. I still hadn't even told my parents what had happened, since they were on a cruise. "Is that all you care about?" I followed behind her, stealing the broom away so fast she had no idea what was coming, and started to sweep. "Good. My cleaner is back." She didn't try to stop me this time. Maybe she just needed a hug or assurances that I was fine. "I need to run some errands and head to Starbucks since I ran out of coffee. I'm going to bring my laptop and read some query letters while I'm there. Do you or Max want anything?" "No, we're good, but thanks." Becky looked deep in thought, then dashed into her bedroom, made some noise, and came out with several small boxes in her hands, as I finished sweeping the last pine needles into a pile. "Let's decorate the Christmas tree before I go." "Sounds good." I steadied the broom against the wall. Placing the boxes down, Becky went to the kitchen and brought back a bowl of water as I opened the boxes. Kneeling down, she poured it into the container surrounding the base of the tree. "There, now drink up and stop shedding your greens and make our place smell like we're in the middle of the forest." "Here, you get to put up the first one," I said, handing her an ornament. It was a frame with a picture of the two of us. We had taken it when we first moved into this apartment. Taking it from my hand, she looked at it with soft eyes. Then, she looped the string on a section of branch. After putting the first ornament in place, we draped white lights around the whole tree. This was kind of tricky, since they always seemed to tangle. We hurriedly hung the other ornaments. We finished by placing the angel on top, and decided not to turn on the lights until that night. After Becky and I hugged, she went out with her workbag, while I headed straight to the computer, waiting for Max to return. While I was surfing the Internet, my phone buzzed with a text. Surprisingly, it was from Luke. Not only did he apologize again for the way he acted when we broke up, he asked to see me. The last text I'd sent to him, I told him I was seeing Max and that there could never be anything between us. I guess he wasn't giving up. I didn't know what else to do except to ignore him. **Chapter 2 Becky** Jenna had no idea how difficult it was for me to see her lying in a hospital bed, so helpless. She didn't know I had lost a good friend before; a friend who happened to have been my roommate. I was too embarrassed to tell Jenna because Amber had been under the influence of alcohol when she wrecked. I should've been a better friend and forced her not to drive. Not only did she die in that accident, but she had taken someone else's life as well. That was unforgivable, but it wasn't my story to share. My friend had passed away because of a terrible mistake, and I know somewhere she's feeling a whole lot of guilt and making amends for what she had done. Selfishly, I was glad I wasn't the one who took someone's life. I'm also glad my friend would never know what she had done. I don't think she'd have ever forgiven herself, so in a way, fate somehow spared her, but not her parents. That made me sober up right away. Since that day, I had never allowed any of my friends to drive drunk, even if I had to steal their car keys. I spent many days missing her and I drowned my sorrows, sometimes not in a good way. So, I decided to get a roommate, hoping that would help me move on. Not that I wanted to forget her; I just wanted someone around. I had friends, but they were mostly party friends. When Jenna became my roommate, her goody-two-shoes ways made me reform some of my behavior. I stopped cussing around her, because she would flinch or become edgy when I did. She was so innocent and naïve, it made me like her even more, not to mention her "goodness" rubbed off on me...somewhat. Nicole and Kate also came into our lives shortly thereafter when we ended up on a group project together. We were great friends who were meant to last, even after college. Though I still partied during our senior year, I didn't party as hard as my junior year. I didn't have a good reputation with the boys like Jenna did. Guys went after her, not only because she was beautiful, but also because she wasn't the type to go out with just any guy. She was like a trophy they would try to win, but couldn't. So conquering her meant they would have to be someone pretty special. As for me, I made out with enough guys to lose count, but I wasn't a slut. I'd had two actual boyfriends, though not long term, so I was more experienced in the "making out" department

than the “long-term relationship” department. I always hoped one day, I would meet that guy who would lift me off the ground and never put me back down again. That was how Jenna told me she felt with Max. I was so happy that she found her forever—hopefully. Starbucks was packed with a line to the door. I thought it would have slowed down, but the cooler weather attracted more customers. The thought of leaving entered my mind, but I realized I was practically high from the first whiff of the scent of coffee. I didn’t care if I had to stand in line all day. I had to have my coffee fix. I was totally addicted to caffeine and my favorite latte. After I picked up my drink, I headed toward the table in the corner near the front door. Since it was difficult to find a table at Starbucks no matter what time of the day, I was more than happy to find a table with two chairs. Perfect! Hopefully, nobody would sit across from me. Taking out my laptop from my oversized bag, I opened it up and clicked on the file I’d named “query.” I was so behind it wasn’t funny. I had put work on hold while Jenna was in the hospital. Unable to think clearly that whole week, I stopped trying to read since I couldn’t give it my full attention, and that would be totally unfair to the authors. Before I even opened my first file, a group of women who started giggling like schoolgirls distracted me, whispering things like, “He’s hot...let’s get his attention...ask him to sit with us.” I couldn’t help laughing, and being the curious type, I had to look. Shifting my eyes away from the screen, I peeked up to see him standing in line. He was wearing an Angels baseball cap, a dark gray sweater, and jeans. Nicely built, he was tall with broad shoulders, and an ass anyone would love to squeeze. He was definitely swoon-worthy from the back. He reminded me of someone, but I couldn’t figure out who. When he turned to the side and winked at the ladies who were ogling him, my heart did a funny flip and I died right then and there. Actually, I wanted to bolt out the door, but he would see me. Oh God! I didn’t want to see Matthew again after our last encounter. That’s when he had told me to wash his sweater after I purposely, though I made it look like an accident, dumped the leftovers on him. Not only that, he had the audacity to ask me out. If he looked a little more to his left, he would see me staring at him, so I shot my eyes down to the screen. Ducking my head as low as I could without making it obvious, I prayed that he wouldn’t see me. I didn’t know why I felt this way around him. My heart fluttered and butterflies danced inside my stomach. In all my dating years, I had never been like this in front of a guy. In fact, I made the boys feel like how I’m feeling right now. Damn! I had to break out of it somehow. This feeling was too much for me to handle and I didn’t like it at all. Hearing the cashier giggle meant only one thing. She was flirting with him or vice versa, but I didn’t care. I just wanted him gone. When I heard his footsteps, I held my breath, hoping he wouldn’t notice me. I didn’t know what he would say or do, but from what I recalled of our last confrontation, he would probably say something egotistical and get me all riled up. When he passed by, I slowly exhaled the breath I was holding, knowing he would be gone as soon as I felt the cold breeze from the door swinging open. I couldn’t understand how his mere presence sent blazing heat through every inch of me. Just when my heart had settled down, the chair across from me slid out. How rude! He or she didn’t even ask if the seat was taken. Great! Playing the same game, I refused to look up and acknowledge the uncouth person. After a few seconds, a sound vibrated through my ear. He was definitely male judging from the deep sound of him clearing his throat. Thinking he was doing it out of impulse or simply something in his throat, I ignored him until he did it again, begging for my attention. He nudged his feet lightly against mine at the same time. With a huff, I flashed my eyes directly into his and heat infused through me. I couldn’t look away; I think I even drooled a little. As I desperately tried to break away from the spellbinding trance he had over me, I couldn’t move or speak until his deep voice and that sexy grin snapped me out of it...somewhat. “Hello, Becca.” He dragged the last sound of my name out as if it was the ending of a song. Leaning toward me, he crossed his arms on the table and checked me out. I wore a fitted black sweat suit from Victoria's Secret, and my hair was tied in a high ponytail. Feeling his eyes practically undressing me, and irate that he called me by the wrong name, I spoke out. “I don’t know who you have confused me with, but I’m not Becca. My name is Becky,” I scowled. “Don’t worry. I remember your name, and I never forget a pretty face. I just like to call you Becca. It’s cute. It has a nice ring to it.” “Then don’t expect me to answer.” Did he say I was pretty? Matthew ignored my last comment, reached over to grab my cup, and took a long whiff. “Hazelnut, such a girly drink.” Then he placed it down and took

a sip of his. Watching him made me thirsty, so I took one too. "Becca, what are you doing?" His eyes burned through the computer screen...actually through me. "None of your business," I snapped lightly, so he would get the point that I didn't want to be bothered. Matthew beamed a mischievous grin that caused all sorts of funny flips in my stomach. He was simply gorgeous. "I made you answer when I called you Becca." Grrr! He was right; I did. Knowing he had the upper hand, I changed the subject. "Do you mind? I have work to do. Some of us actually have to work." His eyebrows narrowed together, pinching in the center. A part of me felt bad. I shouldn't have said that, but then again, that's what he got for being an ass—albeit a *hot* ass. "You shouldn't read on the computer screen so much. It's not good for your eyes." Matthew leaned back into his chair, spreading his long legs, while his eyes continued to fixate on me. Not knowing how to respond, I decided to ignore him and shifted my eyes back to the screen. I'd hoped he would get the point that I wasn't in a talking mood. Actually, my nerves were unsteady and I didn't know what to say, but he kept right on rolling with whatever he thought this was. Matthew tapped my shoes with his, making me look up at him. "You didn't answer me," he said, giving me that sly grin. I pulled my legs back so he couldn't touch me again. "Why don't you talk to those ladies behind you instead? I'm sure they have nothing better to do. Go bug them." I pointed to the table where the group of women sat. Their eyes never left him, and I could tell they were homing in on our conversation. Matthew didn't even bother to look in the direction I pointed. He didn't seem interested at all. "I'd rather stay here. I think you like me here too." With his eyes intentionally locked on mine, he took a big gulp of his drink, and EVER so slowly, licked away some that escaped with a long, seductive stroke of his tongue. Watching him made me quiver *everywhere*. My face became as hot as my drink, and naughty thoughts rushed through my mind...I wanted to be the cup he just licked. Managing to snap out of my trance, I said hastily, "Fine. Suit yourself. I'm not going to talk to you." My eyes went straight to my laptop, but since I was dying to know, I asked him a question. "Why are you even here? You don't live near here." "I thought you weren't talking to me?" he smirked, but he continued. "Max asked me to stop by your place and bring some files over. We have some business to discuss." He leaned over. "I actually work for a living, too, in case you didn't know, but I also like to have lots of fun. I could show you what I mean someday." I stared at him as my jaw dropped. Show me what fun meant? I didn't need him to show me. I practically invented the word. No way would I allow this arrogant jerk to show me what he meant by fun. "I don't think so," I replied with a sting of attitude. Without a comeback, Matthew stood up, shifted his baseball cap and quietly pushed his chair back in while I watched his every move, trying not to make it obvious. "Gotta run. Duty calls. Have a nice day." "How long will you be in my apartment?" I asked casually. "Couple of hours, I suppose. Why? Would you like me to stay longer?" "No. I just wanted to calculate how long I need to be here so I don't run into you again," I said in monotone, with a twitch of a brow—playful yet serious. He let out a chuckle. "That's a first." What did he mean by that? When I thought he was out the door, I took in a deep breath. He was stealing my oxygen and I didn't even know it...that thief. He even took a piece of me with him, but I didn't know what it was. All I knew was that I kind of missed his presence and our awkward, not-so-friendly conversation. I was just about to click on a query letter when a shadow loomed over me, getting smaller. "Looks like an important document. I like what you're reading. The file must be called the blank screen," he whispered in my ear. His hot breath brushed against the side of my neck and heat rushed to the core of my being, making me dissolve into the chair. I didn't want him to stop. When he opened the door, the cool draft took his warmth away. I was upset at myself; now he knew I had nothing on my screen. I was also sure he knew I was too nervous around him to even *think* of work. Freakin' great! **Chapter 3 Jenna** It had been a week since I was released from the hospital. Max came over every single day to take care of me, even though I was perfectly fine on my own. I also had Becky if I needed anything. Max threatened to hire a full time nurse if I didn't cooperate, which would have been a waste of money, so I agreed. My sweet Max; he was too good to be true, but sometimes too much to handle. Matthew came over on several occasions to discuss work, but somehow Becky always managed to have scheduled a meeting or something. I had a strange feeling she purposely avoided him, and I knew why. I assumed she had a crush on him, since I had never seen her act so nervous around a guy before. Max and Matthew decided I should

transfer to Matthew's department, which I was thrilled about. I would be helping him with the layout of the magazine and I couldn't wait to get back to work. Since I would be under Matthew's supervision, Max agreed that I could start as soon as he felt I was ready. I was one hundred percent ready to get out of the apartment and get back to reality. I just needed a car. "Ready for car shopping, Jenna?" Max asked, standing against the doorframe, looking as handsome as ever. Max dressed casually today—a pair of jeans and a V-neck brown sweater that hugged his firm chest nicely. Since Max hardly wore a jacket, the fact that he wore one today indicated it must be freezing outside. As if time stood still, I took a moment to stare at this gorgeous man, taking a mental picture of him in my mind. He was too good to be true; not only did he have the most generous heart; he was so good to me. Occasionally, I would wonder if I had dreamed him up. Perfectly combed, Max's hair was never out of place. His smooth, clean-shaven face made me miss that gruffly, sexy, I-don't-give-a-crap appearance, but then again, he looked delicious either way. Every time I looked at him, I saw a respectable, genuine, powerful, possessive, and sexy man. To put it in easy words, Max was hot, and I could never help the direction my thoughts took around him. I loved the way he made me feel when he kissed me, touched me, and especially when he was inside me. I could already feel that electrifying sensation, and he hadn't even touched me yet. "Ready as ever," I cheered. Max helped me slip into my long coat. After grabbing my purse, I shouted goodbye to Becky, though I didn't know if she heard me since she hadn't come out of her room. Several days before, I had explained to Max what kind of car would fit my budget. He had agreed, but somehow we ended up at the BMW dealer. Was he looking for a car for himself? Surely, he remembered we were supposed to be shopping for me. "Max, what are we doing here?" I stepped out of the car and gladly took his extended hand. Without answering, he wrapped his arms around me and tried to block the freezing wind that whipped around us while he led the way. An employee held open the double glass door for us as we entered. Talk about customer service. "Good morning, Mr. Knight," a salesman greeted, coming toward us with a huge, warm grin. He offered his hand to Max. "It's good to see you again." "Kenny," Max said, shaking his hand, then he turned his attention to me. "This is Jenna." From their friendly greeting, I assumed Max had been there many times before. "Hello, Jenna." Kenny took my hand and gave me the biggest grin. After the polite professional greeting, he led us toward the back. "Max, where are we going and why are we here?" I narrowed my eyes at him. He was up to something and he didn't let me know what. Lacing his fingers through mine, we followed behind Kenny. "I'm leasing a car for work...for you," he whispered in my ear. I halted, but my body weight did nothing to anchor him. Pulling me to his chest, he tried to calm me down by caressing my arm as we continued to follow Kenny. "I can't take the car." My tone was intense, but soft. I didn't want to make a scene. "It will belong to the company. You'll be driving around for meetings. It's the company policy. We'll be paying for your gas and insurance too." Though I liked the sound of everything he told me, I wasn't sure if it was the company's policy or his. "Then why didn't you let me know?" "Would you have come if I told you?" He planted his lips on my forehead when I frowned. "No." I pouted as we stepped out to a lot full of cars. "Don't pout, Jenna. You make me all crazy inside and if you don't cooperate, I'll make a scene." He winked, giving me that wicked sexy grin. Already weakened by the wink, I didn't say a word. "Here is the beauty," Kenny exclaimed, opening the passenger door, and giving us space to peek inside. "What do you think, Jenna?" Max asked. He looked so proud; I couldn't break his bubble. "It's beautiful," I replied, and it was. "It's perfect." It was sleek, black with black leather interior. "Come sit inside with me," Max ordered politely, forcing me into the driver's seat. "You need to feel the car." I never knew what it was about men and their cars, but for me, I only needed something reliable and I'd be perfectly happy. After admiring the inside—the dashboard, the high tech gadgets, and the smooth steering wheel with wood trim, Max asked me to turn on the engine and we went for a test drive. I had to admit, I didn't want to let go of this car. The ride was smooth, sturdy, and it turned the corner as if it were gliding on air. Yup, I liked this car way too much. If I compared the car to a woman the way most men did, I would say the curve of her luscious body would make any man stop dead. Just one look would leave him greedily wishing for one. The engine purred softly like a kitten, but roared like a lion when at full speed. The tantalizing package could make someone explode with hunger and want. Max never took his eyes off me as I

drove. I think I know why. I knew for sure I had the happiest grin on my face. I must have looked like a little girl who'd opened up a brand new beautiful doll and it wasn't even Christmas. After I parked the car back at the dealership, we headed to Kenny's office. After pulling out a chair for me, Max pulled out his. I thought about how we were still at the dating stage and wondered when or if Max would stop pulling out chairs for me like a perfect gentleman. Most guys I'd seen stopped acting charismatic when they officially became a couple, but I hoped Max never would. "We just need to take care of some little details. We can finish the rest of the paperwork with your secretary, Mr. Knight, if that is what you prefer." Kenny muttered, shuffling papers in front of him. "Thank you," Max said. "We do have things to do." "Great. I just need to know what color." Max looked at me for an answer, but instead of giving him one, I kept my lips sealed. Feeling somewhat annoyed at him for not letting me know about all this before we came, I decided to be a little naughty and playful. "What color would you like, Jenna?" Max asked. "Orange," I said, crossing my arms. He raised his brow at me while the corner of his lips curled, and his expression stayed there longer than I had expected it to. Turning to Kenny, he said, "Black." "Black," Kenny repeated, typing something on his computer, then turned to Max again. "How about the color of the interior?" "Lime green," I sputtered. Max tilted his head and gave me a hot, evil grin, as if he was going to punish me. "Black," he said to Kenny. "Black," Kenny repeated. Then he asked a bunch of other short questions about window tinting, navigator, and other requests I had no desire to pay attention to. Since I wasn't cooperating, Max stopped asking me what I wanted. I couldn't believe I was acting like a child, especially in front of Kenny. After they completed the deal, Max and I shook Kenny's hand; he held the most amusing grin on his face, as if he had just watched a comedy show. When we got to Max's Porsche, he opened the passenger door for me, and then walked around to get into the driver's side. "I hope you like your orange car, babe," he said, chuckling lightly. I wanted to thank him, but at the same time, I felt so guilty. "Max, I can afford my own car. Was it because I told you I could only get a specific kind? You've already done so much for me. I can't take this, too. I feel awfully guilty." Max cupped my face with both of his hands. "Don't feel that way. I want to take care of you. Let me make you happy; that makes me happy too. Don't take it away." Sighing, he placed his forehead on mine, then his lips tenderly stroked mine. It was so soft and gentle, yet powerful, making me want more. When he pulled away, I slowly broke out of my daze and watched him do the same, as his eyes set on mine with lust, waiting for my reply. After what he had just said, how could I refuse? I wanted to make him happy and if a car was one way, then I would have to let it go. "Okay," I sighed, but I barely got the word out. Max was already devouring me with his lips again. Shortly after, he let go with the pull of his teeth on my bottom lip. A soft, sensual growl escaped his mouth while his hand ran over my breast, and then stopped. "I don't want to give them a free show," he said. "Let's get out of here before I really give them one." "Where are we going?" I asked, feeling electric tingles throughout my body. "Back to our place, Ms. Mefferd. You've been very naughty today. You have no idea how turned on I am right now. I'm going to have to punish you until you can't take it anymore." Then he drove off with the thunderous roar coming from his car. Holy Jesus! I thought I'd just combusted from his hot words and the anticipation of what he was about to do to me.

Chapter 4 Becky Max and Jenna had gone car shopping so I had the apartment to myself. I didn't mind having Max over, but it was nice to have some solitude. I hadn't planned on going out, so I stayed in my PJs and didn't even bother to brush my hair. Looking at myself in the mirror, I saw my hair was wild, kind of sexy, and made me look like a hooker. Laughing, I grabbed my empty water glass from last night and headed toward the kitchen. The aroma of my favorite thing to eat for breakfast filled my nostrils, and my stomach cramped deeply with hunger. Wow, how strange! Someone was cooking. Had I misunderstood Jenna? I could've sworn they'd left. Feeling groggy, I didn't even bother to reply back when she had said she was leaving. I figured she would assume I was asleep since I didn't answer. "Jenna?" I murmured. I started blinking, wondering if what I saw was real. A stranger loomed in front of me, I was about to scream when I realized I knew that masculine figure. I took in how good he looked in dark navy slacks and a pin striped, black and blue dress shirt. He had the sleeves rolled midway up his arms. The shirt clung nicely to his upper body, and he was way too sexy for my eyes. Matthew was cooking. He was using my kitchen utensils and my food without

even asking. "Wh...wh...what are you doing here and h...how did you get inside?" I stuttered. Then the empty glass slipped out of my hand, crashing onto the floor and splattering glass shards around me. He flinched, and then his vision went straight to my top, then down to the floor. Shit! I wasn't wearing a bra and my T-shirt was form-fitting and midriff-baring. "Sorry to scare you." He reached for the broom that was in the space between the refrigerator and the stove. "Max and Jenna let me in. I stopped by to bring you a cup of hazelnut, and since I hadn't eaten breakfast, I assumed you hadn't either. I thought I'd cook some for us." He brought me a cup of my favorite coffee and he cooked me eggs? No guy had ever cooked for me before. No guy ever bothered to find out my favorite coffee either; recalling when he smelled my coffee at our last encounter...that was smooth. When he came toward me, I crossed my arms and retreated, uncertain how much of my breasts he saw. That's when I jerked my leg up and yelped in pain. I had stepped on glass while barefoot. Matthew's expression turned from boyish grin to a look of concern. "Don't move. Let me help you." I wanted to refuse, the blood pooling under my foot made me so nauseous I had no other choice. Planting my hand on the cabinet door for support, I waited for Matthew's help. Quickly he swept a clear path on the floor. With one effortless move, he picked me up and headed for my bedroom. As he carried me, I held my breath in fear that somehow I would let him know I was attracted to him. His bulging muscles flexed against my back as he held me steady. When he laid me down on my unmade bed, I thought about pulling him on top of me and making it look like I had accidentally done it, but I resisted by looking away. If I looked him in the eyes, I would never want to look away. Since I still had my arms crossed over my breasts, he covered them with my blanket. That was considerate of him, since most men I knew would be gawking. Especially since I'd been told I had a "nice set" that many women envied. I was also impressed at how calm he was and how willing to take care of me. "Where are your medical supplies?" Matthew raked his hair back, causing his hard toned muscles to flex as he looked concerned. I hoped he wouldn't do that again. He did it so appealingly. "In the kitchen. Top right cabinet over the sink." Matthew headed to the kitchen. After the sound of a few cabinets opening and closing, he came back with a small bag and some paper towels. "This is going to hurt, just a little. I'm going to have to take out the glass." "Okay," I nodded. Though the pain was bearable compared to the first initial stab, the sight of blood got me all riled up. I could never be a nurse or any profession that involved seeing blood. After Matthew took the glass out, he cleaned my wound, wrapped a bandage over it, and left the room. I heard him back in the kitchen, so I assumed he was cleaning the mess for me. He wasn't a big jerk after all. After I changed my top, I hobbled to the table where he set the dishes of eggs and coffee. "Thank you," I said sincerely, getting lost in his hazel eyes. Looking through his thick, long eyelashes, he winked at me, making my heart skip a beat. I had to stop allowing myself to feel these feelings. He was Max's brother and he would be around a lot, so I would have to get used to his presence and try to be his friend. "Becca, what do you do exactly? I mean I know you're an agent, but I really don't know what agents do," he asked, giving me his full attention after he shoved a forkful of eggs in his mouth. After swallowing the rich, sweet coffee, I explained. He asked me if he could read some of the query letters, and of course, I told him they were confidential. He gave me a frown that was too adorable, so I focused on his chest. Big mistake. Then I couldn't stop staring at his pecs. When he probed with more questions about what I looked for in query letters, I told him I liked romance novels and that I basically looked for potential book boyfriends. "Book boyfriends?" He chuckled. As I watched, his chest moved to the rhythm of his laugh. "Really?" He took his last bite and chugged his coffee. "Yes, really." I had already finished my plate since I was too nervous to talk. "Is that like for people who can't get one in real life?" He was totally amused by the notion. "No, silly." I giggled. "Readers want books that help them escape from the daily routine of life. Many of these romance books have a swoon-worthy, gorgeous guy with six pack abs, who can deliver wild, hot sex." The thought made me turn red, and I froze when he gave me a heated look. Then his eyes concentrated on my lips, shifted to my breasts, then back up to my eyes. When I said 'wild, hot sex,' I just described him and what he could potentially do for me. Gravitating toward me, his eyes locked lustfully on mine. His lips were inches away as they parted to speak, and I didn't know how he got so close to me. "I would like to be your book boyfriend," he said with the hottest sound that could sing out of his

luscious, lick-able mouth. The puff of his breath on my lips sizzled way down to my sex. He reached out to my face, his thumb sensually sliding, feather-light to touch my bottom lip with one long, slow stroke. As I watched his tongue glide over his bottom lip at the same time, I quivered beyond control.

Jeanella's confidence and trust in Max continues to grow, and life seems to be on track. Then Crystal decides to pursue a sexual harassment lawsuit, and Jeanella's world turns upside down. Once again, she wonders if she will ever be enough for Max. Jeanella is forced to make a decision; stay and fight for her man or leave him for good.

Becky's unexpected friendship with Matthew continues to blossom, as they try to define the boundaries of their relationship; but a one-night stand threatens to ruin it all. As Matthew's feelings for Becky grow, he's torn between guilt and heartache over his deceased fiancée. Can Becky break through his wall and help him heal?

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