



"I am officially in love with  
The Alexander family."

--Smitten by Reading

*the*  
**THINGS**  
**I DO**  
*for* **YOU**

**bonus**

NYT & USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR  
AND 2019 RITA® AWARD WINNER

*m. malone*

(BONUS CHAPTER) THE  
THINGS I DO FOR YOU

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M. MALONE



## Chapter 21

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*Many months later...*

Raina took a big bite of a chocolate chip cookie, reveling in the taste of pure sugar. The horrible pregnancy nausea had finally gotten better once she hit her second trimester, thankfully. Poor Nick had been almost as sick as she was watching her throw up so much.

Julia entered the kitchen carrying an empty bowl that had originally contained her famous potato salad. They were gathered at Jackson's house as usual taking advantage of the perfect weather.

"There you are, honey. Nick was just looking for you."

Raina shrugged sheepishly. "I snuck away to get another cookie. I made them so I should get extra, right?"

Julia chuckled. “Sounds right to me. Nick tells me you’ve been baking a lot.”

Once she’d mastered chocolate cupcakes, she’d moved on to cookies. It was something to take her mind off her approaching due date. She rubbed her belly absently. She only had two weeks left but it felt like an eternity. Although Julia was fond of reminding her that she’d miss this time once she had an infant to take care of.

In fact, maybe she should find her sexy husband and ask him to take her home.

Raina stepped out into the backyard, smiling at Bennett as she passed by. Elliott was behind a table jamming along to the music blaring from the speakers. In the distance, Matt and Penny swayed to a beat all their own. She’d already said hi to his twin sister, Mara, earlier. Even Grant had made an appearance. Several groups of children, some she’d never seen before, ran by shrieking and laughing.

One day, her child would be out there, too.

She couldn’t wait.

“Have you seen Nick?” she asked Ridley, who was busy rearranging the food on one of the buffet tables.

“Sure, he was just... oh, there he is!” Ridley waved him over.

“Is everything okay?” Nick asked, looking between them.

Raina winked. “Everything is perfect. I just figured we could sneak away a little early.”

Ridley covered her ears. “La, la, la. I’m not listening!”

They all laughed until Raina stopped suddenly. A sudden sharp pain took her breath away. She looked down to see a large wet stain on her leggings. “Oh my god.”

“Raina?” Nick followed her gaze down to the wet spot.

“My water just broke,” she whispered.

By this time, everyone was clustered around them, and Eli had cut the music. Matt and Penny rushed over to see what was happening.

“Okay, it’s all going to be okay. We’re having a baby. We’re ready for this.” Nick took off across the lawn.

Ridley looked over at Raina. “Where is he going?”

She shook her head in confusion.

“Nick! I think you forgot something.” Matt pointed at Raina.

“Aw, hell. Sorry, baby.” Nick doubled back and took Raina’s arm gently.

Grant stepped out of the crowd. Raina felt an instant wave of relief. He was a doctor so he would know what to do.

“Raina, take deep breaths. Are you having contractions?” he asked.

She shook her head. “Well, I’ve been having those weird things where my stomach gets all tight for the last

hour. But those aren't real contractions. They're just the fake ones, right?"

"Braxton Hicks. Yes, those are very common leading up to the birth. But in some cases, what feels like Braxton Hicks can be real contractions. Which is definitely the case since your water broke. We need to get you to the hospital. Who's your doctor?"

"Dr. Waters," Nick answered.

"I'll call her and let her know you're on your way in." He pulled out his phone and started dialing.

"I can't believe we're having our baby." Raina grabbed Nick's hand. "Our baby girl is anxious to get here."

"She wants to join the party, that's all," Julia added. "Now let's get you to the car." Julia took Raina's other arm gently. "I'll swing by the house and pick up your overnight bag so that Ridley doesn't have to do it. I'm sure you want your sister with you."

"I do. Ri? Where's Ridley?" Raina looked around frantically, suddenly needing nothing more than her sister's calming influence.

"I'm right here, Ray. I'll be there with you the whole time," Ridley promised.

"Can someone call our father? He should know. I mean, I think he'd want to know." It was a small gesture but Raina knew William would appreciate being

included. They couldn't change the past but they were working on having a better relationship for the future.

Matt stepped forward. "I can do it. What's his name?"

"William Ranier-Ridley," Nick responded.

"No problem. I'll get his information from Sam." He looked at Raina. "Don't worry about anything. I can't wait to meet the newest Alexander."

Raina nodded shakily but had to stop moving when another contraction hit. She'd spent the last few months reading about labor and taking Lamaze classes but none of that had truly prepared her for the pain. When she could finally breathe again, she opened her eyes to Nick's panicked expression.

"It's okay, Nick." She started her slow steps forward again. "At our last appointment the doctor said everything looked great."

"It's too soon. We had a birth plan. We're supposed to have a relaxing, natural birth with a midwife," Nick muttered.

When the next pain hit it was so bad she grabbed Nick's shirt and yanked him closer. "Screw the birth plan. We have to get to the hospital. *This hurts!*"



When Nick emerged from the delivery room, he felt like he'd just been through a war. Watching the love of his life battle to bring their daughter into the world had changed him.

He had a daughter.

His mother followed him into the hallway. She linked her arm through his as they walked. "I can hardly believe my Nicky is a father."

"Thank you, mom. For everything."

He'd never forget how she'd helped Raina breathe through the pain, talking her down from her panic in the way that only a mother could. His family would go down in history as the best gift he'd ever given his wife.

"Of course. I love you both so much. Now let's go tell the family the good news." Julia was beaming, her happiness at having a new grandchild to spoil radiating off her in waves.

As was their way, his family and friends had taken over the waiting area in the maternity wing. His dad was on the phone. Elliott and Bennett were both sleeping. Jackson was talking softly to Matt, who was perched on the edge of a chair next to Penny. When they saw him, everyone quieted.

"She's here. Our baby girl is six pounds and nine

ounces,” Nick announced. “They’re moving Raina to a private room while the baby’s getting her tests done.”

Matt bounded to his feet and held out his hand. “Congratulations, man. I can’t believe you’re a father now.”

“I can’t believe it, either. She’s absolutely perfect.”

Bennett pulled Nick into a hug while Jackson and Eli slapped him on the back.

“Do you guys want to see her?” Nick shook his head. “What am I saying? Stupid question. Let’s see if the nurses have finished their tests and put her in her crib yet.”

They followed him down a hallway to the long glass window of the nursery. He recognized the nurse who had come to take the baby for her tests.

“There she is.”

When the nurse noticed them, she waved and then came closer so they could see the tiny baby in her arms. The pink cap on her head was no match for the wild thatch of black hair escaping from under it. Although she was swaddled in a white blanket, one fist peeked out of the top in defiance.

That was his baby girl, a fighter from the very start.

“I hope she’s not too warm in there. Maybe I should have the nurses get her a lighter blanket?”

He was hit then with a blast of anxiety. There were so many things that could go wrong at any given moment and he was supposed to protect her from them all. He rubbed

his chest feeling like it might burst from the sudden rush of emotion.

“I love her so much already but I have no idea what I’m doing. What if she needs something and I don’t know?”

His dad clapped him on the back. “Welcome to fatherhood. You’re doing great so far. We were taking bets on how long you’d last in the delivery room before passing out. So you’re already ahead of the game.”

“My bet was on Raina *throwing* you out,” Eli added.

Julia hugged him. “He did great. You’d better hope you do so well when it’s your turn.”

Eli wisely clamped his lips shut. Nick smothered a laugh. His big brother wasn’t interested in settling down any time soon. Nick had once felt the same way. It was funny how life had a way of pushing your plans aside.

“She’s beautiful,” Matt said. “She’s going to be a knockout. You’d better invest in some guns now.”

They all laughed.

Behind the glass the baby squirmed in the nurse’s arms as she set her down gently in her bassinet. Nick couldn’t wait until he could hold her again. She hadn’t even been on this earth for a day yet and she already had him wrapped around every one of her little fingers.

“Her name is Jada. Since both our mothers’ names start with the letter J, we decided to keep that going. Her

middle name is May since she didn't wait for June and came early. So, she's Jada May Alexander."

"I like it. Sweet, simple, and strong," Penny commented.

"Thanks. I need to go check on Raina."

With a wave, he jogged back down the hall toward the patient rooms.

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*R*aina closed her eyes, hardly able to believe she'd survived and come through the other side. The past seven hours had been a blur of pain and exhaustion. Even after she'd gotten her epidural (best thing ever invented), the time seemed to pass in a haze. But the number one thing that stood out was how safe she felt with her family around her.

Nick. Ridley. Julia.

Not to mention the crowd of Alexanders she'd been told were in the waiting room.

Nick walked in smiling from ear to ear. "I took the family to see Jada. They have her in the nursery."

She held out her hand and he cradled it in his. It was hard to believe how far they'd come in their journey together. A chuckle escaped as she thought of their first date. The best one night stand ever, she decided.

“After this is over, I need some of whatever was in that IV. I wasn’t expecting to see you smile again for days.” Nick kissed the tips of her fingers.

The nurse standing in the room snorted with laughter. When they’d first arrived, Nick had been frantic with worry, asking a million questions about why it was taking so long and yelling at every passing nurse that his wife was in pain and needed help. Luckily Julia had been able to calm him down.

Apparently in all his reading about pregnancy, he’d missed the part about labor taking forever.

“I was just thinking about our first date. Would you have guessed this is where we’d end up?”

Nick shook his head. “No. I could never have imagined anything this good.”

“Even when I’m cranky and my ankles are huge? Even when I’m driving you crazy?”

Maybe it was being sweaty and tired that had Raina feeling insecure. But in that moment she felt afraid in a way she hadn’t in months. Nick was just so ... Nick. Her greatest fear was that the past year had actually been a cruel dream and she’d wake alone and missing him.

But as usual, her husband seemed to know what she needed even before she did. He caressed her hair back from her face, his thumb tracing soothing circles on her cheek.

“Even when you’re driving me crazy, you are the best thing that ever happened to me.” He kissed her gently.

“So, how do you feel about having twins next time? I mean, we’re going to have at least four kids, right?”

Nick’s eyes rounded in surprise.

Raina laughed so hard that she had tears in her eyes. “Just kidding.”

Another nurse came into the room then carrying Jada. She transferred the sleeping baby into Raina’s arms. “Here you go, mom. She’s doing great.”

“That’s my girl. Already acing all her tests. She’s absolutely perfect,” Nick declared.

With a full heart and her husband by her side, Raina looked down at the best thing that had ever happened to *both* of them.

“This is everything I ever wanted.” Raina had to take a breath, suddenly overcome with how incredibly lucky she was. “Thank you for saving me that day. You changed my life.”

Nick smiled knowingly. “I told you there was nothing I wouldn’t do for you.” He leaned closer then whispered. “Except for twin girls. I have to draw the line somewhere.”

I hope you enjoyed *The Things I Do for You*! Want more Alexanders? You’re invited to spend the holidays with the

M. MALONE

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Kaylee shoved the books on her night table in the drawer. Her eyes swept over the rest of the room frantically. Hopefully she hadn't left anything embarrassing lying around. She wasn't used to having guys at her apartment. Especially not men like Elliott.

Big, masculine men that she fantasized about every night.

The hair on the back of her neck stood up and she didn't have to look to know that he was standing in the doorway. Her apartment wasn't that big, but it suddenly seemed exponentially smaller with Eli sucking up all her oxygen.

"Tank finished his assessment before we got here. We're all clear." Eli stepped in and looked around. "Where do you normally keep the figurine?"

Kay pointed to the top of her dresser. Eli walked over and looked down at her collection. He touched one and the sight of his thick fingers stroking the delicate china shouldn't have seemed erotic at all. But the image of this big, strong man handling tiny breakables with such care



struck her as incredibly tender. Would that be how he treated a woman in bed? Like she was delicate, precious?

Or would he push her hard, demand things she didn't know how to give? Warmth spread to her face just thinking about it.

*Not that you'll ever find out.*

"There's an empty space here. He didn't even bother to push the others closer together to conceal what he took."

Kay hated to even think of it. Someone had been in her apartment, touching her things. Had he been here while she was home alone? While she was with her daughter?

While they were sleeping?

She shivered and grabbed the duffel bag she kept underneath her bed. Her favorite nightshirt was on top of the comforter, so she shoved that in the bag. Then she pulled open the drawers in her nightstand and added a big handful of underwear and bras. She didn't even look at how much she was taking, just grabbed blindly. Who cared, really, what she wore? All she cared about was getting out of here. Would she ever be able to relax in this room again without wondering if someone was watching?

She crossed to the dresser where Eli stood and yanked open the last drawer. In went several pairs of jeans, then she yanked open another drawer and added a big armful of sweaters.

“Kay, what are you doing?”

“Packing. I just want to get out of here.”

She struggled with the zipper on the bag, almost breaking a nail on the metal teeth. Her breath came in harsh pants until little black spots danced in front of her eyes.

“Kay, calm down. Just hold on.”

She struggled against his hold, but he held her securely in his grip, her back to his front. His arms wrapped around her, keeping her from moving but not holding her so tight as to cause pain. Eventually Kay stopped fighting and allowed her head to fall back against Eli’s chest.

“Hey, hey. It’s all right. Just calm down.” He rubbed her arms gently, soothing her.

Kay finally stopped wrestling with him and allowed him to hold her. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. It was a foolish moment of weakness, but for just a second, she soaked up the comfort and warmth of being in his arms.

“We’re safe here. You’ve got a great security system. I already had Tank check it out and it hasn’t been tampered with. I don’t know how this guy got your figurine, but he didn’t break in to do it.”

Tears welled up, but she squeezed her eyes closed,

swallowing back the sudden flood of emotion. There was no time for nonsense or feeling sorry for herself.

“Why would someone do this, Eli?”

“I don’t know, angel.” He spoke in a hush, the words flowing over her in a soft puff of breath.

His features tightened, and for the second time in recent memory, she allowed herself to soak up the masculine presence that was Elliott Alexander: the smooth dark skin, the high cheekbones, the long straight blade of his nose, and the sinfully full lips. It was a harsh face, not quite as elegantly hewn as his brothers’ faces, but one that she vastly preferred. It looked like safety.

It looked like strength.

“I’m okay now. I promise I won’t freak out on you again.” She stood reluctantly. As wonderful as it felt to be held in his arms, there was only so much she could take before she lost all sense of propriety and threw herself at him again. She already knew he wasn’t interested. When you kissed a guy and he responded by leaving town, that was plenty clear enough.

“It’s okay to be freaked out, Kay. As long as you know that I won’t let anything happen to you.”

Kay nodded and dropped the duffel bag on her bed. She didn’t have enough room to put him up in style, but at the very least she could rustle up some extra pillows and a blanket for him.

“I’m sorry I don’t have a guest room. Or an air mattress.”

Eli gave her one of his trademark *are you kidding* looks. “I’m not supposed to be on vacation, Kay. The couch is fine. Now, what about Hope?”

Kay gasped. Shame flooded her face. She’d told her mom that she’d pick up Hope by eight o’clock and she was already twenty minutes late. She pulled out her cell phone and hit the first speed dial.

Eli walked away to give her some privacy. Luckily, her father answered, so she was able to explain things with a minimum of fuss. As expected, her parents were thrilled to keep Hope overnight.

When she turned, Eli was watching her with an inscrutable expression. Unsure what to make of his sudden change in demeanor, Kay pushed past him and pulled open the door to the linen closet in the hallway. Several towels fell out and hit her in the face.

“Don’t worry about that now.” Eli took the towels from her arms and shoved them in the closet. “We need to talk first.”

“About what?”

“Everything. Clearly I missed something when I was digging into your life last year. It’s time to rectify that.”

“But nothing has changed. I don’t do anything interesting. So what’s there to talk about?”

Eli stopped and nailed her with an intense look. “I need to know who you’ve been with since last summer.” He moved closer and Kay inhaled, immediately assaulted by his unique scent—warm and rich and disarming. She looked up at him, her senses swirling from the intoxicating blend of reactions that only Eli could cause.

“We need to talk about your lovers.”

*All I Need is You* **is Available Now at**

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*Laugh out Loud Romantic Comedy*  
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**FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER MY ROOSTER  
WON'T CROW.**

I can't believe it either. It's a tragedy.

Years of perfect performance and now this traitor decides to get picky. And the only woman who makes little Milo stand up and *c-ck a doodle doo* is my co-worker, Mya

Taylor, a.k.a. my competition for the biggest ad account this side of the Atlantic.

Our client wants a wedding expert so I'm suddenly fake-engaged to a woman who hates me AND would gladly put my balls in her purse. But when I find out she's never taken a trip to O-town, we make a little wager.

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## **MILO**

Time to get our game faces on.

As we approach the table, everyone stands, and the introductions are made all around. Maybe it's because I'm watching Mr. Lavin so closely that I see how his eyes follow Mya after she shakes his hand and then walks around the table to greet the other members of his team. She knows all of their names, as do I. Then she takes a seat right next to me.

Before I can even sit down, James is already ordering a scotch from the waitress. Then I see why.

Elizabeth is sitting two tables away.

She raises her glass of wine in our direction. I turn to see James give a begrudging wave. I'm not sure if anyone else has noticed her yet, but she's already accomplished her goal. There's no way James can focus completely on the client tonight with his ex-wife sitting right in his line of vision.

*Christ.*

“Thank you all for traveling to meet with me. I've had this week scheduled with potential investors for months, so it's been helpful that you could come to me while I'm already in the States.”

“When do you go back to Italy?” Wallace asks. “I follow you on Instagram. You guys, his page is *lit*. Fast



cars, beautiful clothes. You're living the dream, man." He sighs before digging into his salad course enthusiastically.

Andre just laughs. "Thank you. This is our goal, to be as the kids say, *fire*. Why is all of the American slang centered around temperature, I wonder? It used to be that things were *cool*, now they're *hot*, *fire*, *bomb* or *lit*. Fascinating. I have an entire team of people who study the social media trends."

James looks like he has no idea what is happening. But I strongly suspect that Wallace in his own unique, bumbling way has just broken the ice for us.

Well, if he's broken the ice, I might as well jump in first. "Mirage employs a lot of talented young designers. It's why our ad campaigns are so on trend. We combine years of experience in understanding what makes people buy with the fresh perspective of different generations."

Mya grins over at me. "Wallace is on Milo's team. He's been with us for almost a year now and graduated from Columbia with honors. He's also an amateur photographer and is pretty popular on Instagram, too."

I glance over at her. *He is?* How does she know all that? Maybe there is something to paying attention in those bullshit icebreaker sessions at work after all.

Wallace looks shocked, too. "My account has nowhere near the numbers some of my friends have, but I just passed ten thousand."

Mr. Lavin actually looks impressed. “That’s quite an accomplishment, especially for a hobbyist.” He clears his throat. “I’m happy to meet with you all in person after hearing about you from Mr. Lawson.”

James gives him a tight smile. “I’m extremely proud of my team.”

“It shows,” Andre replies.

Dinner proceeds with the typical pleasantries. Wallace looks a little confused, but I can only pray the kid can hold his tongue. With these types of clients, you never rush right into business. You need to woo them, almost like a woman you’re trying to convince to come back to your place after dinner. She’s not just going to come with you if you ask within the first ten minutes. She needs you to show her that you’re worth her time. Are you going to savor her the same way you do the ten-inch porterhouse on your plate? Or will you rush through the act like a kid scarfing down an ice cream cone?

I can’t imagine a man like Andre Lavin scarfing anything. He needs to see that we’re not only the best team to take over his marketing but also that we’re people he can work with.

We need him to *like* us.

As the waitress is clearing the entrees, Andre looks around the table with satisfaction. “Perhaps it is old-fashioned, but I care to meet with any agencies that work on

our marketing directly. It's important that the people crafting our image understand what we're about here at Lavin Fashions."

Everyone instantly ceases their side conversations and pays attention. Now we're getting to the good stuff. The reason we're all here.

"What is your vision of Lavin Fashions, Mr. Lavin?" Mya asks. "I've read the official company mission statement, but I would love to hear it from you."

"Please, call me Andre."

The way he's looking at her makes it seem like he just wants to hear her say his name. My hand sitting on top of the table curls into a fist. It's unsettling that this bothers me. He's just a client, throwing a little charm at the pretty ad executive. I've seen it plenty of times, and I've had my fair share of clients, male and female, attempt to flirt with me.

None of those made me want to growl in frustration. Or made me worry that Mya might actually want to flirt back.

"It's much more than just the clothes," Andre begins after a brief pause. "Our brand creates the garments that become part of people's memories. And for our newest venture, we're looking for a partner that understands the importance of family, friendship, love."

The woman sitting next to him sniffs. *Cristiane*

*Laveque*. From my research on the Lavin team, I know that she's a top designer for Lavin Fashions.

"Apologies, but this is not a strength of American companies, we have found. So few understand *l'amore*." She shakes her head ruefully as if the vulgar ways of the American market are just too much.

Mentally, I'm rolling my eyes, but this could be a real obstacle to winning their business. If they think that we're not cultured enough, it will be difficult to change that opinion. Granted, Mirage does plenty of "American" commercials and brands, but it's not like we're all racecars and beer. We have plenty of upper-echelon brands in the jewelry, hotel and entertainment industries.

"I believe Mirage can handle anything. We have such a diverse workforce that all of our clients find someone they can relate to. We also have more women in leadership roles than many of our competitors."

Maybe that'll calm her fears that we don't get *l'amore*. Mya in particular handles a lot of brands that cater to women, including a high-profile lingerie line.

Andre sits back in his chair and seems to be considering her words. "I must admit we've been approached by other firms that are run by people who are married. They understand what brides want."

James sits up straighter. "So, it is a bridal line?"

Andre laughs lightly. "Yes, the rumors are true. Lavin

Fashions will introduce a new line called Lavin Bridal next year. It will be a separate division of the company which is why I'm meeting with investors. I didn't want word to get out until it was all finalized."

James looks like he's going to be sick. This is why Elizabeth has been so smug. She must have heard the Lavin group wanted someone who has been through the process of planning a wedding. Just another way for her to rub her recent marriage in James's face.

"I'm sure all the women on our team have mentally planned their dream wedding, even if they aren't married." I send a panicked glance at Mya.

This would be a really good fucking time for her to pipe in with some story of how she's been dreaming of her wedding dress since she was a little girl.

Unfortunately, Andre seems to be following my line of thought because he turns directly to Mya, too. "If you were planning a wedding, for example," he says, "wouldn't you want a wedding planner who was married?"

Mya pauses with her water glass halfway to her mouth. "Well, yes. I suppose I would."

James just blinks. Wallace pauses mid-chew with a piece of iceberg lettuce hanging from his lip. The whole table seems stunned into silence. She didn't mean to say that, and everyone can see it on her face. But in a rare, caught-off-guard moment, Mya has done the unforgivable.

She's been honest.

An awkward silence descends over the table. James takes another gulp from his scotch. Across from me, members of the Lavin team exchange significant glances before taking an interest in their plates. Worst of all, Andre Lavin just looks amused.

While Mya looks devastated.

You know how sometimes you can look back and identify the precise moment you fucked up? Well, later tonight I'm sure I'll be remembering the exact second I pushed us all off the cliff together.

"I agree," I state loudly.

James chokes slightly, and Wallace pounds him on the back. I ignore his panicked look and keep my eyes on Mr. Lavin.

"I agree with Mya," I repeat in case anyone at the table missed it the first time I pushed my career in front of a bus. "Having a married wedding planner would be great. Although I'd be more concerned about the people actually doing the work. That's really what sets Mirage apart."

By now, everyone is staring at me, especially James, probably wondering where the hell I'm going with this.

Mya, however, is watching me with a small, tremulous smile on her face. Like she can't believe that I'm backing her up right now. And damn if that smile isn't what does me in. Because I don't just bet on distracting

Mr. Lavin; I double down and take it all the way to the bank.

“Mirage is really the best fit for anything to do with weddings. After all, it’s the only agency I know with two team leads that are in love and engaged to be married.” I turn to Mya and whisper, “Just go with it.”

Then I tilt my head slightly and brush my lips over hers.



## **MYA**

Everyone is staring. I can feel the heat of their eyes on the side of my face. But even that isn’t enough to take me out of this moment. This sweet, thrilling moment. My eyes drift closed, and the world falls away.

Milo is kissing me.

If you’d asked me just an hour ago what kind of kisser I thought Milo would be, I’d have said aggressive. He’s all about going all-in and getting to the finish line. I would have assumed that he wouldn’t care much about the process but rather only about the end game.

I would have been completely and utterly wrong.

His lips are soft, and he feathers them over mine gently, barely touching me. The result is a whispery soft touch that sends chills up and down my spine. Then he

lays his mouth over mine and kisses me properly, his tongue brushing softly against mine.

After what feels like several hours but is probably only several seconds, he pulls back. But he doesn't just stop. No, Milo can't do anything simply, not even shocking me to my core with a kiss. Because right after he pulls away, he does this soft little nuzzle, rubbing his nose back and forth against mine.

Why is that my kryptonite? That completely unnecessary little snuggle just takes all the indignation I was building up to and scatters it into the wind. Along with all rational thought.

A throat clears and it's like jumping into an ice bath. If we'd been standing, we'd have probably sprung apart, but instead I grope the table blindly until my hand connects with my water glass. The icy liquid cools my throat but not my lust.

What the hell was that?

Everyone at the table is still eating and talking softly amongst themselves, almost like the last thirty seconds didn't just change the rotational orbit of the planet. Isn't it funny how a certain event can knock you off your feet but seems to have no effect on anyone else? It's like experiencing an earthquake while everyone around you goes on with their lives unaware. Well, everyone isn't unaware. Andre Lavin is watching us carefully.



So is James.

*Oh shit.*

This is where I should speak up. Tell Mr. Lavin that I cannot wait to see his newest designs, that women everywhere are going to be clamoring for the chance to wear one of his dresses. But I can't because my mind is still muddled, and I can still feel the imprint of Milo's lips against mine.

"You make an interesting point, Mr. Hamilton. Being married is one thing, but to have a couple who are currently planning a wedding designing my campaign would be ideal." Mr. Lavin nods in satisfaction. "I had a good feeling about this firm, but I can see that your reputation is accurate. Professional, innovative and discreet. Exactly what I need."

James looks slightly dazed, the same expression you might wear after you narrowly miss being hit by a cab. He looks between me and Milo and then back to Mr. Lavin, but nothing comes out of his mouth.

Once again, Wallace comes to the rescue. "You can't go wrong with those two in charge, if you're looking for discretion. They've been dating in secret for ages and nobody knew except for me. I mean, I could tell. He stares at her ass whenever she walks away."

The water I just sipped comes back up my nose.

Milo hands me a napkin without missing a beat.

“Thank you, Wallace. So, Mr. Lavin, tell us about your vision for Lavin Bridal in particular.”

And so it goes. Milo manages to carry the conversation all the way through the dessert course and then through coffee. Personally, I’ve never understood the practice of drinking coffee after dessert, but when the waitress comes around, I order some anyway. Maybe the extra caffeine will wake me the hell up.

But I still feel like I’m sleepwalking as James bids the members of the Lavin team goodnight and they promise to be in touch. Wallace is the first to scamper off, probably to go post the selfie he took with Mr. Lavin to Instagram. The thought makes me chuckle, but my throat instantly turns to sandpaper when James approaches.

This entire time, Milo and I have been sitting in silence. I couldn’t take the chance of asking any questions where the Lavin team might overhear. But now I wish I’d thought to text him or something so I’d know how we’re handling this.

But James doesn’t look upset at all. He’s practically glowing. It could be all the scotch, but either way, he looks thrilled.

“You two, ah, I should have known. You’ve done an amazing job keeping your relationship out of the office. Good work. Knew I could count on you.” He claps Milo on the shoulder and gifts me with a wide, loopy grin.

Even if I knew what to say to him right now, I don't think I'd have the heart to wipe that smile off his face. Tomorrow is soon enough for him to realize that we've screwed up this deal. Maybe a good night's sleep will make him more lenient when he's deciding whether to fire us.

Milo pulls out my chair for me as I stand, and I follow wordlessly as we leave the restaurant. It's a Thursday night, but as we walk back through the casino to reach the elevators to the rooms, there are so many people out you'd never think it was a weekday. Time seems to move differently here. I notice an older lady with a purple fanny pack methodically feeding coins into a slot machine. She looks like she's been at it for a while. Maybe I should just stay down here, living off the free drinks and the adrenaline of gambling. It would probably be better than what's waiting for me when we get back to DC.

I'm so deep in my thoughts that I'm not paying attention when we get on the elevator. It's only when it stops that I realize we didn't push the button for my floor. But Milo loops his arm around my waist and guides me out of the elevator anyway.

"But my room—"

"Not here," he murmurs in my ear. The deep rumble of his voice so close sends a shiver down my spine. "Some of the Lavin team are on this floor. Wait until we get inside."

“Inside what?” Belatedly, I realize he means inside his room. He has his key card out and the door open before I can say, *No way in hell*.

The door slams shut behind us, and all the things I was getting ready to say get stuck in my throat.

Trying to gather my thoughts, I look around the room. The layout is the same as the one I was given, TV, big window directly across from the door, except he has a king-size bed instead of two doubles. Behind him, there are several dress shirts scattered on the bed, and the covers are all tangled, like he took a nap before coming down to dinner. Just like that I have a mental image of Milo naked in those sheets, and being alone with him in this room seems like a *very* bad idea.

Completely at ease with the idea of the two of us being alone, he shrugs out of his suit jacket and loosens his tie. I’m instantly distracted by the small patch of skin revealed at the top of his shirt where it’s unbuttoned. “I know you must have a million questions,” he says finally.

But I don’t. Truthfully, I only have one.

“What the hell just happened?”

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Also by M. Malone

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### **Mess with Me (Romantic Comedy)**

BEG ME (Milo & Mya)

My rooster is on strike. Yeah, I can't believe it either. But he'll only crow for one woman. Spoiler Alert \*she hates me\*

ASK ME (Andre & Casey)

Am I arrogant? Maybe. Do women still want me? Abso-F'ing-lutely. Then I meet the one woman who isn't impressed.

NEED ME (Vin & Ariana)

Crazy sh\*t every day keeps relationships away. Except this guy who just *keeps* showing up. And if I'm not careful, I might get used to needing someone.

WANT ME (Law & Anya)

No strings. Sounds good, right? But if I'm not her boyfriend the position is open for someone else.

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### **The Alexanders**

**One More Day** : "Good girl" Ridley has always attracted bad

guys. Now she's on the run and has nowhere to hide. So when Jackson Alexander mistakes her for her twin, for once she decides to do the "wrong" thing.

**The Things I Do for You** : Nicholas Alexander finally has something his dream girl needs. He'll give Raina a baby if she gives him what he wants. *Her*.

**All I Want**: The only thing Kay wants is for Elliott Alexander to stop treating her like she's invisible. But a car accident forces her to reach out to the only man she trusts to save her.

**All I Need is You** : When the man she loves leaves town after their steamy kiss, Kaylee Wilhelm is done. But when she's targeted by a stalker, Eli is the only one who can protect her.

**Just One Thing** : Scientist Bennett Alexander is a bona fide genius but he still needs a dating tutor to "get the girl". What could go wrong? Other than falling for his teacher, of course!

## **The Simmons**

**Make Him Mine** : When he's not pretending she's invisible, Trent sees Mara Simmons as the little sister he never had. But she finally has a plan to get him exactly where he should be. *In her bed*.

**Make Me Feel** : Matt Simmons is over Army doctors poking him until he sees his physical therapist is h-o-t. All Penny wants is to put down roots which means NO military men. And Sgt. Sexy isn't going to change her mind.

**Make Her Stay** : Mara has always known Trent Townsend is

*The One.* But when his frequent business trips turn out to have *nothing* to do with business, she discovers the man she loves just might be a stranger.

### **Bad Business (The Kingsleys)**

**Bad King:** My parents just put a gold diggers target on my back. But if all they want is a wedding, I can do that. I'll find the fiancée of their nightmares. *Who Wants to Marry a Billionaire?*  
*Must be completely inappropriate.*

**Bad Blood :** I'd do anything for my best friend's little sister. Until she asks for the one thing I can't give. One night. No rules.

***RITA® Award Winner!***

### **Blue-Collar Billionaires**

*Billions from the deadbeat dad they never knew sounds pretty sweet. Until they find out what he really wants.*

Tank / Finn / Gabe / Zack / Luke

- Romantic Suspense -

**(Co-authored with Nana Malone)**

- The Shameless Trilogy
- The Force Duet
- The Deep Duet
- The Sin Duet



- The Brazen Duet

- Paranormal Romance -

Nathan's Heart

The Brotherhood of Bandits

## About the Author

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M. Malone is a RITA® Award winner and a NYT & USA Today Bestselling author of completely inappropriate romantic comedy. She spends most days wearing Wonder Woman leggings and T-shirts that she's embarrassed for anyone to see while she plays with her imaginary friends.

She lives with her husband and their two sons in the picturesque mountains of Northern Virginia even though she is afraid of insects, birds, butterflies and other humans.

She also holds a Master's degree in Business from a prestigious college that would no doubt be scandalized at how she's using her expensive education.



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## Contents

Chapter 2 1	1
Also by M. Malone	35
About the Author	39

