

CHAPTER ONE

SERGEANT ALEXIS BROWN, AS she used to be known in some circles, or Professor Alexis Brown, as she was known now in the rarified air of academia, groaned loudly in response to her desk mate's reminder. Her proposal for a "Summer Adventure" to the head of the Geology Division was due later in the week and she had no idea what to propose. "God, Mona, I hate summer."

"No you don't. You know you love it."

Professor Ramona Patterson chuckled as she watched her desk mate drop her head on the desk in the office she shared with her. She loved working with Alexis Brown. It was fun watching her come up with intriguing ideas for summer courses for the mostly female summer interns and students that filled her classes. How did she do it? Every year like clockwork, Alexis filled all of her classes. There was no seat was left empty and no young woman left behind. In fact, there were always waiting lists for each of her classes. She loved teaching and teaching loved her right back. Every year like clockwork, she selected the best and the brightest female graduate students to mentor. She also selected the best and the brightest to have a low-key, off-the-record affair. Her affairs never lasted beyond the start of the fall classes.

Ramona frowned. That wasn't quite true. This last one with an older student named Molly or Polly... something looked like it might go somewhere special since they were still

seeing each other into the spring months. Then, one night, also like clockwork but delayed a bit, Alexis rang her doorbell drunk as seven skunks. Alexis slapped a gallon of ice cold Cookies n' Cream against her stomach, then shoved her way into the apartment she shared with her partner, Sherrie. Her fist clamped around the proverbial half empty bottle of scotch and Mr. Peepers followed her inside. How Alexis managed to get the stubby little bulldog into the car and then drive the ten miles to her apartment complex when she was dead drunk, Ramona never could figure out. It must be dead reckoning or whatever. Maybe it was radar or what was it? Sonar that homing pigeons and dying elephants used to find their way home?

“I said stop scowling at me. Come up with a subject worthy of study and investigation, Ramona Patterson. I’ve run out of options.”

“Why don’t you just go screw Dorothea, Alexis? I keep telling you that will work with her. Then you could have your professorship, a nice little raise, and goddamn book deal. Hell, she’d be so happy that she’d probably hook you up with a TV series or something with the History Channel. She knows people, Alexis. If you could see the way she studies your ass when you exit a room, it’d make your blushing ass turn redder than it normally does whenever a woman gives you a compliment.” Ramona sighed. “I don’t get it. You’ll be fifty-one in a couple of weeks. You could easily pass for thirty-five. You’ve screwed every woman on this campus that even looked at you cockeyed, but you won’t screw her.”

“Duh, Mona, she is our boss. You don’t shit where you eat or where you work.” Alexis sighed and rubbed her temples. “I mean, I do, but not with the boss. If things didn’t work out, and they never do with me, imagine what a bitch on wheels she’d be to work with. She’d squash me like a pesky little fruit

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fly.” Alexis stood up and stretched, then walked over to the window that looked out on the campus grounds. She could see students beginning to enjoy the warmer weather. They were wearing shorts, cropped tops, T-shirts, belly shirts, capris, cargo shorts, and no coats or hats. She hadn’t seen the bikinis or the one-piece swimwear yet, but it was coming. She grinned. Oh yes, she was definitely waiting for those long, hot days when young people...who was she kidding? She only wanted to see the young women in her classes wearing the brief gear. Humph, all those young, fit, nubile bodies; it was mindboggling.

Ramona studied her friend, all five-foot-ten inches of her studly frame, and grinned. She could see why women appreciated her friend with her long, bowed legs, flat waist, lean but muscular arms, and just enough tits. What she loved about Alexis was her round, sweet ass. The way her ass stuck out in profile reminded her of Jean Claude Van Damme’s butt. “Baby got back” was the phrase that came to mind as she snuck looks at it when she thought Alexis wasn’t looking. She couldn’t remember how many times she stopped herself from reaching out to stroke it over the years.

“Quit scoping my ass and get over here and talk to me, Woman!”

Alexis heard the patter. She also heard the click of high heels before she smelled the spicy scent of her boss, Dr. Dorothea Watson. Her boss settled next to her as she stood by the window.

“What are we looking at today, Alexis?” Wide gray eyes in a peaches and cream complexion studied Alexis’s profile with a soft smile. From the corner of her eye, Dorothea watched Alexis subtly move away, creating a narrow barrier that she decided to cross. She moved closer, curious as to what Alexis

would do now. “I know what I’d like to look at, but what are you studying so intently?”

Alexis turned around to face her nemesis and uncrossed her arms, placing them in her pockets. “I can just imagine what that might be, Dr. Watson.”

Dorothea tapped her lips as she sized up Alexis, noting the half-up and half-down position of the collar on her pink button-down shirt. She reached up with both hands and straightened out Alexis’s collar. “I doubt very seriously if you could imagine what I’d like to see right now.” Gray eyes stared up into wide hazel-brown eyes set in clear, smooth brown skin. She allowed her hands to rest casually on Alexis’s broad shoulders. She winked mischievously at her assistant professor. “Although you just gave me a bit of hope when you told me to stop staring at your especially delicious-looking, khaki-covered backside and get over here. I aim to please, so here I am.” She watched the blush she knew her words would create creep up from somewhere inside Alexis’s shirt and up her neck and stop at her cheeks. “You’re blushing, Dr. Brown.”

Alexis cleared her throat. “Good morning to you, Dr. Watson.” She decided a bit of snarky charm might get the woman to leave her office before something truly embarrassing happened. She grinned at her boss. “I always feel like I should ask if you’ve seen Sherlock Holmes lurking around the campus.” She watched Dorothea snatch her hands away from her shoulders and then wipe them on the skirt of her business suit as if she’d just touched something extremely nasty.

“Have your project ready by Friday morning.” Dorothea spit out, coldly looking right through her. “It better be damned near perfect, Dr. Brown, and attractive enough for pre-enrollment this summer.”

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“Is that all it should be, Dr. Watson, or are there some other requirements you haven’t told me about?”

“If you would show your face instead of your behind at my one-on-one sessions with my staff, you’d know about the requirements for this year’s summer institute.” Dorothea turned to Ramona as if suddenly remembering she was there. “Perhaps your officemate can inform you of the latest updates. Unlike you, Dr. Patterson has the time or makes the time to attend my one-on-one sessions. She understands the natural order of things around here. You could take a lesson from her behavior. You never know when a promotion or a demotion might happen. Ladies, you have a nice day now.” Cool gray eyes gave Alexis a look that said, “Watch your back.”

Ramona could see the steam heat exploding from Alexis’s ear but put a finger across her lips and waited until she heard the click-clack of heels marching down the hallway before she peeked outside and then closed the door. It was safe. “Count to ten, Al, before you say anything.”

“That is a stunning example of an effing crazy woman, Mona! You realize she just violated at least five of my rights as a state employee.” Alexis paced back and forth in front of the window, but that didn’t burn off the bad energy in the room. She stopped to rub her temples. “Okay, forget what just happened. What new requirements is she talking about for the summer series?”

“Christ, don’t you read your email?”

“If it’s from students, then yes, I read them. If it’s from you or her, no, I don’t read it. I figure you’ll break down eventually and tell me whatever I need to know. There’s always good old Sherrie, who if I tell how you’re treating me like shit, she will nag at you until you give me the updates.”

Ramona grinned. “It’s a damned good thing I like you so much or I’d drop you like a hot potato after her digs at you this

morning, since they might contagious.” She winked at Alexis. “Next time, turn around and look before you tell somebody you think is me to get their buns over here. She was looking for an opening and you gave it to her, Hot Stuff, or as the students say, Sexy Lexy.”

Large hazel eyes grew stormy for a moment, remembering who called her that and what had happened to her.

Realizing what she’d just said and seeing the dark look in her friend’s normally happy sparkling eyes, Ramona groaned. “God, I’m so sorry, Al.” She walked over to rub her best friend’s back in small, comforting circles, hoping to erase the dark expression in her eyes.

Alexis sighed. “It’s okay, Mona. It’s about time I got over it. Thirty years is a long time to relive that shit.” *Thirty years wasn’t nearly long enough to forget what she’d done to the woman*, she mused. She stepped away from Mona to sit back down in her office chair and place her hands behind a head full of short, neat dreadlocks. She needed to start researching something, anything on the web that had to do with the Earth’s oddities. She’d figure out how to link it with course material later. She sat up quickly. Enough of this feeling sorry for her plight. She’d better start her usual net surfing.

Mona walked over to sit on the edge of Alexis’s desk and began to straighten the papers on an already neat desk. Oh, how she wished she could organize her clutter like Alexis did. She catalogued everything. Files were neat and color-coded, based on subject matter and year. She also added a little quirk that involved whether the student was promising academically and his or her grade point average, public-speaking skills, capacity to debate a topic, writing ability, and critical-thinking skills. Those color codes changed every year. They weren’t public knowledge either. She’d swear her best friend’s coding system had other uses too. It told Alexis which students were

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available and would fall hard for her charms. It wasn't a coincidence her friend's best students, year after year, were the same ones she'd slept with at some time during the year...not the same as her summer lovers, but they were her paramours all the same.

Alexis grabbed Mona's hands to stop her from moving the files and folders out of order. "What are you doing, Mona? You know how I like my desk."

"Yes, but I'm nervous about this one." To prove her point, Ramona refused to look at Alexis. She cleared her throat several times, then licked her lips.

"Speak, Woman, or I call Sherrie and get her to squeeze it out of you tonight."

"So you haven't looked at your calendar, have you?"

"Well, let's see. My students turned in their final papers on time. I read all of them. I graded them. I issued final grades. My grades are in early this semester. I don't have any late papers." She sighed. "Maybe the one from Junior Rivera, but he's working on it. I'll probably get it before Friday. He showed me an outline, then a rough draft."

"How was the paper this time?"

Alexis frowned. "To be honest, I'm not sure he wrote it. It has his flavor, but it's almost too sophisticated for him. The draft only needed minor edits and footnotes."

"Just minor edits this time, huh?" Ramona whistled softly. "Count me as surprised. The kid can't spell a whit. Who do you think helped him write the thing?"

"I heard he has a new woman in his life. Maybe she did or he audited the punctuation and grammar refresher courses I suggested. I thought before I did anything, I'd check out both possibilities."

"And if it turns out he didn't write it or even dictate it to the girlfriend, what then, Al?"

Alexis scratched her head. “Christ, Mona, I haven’t the foggiest notion. I guess I’ll sit him down and try to find out why he did it.”

“And then what?”

“I’ll ask him to turn himself in to the student committee or get him to drop out. If he dropped out, nobody would have to know why if I signed his request to drop the course.”

“That’s a dangerous course of action, Al. If our boss ever found out, your ass would be grass at every institution I can think of and several I’m sure she knows about and we don’t. Your career as a professor would be over.”

Alexis tapped her desktop with a finger. “I’m not so sure that would be a bad idea, Mona. I mean, I’ve been here nearly fifteen years. What do I have to show for it but a boss who literally wants to ream my ass if I give her a scintilla of encouragement? Don’t bother pointing to the awards behind me. I know, I know. I mean, doing something that makes me feel good. When I was a street cop...a sergeant... I always felt like I was doing something to help people. I could see the dealers and pimps we arrested and the streets we cleared. If we got lucky, at the next community meeting, an old lady or an old man came up and thanked us. With this job, I don’t know.” Alexis rubbed her chin. “Yes, I get awards and plaques to hang on my wall, but it’s not the same thing. These kids don’t really need me or you. We can be replaced by the next crop of non-union adjunct professors and they’ll work cheaper too.”

“Who fed you a bottle full of depression pills this morning, Alexis? Make my day dark, why don’t you?” Ramona caught Alexis’s attention again. “Anyway, getting back to tonight, you really should check your calendar once a week.”

“Okay, okay; we’ve already established that, Mona. Just tell me what I’m going to be doing tonight.”

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“You’ll be having dinner at the rich bitch’s home away from home tonight.”

Alexis groaned and then held her head in her hands. “Shit, it’s the end-of-the-semester dinner party, isn’t it?”

Ramona leaned over to tweak Alexis under her chin. “Yep, so now she’ll get the chance to try and have her way with you on her home turf, as it were.”

“Humph, that’s with a big emphasis on TRY. Why didn’t you warn me, Mona? I usually plan something I can’t get out of for that night.”

“Oh, humph yourself! If you’d open your damned email from me, you’d see I started warning you two weeks ago. Anyway, I really don’t see what the problem is. Just sleep with her and get it over with.”

“Like hell I will. Anyway, she’s not my type.”

Ramona tweaked Alexis under the chin again. “May I remind you that you don’t have a type? She’s attractive, Alexis. She’s rich. She’s smart. She has connections. She has the hots for you. She’s been pining for you for three years. Why make the woman wait? You’re free and unattached. She’s free and unattached. It’s a match made in heaven.”

“Or a breakup made in hell, Mona. Imagine me and her breaking up in the fall. I shudder to think where I’d be then.”

“A minute ago, you wanted to leave this job to go and find yourself again. If she fires you, now you could do that.”

“Humph. You say that like you wouldn’t miss my shining face and my magical way with people, Ramona.”

“Oh, I’d miss the hell out of you, but if you were really happy...” Ramona sighed as she studied her friend’s smirking face. “I mean, if you found that special woman and you were happy, I wouldn’t mind getting a new officemate so much. But I know you, so finding ‘the right woman’ isn’t happening in my lifetime and probably not your goddaughter’s either.”

“You and Sherrie know it’s gonna be a girl, huh?”

Ramona shrugged. “Sherrie says only a female child would be late like this so she could make her grand entrance into the world like Loretta Young used to do.”

Alexis nodded. Ramona was a trivia buff. She loved watching old TV series that had aired when the world wasn’t so cynical. Once, when after she’d broken up with whoever struck her fancy that summer, she and Mona drank several bottles of scotch over a weekend and watched Loretta Young sweep into the camera range like the Queen of England leading a grand tour of Buckingham Palace.

She couldn’t remember what each show in the series was about. What she did remember was the tall, stately, elegantly attired white woman with the amazing large dark pools for eyes and how she lit up the entire room when she entered it. God, now that was presence. The woman didn’t say anything for an eternity, but she didn’t need to because her face and her walk said it all. *I’m a goddess and this is my show, so sit down, shut up, and watch ME.* They would have watched the woman for a lot longer had not Sherrie kicked her and Mr. Peepers out the door so she and Ramona could get some rest.

She also remembered when Sherrie and Ramona lost their first baby that fall. The three of them sat watching that damned show and drinking scotch for hours and not speaking a word. They just held each other and watched Loretta Young trip lightly and elegantly down that spiral staircase. That night, Sherrie didn’t kick her or Mr. Peepers out like she usually did when she’d had enough of both them.

“What happens if it’s a boy?”

“Sherrie’s been researching ways to send the boy child back to the universe.”

Alexis studied Ramona’s face to see if she was serious. With Sherrie, one never knew if Ramona was telling the truth

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or not about her activities. She couldn't tell. "Hmm, would that work with adults too?"

"Nah, Sherrie says they're too sinful. You want to send innocents back, not old, cynical, experienced souls."

"Christ, Ramona, stop messing with..." Alexis swallowed her next words when she heard a light tap against their door. Damn it, the boss's secretary was supposed to buzz and let them know who was out there before letting the students wander over to the office door. Anybody could have eavesdropped on them this morning. She ran a restless hand through her hair, then quickly scrolled over and clicked on her calendar. She had six appointments scheduled back to back with a fifteen-minute breathing space in between appointments, which was usually eaten up due to a talkative student or a late one.

"Please, come on inside, Phyllis." Alexis stood up and walked to the door to greet her first appointment of the day. Maybe it was good to start her day with Phyllis the flirt. She was so named by Ramona the first time the young woman showed up at the office wanting to know about extra course credit. Actually, Phyllis was part of a group of young women who had formed a mutual admiration society. She heard they had an ongoing bet as to which one of them would bed her first. They were a diverse group that included Phyllis, the tall, stunning blue-eyed blond who had the first appointment of the day. Karen was a cute, petite brunette. Julia was a Latino with long, dark hair that reached her waist and flashing midnight-brown eyes. Tall, copper-skinned Betty was Native American. Zamora, with her shapely body, smooth, warm brown skin, and huge, wild afro was proudly Black.

Each of the young women were at least twenty-five years younger than she was, but she never failed to faze them. In fact, they continued to wear outfits that emphasized their best

physical features. Today, Phyllis wore unusually baggy, below-the-waist cargo shorts that showed off shapely legs and a loose, short T-shirt that couldn't hide large, firm breasts and a belly ring. Her hips weren't bad to look at either. But Phyllis's typical attire was tighter, low cut, and more revealing dresses, short skirts, and blouses. Why the change in gear today? Maybe it was laundry day? Alexis mused, offering Phyllis a seat.

Ramona barely contained her chuckles as she watched Phyllis's wide, sky blue eyes follow Alexis's behind as she walked around to the other side of her desk and sat down.

"Okay, Phyllis. How can I help you today?" Alexis pulled a red folder from a stack of red folders and began to look through it. "You have a 3.7. That's nice grade point average. You don't owe me any papers. You participate in classroom assignments. Over all, I'd say you're one of my better students. What did you want to see me about today?"

Ramona snorted. *God, what a thing to say to somebody with an "I wanna sleep with you" look in her eyes. Was Alexis crazy or just into torture today?*

Phyllis cleared her throat and leaned forward to whisper, "I wanna be in your summer course, whatever it is. Okay? When and where can I sign up? Do you need an assistant?" She reached over to place her hand on top of Alexis's hand as it rested on her red folder. She used a finger to stroke Alexis's knuckles while she looked into her eyes with a plea. "Please, please consider me for the job. You won't regret it." She caught Alexis's attention as her tongue peeked out, then moistened sultry lips. "I'll do anything you ask...anything, Dr. Brown."

Alexis glanced over Phyllis's shoulder to Ramona, who was barely containing her laughter. Alexis pulled her hand gently away from Phyllis' grasp. "I'll be sure and post the

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course on the bulletin board in the student union. Look for the application in the student newspaper and the student news online.” She noted the disappointed look in sky blues and the near pout of full lips. She sighed, then stood up from her desk. “I’d love to talk longer, but I’m afraid I can’t. If there’s nothing else, Phyllis, I have back-to-back appointments today.”

“Oops!” Phyllis turned around, then deliberately allowed the backpack on her shoulder to slide off. When she bent over to retrieve it, both Alexis and Ramona stared at her shapely behind and her obvious flexibility. It was hard to say no, but Alexis did.

“Make sure you pick up everything, Phyllis. I’d hate to step on one of your pens or pencils and demolish it.”

Phyllis picked up her backpack and stuffed the few items that had fallen from the unzipped pockets back in place. “I wouldn’t mind. I love devouring things...and people too, Dr. Brown.”

Alexis watched the sexy young woman stroll to the door. Knowing she had both women’s attention, Phyllis flipped her thick, healthy mane of blond hair back, turned, and gave them a deliberate wink before exiting and closing the door behind her.

“Jesus Christ! Alexis, did you see that?”

“This was light action, Mona. It’s worse in the classroom.”

“Why?”

“She’s in competition with the other four women.”

“Oh, you mean the Fabulous Five, huh?”

“Yep, they are always upping the ante. I’m surprised any learning gets done with them there.”

“So talk to the head of our department. She could...”
Ramona sighed, realizing their boss wanted Alexis in her bed

as much as the five little sexpots did. “She’d probably cut off the balls you don’t have and dangle them in front of you.”

“The semester is almost over for us, so I shouldn’t have those problems much longer. Who’s next?”

Dr. Watson’s secretary, Jennifer, offered to set up her calendar. Actually, she and Ramona, along with the other assistant professors, didn’t have much of a choice in the matter. Everything passed through the department head’s office for approval first.

Alexis sat down to quickly scroll down her email page on Outlook to the calendar and clicked on it. “I see my last appointment is with Junior. I’ll probably have to reschedule it. If I want to get our boss lady off my back, I need some quality time to research a couple topics I considered last year.” She glanced at the rest of the appointments, growing more annoyed as she clicked on each one. “Shit! Jennifer scheduled all the little tarts for today.” She held her head in her hands. “God, how could she do that to me? Mona, you can’t leave. I need a witness. These kids...young women are sex-crazed. If I’m in here alone, I know they’ll try something.”

“First of all, Jennifer has a sick sense of humor. Second, in her position, she hears all kinds of campus gossip and shit.” Ramona chuckled and then rose from her desk to give her best friend’s shoulder a comforting squeeze. “Of course I’ll stay. I love watching you get your just rewards for playing the field with their older sisters for all these years. As Sherrie always believes, bad karma always comes back to haunt its original creator, sometimes faster than when it was first sent into the universe.”

“What goes around comes around, only faster now, huh?”

Ramona grinned, then nodded. “Exactly right, my dearest of dear friends. Go greet the next student.”

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Alexis groaned when she heard a tap on the door's frosted privacy glass. "Please come in."