

Hey, babes.

Please enjoy a sneak peek at a snippet of the first chapter from my novel, *XXIII*, the sequel to *XXII*, the 5-star rated novel available on Amazon.

Thanks for being so effin' rad. Thanks for reading my blog posts and my book, for talking to me on social media, and for being the best humans beings a girl could ask for.

Enjoy, my loves.



**WARNING:** The following material contains content intended for a PG-13 audience. **AND THERE ARE SPOILERS, DAMMIT! SO GO READ THE FIRST NOVEL AND THEN READ THIS, YA FILTHY ANIMAL!** *Oh, and sorry for leaving y'all on a cliffhanger...DON'T HATE! BUY THE SEQUEL WHEN IT COMES OUT! ;)*

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# 1. YOUNG AND IN LOVE

So. Much. Champagne. And dancing. And Hunter.

*Oh, Hunter.*

That kiss...*god*, everything really.

I couldn't believe this was actually happening. What the fuck happened to me? Did it only take twenty-two days to "fix" me?

I remember shaking my head at myself, positioned at the family table in the middle of the tented field. Hunter had left to get us more drinks and I couldn't help but to psychoanalyze myself for everything that had happened up to that point:

tried to kill myself (real smooth)

survived (embarrassingly)

bought a one-way ticket out of Palemo (good riddance)

crashed Quinn's wedding (well, *kinda*)

admitted-*out-loud*-to Hunter that I loved him...

Correction: I believe I said something to the effect that he fucked everything up inside of my twisted, scarred mind and changed me forever, which is like saying "I love you", right?

No.

I mean, I know I love him. If this *is* love. Or it could simply be lust...I mean, he sure as hell did kiss me back in a Mads-approved manner after I told him all that jazz...so *maybe*.

I'm currently painting my toenails some glittery-hot pink shit that Quinn left behind before boning out on her

honeymoon. I can't believe the wedding was three months ago. Today.

July to October. Three months. So much freedom. So much Italian-ified country food. And so much *Hunter*.

Goddamn, I don't know how I got so lucky. This man—this man loves me. *For* me. And it's wild and incredible and erotic and electrifying.

And we haven't even had sex yet.

I know, I know: you probably just spit out the iced honey whiskey you're sipping on. Yes, this girl, *me*, Mads, hasn't had sex in a little over three months.

And I haven't died. I feel like a born again virgin. *Literally*.

I'm terrified to do anything more than kiss him. I care too much. And if I go there, if I can open myself to that vulnerability, naked skin on skin and lips on lips and holy *fuck*...I can't wait. Chills prickle up my arms and I get glitter on my pinky toe.

I mean, *shit*...

I don't know how to perfectly capture this for y'all. I don't know how to explain it. But I know I want to and every time there's an ample opportunity, i.e. his truck, his bed, his couch, the cornfield, the little spot by the river where he tossed me in trying to be funny, the tire swing we almost died trying to set up in his huge-ass backyard (albeit, sex in a tire swing would raise some questions about logistics, but what a challenge that would be), I always clam up (insert joke about clams and vaginas here...*ha ha*) and stop the chemistry and the feeling in its tracks.

I sigh.

The October sky in Tifton blazes a bloody orange as the sun sets on another beautiful, glorious day. With Hunter, time slips slowly and deliciously along...I get lost in him...those

eyes, the hair, the bod, his mouth on mine and my hands on him...*Jesus*.

I need to get laid.

I get up off the wicker seat, giving up on my jacked up toes completely and light up a menthol American Spirit. My "spirit sticks". Fucking legit.

I don't mind smoking because with my anxiety, it helps. I could get therapy and meds of course, but I'm still the stubborn bitch y'all know and love.

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Meandering back into Quinn's old room seems so familiar, like my footprints were already starting to wear down the wood flooring.

The cot is gone; I got promoted to the bed. I even have made a small dent in the abnormally huge and empty closet she left behind.

And I *miss* her. Her and Josh left immediately after the wedding, jetting over to Florida for a Caribbean cruise (Josh had won that battle—she wanted to go to Paris or England and Josh promised instead to take her there before they had kids...ew).

I plop on the bed. And yes, it was made. I made it myself. Things were definitely changing around here.

No more dirty mattresses and warm vodka-fueled nights. No more coke and bloody noses and vomit. No more *bullshit*.

Well...

I still grappled with self-doubt and hatred, *naturally*. I still feel like I don't deserve Hunter...*ever*. And I don't know what to do with all of these feelings. He has to *know* that I love him, right? Even without saying it?

I sigh aloud to no one in particular and without a formal invitation, Lucy or Ricky or whichever silly dog it is bounds its way across Quinn's room and leaps onto the bed.

I'm tossed around a bit and whacked in the face with an overzealous tail, but the dog turns towards me and gives me the usual greeting of wet kisses and a cold nose nudge to the hand, always so needy and wanting me to pet him...or her...*shit*, I gotta figure it out. They're so goddamn hairy I can't even see their goods.

I make a mental note to volunteer to bring them to the groomers next time.

And it shocks me suddenly, a ripple, a vibration, shivers through my body and I lose my breath for a second.

Everything seems so *normal*. It's almost uncomfortable, but I swiftly stuff that feeling back down into my stomach.

This is all so new to me still...so fresh and unusual and *exciting*. I need to just make room for it inside of me. I need to process that they enjoy having me here. I need to *believe* it.

And I need to get *fucking* laid.

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After dinner and one of Ralph's long-winded stories about work and how a weasel or something had gotten into his fresh crop of lettuce and onions, Hunter nudges me while we clear our plates, heading to the kitchen.

"Meet me by the cornfield in fifteen" he whispers, disappearing before I could argue with him. I don't know why, but for some reason I felt bad ditching out on the movie night Isabelle had planned for us in great detail (popcorn, chocolate covered marshmallows, and some homemade cannolis she had made "just for the heck of it").

But some nagging, exhilarated feeling has my feet moving on their own accord and I find myself opening the sliding glass door and into the still-warm Tifton night air.

I'm early, that's for sure, but I wander to cornfield regardless and stare up, mind wandering while considering the stars and their finicky patterns.

A warm breeze tickles my ear and I turn quickly, right into Hunter's arms.

I find myself blushing and though I duck my head into his chest, I know he sees it. He sees me. *All* of me.

His voices rumbles, resting his chin on top of my head, and he says,

"I have a surprise for you."

I look up.

"Don't look at me like that," he says, slipping his hand into mine and leading me to the barn.

His damn legs are always tugging me along, and I drag my hand back, stopping him.

"Dude, for the millionth time-I'm not as tall as you. You gotta wait for me instead of dragging me around," I say, pretending to be super pissed...and failing.

"*Hmm*, okay then."

And he fucking picks me up like a jacket and tosses me over his shoulder.

I yell and slap at his back, but it's pointless—those *damn* back muscles...I shiver and I wonder if he can feel it as he carries me onward.

"Jesus *Christ*, Hunter, put me down NOW!"

"Okay, okay, sheesh..."

And with that, he gently lets me down onto my own two feet.

I'm about to rip him a new one, but I gasp. Out-loud. Like a moron.

The barn is reminiscent of the night we both danced together after drinking too much cinnamon apple moonshine and chicken parm and I ran out, terrified that I would hurt him...I couldn't kiss him then. But I do now.

He presses me to him, his calloused hands making their way down my shoulder blades towards my ass.

I almost want to cry. A little. *Dammit.*

I pull away for a second to look at him, right into him, absorbing his scruff and rowdy hair and forest-green eyes...I'm breathless and it makes me even more emotional.

And my heart races. I start to panic. What's happening?!

*Jesus.*

"Hey, Mads, hey...I'm right here. Everything's okay...I wanted to surprise you...it's been three months since you kinda-sorta admitted that ya loved me and all that..."

I literally feel my mouth pop open and I realize that he did all this for me...the candles in mason jars and the string lights and...

*Oh my god.*

"Hunter...I don't—I don't deserve any of this...I mean, listen to me...I'm not fixed...I'm healing but I'm not fixed and I know I admitted that I kinda-sorta loved you but even now I don't know if I'm capable of that—"

He releases a hand from my back to put a finger on my lips, effectively shushing me for a second. And he leaps into action.

His finger quickly replaces by his mouth on mine and I let his tongue in to explore mine and suddenly, I'm on fire—electric and coursing through me. I can't breathe...

And I love it.

I stretch my arms up around his neck and he easily picks me up so my legs are wrapped around his middle.

And I lose myself in our kiss...in the moment...

And I realize that no matter how much I deny it...how much I fight it and hate myself for it, I'm more vulnerable with him now than I've ever been because I know I love him and I'm in love with him and I can feel my closed eyes watering as he holds me even tighter to him.

I'm going to lose it.

"Hunter," I rasp out, "I love you. You know that, right? You've *known* it. I love the shit out of you and it terrifies me and exhilarates me all at the same time and, and, I-I--"

And I swear it's like watching the sun rise from the balcony of Quinn's room: his eyes, his smile and perfect teeth, his face...everything is glowing and I know it then and there. But he says it anyways.

"Madison, I love you, too."

He surprises me by putting me down. I must have looked confused or about to cry *yet again* because he takes my hand in his and asks,

"Do you trust me?"

And I nod even though the Old Mads, the bitch still buried and repressed inside of me, is screaming to say no and burns in my stomach, but I whisper a nearly inaudible "yes" and he leads me to a ladder that I've never really paid attention to before.

Until now.