
TOTALLY TORI

Hometown Love, Book Three

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Published by Blushing Books
An Imprint of
ABCD Graphics and Design, Inc.
A Virginia Corporation
977 Seminole Trail #233
Charlottesville, VA 22901

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EBook ISBN: 978-1-64563-173-6

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Cover Art by ABCD Graphics & Design

This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

Chapter 1

Tori Lambert looked at the clock. Two hours. Two hours and two days until break. She needed a break so badly. Winter break was coming and luckily, since the daycare she ran was associated with the college, she got an entire week off work. More than ready could not describe how she felt. Burned out, yeah, maybe. She wanted an entire week of hanging out with her dachshunds, working on her novel, and being at home. It was a tough job, but someone had to do it.

That was one reason she loved her job so much, despite the stress. The time off. All she wanted was to stay home. She loved being home in her sweet little apartment with no kids running around it, and no parents to answer to. Unfortunately, neither her dogs nor her writing supported her, so she had to work with the children and their parents, every day. Her dream, yeah, to be in a cabin in the middle of nowhere, being a hermit and not speaking to people, except for maybe her fantasy guy she had yet to meet. Was that practical? Of course not, and she'd miss her friends, and the five-minute drive to her favorite store but still, a person could dream.

Looking around the main hallway where she was sending the

kids home with parents, she knew this wasn't her dream. She'd had two teachers call off today and so was covering classrooms and hadn't even had time for lunch. Happened sometimes, but she was ready to be home and find food and take it easy.

"Hey, Jessie, how are you doing?" she greeted her heavily pregnant friend who'd come to pick up her son from daycare.

"Well, I can almost breathe sometimes," she said. "I am so ready for these two to be here."

"I can imagine," Tori empathized. "How much longer?"

"Less than a month, but I've heard twins often come early, so who knows. Anytime?" Jessie waved and Tori looked over to see Sam running toward her. Sam was such a little love. He would be a great big brother to the twins. "What are your plans for this week?"

"Going home to see my mom," Tori lied. Why did she lie? Because she didn't want to be asked to go to someone else's this next week. She just wanted to be home alone for a while. A few days, with no parents being upset with her, no paperwork to do, no kids being needy. Just her, Lovey and Thurston hanging out in the apartment, her book pulled up on the computer and going nowhere. She was doing a girls' night one evening, but that was the extent of her plans.

"Well, if that falls through, just let me know. I'm having some people over before the twins come, and I'd love to set a place for you, if you brought your cherry cheesecake." Jessie looked at her as if she knew she wasn't really going to her mom's. Well, she would think about it.

"I promise to let you know," Tori said. "Hi, Sam! Ready to head home?"

Carly's eyes looked at her through him, and she had a moment of heart clutch. Sam looked so much like his biological mom, one of her best friends when they were growing up. "I wub you Miss Tori," Sam flung his arms around her and she bent down to receive his kisses.

“Bye, Sam, you take care of your mom, okay?”

He nodded, seriously. He was a pretty smart kid for being just two. Jessie and her husband Mac had adopted him after Mac’s twin sister died not long after giving birth to him. Now they were giving him twin siblings, soon. Looking at Jessie, Tori didn’t think it would be much longer, and not near a month before she had those two kiddos.

“Two more days!” Jessie said. “We got this!”

“We do!” Tori agreed. “I can’t wait to get home today, I’m starving. Didn’t even have lunch today. Hi, Marnie!” Another friend came to get her kids and the next couple hours finally dragged by. Locking the door behind her, Tori headed out into the gathering dusk. Soon it would be dark when she left work, unlike summer where she had a few more hours of daylight left. She didn’t mind either one, she loved Macintyre mostly, and adored the changing of the seasons. It was a gorgeous little town, mostly safe, friendly and big enough for amenities but small enough that many people knew each other. She’d grown up here and had no intention of leaving.

Her group of friends expanded every year, besides Jessie, Marnie, Bronwyn, and Emmy that she’d grown up with, they added Hannah into their little group. Jessie and Marnie were married with kids, Bronwyn was dating Hannah’s brother Hunter, Hannah was planning to move in with her guy, Hawk, soon. She and Emmy were blessedly single. She had no time in her life for a man. Her girlfriends, her online life, her book and work were all she wanted right now. Right? Right.

Probably.

Unless the right one just happened to come along and she didn’t really see that happening unless she worked at it, and right now, her focus was on getting this book finished. Being a published author was her dream. Right?

Right.

Probably.

Frowning, she heard the smack of a basketball as she got out of her car at the apartment complex. The Bennett brothers, of course, and Tori hoped they would be gone by the time she walked Thurston and Lovey. She did not like them and she especially did not like their father. Rude, crude and just mean and yes, she was a little afraid of him. The boys ran wild all over town and she was quite certain they were on probation or parole or something for stealing Hannah's purse and putting her in the hospital a while back. She tried to avoid them as much as she could. Luckily they didn't live in her building, but the building two over out of a complex of nine buildings.

She liked her little apartment complex mostly. No worries over fixing anything, her own covered stall to park her car in and right in front of her door, no yard work and a nice, mostly clean area to walk her little dogs. The gym was wonderful and so was the pool in summer. Emmy, who was a realtor, kept bugging her to buy a house, but she didn't want one. She liked apartment living until she got her cabin in the woods, or maybe by the ocean. After being in charge of everyone and everyone's kids all day long, she liked coming home to no concerns, but taking the dogs out for a short walk and figuring what was for dinner.

The eye candy wasn't bad either, she thought, as a tall, dark haired man got out of his car next to her and grabbed a couple boxes out of the back seat. New neighbor, she assumed. People came and went here fairly often. This one looked vaguely familiar though. Had she seen him around town? Was he one of her kids' dads? She hoped not. Newly separated parents were, well, usually very emotional. She'd run into many of them over the years and that was one reason single men moved in here. There were long- and short-term leases here and they often moved in to figure out what they were doing next before they moved on again.

He looked at her, as she pulled the door to the building and the hallway to her apartment open for him. "You have your

hands full.” She smiled at him and his dark eyes went right through her. Wow! He was a good-looking man! Eyes that reminded her of a guard dog, deep and looking as if he knew all your secrets. Tall, well-built and dark hair with a hint of curl in the back that probably made him crazy.

“Aren’t you a friend of Hannah’s?” he asked. “I’ve seen you in the store.”

Ah, that was it; he worked in the hardware store for Hannah. “I am,” she said. “I’d shake your hand, but, well, boxes. I’m Tori Lambert.”

“Joseph,” he said. “Good to meet you for real, instead of seeing you in the aisle at work. I just moved in.”

Tori heard yipping behind her apartment door. “The bosses are calling me,” she said. “Good to meet you! Welcome to the building.” Unlocking her door, she stepped inside to be greeted by her smooth black and tan, and longhaired red dachshunds. “Hello, Lovey, Hello, Thurston,” she told them while she told her silly heart to stop hammering. Seriously? Someone tall, dark and handsome and she goes all weak in the knees like a silly school-girl. “Let me change and we will go for a walk.” They knew the drill by now. Rain, snow, whatever, they went walking before she went to work and after, right before bed, and on the weekends she took them to the dog park to run around. They thrived on the routine and she loved them both desperately.

She shot Hannah off a quick text. “*Met my new neighbor. Joseph from your work. He’s a hottie!*”

Then she pulled on a pair of jeans, a hoodie because it was getting cool and her sneakers while Lovey and Thurston danced around her. “Let’s go for a walk!” she said. They agreed, so she snapped their leashes on and they headed out for their walk. Dang it, she still heard the basketball bouncing, so she turned and they walked the other way. She did not want a run in with the Bennett boys tonight. Sure, she had her teacher voice that usually quelled them, but they were getting bigger and more

violent in recent months. When they stole Hannah's purse, they'd slammed her so hard she had a concussion. That, as far as she knew, was the worst thing they had done. She tried to avoid them, but hoped someone would put them on the right track. Sadly, she worried about their future but getting in their way was just a hassle and she also worried they might do something to her little dogs. On purpose or as an accident, she didn't know, but she didn't trust them at all.

Hearing her phone ding, she took it out and saw Hannah's name. *"Really? He moved out of his dad's house? Interesting!"*

"I guess. He's two doors down from me here."

"Will have to ask him what's going on."

"Walking the dogs, chat later."

"Will let you know."

Tori slipped her phone back in her jeans pocket and continued up to the main road with the dogs that were glad to be going out. They always were, never losing their enthusiasm for life and she enjoyed that, except on mornings when she wanted to sleep late. They didn't understand a day off. That was okay. They gave back to her way more than she gave them. She couldn't imagine life without her dogs.

She turned the corner, to head back to her apartment and sighed. Of course. There they were, heading home, probably. She gave the Bennett boys her best teacher look and kept walking.

"Hi, Ms. Lambert," one of them said. Tony? She thought the older one was Tony and the younger Thomas. Not that it mattered. They seemed to go everywhere as a set.

"Good evening, boys. Have a good game?" She looked at the ball in their hands.

"Yes, we did," one of them said.

"I'm glad. Have a good evening."

She kept walking and the dogs mostly ignored the boys, which was odd because they usually loved people. Not ques-

tioning their wisdom, though, she just kept moving and didn't look back.

"Ready for supper?" she asked them and they wagged happily in response. Silly question, they were always ready for supper. One thing the vet scolded her about was keeping their weight down because dachshunds were prone to back issues. They did not agree with the vet, but she was the one in charge of their food. Carrots, oddly, they loved carrots and those she could hand out generously. It was good for their teeth and gave them something safe to crunch on.

She liked carrots too, but with a heaping helping of dill dip with them. They didn't get dill dip.

Opening the door to her apartment building, she walked down the hall toward her small place, thinking about dinner and feeling a little relief that there was a door between her and the Bennett boys.

Often she started something in a crock pot before work, but today she hadn't and her stomach growled. What sounded good? After putting food down for the dogs, she began to search in her fridge for food. Nothing sounded good. Cold cereal again? Scramble an egg?

Hearing the doorbell, she peered out the peephole. Cute neighbor boy! Okay, she could deal with that, maybe he needed to borrow something? Maybe he needed to borrow her? Opening the door, she smiled, realizing suddenly she hadn't brushed her hair since her walk, but that didn't matter. "Hi!"

He looked at her, all sheepish, as if he were in trouble and it was adorable. "I got a text," he said and held up his phone to her. The text read, "*Tori hasn't eaten today and neither have you. Take her out.*" It was from Hannah.

"She's my boss," he said and gave a little shrug that almost made her melt. "I kinda gotta."

Tori laughed, yeah, she could have dinner with cute neighbor boy. "Well, if you gotta, you gotta. I don't suppose she's paying?"

“No, a gentleman always pays,” he said, the sheepish look gone. “My daddy raised me right.”

“Well, in that case, steak and lobster it is,” she teased him. “Let me grab my purse. I’ll be back soon, guys.” She informed the dogs that were still busy eating and didn’t care.

“Cute dogs,” he said.

“Thank you, I’m fond of them.” She grabbed her purse and ran a brush through her hair. Her jeans and hoodie should be okay—he was wearing the same

“Where do you want to go for that steak and lobster?” he asked as they walked back outside.

“How about we just go to Remmi’s, the Mexican place,” she suggested. “Unless you are just in the mood for lobster?”

“Mexican is fine with me,” he said. “Here’s my car, I’ll drive.”

Okay, whatever. She didn’t care.

“So tell me about you,” she said, once they got in the car. He opened the door for her, which was unexpected but nice.

“I moved back to town a couple months ago. My dad had a stroke and I moved in with him, to help out.”

“Oh, that’s hard,” she said. Her folks were both in good health, but she knew that Hannah’s mom had cancer. It was scary when your parents got sick. “How’s he doing now?”

“Not good,” he said, pulling into the parking lot. “He had another surgery and is going to be in rehab after he gets out, so I’m taking advantage of that and fixing the house to make it easier for him to get around in for now, and to sell, sooner or later. That’s why I got an apartment, I wasn’t excited about living in a demolition zone.”

“That makes sense,” she said. “Ours is a nice complex most of the time. But that sounds like a lot of work.”

“Yeah, I hope to have it done before I start work,” he said.

“I thought you worked at the hardware store,” Tori said.

“I do, part-time, mostly for the discount to help with the house fixing up. I’m teaching psychology at the college starting next semester. I’ve been teaching at Western for the past five years now.”

“Oh, I visited Western often to see friends, but I went to SIUE.”

She opened her own door and got out of the car, as they walked into the little diner. She’d eaten here often and loved the food and casual atmosphere and on Friday nights with her girlfriends, their huge pitchers of margaritas.

“Hi, Remmi, how are you?” she greeted the owner as they walked in the door. “This is Joseph, he just moved to town, so I’m introducing him to the best Mexican food in town.”

“Good idea,” the dark-haired woman said. “Priorities, right? This way.”

“Nice to meet you,” Joseph said. “It sure smells good in here.”

“I pay someone to stand back there and just fan the cooking smells out here,” Remmi said, laughing and put the menus down on a cozy booth.

“Give him a raise, he’s doing a good job.”

Remmi smiled at him, and Tori felt pleased she was there with him. Weird. No, normal. Whatever. She rolled her eyes at herself.

“Annie will be here to take your drink orders in a minute,” Remmi said.

“Thank you,” Tori smiled and opened her menu. “Darn, no lobster.”

“Hey, you picked the place,” he said. “So you got some of my life history. Tell me about you.”

She liked the way he said it, as if he assumed she would. Probably his teacher voice.

They stopped and ordered drinks when Annie came by, and she shrugged and said, “Not much to tell. Small town girl grows

up and stays home. I run the daycare out at the college, actually, so if you have a rug rat or two, I'll see you there."

A pained look went over his face but then he smiled and said, "No rug rats, but funny we will be working at the same place."

"And living in the same apartment complex," she said, sipping her soda and then ordering the taco salad. "I hope we like each other or that's going to be a lot of awkward encounters in the hallways."

"I don't think there are going to be any problems with that," he said, looking her over in a way that made her shiver, just a little. It wasn't creepy, just appreciative. She knew she wasn't a beauty like Hannah or striking like Marni. She wasn't ugly, but average with her short brown bobbed hair that probably needed a trim, her average brown eyes, and her average height. She even had a couple freckles on her nose when she got too much sun in the summer. How much more down home and wholesome could you get?

Now he, on the other hand, was a handsome man, dark hair, flashing dark eyes that seemed to probe you when he looked at you. They probably taught you how to do that in psychology classes. There was just something about his eyes that made you want to fall at his feet and do anything he wanted which was weird, because he looked so friendly and his grin made him just adorable. She was overthinking his looks and attitude and needed to not do that. He was only the guy next door.

It was nice to be here, having someone bring her food rather than making it with dogs at her feet begging. Usually her evenings consisted of walking the dogs a couple times, watching some TV, and working on her book. Oh, and eating something at some point. Sometimes it was popcorn in front of the computer, which was why she liked to start food in the crockpot before work a few times a week. Then to bed early and back to work by seven in the morning. They closed at six, and often she was there from open to close depending on who showed up for work that day.

The thing about student hires, which was part of their school requirements for an Early Childhood degree, was that they were students and often didn't show up. The kids of the other students and the professors, teachers and staff needed cared for, no matter what, and she could change a diaper and potty train and read stories with the best of them. It wasn't her life passion, but it paid the bills for now.

"Thank you," he said to the waitress who brought their food. "Make sure you eat now," he told her, "I don't want Hannah mad at me.

"Gotta keep the boss happy," she agreed. "So what do you do for fun when you aren't working?"

"Take pretty girls out to dinner," he said, lifting his tea glass. "Cheers to the pretty girl."

Tori blushed and tried to say something smart but nothing came out of her mouth, so she just clinked her glass with his and sipped, hoping he wasn't making fun of her.

"You aren't used to compliments," he said, those eyes meeting hers.

She took another bite of food and just shook her head. Sure, the kids' parents told her they didn't know how she did it, but from males? No, not really. She knew average when she saw it in the mirror. Nothing to see here, move along. She didn't date that often, anyway. When was the last time she'd dated? It had been a while. Over a year? Surely it hadn't been that long? Maybe it had.

"Hang in there, kiddo, it will get better, you'll learn," he said, and smiled at her in a way that made her, made her what? She didn't know. Yeah, she did. Nothing. He was a thoroughly nice guy. Did she want a nice guy? She sipped her drink. She didn't want a nice guy. Sad, but true. What she wanted, she knew about but never put into words. Well, maybe words in her book but never told anyone.

Later that night, she lay in bed and stared at the wall beside

her, frustrated. What was wrong with her? If she was a normal person, she could see a relationship with Joseph. He was a decent guy, smart, funny, but... well... vanilla.

Tori knew she craved more; she wanted some spice in her man. Not a bad boy, technically, but more of a command man. She felt compelled to serve her man. So old fashioned and nothing she would tell anyone about, but she wanted to kneel beside him, make his lunch, his day better, just simply do for him. Wanting to be commanded and be of service made her weird, she knew. That was why she never told anyone, but dived into the online world of subs and slaves, masters and Doms. That was why she wrote, or tried to write books about her cravings. She wanted to feel safe in a relationship, yet challenged to do more, be better, serve deeper and she had yet to meet a man who could make her feel that way.

Hannah's Hawk was a man like that, she could tell. However, he was taken and he was the kind of man who, if she even tried to steal him away, wouldn't be stolen. Why did women always blame the other woman in those scenarios instead of the cheating man? Well, it was easier, she guessed, to blame her than his wandering eye or the fact he just wanted to cheat. Nope, some naughty female stole him and he just couldn't help himself! He had to give in to her! She knew, though, Hawk wasn't the kind of man who would be stolen and would never cheat. He was Hannah's through and through. She saw how Hannah adored him, how she would do little things to make him happy and how he gave her subtle commands, how that made her glow, and figured that at home the power exchange was stronger than in public.

She wanted a power exchange, she wanted to exchange her power for his strength, his dominance. Poor Joseph. He'd find himself a nice vanilla girl one day and would be happy with her. And she would be happy with him. Very happy, and they would

be a pillar of the community type of people. But that was not the life she wanted.

However, she didn't want the life she had either. Her clock wasn't ticking yet, but she was getting restless. Wasn't there more to life than working at work and walking the dogs and working at home? She'd been happy doing it for a while, but now? Her friends were all pairing up and were happy, and she was... working. Nothing wrong with work, a person needed to work, but she also had this deep seated, very weird need to serve. Serving a man like Joseph wouldn't be the same as serving a man who craved being served. Who breathed dominance. What was wrong with her? Why was she even thinking these things? Why had she always thought these things? She wanted to be collared. Owned. It was beyond kinky, but she had been online, and knew she wasn't the only person who felt this way. When she wasn't working on her book, she was online in her groups, chatting to people, finding out more information about the lifestyle.

She'd met someone who called herself a rope bunny a few days ago. Someone who liked to be bound. This was a new kink for her, one she didn't think she was into, but it was interesting reading and learning about it. There were a lot of things she never knew were things. She'd always thought that her weird was very weird. Now she read about people who liked needle play, branding, flogging until blood flowed, edging, so many things and she kept delving deeper and deeper reading about them. She started making a list of her hard limits, just in case she ever met someone like her, only different. Really, she didn't want those extremes, she just wanted a man to take care of, who would give her loving but firm guidance and maybe take the belt to her once in a while when she needed it. Hey, a girl had her needs, after all. If she even wanted a man. See how her brain flipped around.

Sighing, she reached over and grabbed her phone. She might as well see if anyone else was online because she sure wasn't

sleeping. She logged on to one of her favorite groups. Yup, there were several people in chat. She knew there would be.

And there he was. Master Matt. She had an online crush on the man, though, for all she knew he was a woman and living in her mom's basement. But. Well. It wasn't like she'd ever meet him anyway.

"Good evening, kitten," he greeted her when she logged into the chat room.

"Good evening, Sir," she answered him. *"How was your day today?"*

"Quite interesting," he replied. *"And yours? Did you have a good day at work?"*

"Long but good. However, I met a friend for supper, so that was fun. You, Sir?"

"Mine was the same. So, kitten, have you been practicing your positions?"

"Yes, Sir, I have researched them. They are interesting, I must say."

He had her researching submissive postures, or slave positions as they were sometimes called. He said they were important in something called High Protocol and she found that fascinating, too. If she ever found her Sir she wanted to please him the best way she could, the way that pleased him most and knowing all she could and becoming the best person she could be in the meantime was important, vital even. Master Matt had told her that.

They chatted a bit more before she glanced at the time and knew she had to get to sleep or she'd be exhausted tomorrow.

"Must turn in. Hopefully, I can speak to you tomorrow, Sir?" she asked him.

"I'll be around. Good night, kitten," he replied. *"Sleep well, don't forget to eat at work tomorrow."*

"I will try to remember." She felt guilty remembering she'd told him she often had to skip lunch. She knew making time for her own health was important. Hopefully tomorrow, though.

“Good kitten,” he said. *“Nutrition is important to keep your energy and health up.”*

“Yes, Sir,” she agreed. *“Sleep well, Sir.”*

She plugged in her phone and snuggled down in her pillow after moving Thurston over for the third time. What would Master Matt be like in real life? He was probably a normal looking guy, not the handsome devil she built him up to be. He was online a lot in the evenings when she was, and she didn't even know if he had a job or not. Or if he was married or anything about him, actually. However, her writer's brain went wild thinking about it. She had this big imaginary life made up for him, where he was some kind of high powered CEO who never slept and popped on and off line all day when he wasn't having his sub of the moment—because she would be his sub of forever, of course, eventually—bring him coffee and martinis and serve him while he looked at her and wished she was his kitten, her. He might even live in Europe, who knew? Well, he could get to her via his private jet if he wanted to. Of course. Billionaire CEOs who owned their own planes weren't just for books, right? Right. She laughed and rolled over to try to sleep.