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BEHIND TWO  
SCREENS

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SELENA MICHAELS



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Selena Michaels  
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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.

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## Chapter 1

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### *Holly*

"**F**ucking bitch, come back here!" he screams at me as I rush up the steps to hide in our bedroom. "You can't run from me. Holly! Holly."

"Holly? Holly? Are you listening to me? Girl, you need to get out of the house," my best friend, Grace, was saying on the phone.

"I do get out. It's just that I don't know anyone here," I lament as I snap back to reality.

"Holly," Grace sighs, "seriously. You moved for a reason. You need to do what you said you were going to do."

I start nodding my head in agreement. It's hard to be on Facetime with Grace and not miss her.

"I love you." My eyes start filling up with tears.

"I love you too," she says.

"As soon as it dies down, I'll come see you. You can show me the sights," Grace adds.

"All right," I agree.

We sign off, and I rub my sweaty palms on my sweats. *If only*

*I hadn't left, I wouldn't be so nervous. I know I had no choice. Even working from home, he would have...* I stop that thought before I spin out again and give myself an anxiety attack. I grab a coffee cup and start my Keurig. Luckily for me, I can go days without seeing anybody. I moved from a rich suburb in Maine, to a bigger area in Virginia Beach, hoping to get lost in the sea of endless people and tourists visiting the area. I told no one where I was going. I just broke my lease, took the bare minimum I needed, and booked it straight south. Even though I am not close to my family anymore, I didn't want to move too far away. I wanted to be able to get back home, just in case. My mom is not getting any younger, and I know she would love to see me. But I couldn't bring myself to face her, not even to say goodbye. She did not deserve that. She raised me by herself and gave me the tough love I needed. I was just too blinded to be grateful. I take my coffee cup and head to my office. Maybe Grace is right. Maybe I need to get out of the house and make a friend. I open my email and see my boss has sent something to the entire company.

*Subject: Mandatory*

*All staff report for a company Zoom meeting, tomorrow at 7 AM EST.*

"Ugh!" I groan out loud. Most of us do not even start work until 10 AM, at the earliest. Now I have to set an early alarm and put on pants, just in case. Most people who work from home, like myself, do not even bother getting dressed, but I can't get caught with my pants off. Metaphorically speaking, that is. I go through the rest of my emails and see a few proposals that need work. Like many freelance contractors, I set my own hours and can work from anywhere. I have deadlines, but they are tentative at best. My supervisor is laid back, and as long as I write my articles, tune in to our Zoom meetings and propose ideas that are

not too crazy, I skate by. It is not really the way I envisioned my life going. At one point, I thought I would be married and have kids. But I made a mistake. A mistake I am paying for now, every day. What really kills me is that I miss my mom. I grab my phone and dial her number. The phone starts ringing once, twice, and I start panicking because my mom does not have my new number. As the call keeps ringing, I contemplate hanging up. Calling my mom is a bad idea and puts me in danger, but I just want to hear her voice.

"Hello?" my mom answers, sounding hesitant.

"Mom." My voice catches in my throat, and I can feel the tears welling up in my eyes.

"Holly? Holly? Baby girl, are you okay?"

I blow out a shaky breath. "Yeah, Mom, I'm doing well. I just wanted to hear your voice. I feel so alone."

"What's wrong? Do you need me to come over?"

I pinch my nose. I didn't even tell my mom I moved.

"Mom, I had to leave."

Her gasp broke my heart. "Holly, I knew something was wrong. You've been getting flowers and letters here that I haven't opened." My mom's voice cracks, but I can feel my heartbeat speeding up.

"Gifts?" I croak out.

"That's the odd part. None of them are signed. Also, I know you hate red roses, and whoever your secret admirer is should know that by now."

The blood rushes to my head, and for a minute, I really believe I am going to pass out.

"Mom, I have to go. I love you, and don't give anyone this number," I say quickly.

"Okay, sweetie. I love you too."

I can hear the worry in her tone. I drop my phone and race to the bathroom. My meager breakfast comes up and the tears run rampant down my face. How am I going to escape this?

After my miniature meltdown, I sink to the floor, to think. I focus on my breathing and start to think of a plan. Maybe it's time to move my mom. The question is how do I do that without drawing attention to my current whereabouts? Instead of focusing on my problems, I decide to throw myself into work. I will write my assignments now and then obsess about how I am going to protect my mom and myself later on tonight. Hopefully by then, I will have found some kind of solution. If not, there may be no hope of escape at all.

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*Alexander*

"I am so over this day." My good friend, Zack, sinks into the chair across from me.

"Why?" I glance up from my computer, noticing that Zack has his sleeves rolled up.

"Brenda, in accounting, isn't talking to me because Susan, the secretary, told her I was flirting."

I sigh. I can feel the beginnings of a headache forming. "I thought you were going to be celibate, or at least keep it in your pants at the office." I glare at Zack. We have been friends since preschool, but the older we get, the more the playboy routine gets old.

"I was, but Brenda has triple Ds, and Susan's ass is made for grabbing." Zack gestures her curves in the air.

"You're going to get sued or fired, or both, one of these days." I shake my head at Zack.

"Let's go out for drinks tonight, yeah?" Zack shoots me a grin.

"I'm sick of going out," I say. "I just want to meet someone who's not trying to use me. Girl next door, who is honest and sweet."

"Why not use a dating app?" Zack whips his phone out.

"There's this new app called Crush. It matches you to blind dates, based off your profile input. You don't even have to post a picture, just use the generic avatar." Zack shows me the app after pulling it up on his phone. I scroll through the profiles and look at the message feature.

"Seems a little unsafe," I muse.

"Yeah, but you don't have to meet anyone, and you can get to know them without it just being superficial. I haven't really used it, but it'd be perfect for a broody bastard like you." Zack laughs, and I hand him his phone back.

"I'm not broody, dick," I mumble.

Zack shakes his head. "Tell me, when was the last time you got laid?" I sink back into my chair and start to think.

"Um..." I hesitate, and Zack pounces.

"Exactly. I haven't seen a woman on your arm in almost a year. Ever since Sheila—"

"Don't bring her up." I grit my teeth. "She was my worst mistake, and I'll never make another one like it again." Zack closes his eyes. Probably so I don't have to see his frustration. The bad thing about being friends with someone so long is that we know each other's tells.

"I'll think about the app."

Zack scoffs, but as usual, he lets it go. He launches into business account and client information that I already know about. I zone out, letting my mind drift to the perfect woman. I have always been obsessed with redheads. My imaginary woman would have fire engine curls that hang loosely down her back. Her cerulean blue eyes would look up to mine with a hint of lust. Her lips would be plump and ripe, ready and waiting to be mine. She would be on her knees for me. I would want her to be as subservient in the bedroom as possible, but I also need a challenge. I hoped my dream woman would have a temper as fiery as the locks on her head.

"You're not even listening to me, are you, Alex?"

I grunt back at Zack. My cock, which had gone stiff, starts to wane when his voice filters back into my mind. He has unintentionally ruined my fantasy.

"Let's call it a day." I scrub my face with my hands. Zack calls the car service as I pack up my briefcase.

"Keep it in your pants around the rest of the staff, Zack," I say. "The last thing we can afford is a hostile work environment." With that, I motion to the driver to set off. The idea of using the app to hide my identity is appealing. Over the last few years, I kept meeting gold-diggers and opportunists. I felt used and not worthy of real love. Then, there was Sheila. Sheila was little miss sunshine in front of me. She was sweet and loving, not at all sassy. So, when I came home early from work on a Friday to take her on a weekend getaway, I was floored to see her riding the cock of her secretary in our bed. Jerry seemed to love getting caught and locked eyes on me as he thrust deeper into Sheila.

"You're my dirty bitch, aren't you?" When he twisted his hands into her hair, I literally saw red. Next thing I knew, Sheila was screaming and hitting my back with fists, while Jerry the jerk was turning purple underneath my outstretched hands. The last good thing Sheila ever did for me was to call Zack instead of the cops.

Zack helped me stay out of jail and packed all of Sheila's crap. I physically shake off the remnants of Sheila haunting my memories as we pull up to my townhome. Even though we kicked Sheila to the curb, metaphorically and physically, I still moved to a new place. One that was not tainted by her memory. I did not want to relive Sheila's cries of pleasure or Jerry's smug face as she betrayed me. Zack and I burned the mattress and gave away the bed frame. I got a nicer place with better furniture. Still, walking into what was supposed to be home was cold. It looks like a showroom. There is nothing warm or comforting at all. All I do is eat and sleep here. There is nothing else here for me. I'm not interested in anyone. A fantasy will not hurt me. A



fantasy will stay faithful and do whatever I want her to do. Before I can change my mind, I am downloading the app and inputting my information. Who knows, maybe I will find my soul mate. Or maybe I will find someone I can talk to, so I would not feel so lonely anymore. With that thought, I wait to see if I have any matches.

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*Holly*

"Hey, can you download this app called Crush for me?" I was having my weekly video chat meeting with Grace.

"Um, sure, I guess." I go to the app store and press download. "What's this app for?"

Grace flushes and her eyes start darting around, not connecting with mine. "Don't get mad." She sighs, "I really don't like that you don't have any friends there. So I made you a profile that matches people with you."

"Like a *dating* profile?" My voice raises several octaves.

"Yes and no. Look, it doesn't use pictures, so no one will know that it's you. There's a private messenger feature, a calling feature, and a video feature that you could use. You can tell them you're not looking for anything but a friend."

I take a few breaths in and out, so I don't blow my top at my friend, my only friend in the whole wide world. After Josh—nope, I still can't think of that situation without being physically ill. In the back of my mind, I know that Grace is just trying to take care of me.

"I'll try it, but I make no promises."

Grace squeals, and her screen starts bouncing up and down.

"I'll let you go, so you can figure out the app, but keep me posted." Before I can say anything else, Grace's doorbell rings. "Hey, Holly, hold on a second." Grace takes me along with her to her front door.

"Delivery for Grace Oakley," the man says and holds a sheet for her to sign.

"That's strange. I didn't order anything," Grace muses. Once she signs, the delivery guy hands her a vase of red roses.

My hands start to shake. My breathing starts to come out in pants.

"Flowers?" Grace looks quizzically at them.

"Is there a card?" My voice sounds strained and far away to me. Grace props the phone up on her counter so I can see the sickening package. I know. I just want her to verify the nightmare in front of me.

"Yeah, it says, I'm coming for you..." Grace trails off as her shocked eyes look at mine. "It's him, isn't it?"

Even though I feel like my whole world is crashing down around my ears, I am able to shake my head yes. I can't breathe. "How did he get your address, Grace?" My voice is shaky, and I can feel the tears coming.

"I don't know, hun. I-I think maybe you should go to a lawyer or something. I know the cops didn't help, but he's escalating. I'm worried about you, even though you aren't living here anymore." Grace sounds like she's scared.

"I'll look into it down here. I don't want you to put a target on your back," I reassure her. I have to put distance between me and my only friend, for her safety. "I love you, Grace. Talk to you soon, okay?" She says it back, and I get off the phone quickly. I have to think through my options. Should I run again? He has not necessarily found me, so for now, I am still safe. Maybe I should listen to Grace and speak to an attorney. I don't have a lot of money saved up, but a consultation can't be too expensive, right?

The next day, I make an appointment at Harris and Associates Law Firm, if only to figure out a way to get away from this mess without starting over again. Not that I have much to lose here. I am just tired. I have been dealing with this

for years. Hiding from my family and friends, lying, covering for him, just to end up alone, scared, and miserable. I left so that I could be happy, so that I could overcome my shyness and learn to be human again. Years ago, I used to be a vivacious, outgoing person. Now, I am some kind of hermit and not really by choice at all. Through my transformation, Grace stayed with me. She has always been there for me, never judging me and pushing me to do better. I will be damned if I let this bastard stalk and destroy Grace like he has done to me. In order to prepare for the lawyers, I decide to work ahead of schedule. If I can bang out all my articles for the week, it will be one less thing for me to stress over. I am anxious by nature, so it's best to keep myself busy. Surprisingly, there is an opening in just two days' time, to see a junior associate. I expected to be waiting for a month, at least, to see anyone. It's all happening fairly fast. I have so many doubts. Even though I clearly see the situation is escalating, I feel stuck. It is only a matter of time until Josh catches me again. When he does, I am not certain I will make it out alive.

My phone chimes then, letting me know I have a new match on Crush. I open the app, feeling like nothing in this world can protect me. Not anymore.

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*Alexander*

I am lying in bed, when my phone goes off. I open the Crush app, to see I have a match. I war with myself. On one hand, I want to find someone. On the other, I don't want to get hurt. Before making any major decisions, I decide to call Zack.

"Hey." He was clearly at a bar.

"I can call back later," I say uncertainly.

"No, hold on." I hear the sound of the bar muffle. "I'm in the bathroom now. What's up?"

I sigh. "I got a match on the app," I say. "I just don't know if I should even try."

Zack groans into the receiver. "Look, man, you have to try. Why don't you use the messenger feature and see what happens?"

"You're right. I'm going to look at her profile and then go from there." We say goodbye and I pull up the app, to see whom I am matched with.

"That's a cool feature," I murmur aloud. The app didn't use last names. It gave a kind of anonymity to the users that I really liked.

*Name:* Holly

*Eye Color:* Blue

*Age:* 28

*Hair Color:* Red

*Height:* 5'5

*Weight:* LOL No

I scroll down further.

*Interests:* Writing, reading, singing off-key, watching movies, eating new foods, and dancing.

I stop scrolling. This woman sounds too perfect. Maybe I should message her to find out if she is real or some sweaty guy breathing heavily from his mom's basement, getting off on catfishing. I decide to talk to her.

*Alex:* Looks like we matched!

*Holly:* Yeah, looks like we're a match made in heaven.

*Alex:* That's funny! I don't really know how to start these things off.

*Holly:* Well, how about I didn't get a chance to look at your profile before you messaged me. What are your specs?

*Alex:* I'm 32, I go by Alexander; no one calls me Alex. I'm 6'3 and weigh about 210 pounds. Eyes are blue, and hair is black. My interests are that I don't really have any. Is that sad?

*Holly:* Why in the world don't you have any interests? There must be something you enjoy.

*Alex:* Does whiskey count?

*Holly:* How predictable. Yes, it does. What else?

*Alex:* Working?

*Holly:* Are you asking or telling me?

*Alex:* Oh, she has sass, ladies and gentlemen.

*Holly:* Surprisingly enough, I do. I'm trying to find myself again.

*Alex:* Bad break-up? If so, I can understand, and maybe I'm trying to do the same thing.

*Holly:* Yes, on top of that, I just moved here and don't know anyone.

*Alex:* So, you're looking for friends?

*Holly:* Yes, this app wasn't my idea.

*Alex:* Mine, either. So, let's be friends.

*Holly:* Are you sure? Isn't this like a hook-up site?

*Alex:* I'm sure. I'm really not looking for anything. I just want someone to talk to.

*Holly:* Are you saying you don't want to meet?

*Alex:* Eventually? Yes, but for right now, I just want to talk. We don't even have to exchange numbers.

*Holly:* Okay! I like that idea. At least for now.

*Alex:* I have an early meeting tomorrow, but would you like to chat again around 8?

*Holly:* Yes, I look forward to it.

*Alex:* Goodnight, Holly.

*Holly:* Night, Alexander.

I plug my phone in with a smile on my face. Maybe Holly is just what I need.

The next day, I sit through my meetings, distracted. I debate asking Zack for help. How am I going to lead a conversation, to get to know her better? Maybe I should just message her now. But what if she is working? She can just answer when she has the time. Before I can talk myself out of it, I have the app open.

*Alex:* Good morning! I was thinking about you and thought I'd ask what your top five favorite movies are.

While I wait to hear back from her, I open some of my emails and have my secretary get me a fresh cup of coffee. My phone pings.

*Holly:* How about I offer a proposal?

I start grinning. She sure had moxie.

*Alex:* Yeah. lay it on me.

*Holly:* For every movie I give you, you tell me something no one knows about you.

I groan, smacking myself in the face. I walked right into that one. I can just tell her surface things. But usually, Zack knows

them, so if I don't want to get caught in a lie later, I probably need to dig deep.

*Alex:* I accept your proposal.

*Holly:* Okay. *The Notebook*.

*Alex:* Never seen it.

*Holly:* What? Do you live under a rock?

*Alex:* No? How about we watch it together?

*Holly:* I thought you didn't want to meet.

*Alex:* We can watch the movie at the same time and talk on the phone, using the app. No meeting. No exchanging numbers.

*Holly:* That sounds great!

*Alex:* So it's a date, then?

*Holly:* Yes, talk to you at 8.

*Alex:* Have a good day, Holly.

*Holly:* You too, Alexander.

I sit back in my chair with a huge grin on my face. Holly and I are having our first date night. There is no putting on airs, and I won't have to worry about why she is with me. I am sick of vapid women who only care about how much is in my bank account. I need someone real. Someone I can see a future with. I am not cut out to be a playboy. I'm not the kind to love them and leave them. Hopefully, Holly is my dream woman. I really hope her voice is as sweet as she seems. She can take up the space in my fantasies. That will be enough for me.