

Excerpts – Her Marine Next Door by Aliyah Burke

1:

Three hours later, Skylar hollered at him from her bedroom. “Are you sure this will be okay? I can wear a different dress.”

“Woman,” he growled. “If I come back there, that dress is coming off you and we’re not going at all.”

“Not helping here. I’m not exactly chomping at the bit to go.”

“Can I bribe you?”

She smiled at her reflection, willing the sadness away from earlier. She had to get her game face on as it was time to meet the parents. “Probably. I’m pretty easy.”

“Not even close. You’ve played hard to get for over the past year.”

She cut her gaze to the door and had no doubt he was there leaning against the wall waiting for her to summon up her rapidly waning courage. Baby momma had already met them.

Something Parker wasn’t telling her and part of her wanted to ask, but she decided it wasn’t any of her business.

This was what happened when you had a fake arrangement set up. Feelings got hurt and she would just have to live with it. She’d given her word and no matter how difficult this was becoming for her, she wasn’t going to quit.

*Besides, it’s not permanent. He will be back to work soon and gone. Then I will be back to my old life.*

Running another look over herself, she wished she felt better about this. She’d piled her hair up in a high ponytail, allowing the curls to fall free. Her burgundy dress had long sleeves, ruching down the front bodice, scoop neck, and hit her at the knees. Respectable to meet the fake in-laws yet flattering to her figure. Gunmetal strappy heels with a four-inch height were sleek and hopefully sophisticated enough for her to pull this off.

“Please don’t let me fall on my face.”

“What was that?” he called out.

“Nothing. I’m coming, I know we have a reservation.”

She stuck her tongue out at herself and tried to provide another mental pep talk. The last time she had gone to see someone else’s parents she’d been— Another door slammed on the memories she didn’t need to revive tonight.

With another much needed deep breath, she opened the bedroom door and froze. *Holy shit.* Parker was leaning against the wall, much as she’d suspected but what she hadn’t counted on was how damn delicious he would look in a suit.

All her lady parts were wide awake now. The man slayed in jeans and a tee-shirt. This was that on another level. The broad shoulders he had even more amplified and the muscled legs made her weak in the knees.

“Shit you’re gorgeous.” He pushed away from the wall and neared her, taking up what little common sense she had left. Parker stopped in front of her and ran his hungry gaze over her again.

“Thank you.” She reached up and adjusted his tie, not that it needed it, but she had to have some excuse to touch him. “You clean up pretty well yourself.”

“They can eat alone.” He prowled closer.

“No. Stop.” He drew up short, lust overflowing in his eyes. “We have a dinner engagement. Let’s go.”

“Ballbuster.” The smile tilting up his kissable lips removed any sting there would have been.

“It’s what you get for agreeing to this in the first place.”

She made sure Alpin had water and gave him some treats as they went out through the garage to her truck. Parker led her to the passenger side and helped her in.

“Just so you know, I’m going to be hard and uncomfortable all night because of that dress.”

She gave him a sugary sweet smile. “Be glad you’re not in a thong, those aren’t exactly comfortable you know.” *Guess I’m getting the hang of this flirting thing.*

“Killing me here, baby.”

She patted his cheek. “My misery is your misery. Let’s go. Don’t want to be late.”

2:

“She doesn’t need any help moving wood. If it has to happen, I’ll handle it. Like I’ve been doing.”

That deep reverberating voice tore through the flimsy barrier she’d pretended she’d erected while staying away from him for the afternoon.

“And you are?” Dr. Morse asked.

“I’d be the fiancé.” Parker stared at her, looking like he just walked off some sexy tattooed man cover.

Instant heat hit her, making her knees weak and her mouth dry. *It’s not fucking fair.* Even now, right here, there wasn’t any way to ignore the pull he had on her. Not just on her hormones, but *her*.

“Interesting.” Dr. Morse reached out his hand. “Dr. Morse. I’m sorry, I had no idea Skylar was engaged.” He made a pointed look down to her left hand that was suspiciously empty of a ring. Parker drew her close to his side, which happened to be the one of Parker’s furthest away from her doctor. His fingers flexed along her waist, but the smile never left his face. “You know Skylar, she’s not one who likes the limelight. We’re keeping it quiet until my woman here, picks a date.” Only then did he shake the man’s hand.

He kissed her temple and she stewed but kept her mouth shut. He wasn’t playing by the rules, but then, she shouldn’t have expected him to do so.

“I didn’t know you were coming to the doctor today, baby. I would have brought you.”

She forced a smile into her tone. “I thought you were busy and didn’t want to concern you. Just a checkup on my hand.”

“I see.”

Skylar had no doubt he saw far more than she wanted him to about that matter.

“We can get lunch on the way home. I had to take Mrs. O’Neary to a bridge game, so I swung by here after I dropped her off and did my physical therapy.” Parker looked back to Dr. Morse.

“I’m sorry, we should get going, I’m sure you’re a busy man. Thanks for fixing up *my* woman.”

Not a single person in that room missed out on the utter proprietary claim Parker put on her with that statement. She swore every one of them also turned to look at them. Dr. Morse, thankfully, just gave a patented smile and pushed his hands in his lab coat.

“Just doing my job.” He dismissed Parker. “I meant what I said back there, Skylar. Take it easy. Call and set something up if it starts hurting again. Your knuckles will be sore a bit longer but at least they’re not broken.”

“Thank you,” she said.

Parker’s grip on her clamped down when she tried to move away from him. The moment they were outside, she tried once more to put some distance between them. Again, only to be denied.

She saw her truck there and reached for the driver’s door only to stop when he snorted and drew her back by him.

“Woman,” he growled. “You’re not driving. And when we’re on the way you’re going to tell me what the fuck is going on that you had to get back to the doctor.”

And that way of saying woman, *still* had that ability to turn her into a small pile of mush.

He opened the driver’s door and lifted her to the seat.

“This is *my* truck,” she protested.

He cocked a black brow in her direction, a taunting smirk on his face. “Keys are down the front of my pants, want to go after them?”

*Hell yes.* Her grin more feral than anything. “Aren’t you afraid something down there is going to be jealous with the keys outsizing them?”

His eyes, more green than blue right now, blazed with heat.