
HONEY

SOMMER MARSDEN



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vi

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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.

For Jason, my bearded giant. You woke up my heart. I love you.

Chapter 1

People were always starting over because of some trauma. Abuse. Someone died. God knew how many books Bishop had read where the person started a new life because of the death of a loved one. Her great trauma was no trauma. No one in her life she loved enough to be devastated by their death. No family at all, really. And certainly, no abuse. Any guy who had the balls to hit her would be hit right back, and then the cops would be called.

She was no one's punching bag. And no one's next of kin. She was no one's anything.

Most of the time, she liked it that way. Sometimes she didn't.

She folded the last of her tees and closed the trash bag. That made her laugh.

"Only the finest traveling luggage for me."

Zed, her one eyed, black cat jumped onto the trash bag and regarded her stoically.

"Yeah, I see you, squashing what I just did. And I have no fucking clue why I folded them to put them in a trash bag."

Zed blinked her lone eye and yawned, bored already.

"You about ready to move down by the river?"

Bishop started humming Neil Young as she sealed a box that held her meager kitchen equipment—an electric kettle, a pressure cooker her former boss had given her when she got a new job, some mugs, a single frying pan, mismatched silverware and dishes. Not that she'd need any of it, really. The house she was going to was fully stocked.

There was a knock on her door. Bishop ignored it. She packed up some of her DVDs and left a pile of them stacked against the wall.

More knocking. "I know you're in there, you river whore!"

She shook her head and rolled her eyes. "Jesus," she said to Zed. Zed's response was to jump down and saunter to the front door and sit there.

More knocking, that turned to pounding. Bishop stood there, leaning against the doorjamb, arms crossed—waiting. Finally, she heard, "Fine!" And the door opened.

This was the closest to family she had. And he was a pain in the ass.

Chris flounced in, putting on extra gay for whatever drama he was about to assault her with. "You can't even open the door for your best friend in the world?"

"Best friend in the world?"

"Yes. Everyone needs a best friend. Even a hard hearted, hardcore introvert, fuck the world, eye rolling bitch like you."

"And you're here for the job, eh?"

She turned her back to him and pushed a few odd throw pillows into another trash bag. Bishop ignored the twinge in her gut that said she'd miss him, that he was her friend, that he was one of the few beings on earth she cared about. The other one had one green eye and was currently lazily scratching behind her ear.

"I am. And you should be kissing my gorgeous booty for it. Here, I got you this—"

He was suddenly in her field of vision thrusting a bright pink gift bag at her. The opening was tufted with white and pink and red tissue paper.

"Ugh. What is it?"

He straightened and narrowed his eyes at her. "That's a lovely way to receive a gift."

"You know I'm an asshole," she said, pulling the paper out one sheet at a time and dropping it on the scuffed-up hardwood floor.

"You're a curmudgeon," he said. "How that's possible, given you're female and twenty-eight years old, I don't know. I can't explain every oddity of the universe. Why, for instance, did I get all the gorgeousness in the family and my sister looks like Mr. Mole from *The Wind in the Willows*?"

Bishop snorted because Cathy Cook did look like Mr. Mole. And her brother was gorgeous. Especially when he did flamboyant makeup, which he'd done tonight. His big brown eyes were done up impeccably. His lips shimmered with pale pink lip-gloss. This was one of the reasons it drove him bonkers that Bishop didn't even own a makeup palette.

She tugged the gift out and snorted. It was a coffee mug with *his* big old mug on it. And of course, in the picture on the cup, his face was done up like a supermodel. Prettier than a super model.

"I knew you'd be needing that."

She cocked an eyebrow at him. "You did, did you?"

He dropped onto her old gray sofa and put his feet on top of a bag of clothing. So much for the folding.

"I did. Are you sure you won't let me come with? I can take one room. You can take the other. It's a little *house*. You said the word house."

"I also said the word little. And you know you and I would kill each other in about five minutes. We need the buffer of a floor between us and separate apartments."

"You love me."

"As much as I can love anyone," she said, only half joking. She rewrapped the mug and put it atop the kitchen box.

"You love. You just don't have anyone to love but a one-eyed cat and a startlingly beautiful gay boy. It's a hard knock life."

"Aren't you supposed to be on a date?" She didn't ask him; she simply went to the bag of disposable dishware she'd bought for her last few days at the apartment. Bishop took two plastic cups and filled them to the three-quarter mark with cheap red wine from a box.

"Ah, you know me so well."

Bishop tapped her glass to Chris's and sat down next to him.

"I was. But I had this idea you might sneak off in the dead of night like a bandit if I didn't corner you and say goodbye."

"You know I'm leaving. It's not sneaking off."

"I know you're leaving, but I'd like to say goodbye. I know you think you're above human interaction, but some of us do care about you."

"One of you," she corrected.

He nudged her with his shoulder and her wine sloshed. She snorted.

"It would be more than one if you weren't such a cunt."

Then she did laugh in earnest. She located the remote and turned the TV on. A rerun of a medical show blared until she turned it down.

"Duly noted."

"What about that dude you were knocking boots with?"

"Kip?"

Chris shook his head. "Kip. Who names their kid Kip? But yeah, him."

"What about him?"

Chris blew out a dramatic sigh and downed half his wine. "You are hopeless." He turned to her and spoke slowly as if she

were hard of hearing. "What. Does. He. Think? Of you leaving?"

Bishop couldn't help it. She raised her hand and flicked him hard between the eyebrows. "That's for being a dick." Then she shrugged. "I have no idea. I didn't ask him."

Chris made a sound of distress. "Okay. You didn't ask him. But did he react?"

She thought back. "I don't know. I guess he was...okay? Upset?"

"There's a big distance between okay and upset, sweet cheeks. This is your problem with people. You don't pay attention."

Most people couldn't keep her attention, she thought. But she left it unsaid.

"See!" Chris slapped her thigh.

"What?"

"You didn't pay attention!"

"I heard you." She rolled her eyes and clicked at Zed. Zed stoically ignored her.

"Did you say goodbye to him?"

"Who?"

Chris tossed his head back and howled at the ceiling. "Have you ever been tested for ADD?"

"I told him I was leaving. Isn't that the same as saying goodbye?"

"No."

"Oh. Well, no. I didn't. It was just a fling, C; there is no reason to get your panties in a knot. I told him I was moving. We fucked. I said goodnight. That was it. It's fine. Stop worrying. You worry too much."

"I worry just fine. Someone has to worry."

"Not all the time."

He leaned against her and she allowed it, the same way she

would have with Zed. "I should worry less, and you should worry more."

"You should worry less, and I should stay the way I am. I'm on point." Then she found a movie and told him to shut up.