

## THE HOT SHOT TOUR EXCERPT

### CHESS

Grumbling, I toss on some black lounge pants and my oversized Tulane t-shirt and head to the drugstore.

My head throbs by the time I get there, and my insides are writhing. I rest my hand against my lower stomach and grab a basket before calling James to complain.

“I swear,” I tell him as I grab a bottle of painkillers. “It’s like this entire day has been cursed.”

He snickers. “Curse. Get it? Curse?”

I roll my eyes, even though he can’t see me. “Laugh it up. Meanwhile, it feels as if someone is playing Battleship in my uterus.”

“Poor Chessie bear. At least we know why you were in such a foul mood.”

A flush washes over my cheeks. “Yeah.” Lie. Lie. Lie. A tub of salted caramel gelato makes its way into the basket.

“Tell me you’re getting some gelato,” James says.

I smile. “Just grabbed it.”

“Salted caramel?”

“You know it.”

I find the feminine products aisle and search for my brand. “I’m going to go home, take a long bath with my gelato, and forget this fucking day.” Forget Finn. “And then I’m going to go on Amazon and buying a freaking year’s supply of tampons so I don’t have to make these kinds of emergency runs anymore.”

A low, deep chuckle rumbles from behind me, and all the tiny hairs lift on my arms.

“But you’ll still need your gelato,” a familiar—fuck me, seriously?—voice points out.

My insides swoop even as my cheeks burn.

“Who is that?” James asks in my ear.

I slowly turn on one heel. “The plague,” I say, glaring up at Finn Mannus’s smiling face.

“From asshat to plague.” Finn scrunches up his brow. “I’m not sure if that’s a step down or a tie.”

“Who is that?” James nearly yells now.

I don’t take my eyes off Finn. “I’ll call you back.”

James’s squawks of protest cut off as I hit the end button.

“Are you stalking me, Mannus?”

Finn rests his hands low on his lean hips. "Having a healthy amount of conceit myself, I have to admire yours, but no, buttercup. My buddy Woodson lives a few blocks away. It's poker night. I'm stocking up on beer."

It's only then I notice a twelve pack tucked under his other arm.

"And tampons?" I ask, with a pointed look around the aisle we're standing in.

"Not tonight," he says easily. "Though we used to keep a pack of them back in college. Light flows were perfect for stopping up bloody noses."

A snort escapes me. "Now there's a visual." Somehow, I've taken a step closer to him. He's freshly showered, the golden brown strands of his hair still damp at his temples. And I wonder if he's just come from the gym or practice. "So back in college you went and bought these tampons?"

"Nah," he says with a cheeky smile. "I'd ask one of the girls hanging around to get me some."

"Of course you did." My nose wrinkles with annoyance.

"Give me a little credit, Chess. I'd buy them now if I had to."

"Hmm..." I eye him, trying not to return his smile. If only because it's more fun when he teases. "So why are you in this aisle now, if not for potential nosebleed needs?"

"That's easy." He steps closer, a warm wall of muscle and clean scent. "I heard your voice."

For a second I just blink. "You recognized my voice?"

His gaze darts over my face as if he's trying to get a read on why I'm gaping at him. "Not to be...ah...rude, but you're loud when you talk on the phone."

"Yeah, but... You recognized it." We'd only just met. It occurs to me that I'd recognized his both times he'd snuck up on me. Then again, his voice is distinctive, flowing like hot honey when he's relaxed or hammering down like iron to rock when he's taking command of a situation.

A soft flush of pink tints the tips of his ears. If I wasn't staring at him, I might have missed it. He shifts his weight. "Was I not supposed to?"

"No. Yes." I shake my head and laugh. "I don't know."

He grins then. "You're cute when you're flustered."

"I'm not flustered." I am.