

# MORE PLEASURE THAN PAIN

## TABBY

LAY IN bed, fully clothed, tangled up with my man (who was also fully clothed), staring at the poster-sized picture of us on the back of his bike that was on the wall over our dresser.

“It’s time, sugar,” he whispered.

It was. It was actually time five minutes ago.

But I wanted this. I wanted these few minutes that were the last of the best of us before that became even better.

“Just a couple minutes longer,” I told Shy.

“Whatever you want, Tabby,” he murmured, pulling me closer in his arms.

I already knew the answer to the question that the test that was sitting on the bathroom counter brewing was going to provide.

And that answer was what I wanted. That answer was what *we* wanted. In fact, I had a feeling Shy wanted it even more than me considering all he’d lost and how much it meant to him. He wanted to rebuild that. He wanted it for himself. For me. For his brother. And in honor of the memory of his parents.

And we were going to have it.

But now, I just wanted these last moments of just him and me.

So I laid tangled up in Shy, my cheek to his chest, my eyes on that picture.

As I stared at it I thought what was in that picture was us and always would be. We would always have that no matter what. No matter what we added. How we grew. When we grew old.

That picture of me wrapped around Shy on the back of his bike would *always* be us.

“We should get a dog,” I blurted.

I heard the smile in Shy’s voice when he replied, “Sounds good.”

“A mutt. A rescue,” I decided.

“Okay, babe.”

“We should get him before.”

“Probably smart.”

I tipped my head back until my nose was pressed to the underside of his jaw.

I felt him. I smelled him.

He smelled good. He felt great.

“Do you know how much I love you?” I asked.

The smile was gone from his voice, it was quieter, rougher, when he said, “Got a fair idea.”

“Take that fair idea and times it by ten thousand and there you go.”

He slid me up and onto his chest so we were eye to eye.

I looked into his green eyes, saw his messy dark hair, and fell in love even more.

God, my man was gorgeous.

“Let me go look,” he whispered.

He couldn't wait.

"You want this," I whispered back.

"Yeah," he said.

"Me too," I told him, but he already knew that. We'd talked about it. This was not unplanned.

"Then let me go look."

"Whatever you want, baby."

Those green eyes told me things I loved to see before he slid his hand up into my hair and pulled me down to kiss me.

It was not a quick peck. It was long and lazy and wet and sweet.

I knew he was almost done when he rolled me to my back before he broke the kiss. But he didn't leave me immediately. He kissed my chest and the underside of my jaw before he again looked in my eyes.

"Be back," he said.

"Okay," I replied.

He slid away.

I looked back to the picture of us.

The beginning of our now started in Shy's bed in the Compound, him holding me, me crying and singing a sad song.

The conclusion of our now ended in a bed that was ours, both of us wearing the other's ring, with that kiss.

I'd take that.

Happily.

I kept my eyes to the picture until Shy took my attention rounding the bed to come back. His gaze was on me as he moved and he kept hold when he moved in, putting a knee to the bed then shifting in over me, covering me with his long, lanky, loose-limbed biker body, most of his weight in a forearm.

When he was right where he belonged, he ended our now.

And opened our future.

We'd had beautiful.

But the best was yet to come

"We're pregnant, baby," he whispered.

I said nothing. Just watched his eyes start to shine with happiness.

I suspected mine were doing the same.

And not just because I had my husband's baby inside me.

But because him knowing that made him happy.

\* \* \*

"I'M GONNA BE an uncle?" Rider shouted. "That's crazy! I'm too young to be an uncle!"

"I think it's awesome!" Cutter announced loudly. "That means I'm not gonna be the youngest anymore and I get to boss someone around!"

We had the family over at our house for dinner. Dad and Ty-Ty, Rush, Rider and Cutter. We hadn't let on that there was a purpose for this and since we got together often, no one thought anything of it.

But Shy and I had just shared our news.

I was grinning at my little brother when I felt strangeness coming at me. I looked in the direction it was coming and saw Dad throw his napkin down, push back and get up from the table. He then promptly walked out of the dining room.

I looked first to Shy, whose gaze was on where Dad had disappeared.

Feeling my look, it came to me.

“It’s okay,” Tyra said and I tore my attention from my man to look to her. “He just needs some time.”

“Some time for what?” I asked, confused and a little freaked. “I thought he’d be happy.”

“He is, honey,” Tyra said softly. “He just needs to have a second to wrap his head around it.”

I didn’t get that and began, “Shy and I have been married awhile and he knows that we planned—”

“He knows,” Tyra cut me off to say. “That doesn’t mean the reality isn’t something different.”

“It’s ’cause he’s old,” Rider shared with authority. “And now he’s gonna be a granddad which means he’s even more old.”

“Your father will never be old,” Tyra told her son.

This was true. Dad was the kind of man who would be vital even if he lived to be one hundred and five.

Though, Rider wouldn’t get that, or all the goodness it meant to him considering he was of Dad’s blood, for probably ten years.

“You should go talk to him,” Shy said and I looked to him. When I did, he jerked his head to the door.

He was probably right but the person who would know that to be true needed to weigh in.

I turned to Tyra. “Should I?”

“Being with you in this moment?” She smiled a gentle smile and said no more.

That meant I should.

I pushed back my chair and got up, moving around it to follow Dad.

I got two steps in before I was stopped because my big brother was standing in my way.

I looked up into his eyes. Mom’s eyes. My mom who was not a good mom but she’d given Rush and me one good thing. She gave her son her eyes that were beautiful in Rush’s face.

And I got to look at them.

“I’m gonna be an uncle,” he said and the way he said it it sounded like it was unbelievable.

Unbelievable in the sense that he just got news he won the mega million lottery.

My eyes started stinging.

“Yeah,” I confirmed.

“I’m gonna be an uncle,” he repeated.

“Rush,” I whispered.

He yanked me into his arms and wrapped them tight.

I returned the gesture.

His voice sounded funny, thick, choked, when he said, “Happy for you, Tabby.”

I pushed in closer to my brother and drew in a deep breath before I replied, “Me too.” I paused then finished, “Uncle Rush.”

His arms got even tighter.

I fought back a sniffle.

We held on a while before he gave me a squeeze and muttered, “Go. Be with Dad.”

I nodded against his chest then tipped my head back to again catch his gaze. “Love you, bro.”

“Same, Tab.”

I grinned at him and he grinned back before he leaned in, pressed his jaw against the side of my head for a beat then let me go.

I glanced again at the table which, in a few months and through the years, would change. There’d be high chairs. Then there’d be booster seats. More place settings. More noise. More food. More laughter.

Shy and I would create that like Tyra and Dad did. Then Rush (I hoped) would add to it.

And Dad gave us this. Dad found Tyra and they gave us Ride and Cut. This would be what we had forever and this would be what we'd teach our children to build.

Because Dad made what we had beautiful and safe so we could give the same.

On that thought and one last glance at my husband, I went in search of my father.

I found him on the back deck, hands to his hips, head tipped back, eyes to the starry sky.

Silently, I moved in beside him, gave it a second then said softly, "Hey, Daddy."

At my words, his arm shot out and hooked me around the neck, yanking me forcefully his way so I slammed into his side, his hold tight.

Other than that, he didn't move.

My eyes started stinging again as I wound my arms around his middle.

"That's who I am, Tabitha," he declared, his gravelly voice rougher than normal. "No matter what, girl, that's who I am to you."

He was not wrong.

He would always be my daddy.

And I would always be daddy's little girl.

"I'm happy," I told the side of his chest, the words were heavy like a blanket, warm and snug.

"I'm glad," he replied.

"Shy's over the moon," I shared.

"Knew somethin' was up the minute we walked in so he ain't hidin' that, darlin'."

That made me grin.

"I love him," I went on, telling him something he very well knew.

He confirmed he knew.

"I know you do."

I drew in breath and my grin died. "Thank you for giving me this."

At that, his arm got even tighter, curling me into his front as his other arm stole around so he could hold me with both.

I felt his lips come to the top of my hair.

"That was my line."

I made the noise right before the tears flowed and I held on to my dad as he held on to me and let me cry.

"Always wanted this, just this for my girl," he whispered into my hair. "However that came about, you bein' happy. Findin' someone to love. Findin' someone who loves you back just as deep. Buildin' your life. All I wanted for my girl."

I drew in a deep breath and his head came up when I tipped mine back.

"Well, you got it."

He stared at me through the dark with his deep blue eyes. My eyes. I got to look at a piece of my dad that was beautiful every time I looked in the mirror.

Another gift.

"Why'd you leave the table?" I asked when he didn't speak.

"Maybe you'll get it one day, Tabby. Don't know what a woman goes through so don't know if you ever will, but 'spect it'll happen. Do know, a man, his daughter, I had to give you up to give you to Shy. You bein' a mom, gotta give up a little bit more."

He was so very wrong.

"You don't have to give me up," I said firmly.

He shook his head. “Shy’s job is to take care a’ you. Your job is gonna be takin’ care of your babies. Those two things are gonna be your life, honey.” He gave me a squeeze. “This is not a complaint. Pleased as fuck you got that. But in that equation, I’m not there.”

Wrong again.

“You’re always there,” I retorted.

“Not the way I’m used to bein’,” he returned then lifted a hand to curl it where my neck met my shoulder, effectively silencing me when I opened my mouth to speak. “There’s more pleasure than pain, Tab. I just gotta get used to the idea that I give that part up but I get back. When I gave you to Shy, it took time, but it finally hit me that, outta that, I got Shy as a new son. Now,” he grinned, “it won’t take near the amount of time to get used to gettin’ what I’m gonna get now, givin’ up another piece a’ you. That bein’ my first grandbaby.”

I wanted to grin back but all he was saying was making me think.

And what I thought came out of my mouth. “I hope we don’t have girls. If we do, Shy’s gonna have to go through the same thing as you.”

“You don’t have girls, you’ll have boys and that means *you* givin’ up the same thing as me.”

I hadn’t thought of that.

God!

We were screwed either way!

Contemplating this heretofore unconsidered idea, I looked to Dad’s shoulder.

“Tab,” he called.

I looked back.

I knew he knew what I was thinking even before he confirmed it by speaking.

“Darlin’, like I said. You don’t get it,” he told me. “You will. And like I said, there’s more pleasure than pain. It’s life, honey. Sometimes the beauty of the journey is unexpected and hard to recognize. That don’t mean it isn’t still beauty.”

Okay, I guess he wasn’t wrong.

He was right.

Time to move on.

“Are you better now?” I asked.

“Got one of my two best girls in my arms. No way I can’t be.”

That made me plant my forehead into his chest and feel wet again in my eyes.

God, I so totally had the best dad in the world.

Dad moved his hand to the back of my neck and held it, warm and snug.

“Love you, baby girl,” he whispered into the top of my hair. “Proud as fuck a’ you.”

“Love you too, Daddy,” I whispered back.

We held on.

We did this too long.

We’d know this when we heard the sliding glass door open and Cutter shout, “Dad, Tab, you gonna be out here forever or what? You’re holding up dessert!”

I tipped my head back and caught Dad’s eyes.

I was grinning.

He was looking beleaguered.

“Sure you wanna do this?” he asked.

I burst out laughing.

My baby brother shouted, “Jeez! Dessert is pudding parfaits! My favorite! And we’ve waited . . . like . . . *forever!*”

*Come on!*

And at that, I laughed harder.

\* \* \*

I FELT A release and heard bawling.

I slumped.

“You want the honor?” my OB asked.

“Fu . . . yeah,” Shy answered.

I heard this but I was concentrating on the bawling, my eyes darting around seeing people but wanting one thing.

Then the nurse turned and I got what I wanted when she plonked a weight that was surprisingly light on my chest considering what it felt like tugging on my spine and resting on my bladder the last three months.

I looked down and all I saw was a mess of wet, dark hair.

“Five fingers, five toes, healthy lungs, all good,” the nurse murmured, barely to be heard over the bawling.

My hands went to the weight.

He had something wrapped around him that the nurse was using to wipe him off.

I didn’t feel that or her movements.

The skin of my fingers hit the skin of his little body and I was lost.

Gone.

Gone for my baby boy.

He rolled a bit and I pushed up a bit so I could get a better view.

And I saw him. His pissed off face. His scrunched up eyes. His teeny balled up fingers. His pumping little legs.

Oh yes.

*Gone.*

Gone for my baby boy.

“Shy,” I whispered.

“Right here, sugar,” he whispered back and then he was, leaned in so deep he was almost in the bed with me, his face so close to mine, our jaws were brushing, his hand snaking up to hold our son’s tush as the nurse wrapped him up and left him where he was so she could do other things.

“Shy,” I repeated.

“Right here,” he did the same.

“Look at him,” I ordered.

“Lookin’, baby. He’s gorgeous. You did good, Tabby. You did so fuckin’ good, baby.”

I felt him kiss my jaw.

“Look at him, Shy,” I demanded.

Our boy kept howling and I held him to me as Shy lifted a hand to his cheek and slid his finger down the soft, red skin.

I watched thinking I’d never seen anything so beautiful, Shy’s long, handsome finger trailing down that soft, red skin.

“I see, Tabby.”

“He’s perfect.”

Shy cupped our son’s tiny head in his big hand. “He is, baby. Top to toe.”

I tore my eyes away from my baby to look at my man.

“He’s perfect,” I repeated, my voice cracking in the middle.

Shy looked from our son to me and his green eyes flared before they warmed.

“He is, Tab. Top to toe,” he whispered and dipped in closer, his gaze holding mine. “You’re gone, aren’t you?” he asked.

“Totally,” I whispered back.

“Yeah,” Shy replied, his eyes now smiling before he went in for a light kiss on my lips.

When he moved back, he said, “You did so good, sugar. So fuckin’ good.”

I looked down at our son who was still bawling and squirming on my chest.

“I did,” I agreed. “We did.” I saw as I felt my son squirm and tightened my hold on him. “We did so *fucking* good.”

\* \* \*

I WATCHED DAD take my sleeping boy from Shy.

I listened to Tyra’s soft crying as she pressed in close to her husband in order to get a good look at Shy and my baby.

And I saw it when Dad settled my boy in the curve of his arm and lifted his other hand to curl his finger around Kane Landon Cage’s throat.

I knew what he felt. I’d done it myself the first time I’d had my shot.

The pulse was strong.

Dad’s eyes came to me. His gaze warm too.

And happy.

“See?” he asked quietly. “More pleasure than pain.”

I got him.

I *so* got him.

Then again, Kane “Tack” Allen, my dad, was never wrong.

*The End*